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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FREDERICA AND HER GUARDIANS; OR, THE PERILS OF ORPHANHOOD ***

Margaret Robertson

"Frederica and her Guardians"

"The Perils of Orphanhood"

Chapter One.

The Perils of Orphanhood.

The house in which the Vanes lived stood in a large and beautiful garden, and both were enclosed by a high brick wall, over which only the waving tops of the trees could be seen from the street. There were a good many such houses in M. at the time my story opens. They were originally built in the country, amid green fields and orchards, where, on summer days, one might sit and look at country sights and listen to country sounds, and quite forget that the hum and bustle of a great town sounded close at hand.

As time went on, and commerce prospered, the town extended itself in all directions. Houses, some large and some small, were built near those pleasant country homes, and in a few years stretched far beyond them. Sometimes the gardens were encroached upon, and streets were opened, and building lots laid out and occupied close to the house itself, till only a narrow strip of dusty lawn was left. But in some streets the high brick garden-walls made a blank between great blocks of stores and terraces of dwellings for a good many years, and in some streets there are high brick garden-walls still.

The house in which the Vanes lived was a long time before it yielded up a foot of its large garden which the wall shut in. This wall was broken on two sides by gates. In a narrow street which led down towards the river were two heavy wooden doors, one large enough to admit a carriage, the other smaller, for the convenience of those who entered on foot. On another side, from one of the great thoroughfares of the city, the grounds were entered by handsome iron gates. A clump of evergreens and ornamental shrubs in part hid the house, even when the gates, were open, and a low cedar hedge and a fence of iron network separated the lawn and the carriage-drive from the more extensive grounds behind the house.

The house itself had no particular claim to be called handsome, except that it was large and well built of grey hewn stone. It was high and square, and on one side a wing had been thrown out, which rather spoiled the appearance of the original building; but, standing back from the bustle and dust of the street, behind the green, lawn and pebbly carriage-drive, and partly hidden by the trees and shrubs, it looked a very pleasant and pretty place for a home.

This house was built and occupied many years by Mr St. Hubert, an immigrant from France, and at his death it was left to his only child, Mrs Vane, with a condition that neither it nor a foot of the land about it should be sold during her life-time. A great many tales might be told of what happened in that house from first to last—most of them sorrowful tales enough—but it is only the story of poor Mrs Vane and her children that is to be told here.

Almost every one spoke of this lady as "poor Mrs Vane." Her friends had all said, "Poor Theresa," when it was first known that she was to be married to Mr Vane; for he was a poor man, and a widower with three children, who, they all said, wished to marry her because she was the daughter of a man who was supposed to be rich. Her father would have given half of what he possessed, rather than that she should have married Mr Vane; but he had never crossed a wish of hers during all the eighteen years of her life, and it was too late to begin then. So, though he did not like him, he gave his consent to the marriage, on condition that he should leave the army, and accept a situation in a public office, which he, being a man of wealth and influence, was able to obtain for him. It did not cost Mr Vane much self-denial to do this—though he used afterwards to declare that it did—for he was a man who first of all considered what was for his own ease and pleasure. Nor did it trouble him much to send his children from him. His eldest daughter was adopted by his first wife's mother, who resided in the town of M.; and his other children—a boy and girl—were sent home to be cared for and educated by their father's friends in England; and he took up his residence in the

luxurious home of his father-in-law with very good will.

It did not prove a happy marriage. It might have done so, perhaps, if after a few years Mrs Vane's health had not failed. If she could have continued the gay life to which she had been introduced, and could have shone a belle among her husband's friends, as she had done in her own smaller circle while a girl, she might have had a sort of happiness, while it lasted, and so might he. But after awhile her health failed, and at the time of her father's death, which happened when her eldest child was thirteen years of age, she was a confirmed invalid.

She was "poor Mrs Vane" indeed then. A suffering, solitary, forsaken woman she felt herself to be the day her dead father was carried away from the house he had built. Not that her husband had ever been unkind to her, or even openly neglectful. But he had never cared for her as she had cared for him; and it was not in his nature to understand the wants or cravings of a sick unsatisfied heart like hers, much less to minister to them. He was sorry that she could no longer go into the society she had always adorned, and he often told her so; but he never gave up a pleasure which society could offer to him for her sake. He grieved for her sufferings, and did what might be done during a brief visit or two each day to relieve them; but long before her father's death she had come to feel that his grief was of a kind that could very well be left in her chamber when he went away. After a time the vain craving for his sympathy, which made the first years of her illness so miserable, wore away, and a kind of dull content, growing gradually out of an interest in other things, took its place; but she was "poor Mrs Vane" still to the few friends who had not forgotten her already in her enforced retirement.

And her husband was "poor Mr Vane" to himself and everybody else when Mr St. Hubert died. The old man had treated him shamefully, he thought and declared, for his name was not mentioned in his will. The house and a certain income was insured to his wife while she lived, and at her death all the property was to be divided between the children, and given up to them as each came of age. But he had nothing; and even his wife's income was not allowed to pass through his hands.

It was not a very large income. It would not have sufficed for her and her children, had they been living in the gay world, entertaining and being entertained. But living quietly, as her health obliged them to live, it might be considered ample for them all. At any rate, she knew it would have to suffice; for Mr Vane, having always spent his own income on his own pleasures, was ill prepared to give up any part of it.

They did not grow happier together after this. Some time before Mr St. Hubert's death the care of household affairs had been committed by him into the hands of a relative of his own—a widow of the name of Ascot; and during his life-time nothing transpired to occasion any doubt as to her entire fitness for the position he had given her. She was a French woman by birth, and spoke English very imperfectly, though her deceased husband had been an Englishman. She was a very quiet, firm person, faithful in the performance of all her duties, and careful and exact in the management of the household expenses. She never presumed on her relationship in any way that was disagreeable to Mr St. Hubert, and, by her attention to himself and her kindness to Mrs Vane, won his confidence entirely; and his anxiety as to the future of his daughter and her children was in a great measure allayed by the promise she made never to leave them while they needed her care.

But after his death matters were not so well managed. At least, they were not managed to the satisfaction of poor Mrs Vane. In a very short time an entire change was effected in the household. Mr Vane found it an improvement as far as *his* comfort was concerned, or probably Mrs Ascot's stay in the house would have been short. But it was not so with Mrs Vane. Mrs Ascot was very quiet, very reasonable, and, above all, very firm. "Nothing was so necessary for Mrs Vane as entire quiet," she declared; and the poor mother had not the strength or courage to carry on a battle with her stronger will. So her two little daughters were sent to school, and her two little sons, with their nurse, were banished to the part of the house most distant from their mother's room, and were only permitted to visit it at certain times. They would have been sent to school, too, if Mrs Ascot could have accomplished it; but, as the eldest was only four years of age at the time of his grandfather's death, this she could hardly do.

Only one thing saved Mrs Vane from falling into hopeless fretfulness or helpless imbecility—this was the constant presence of her eldest and dearest child, Selina. Even Mrs Ascot's cold-heartedness could not separate these two. Even Mr Vane's selfishness was not equal to planning or permitting anything that could come between the mother and her child. For the little girl was blind,—had been blind from her seventh year, and since that time she had never once been beyond the sound of her mother's voice.

A great many of God's best blessings come to us disguised as sorrows. It seemed to this mother, when she could no longer doubt that the light of heaven was to be denied to her child, that God could deal no harder blow, and in her wild angry way she prayed that the little creature might die. She thought of all that had made life sweet to herself, from all which her child must be shut out for ever, and she utterly refused to be comforted.

And yet, as the years went on, the affliction of the child did more for the mother than all the blessings that had been showered on her youth, than all the trials that had fallen on her later years—it made her forget herself. In seeking to brighten her little daughter's life, her own was brightened. She suffered herself to be beguiled into exertions for her sake, that would have seemed impossible for her own. She welcomed the few visitors that came, because Selina liked to hear new voices and make new friends. The daily walk in the garden or the drive in the carriage sometimes seemed a weariness to her; but they deepened the rose on the little girl's cheek, and she went for her sake. She recalled the little songs and tales of her childhood for her pleasure, and took pains to learn such simple fancy work as the blind child could be taught to do.

In her little daughter the mother found solace for many a sorrow. She was a fair, slender child, more like her father than her mother, but like neither in disposition. She was sweet and cheerful always, even merry in her quiet way. She knew her blindness was a great misfortune, but it did not press upon her as such. She never repined under it, nor murmured that she was not like the rest; but rather comforted herself and her mother, saying that no schools nor visits could ever take her from her and from home; and after a time her mother was comforted and reconciled to her

affliction.

“For after all,” she thought, “what has life to give to any one? Far better that she should live here always, safe, and ignorant of the world and its ways, than that she should taste of pleasure only to have it turn to bitterness on her lips, as it has done on mine. If she could only be always a child! What will become of my darling when I must go and leave her?”

Poor Mrs Vane! She sought refuge in the present, from the griefs of the past, and the fears for the future; for she was one of those who have no safe place to which they can flee from trouble. She had scarcely even a form of religion. She had been altogether untaught as regards sacred things. Her mother had been a Jewess, and had died young, and her father had had no religion. Her husband troubled himself very little about these things, either for her or himself. He had chosen godfathers and godmothers for his children, and had them baptised, and then his duty was done. And the poor, solitary, suffering mother knew not where to betake herself in her time of need. Her fears for the future of all her children pressed on her heavily often, and she longed sadly and earnestly for some true friend to whom she might trust them.

And so the months and years passed, with nothing to break the monotony of their life but the monthly visits of the two school girls, Frederica and Theresa. Very pleasant breaks they were. The girls always came into the still sunshine of their mother’s pretty room like a fresh sweet breeze from the outer world, bringing health and fragrance on its wings. They were bright days indeed. Selina lived another life in the tales told by the school girls; and even their mother forgot her cares and ailments for the time as she listened to their merry talk. They were not at all alike: Selina was growing up tall and fair, like an English girl, her blind beautiful eyes clear and cloudless as the summer heaven; Frederica was small and dark, as much a Jewess in appearance as ever her grandmother had been; Theresa was more like Frederica than Selina, but plainer than either. But they were all alike in one thing: they loved each other and their mother dearly, and longed earnestly for the time when their school days should be over, and they should be happy together.

So poor Mrs Vane, who had comfort in so few things, had much comfort in her daughters and their love. And she needed all their comfort, poor soul! for some troubles, hard to bear, fell to her lot at this time—troubles which she could not let them share with her, and which need not be told here.

Chapter Two.

A whole week of holidays!—unexpected, un hoped-for holidays! For Mrs Glencairn was a Scotch lady, and had small respect for days “appointed by men.” All the days in the year were good days to a Godfearing people, said she; and as a general thing, Easter passed in their school just like any other time. But this year there was to be a whole week of holidays, whatever might be the reason. The pupils who stayed wearied themselves with conjectures as to why it had so happened; but the happy little girls who could go home to enjoy them, accepted the boon without a question, content with the fact itself.

Content! That hardly expresses the feelings of the little Vanes as they went dancing down the street, unconsciously jostling the many church-goers in their joyful excitement. Perfect happiness was in their hearts, shone in their faces, and rang out in their voices, and people as they passed turned again to look at them, so charming was the sight to see. They were happy in their own holiday, and happy in the thought that their coming home would make a holiday for their mother and Selina and their little brothers.

“And I am sure there will be some flowers out in the garden,” said Theresa,—“hyacinths or snowdrops, at least. And all the walks will be so neat and the borders. That is one good thing about Mrs Ascot, she does see that the garden is beautifully kept.”

“Yes, very. But I only hope mama will be well. It is so lovely to-day; and we must have a drive. It will make no difference though Dixen be busy in the garden, because I shall drive myself.”

“But will mama like that, do you think?” asked Theresa doubtfully.

“Of course she will like it, and Selina too. They have perfect confidence in me,” said Frederica firmly. “And as for Prickly Polly,”—she shrugged her shoulders.

“But no, my children! What shall I say to your papa when you shall be brought home in little morsels, and the carriage, and your dear mama!” And Theresa clasped her hands, and threw back her head with an air so ludicrously like Mrs Ascot, that her sister laughed merrily.

“She will go to church to-day. What if we should meet her?”

“Oh! she would be sure to go back with us. Let us go down the other way!”

Laughing and running, the girls turned into a narrow street. In their haste they ran against a little old gentleman just stepping out from an office door. They did not quite overturn him, but they startled him out of his good manners, and he uttered an angry exclamation in French. Then, as they turned to apologise, he exclaimed, “The young ladies Vane! What next, I wonder?”

“Mr St. Cyr! a thousand pardons.” They had been speaking English all the way down the street, but they spoke French to him, and both the girls dropped their very best curtseys.

“It must be that my little cousins have come to get their wills made, or their marriage contracts drawn, in all this haste.”

Mr St. Cyr was the gentleman to whom their grandfather had committed the arrangement of his affairs; it was he who still managed the property; and through his hands their mother's income came still.

"I was going to church this morning, but I shall be happy to defer it for you. You need not have been in such haste, however."

The girls laughed, and apologised again.

"We were running away from Prickly Polly," said Theresa.

"From Madame Marie Pauline Precoe Ascot," explained Frederica.

"Is she coming after you? You had much better come in here," said Mr St. Cyr, pretending great fright.

"Oh, no! But she is sure to go to church today, and we thought we might meet her. And if she knew we were going home, it might shorten her devotions."

"If she knew we had a holiday, she would want to come home to vex us. We are not among her favourites—especially Fred."

"Ah! that is it, is it?" said Mr St. Cyr. "She is hard on you, is she? I hope you do not let her trouble you too much."

"By no means," said Frederica with dignity. "On the contrary, I think I trouble her far more."

"I can conceive it possible," said Mr St. Cyr with a shrug. "But are you sure you can find your way home by these streets? See, I will go with you, and show you past the corner below. And let us hope that Madame Pauline will confess all her sins to-day; and I fancy that might ensure her absence till nightfall at least. And my young ladies, the next time you come to me in your troubles, pray don't begin by knocking me down."

"Pardon us, Cousin Cyprien. It was very careless," said Frederica, eagerly. "But really and truly, may I come to you with my troubles? I mean, of course, when I have any. I have none now," she added, laughing.

Mr St. Cyr did not laugh. He looked gravely into the bright face before him, so gravely that the laughing eyes looking up at him grew grave too.

"I hope it will be a long time before you need my help in trouble, little cousin. How old are you now? Let us see."

Instead of turning at the corner, as he meant to do, he walked on with them.

"I shall be fifteen my next birthday. It comes in August," said Frederica.

"Fifteen!" repeated Mr St. Cyr. "But what a little creature you are! It is a pity."

"I am as tall as mama," said Frederica with dignity.

"Yes, I suppose so. She was just such another child. Ah! how the years pass!"

"I shall grow yet, I have no doubt," said Frederica.

"Ah! well! we will hope so. And be quick about it. If you were only as tall as your sister at home now, we might strain a point, and call your education finished, and send you home to your mother. You must have learned quantities of things all these years, eh?"

"Oh! quantities!" said Frederica gravely. "But, Mr St. Cyr, I am not very big, I know. Still I could be a comfort to mama all the same."

"And she needs comfort you think?"

"It gives her pleasure to have us at home."

"And she has not so many pleasures, these days," said Mr St. Cyr. "But it would not do, I fear, not yet. Why, you are a mere child! I had no idea! Not nearly so mature as her mother was at her age," continued he, not to her, but to himself. "Well, so much the better. The more a child the better. The longer a child the better. She is so like her mother, too. The same sweet smiling eyes. Ah! there are so great mistakes made in this life!"

"Mr St. Cyr," said Frederica in a moment, "I am very little, I know, but Mrs Glencairn says I have a great deal of good sense, if I would only use it; and I daresay if you were to tell papa that I have learned enough of things, and that I ought to stay at home with mama and Selina, I don't think he would object."

Mr St. Cyr only answered by that wonderful shrug of his shoulders, which he could make to express anything—surprise, doubt, utter disbelief; and Frederica went on:

"Indeed, Mrs Glencairn thinks I am very sensible, and so does Miss Robina. Will you tell papa to let me stay at home, Mr St. Cyr?"

"And you think he would do it for me?" said he with an odd smile. "You are too young—much too young. If I had my way, you should remain a happy child for years and years yet—no millinery, no balls, no admiration, for seven years at least. Ah! when I think of your mother, and see you looking at me with her happy eyes! But what is the use of going over all this? I shall, be late for church, and I must bid you good day. And if I shall see—what is this you call her,

little one?—Prickly Polly!—I shall send her wool-gathering, shall I? And then you can pass the day without her.”

They all laughed.

“Oh! I am not the least afraid of her; though I am not very big,” said Frederica.

“But you may send her to gather wool, all the same,” said Theresa.

Then they went quietly on their way. There was no dancing along the street after that, as Mr St. Cyr saw when he turned at the corner of the square to look after them.

“She is like her mother,” said he to himself, “but more like her grandmother, that shrewd little Jewess, with her ‘good sense,’ as madame the schoolmistress says. Ah! if she had lived, that poor foolish child would not have been suffered to make that great mistake in life. But I must go to church. How many times have I said that I would not permit myself to care for her children as I have cared for her, to have my heart torn by ingratitude, or by indifference, which is as ill to bear. If, indeed, through them I could wound the self-love and vanity of their father, and so avenge the wrongs of my friend’s child, the poor Theresa—ah! then I might care for them, and fight for them against him to the death.” And with this Christian sentiment in his heart, the little man went up the great cathedral steps to pray.

In the meantime the two girls were walking slowly down the street.

“I like Cousin Cyprien very much,” said Frederica, gravely.

“Yes, so do I,” said her sister. “But then he is not our cousin, you know.”

“Well, he was grandpapa’s cousin; and if he is not ours, we have none. I like him.”

“Madame Ascot is our cousin quite as much as he.”

“Madame Ascot, indeed! Don’t be silly, Tessie;” and she shrugged her shoulders in Mr St. Cyr’s fashion. “I wish I had gone to church with Mr St. Cyr. I mean I wish I had offered to go. He would have been pleased.”

“But papa would not have been pleased, Fred.”

“He would not have cared about my going to church. He would not have been pleased that I should go to give pleasure to Mr St. Cyr. He does not like him; I wonder why.”

“Oh! you know very well. It is because of grandpapa’s will.”

“Mama likes him. She says he is a good and just man. He is very religious.”

“So is Madame Ascot,” said Tessie. “I don’t admire religious people.”

“But then there are so many ways of being religious. Miss Baines’ religion made her strong and patient to bear pain. And she was good and kind always.”

“Miss Pardie is very religious—the cross thing,” said Theresa, “and so is Fanny Green. But she listens to the girl’s conversation while she says her prayers. And Mattie Holt tells tales, and is very disagreeable. I don’t admire religious people.”

“But then their religion cannot be of the right kind. There must be some good in the right religion, if we only could be sure what the right is.”

“Oh, I daresay they are all good after a fashion. One kind is good for one, and another kind for another.”

“But, Tessie, that is nonsense. How can things be equally good that are exactly opposite? And I know that Mrs Ascot thinks papa and the rest of us all wrong. And you should have seen her scornful look, when I told her once that Miss Baines was a religious woman. And I know that Mrs Glencairn and Miss Robina, among themselves, call Mrs Ascot ‘a poor benighted creature.’ They cannot all be right.”

“Oh! well! what does it matter?” said her sister, impatiently. “Why should you care what Mrs Ascot thinks, or Mrs Glencairn either?”

“Still, one would like to know. Mr St. Cyr is good, but then Mrs Ascot is not; and they have just the same religion, though I don’t suppose Mr St. Cyr goes so often to church, or to confession, as she does. And Miss Baines was good, and her religion was quite different. As for papa and the rest of us, I don’t think we have any at all.”

“Well, that shows that it doesn’t matter about religion. I am sure mama is much nicer than Madame Ascot, and she has no religion at all you say, and Madame says the same.”

“Mama is a Jewess, at least her mother was,” said Frederica; “but she is certainly not religious in her way. One ought to have a religion of some kind, only how is one to know when one has that which is right?”

“There is the Bible,” said Tessie, hesitating.

“Yes, Miss Baines says it is the book of books, and mama approves of it too. She has one, you know, only it is in Hebrew. I shall ask some one about it,—which is the right kind I mean.”

“Papa, for instance, or Mr St. Cyr. But one would tell you one thing, and the other another, and you would be just in

the same place. Only I think papa would just laugh at you.”

“I suppose so. But there must be some way of finding out the truth.”

“Better go and ask the bishop,” said Tessie, laughing. “But then there are two bishops, and which is the right? Don’t be a goose, Fred.”

“I am quite serious, I assure you, for the moment,” added she. “And indeed, it is a thing to be quite serious about.”

“If we had gone to the convent, as Mr St. Cyr and Madame Ascot wished, instead of to Mrs Glencairn’s, we should have known all about it. But then it is quite right that we should be of the same religion as papa. Still I think he did not care himself, only he wished to vex Mr St. Cyr.”

Frederica said nothing for a minute, and her sister added—

“We ought to learn about it in church: that is what we go to church for, I suppose.”

“Yes, and I like to go very well, but I get very sleepy during the sermon, especially when we go with Miss Robina. I try to listen sometimes; but of course all that is meant for grown-up people, and I don’t understand it.”

“Were you not just telling Mr St. Cyr that you are grown up? But I think you are very stupid to bother about it. If people say their prayers and are nice and obliging, and all that, I think that is quite enough. I am sure mama is good, and so is Selina, and what is the use talking so much about religion, as though that would make any difference?”

“Yes, mama is good, and Selina, but I am not, at least very often I am not. And there must be some way of finding out what is wrong and what is right.”

“Of course there is—your own conscience,” said Tessie, triumphantly. “Hasn’t Mrs Glencairn often told you?”

Frederica shook her head.

“But there must be something more than that. I wish I knew.”

“Say your prayers and go to church, that is religion, everybody knows. But to be good and nice is something quite different. I think you are very silly, with all your wishes and talking, and I beg you won’t say anything to Selina about it. She thinks of things afterwards, and you are not to vex her. And don’t look like that, or I shall wish you had gone to church with Mr St. Cyr. But you will forget all about it before to-morrow. That is one comfort.”

“Very likely; but that does not prove anything;” said Frederica. “Everybody ought to have some kind of religion; and sometimes, when I used to see Miss Baines so happy in the midst of all her pain and trouble, I thought of poor mama, and wished that she could know all about it. But I won’t say anything to Selina just yet.”

“No, nor ever, unless you are a goose. Here we are at home. Won’t they be glad?” And the little girl ran up the broad stone steps, and danced out her impatience while she was made to wait for the opening of the door.

“No,” said Frederica, as she stood at her side; “I am not going to spoil our visit with religion, at any rate; and I daresay you are right, Tessie, and I may forget all about it before the week is over.”

Chapter Three.

Easter fell late this year. The grass on the sheltered lawn was already green, and there were many budding things in the borders; and with the sunshine falling on them so warm and bright, it almost seemed to the children like a summer day. Tessie could not resist the temptation to run down the steps again, to peep through the wires and over the low cedar hedge at the crocuses and snowdrops beyond:

“We shall have cold days enough yet,” she said as she came back; “but I need not spoil to-day thinking about them. It is just like summer to-day.”

“We shall make a summer day in the house to mama and Selina, that is—and to the children—and to Madame Marie Pauline Precoe Ascot, too, if she will let us; to the rest, whether she will or not.”

The coming in of the two children brightened their mother’s dim room like sunshine, and the more this time that they were not expected. It was early yet, and their mother was not dressed; but their sister sprang to meet them with a glad cry, and in a minute they were all rejoicing round their mother’s couch.

“A week of holidays, mama! Think of it, Lina! a whole week. I don’t in the least know how it happened. Somebody is going away or somebody is coming. It doesn’t matter; here we are. Isn’t it nice?”

And so they chattered on for a time, while their mother listened.

“Lina,” said Frederica, in a little, “stand up, and let me see how tall you are.”

Seeing her there in her mother’s room, you would never have supposed that Selina Vane was blind. Her eyes were a clear and lovely blue, well opened and bright. She walked about the room, not rapidly, but still lightly; not at all like one afraid. While going about the house and garden, she bent slightly forward, and walked with one hand held a little out before her; but here, in her mother’s dressing-room, she had no look of blindness. Her face was as bright and happy as her sister’s, and she rose at Frederica’s bidding, laughing and wondering a little. Her sister placed herself

beside her, and measured the difference in their height with her hand. She shook her head gravely.

"There *is* a dreadful difference. I am a shockingly little creature; am I not, mama?"

She put on such a face of ludicrous dismay, that her mother could not but laugh.

"Mama, I am nearly fifteen. I ought to be a woman by this time, and really I am nothing but a child."

She stood before a large dressing-glass, and surveyed herself discontentedly.

"These curls have something to do with it, and this short dress. That can be remedied, however."

In a moment she had obtained a dressing-gown of her mother's, and, drawing the silken cord tightly round her waist, she walked up and down, looking over her shoulder to see herself in the glass. The whole thing was done in a manner so childish, and so amusing, that her mother laughed merrily; and her little brother who had come in with Tessie, clapped their hands. Frederica laughed too.

"I am afraid it is not the dress, mama; I am only a child."

"My darling! a happy child is a very good thing to be. I hope it will be a long time before you are anything but a happy child. The longer the better," added she, with a sigh.

"That is what Cousin Cyprien said, mama," said Frederica, gravely.

"Yes; it was Mr St. Cyr that put all that nonsense in her head about being a woman and grown up," said Tessie, severely; "and she told him she had a deal of sense, though she was so little. For my part, I am very well content to be a child."

"But you have a child, you know, dear; only thirteen, or is it twelve, mama? A precocious child certainly, but still a child," said Frederica, with an air.

"Mama, look at her. She must be forty, at least," exclaimed Tessie. "She must be considerably older than Mrs Ascot—ever so much older than Lina."

"What is it all about?" asked Selina, gently.

"Never mind. Don't ask her, Lina. She is so dreadfully wise and clever that she is quite too much for me sometimes. I should not wonder if Mrs Glencairn would wish to engage her to supply Miss Robina's place when she is married."

"Tessie, that is a secret. You promised not to tell—about Miss Robina, I mean."

"How prudent, too?" said Tessie. "Mama, we are not crazy; only we are so glad to get home."

"And indeed, mama, I am very willing to be a child for a long time yet," said Frederica, and seizing her little brother Hubert, she danced with him round the room to music of her own making. Catching Charlie's hands, Tessie followed, while Selina, laughing, joined in the music, though not in the dance.

"Mama," said she, softly, "is it the same house do you think?"

The boys might have grown too noisy, but Frederica brought their play to an end presently.

"Mama," said she, "it is the loveliest of spring days. You think it cold, I daresay, as you have a fire, but it is just like summer, and I am going to drive you and Selina; and afterwards I will drive the boys, if they are very good. We will go very slowly; not in the streets, but away in the country. Mama, you are not afraid of my driving?" Mrs Vane shook her head. "No, love; I am not afraid. I am sure you can drive the ponies; but it is a long time since I was out. Selina will like to go, however."

"And you too, mama—just a little way. Are you not so well, mama? You are tired. Something has tired you. Ah! these papers. I see. She could not have gone to church, and said her prayers quite happily, unless she had left you something to vex yourself with while she was away. Where are they? Why, mama, these are the very same I saw at Christmas—some of them at least," added she, after turning over a bundle of papers that lay on the dressing-table. "I see butcher's bill—baker's bill—grocer's bill. What quantities you and Selina must eat, mama! I don't understand them in the least. Were not all these things paid before, mama?"

"Some of them must have been," replied Mrs Vane, wearily; "but I do not understand them."

"And why should you be vexed? Is not Mrs Ascot here for no other reason than to save you all this trouble? And surely papa—"

Mrs Vane made a sudden impatient gesture. "Papa can do nothing. There is nothing to be done but pay the bills, and he cannot pay them."

"Has anything happened since we were at home?" asked Frederica anxiously. "Have we grown poor?"

"No, no. Everything is as usual. Indeed, Mr St. Cyr gave me more money than usual. Rents have risen, he says. He was here not a month since, but the money has all gone—to pay servants' wages and old debts,' Mrs Ascot says. I do not understand how it can be."

"But, mama, there must be some mistake. I wish I knew about bills and things. Papa ought to examine these. He

would understand them. Why should you be vexed about them?"

"My love, there is nothing to understand, he says, but that the bills must be paid; and he says I must ask Mr St. Cyr for more money—that we have not enough to live upon. I cannot do it. It is not in his power to increase it. He gave me more once, but I think, it was his own. It was for Mrs Glencairn. I could not bear that she who is so good to you should be without her money. But I could not ask him again."

"But, mama," said Frederica, hesitating, "has papa no money? He goes to the office, and all that—and has he no salary, like other gentlemen?"

"There is many a family kept on less than his income, Mr St. Cyr told me; but the keeping up of the place is expensive; and I cannot ask him. And oh, darling, to think that I should have spoiled your holiday with all this!"

"Mama, don't you remember how you put these bills away at Christmas, not to vex yourself and us? And here they are again. It is right that I should be vexed with what vexes you, although I am a child."

"Yes, if you could help me, dear."

The children had gone out to the garden by this time. Selina sat holding her mother's hand, listening with a grave face to all that passed.

"Mama," said she, "Frederica ought to know. She is a child, but she has sense; and, with her to help us, we might be able to understand. Have you the papers, Frederica? Mama read them all at Christmas after you went away, and she gave Madame Ascot money to pay some of them at least, and it cannot be right that they all should come back. There must be some mistake."

Frederica opened a great many papers and read patiently through long household accounts, and in a little while became utterly bewildered. Nothing but the grave looks of her mother and Selina prevented her from bursting into childish laughter, so comical did the going over and over the same thing seem to her. The grocer's bill was the most amusing. "Tea, sugar, coffee, soap, candles, salt," and so on, over again.

"Dear me, mama, how many things people need?"

Then there were other bills, the butcher's, the baker's, and then a wine merchant's bill. There was one which had "paid M. Leroy" at the end of it, and Frederica said—

"Madame Ascot did not intend you should have this, mama. However, we may as well put it with the rest."

Selina listened earnestly, but said nothing. Indeed, when they had all wearied themselves, they were no wiser, and no nearer the end of their trouble.

"Mama, ought people to have bills?" said Frederica; "ought not people to pay when they buy things? It would save a great deal of trouble."

"I think they ought; but Mrs Ascot seems to have fallen into this way. It was not done when I was well. Oh, if I were only able to attend to these things myself! It is quite wrong that things should have fallen into such a state. I do not believe there is any need that it should be so. Everything is wrong, and I can do nothing. I do not trust Madame Ascot: and your father,—there is no use speaking to him."

She was getting excited, and would be ill soon, her daughters knew, unless this could be put out of her mind.

"I will tell you what we must do, mama. We will take all these papers to Mr St. Cyr—not to ask more money. But he will understand them, and he will help us. Mama, he was quite nice to-day, not at all cross, though we nearly knocked him down; and he said I was to come to him when I was in trouble, and I am sure this is dreadful trouble. Selina, don't you think we might go to Mr St. Cyr?"

Selina waited for her mother to speak.

"I don't think Mrs Ascot would like it, nor papa. He says Mr St. Cyr must advance the money to pay the bills, that is all."

"Oh! as for papa, he won't trouble himself; and I think I should rather like to vex madame. She need not be vexed if she has made no mistakes, and if she is quite to be trusted," said Frederica, with some hesitation.

"There is no good in struggling against Mrs Ascot," said Mrs Vane hopelessly; "I have tried often, and there is no use. I have not the strength nor the courage."

The papers fell to the floor, as Frederica started up suddenly.

"Mama, I have strength and courage to tear Madame Ascot into fifty thousand little pieces, if she dares to trouble you," cried she; and then, as she saw her mother's face, she hung her head, adding, "I beg your pardon, mama: that was very foolish and wicked."

"My darling, there is no use in doing anything that Mrs Ascot will not like. I have tried to bring things right often."

"Because you are not strong. Papa ought to do it," said Frederica.

"And, mama, this cannot go on always. There must come an end some time, and I think Frederica is right, and these papers should be sent to Mr St. Cyr." Selina spoke very quietly.

“And why should Madame Ascot care?” said Frederica. “I hope she will care. I should like to see her face when she knows Mr St. Cyr has got those disagreeable papers. I have a fancy that their only use is to make you uncomfortable, you and Selina. Now I shall put them away, and you must promise not to think of them again, till Cousin Cyprien shall make them all right. And I will order the ponies, and drive you first, mama, and Lina, and afterwards Tessie and the boys, if they are very good.”

“Mama,” said Selina, “I think this is quite the best way—about the papers, I mean. You know you have thought about giving them to him before. And he will be quite willing to take the trouble, and he will know what to do; he is wise. Say that this is right, mama.”

“Indeed, love, I do not know what is right; but we will send them: I can do nothing else.”

“And it will all be made easy, mama. I only wonder we have not sent them long ago. And you are really not to think about them—promise, dear mama.”

And so the disagreeable subject was put away for that time.

Chapter Four.

The orders were given, and all preparations made, and in a little time the pony carriage stood at the door. It was a carriage which Mr St. Hubert had had made for his daughter's use, after she became an invalid. It was open and quite low, and large enough to hold two persons, besides the fortunate ones who should occupy the luxurious chief seats. But the boys were restless, and sometimes noisy, and Tessie was to stay at home with them, so that their mother and Selina might sit in state and comfort. Frederica, on the high front seat, acted as driver, and enjoyed it well. Dixen was there beside her, so that her mother need not have the least cause for being frightened or nervous, and so lose the pleasure of the drive.

Dixen had once been a soldier, and Mr Vane's servant while he was in the army, and had lived with him since his marriage in various capacities. Lately he had been called the coachman; but to take Mrs Vane and Selina out to their unfrequent drives, was only a small part of what was expected from him. He waited on Mr Vane, he worked under the gardener, and held himself ready to do whatever else might be found for him to do. The other servants had got into the fashion of calling him old and good for little; but none of them all worked so faithfully for their wages as he.

He did not feel affronted that the reins were taken out of his hands on this occasion; for the young lady had been taught to drive by him, and he was proud of her skill and success in the art.

They left the city streets, and passing the toll-gate, soon found themselves with the river on one side and the dull grey fields and leafless trees on the other, with nothing to hinder the putting of the ponies to their speed. It was a summer day for brightness and mildness, but Mrs Vane drew her fur cloak close around her, as the breeze from the river reached her; for she had made herself a prisoner in the house for a long time, and the keen air made her shiver. Selina smiled with pleasure as she felt the wind on her face, and drew in long breaths of the sweet refreshing air.

“Is not this nice, mama?” asked she, laying herself back among the cushions with a sigh of satisfaction.

“Very nice and pleasant,” said her mother, touching her hand gently. This stood to the blind girl for a smile.

“And you are glad you came, mama?”

“Very glad, love. You have quite a colour already.”

“And so have you, mama,” said Frederica, glancing round. “When were you out last?”

“Not for a long time—not since we went in a sleigh,” said Selina, answering for her. “We thought the roads could not be quite good yet. And mama is afraid of the cold.”

“Not since sleighing!” exclaimed Frederica: “you don't know your privileges. Dixen, I am surprised at you.”

“It has no' been my fault, Miss Frederica, I can assure you,” said Dixen gravely.

“I have not felt inclined to go out,” said Mrs Vane; “and, indeed, there is little pleasure in going when one has to be so muffled from the cold.”

“But, mama, you thought you could not come to-day. You thought it would be too much for you, and now you enjoy it. It is just what you need, and Selina too. You want me to be at home to take care of you both.”

“And indeed, Miss, that's a true word of yours,” said Dixen in a whisper.

Frederica looked up quickly.

“Mama, I am going to ask Dixen. He is a man of sense. Dixen, don't you think it is quite time that I should be considered a grown-up young lady? I am fifteen, and mama needs me at home. I am very little, I know,” added she, deprecatingly, as the old man let a queer glance rest on her. He answered with great gravity, however.

“Good gear is ay in small bundles; and one does not need to be a giantess to be a comfort to one's mother.”

“Just so,” said Frederica, nodding well pleased. “I am fifteen, and one ought to have some sense at fifteen. Mama,

are you keeping your promise? You know you are only to think of pleasant things. You are sure you are glad you came?"

"Very glad, dear."

"And not all for Lina's sake?"

"No," said her mother, laughing; "a little for your sake."

"Oh, I hope it will be fine every day while we are at home. We shall drive every day. Do you like it, Lina?"

"Yes," said Selina softly. Selina's "yes" said more than other people's protestations.

It was very pleasant to them all. It was not in appearance only that Mrs Vane had put away all unhappy thoughts; she had really put them away. It was not that she had much hope that her cousin could put everything right, as Frederica had said, or that she had much faith in her little daughter's "good sense." But she had great faith in her loving heart and happy temper, and it was a wonderful break in the dull life led by her and Selina to have the merry little creature with them, and she yielded entirely to the charm of her lively loving ways, and for the time was well and happy. They only reached home in time for their two o'clock dinner, which they enjoyed all the more for their drive, and then Mrs Vane and Selina were left to rest, while Frederica went out with Tessie and the children.

"It will not be too much for Jack and Jill, I hope," said Frederica, as she stood stroking the ponies before they set off.

"Not if you drive gently," said Dixen. "And I think, Miss Frederica, the mistress would be more at her ease if I were to go with you. Not that there's any need of it, but she's nervous-like, you know."

"And can you be spared? You seem to be in such demand."

"We'll no' ask," said Dixen. "If you're wanting me, that is all that need be said. Duty doesn't call two ways at once, they say; and if it's for pleasure, why should not I have a holiday as well as the rest? And madame's no' here to hinder or to try it even."

Frederica laughed.

"And besides, Miss," continued Dixen, "it is more seemly for a young lady like you to have your servant with you. It may do for children and common folk to go here and there by themselves, but a young lady like you—"

Frederica opened her eyes. This was a new light to see the matter in; she was by no means sure that it was a pleasant one. But if it pleased Dixen to be responsible for her dignity and propriety, she would not object, at least on this occasion.

So away they went through the streets first, and then round the mountain, to the great enjoyment of them all. Not one of them enjoyed it less, and Dixen I am assured enjoyed it all the more, that they met Mrs Ascot not far from the house, and knew by the look she gave them that she would have liked to turn them back.

"Her smile was out of the wrong side of her mouth," muttered Dixen. He knew that she had ordered the carriage for herself at four, and they could not go for her pleasure that afternoon.

"I only hope she will not disturb mama till we come home," said Frederica.

The drive was charming, but even Frederica confessed to being a little tired when they reached home. It was five and after. Madame Ascot met them at the door. It puts the best-tempered people out to be kept waiting, and her face was not an agreeable one to see at the moment.

"Did you not understand that I said four?" asked she sharply.

"Miss Frederica," began Dixen, touching his hat to the young lady.

"Did I not say four?" repeated Mrs Ascot.

"But, madame, it would have been quite impossible. We did not leave home till nearly three," said Tessie.

"Don't let it happen again," said Mrs Ascot; taking no notice of the child.

Frederica was patting her favourites, calling them, all sorts of pet names. She turned as Mrs Ascot attempted to pass her.

"It is a pity, madame. You should have sent, for a carriage. It is quite impossible that the ponies should be taken out again to-night, you know," she added as Mrs Ascot seemed to be preparing to enter the carriage. It is likely madame would have proved it quite possible, had not Mr Vane entered the garden at the moment Tessie ran down the steps to meet him.

"Oh, papa, we are to have a whole week of holidays. Are you not glad?"

"Papa, I am so sorry we did not drive round by the office and take you up. I thought you must have been home. Yes, they are rather warm, and tired too, but they will be none the worse, will they, Dixen? And I am to drive mama every fine day and you must come too, papa. I shall be charmed to drive you."

Mr Vane laughed.

"My neck is too valuable," said he:

"Not more valuable than mama's; and we can take Dixen if you are afraid. Now you must be kind to them, Dixen, and rub them well down," added she, as the old man prepared to lead them away.

"Never fear, Miss Frederica," said Dixen.

"But I thought Mrs Ascot was going out;" said Mr Vane.

"It is too late now," said that lady angrily.

"Quite too late, and the ponies are tired. It is quite impossible," said Tessie, with irritating dignity.

"All right," said Mr Vane, indifferently.

"Papa, we are going to have a party in the drawing-room to-night. We are all going, and mama and Selina and you must come too, just after dinner. Will you come, papa?" pleaded both girls, hanging on his arms.

"Certainly, with great pleasure," said their father, pleased to be thus entreated; "but you must let me go now."

"It is not summer to madame to-night," whispered Tessie, laughing.

"We will invite her to our party, and that will comfort her," said her sister, and then she went upstairs to give private instructions to the boys' maid, that they were not to be put to bed at their usual early hour.

Mrs Ascot did not honour them with her presence, but the party was very successful notwithstanding. Mr and Mrs Vane were becoming quite indifferent to each other by this time; that is to say, no part of the happiness of either was of the other's giving. Mrs Vane was long past resenting the open indifference that had hurt her so much at first, and her husband never brought so much brightness with him in his brief visits, as to cause her to regret his absence very bitterly. She had quite resigned herself to the knowledge that it could not be otherwise now.

Still they had one interest in common. They cared for their children, each in a different way, and took a little pleasure in each other's society when their children were with them. Mr Vane was not a fond father, but his children were pretty and bright, and he had the selfish man's satisfaction in the possession of what other people admired. They were fond of him, and not in the least afraid of him. He never reproved or punished them, and was rarely impatient with them, for they were never long enough in his presence to weary him, or to interfere in any way with his comfort. So when the girls welcomed him to the drawing-room, he was quite prepared to enjoy an hour or two with them.

They all enjoyed it. They had much to say for awhile, and then they danced and sang, that is, the little boys danced with Tessie, and then they all sang, and doubtless a much larger and more discriminating audience would have been delighted with this part of the entertainment; for they all had sweet voices, especially Selina, and her sisters had been well taught; and two hours passed away very quickly, Mr Vane thought.

After the little boys went to bed, the conversation somehow turned again on the subject of Frederica's young-ladyhood, and she once more suggested the question whether she had not learned "enough of things," and whether it was not time that she were leaving school.

"For indeed, papa, I have gone through all the books the girls ever go through at Mrs Glencairn's, and she has given me quite new books lately, French history, and a book about animals; but I could read these just as well at home."

"How very clever you must be!" said her father.

"No, papa, not particularly clever? at least, cleverness has nothing to do with it. But you know their French takes the other girls for ever to learn, and French is nothing to us who speak it at home. So I have just the dictation now, and learning poetry and easy things like that. Indeed, I think it is just wasting money for me to go longer to school," added she, instinctively feeling that that argument her father might be brought to consider.

"I am afraid it would lead to wasting much more if you were to leave school," said her father, laughing. "To be sure you are such a child you could not be taken into society for a while yet, school or no school."

"Oh! as to that, I am in no haste about going into society; I only wish to be at home to take care of mama and Selina. Would it not be nice, mama?"

"It would not be nice for me to be left at school alone," said Tessie; "and as for you, I am afraid you would not have everything your own way. Madame Ascot would spoil your pleasure a little."

"Oh! we could dispense with Mrs Ascot, if I were at home," said Frederica with dignity. "I could take charge of the house, and make less fuss about it than she does. Papa, won't you take it into your serious consideration? I have had enough of school."

"You have had enough of Mrs Glencairn I daresay. I think I must take into serious consideration whether it will not be better to send you to England for a year or two. I think it is the best thing I can do for you."

That was the last word spoken on the subject Mrs Vane was too startled by her husband's words to reply to them, and she touched Selina's lips to stay the exclamation that rose to them. Frederica and Theresa exchanged looks of dismay, but admonished by a look from their mother, neither of them spoke, and in a little time their father bade them good-night and went out.

"He did not mean anything, mama," said Frederica.

"He had not thought of it a minute before he said it, and he will forget it in a day. He often does forget things," said Tessie.

"We must not say anything to make him remember it," said their mother; "and for the present we may hear no more about it."

"And I must stay at school," said Frederica, pouting a little. "Mama, you don't know how nice it would be for you and Lina, if I were always at home."

"I can imagine it, dear. But we will not speak of it, lest I should have to lose you altogether for years to come."

Chapter Five.

The happy holidays passed all too soon away, and it was not till the very last of them that Frederica went with her bundle of papers to the office of Mr St. Cyr.

"Mama could write a note and send Dixen, of course," said she to Theresa. "But in a matter so troublesome every care should be taken, and I shall go myself."

She almost wished she had not, however, when she reached his house. The outer door was standing open, and instead of ascending a step or two as to most other houses in the street, one went down a step to the threshold, and when that was passed, the dark and gloomy hall looked not at all inviting to Frederica's eyes. It was too late to think of running away now, however, and she sat down in the dingy outer office to wait till her name was taken in to Mr St. Cyr. Her courage revived when he came out to her; for he welcomed her warmly, and asked her into his private office with great ceremony, quite as if she had been a grownup young lady, she told Theresa afterwards.

He took the papers, which she made haste to present as an excuse for her coming, and examined them carefully for a minute or two. He nodded his head and shrugged his shoulders, and said mademoiselle should have no more trouble with them, unless he were much mistaken. And then Frederica knew that the right thing for her to do would be to rise and thank him, and go away. But she did not. She sat looking round the dim room upon the numberless shelves and drawers and pigeon-holes, and then through the dusty window into a narrow court shut in by high Walls—as dismal a place as one could imagine. Her eyes were very grave when they came back again to Mr St. Cyr's face.

"Well, my little cousin, what do you think of it all?" asked he. "Do you live here always, Mr St. Cyr?"

"Yes; here by day, and upstairs at night."

"And do you live alone? Have you no one else in this house?"

"I have old Babette, whom you saw at the door."

"And no one else?"

"Is not that enough?"

"And has there never been any one else? And are you happy here?" asked Frederica, wonder struggling with the gravity in her face.

"Ah, well! as to that—like the rest of the world, I suppose," said Mr St. Cyr, with his wonderful shrug; but there came a look of pain over his face that startled the little girl, and made her wish that she had gone away before, so she rose hastily, and said,—

"Adieu—and—pardon me, Cousin Cyprien."

"To meet soon, my little cousin," said he, bowing over her offered hand, "as if I were quite grown up," thought Frederica again, in the midst of her confusion.

He went with her through the outer room and through the dim hall to the street door, and then a new thought seemed to strike him.

"You will think I am a wicked old spider sitting here in the dark to catch unwary flies, if I let you go so. You shall come upstairs to see that the sun shines here too, and that I am not altogether unlike my fellow-men, though I am quite alone. Come upstairs, my child."

Frederica gave one glance upward, and another into the sunny street. She would much rather have gone away, but Mr St. Cyr was half-way up by this time, and so she could only follow. The stairs were as dim as the hall, and she saw nothing distinctly till she found herself in a large but not very lofty room. Mr St. Cyr drew aside the heavy curtains, and let in the sunshine.

"And now you shall sit here till I see what my Babette can find for your refreshment;" said he.

There were a great many beautiful things in the room. Though the furniture *was* dark and old-fashioned, it was very rich and handsome of its kind. The curtains were of the richest damask, of a shade between crimson and brown, and the carpet was of the same colours, and so thick and soft that never a foot-fall could be heard in the room. There were vases and other ornaments on the mantel-piece, and a quaintly carved cabinet opposite, whose open doors

showed many strange and beautiful things. There were pictures on the walls which made Frederica think of the great churches in which she had sometimes been.

It was not a pleasant room, notwithstanding all these beautiful things; but quite as gloomy, though in a different way, as the office downstairs. She did not move about to examine any of them, but sat looking at a lovely picture of a woman with a child in her arms, over which the morning sunshine fell. By-and-by Mr St. Cyr came in, followed by a little old woman in an odd dress, who carried a silver tray in her hand. On the tray was a china plate, with a bunch of grapes, which she set down on a little table at her master's bidding, and then left the room.

"And so you do not think it well to be alone, my little cousin," said Mr St. Cyr, when he had given the grapes into Frederica's hand. "Will you not come and stay with me then?"

Frederica did not answer for a moment. "You have learned enough of things you know," said he, with his odd smile. "If we can persuade Mr Vane to let you leave school, will you come and stay here with me?"

Frederica shook her head.

"I could not leave mama. She needs me."

"But she has your sisters, and I am quite alone. Your mother used to come here when she was a child."

"Did she? Yes, she told us so. That must have been a long time ago."

"A long time ago! And so you will not come?"

"Papa says he will send me home to England to school for a year or two, after I am done with Mrs Glencairn."

"And would you like that?"

"No, not at all. Mama would miss me so much, and Selina. But I don't intend to make myself unhappy about it. Very likely papa may forget all about it again."

"He forgets with ease some things," said Mr St. Cyr: "let us hope he may forget this."

"I should not like to go, because of mama," repeated Frederica.

"And that is a good reason why you will not come and stay with me. Ah, well! I do not blame you. This is not the place for a bright little flower like you to bloom in. I must still be alone, I suppose."

"But I will come sometimes and see you, and so will Tessie, if you would like us to do so," said Frederica, rising to go: "and I shall certainly come if I fall into any more troubles. You said I was to do so, did you not, Cousin Cyprien?"

"Surely, I shall expect you."

"And I have come already with these tiresome papers. And ah! I had forgotten. There were several things I wished to say about them."

"You need not say them," said Mr St. Cyr: "I shall understand them perfectly, I do not doubt, and they shall not trouble you any more, nor your mama either. I only wish all her troubles could be as easily ended as these shall be."

"But, Mr St. Cyr," said Frederica, pausing at the door, and growing very red, "mama does not wish that you should pay these things. Has not mama enough of money?"

"Assuredly, she has ample means. I have no thought of paying these debts. Do not alarm yourself."

"You are not angry with me, are you, Cousin Cyprien?" asked Frederica, wistfully.

"Angry! By no means, my little cousin. Why should I be angry? And now, remember you are to come again, you and your sister. Ah! how bright the sunshine is!" added he, as he opened the door.

Yes, it was almost dazzling at first, after the dimness within. Frederica walked slowly home, not able, even in the bright sunshine, to shake off the quieting influence of the old man's solitary home.

"I wonder why it seemed so strange?" said she to herself, "it must have been the silence. I wonder if any other voice is ever heard in that room. He must have visitors. And mama used to go there when she was a little girl, with grandpapa, I suppose. If I were to do anything wrong, or were afraid of an enemy, I think I would go there to hide myself. But to live there always!—no, I could not do that; it is too silent and sad."

"Mama," she asked that night when she had told them of her visit, "was it always so still and gloomy at Cousin Cyprien's when you used to go there? Was he always alone in those days?"

"I do not remember it as gloomy or silent. Mr St. Cyr's mother lived there then, and there were a great many beautiful things in the house. His brother was there too sometimes, but he was not a cheerful person."

"There are beautiful things there now. The cabinet is full of them, and there are the pictures on the walls," and she went on to name other things she had seen: "but still I wonder that he can content himself there, it is so solitary and silent."

"Mama," said Tessie, "I don't think it says much for Fred's good sense that she should talk in that way about Mr St.

Cyr and his home. Very likely there are crowds of visitors there every night, though there was no one there then." Frederica shook her head. "No, you would not say so if you went there. Only very old people or shadows could ever be content there."

"Mama, listen to her! Is she sensible?"

"Well, perhaps it is foolish," said Frederica candidly. "But all the same I cannot help being sorry for Cousin Cyprien. What does he take pleasure in, mama?"

"My dear, a man like Mr St. Cyr has many sources of interest and pleasure that a young girl like you cannot be supposed to know anything about, or even to understand, if you knew them. I do not think he needs your pity or sympathy very much. He is very religious, I believe."

"And religion is enough to content some people," said Tessie flippantly. "You know you told me the other day that Miss Baines' religion made her quite patient and happy, even when she was in great suffering, and not afraid even of death; and perhaps it suits Mr St. Cyr to be religious too."

"Yes; but then his religion must be quite different from Miss Baines'."

"Oh, well! it may be just as good, or it may suit him just as well. I think you are very foolish, and so does Selina."

But Selina said nothing. She listened always to her sister's talk, and "thought about it afterwards," as Tessie had said. Now she was repeating to herself, "Patient and happy even in great suffering; that must be a good and beautiful thing." And many thoughts did she give to Miss Baines and her sufferings, and her patience, before she saw her sisters again.

It was a beautiful sight, if there had been anyone to see it—the mother and her daughters as they sat there together on that last night before Frederica and Theresa went back to school. And yet it would have been a sorrowful sight to one who knew their history and their affairs, and who loved them and wished them well. For, except the dear love they bore to one another, there was not a single element of permanence in the happiness they enjoyed together.

That the hour of separation was drawing near, none who looked in Mrs Vane's face could fail to see. It was coming slowly, so slowly that she, who had almost forgotten what it was to be quite well and free from pain, had come to think that her illness was not of a kind that sooner or later ends in death. The thought that it might be so—that she must leave her children, young, without experience, every danger doubled by their own beauty and their grandfather's wealth, was a very painful one, but she put it from her, whenever it could be put away. Death was terrible to think of for their sakes. Yes, and terrible for herself too; for of the hope which sustains the Christian alike in life and in death, she knew nothing.

It is difficult to conceive of ignorance so utter as hers on all religious subjects. Her mother had not lived long enough to teach her the little that she herself understood of the religion of her people, and her father had had no religion. During the first years of her married life, she had sometimes gone to church with her husband, but she had never been much interested in what she heard, or tried to understand it. It had been a mere form with her; as indeed it had been always with her husband. She knew nothing of the way in which a sinner must be prepared for death, that must come some time, and which might be near, and there were times when the thought of this made her afraid.

Her daughters knew little more than she did. When the idea of sending them to school was first proposed, Mrs Ascot desired that it should be to one of the convents of the city, and probably there they would have been sent, had not Mr St. Cyr earnestly desired it too. His wish was enough to make Mr Vane decide against it, so bitter was his dislike, and they were sent to Mrs Glencairn's instead. Their religions teaching while there was, at their father's request, committed to the charge of the English teacher, Miss Pardie, and her instructions were not of a kind to make much impression on the minds of volatile girls, with whom she was not a favourite. The Scripture lessons which they shared with the other pupils, were too often learned and repeated as a task, and forgotten.

So neither the mother nor the children had any knowledge of the true way to find happiness, either in this world or the next. A vague dread and fear had come to Mrs Vane now and then during all the years of her illness, but she had tried to put them from her. They had come oftener of late, but she strove to put them from her still.

"Patient and happy in the midst of great suffering, and not afraid even of death." Many, many times in the days when the two girls had gone, and she was left to the quiet of their solitary days, did these words come back to her again.

Chapter Six.

The reluctance with which the sisters always left home to return to school, was usually forgotten by them as soon as they found themselves among their companions, and busy with their lessons again. But this time it was not so with Frederica. She was restless and unhappy, finding it quite impossible to interest herself in her school-work, or to settle quietly to anything.

It was all the more difficult for her to do so, that she was in few regular classes in the school. It was quite true as she had told her father, she had gone through and through all the books generally used by Mrs Glencairn's pupils. This was not saying much, for few of the girls stayed in school so long as they ought to have done—none had been so long as Frederica. Under the guidance of Miss Robina Glencairn, a clever and cultivated woman, she had gone far beyond the usual routine of school lessons, and had taken much pleasure in her reading, though she had read alone, but she could not interest herself in it now. It seemed foolish and wrong for her to be at school, learning things that she could very well do without, when her mother and Selina needed her so much at home. They *did* need her, she was sure; and she grew irritable and impatient under the restraint that kept her from them, till she was in danger, her sister

told her, of losing the reputation for politeness and amiability, which she had been all those years acquiring.

“And where is the good of fretting? If you can end it at the summer holidays, you may be very glad. You may be sure that Prickly Polly will not hear of your coming home just now. If I were you, I would learn the dictionary from the beginning to the end, or do something else to pass the time. Or you might ask Miss Robina for a story-book. She will give you one—you are such a pet of hers, I’m sure.”

“It wouldn’t be a bad idea,” said Frederica.

There was to be no walking that day, because of the rain, and her book would have been little pleasure to her in the large schoolroom, where the girls usually passed the recreation hour on rainy days. But she knew where to find a refuge, to which, without special permission, even Tessie could not follow her. Frederica, because of Miss Robina’s favour, and for some other reasons, was permitted to go to it if she chose, provided her presence was not required elsewhere. So she was soon knocking at the door of a room at the head of a dim staircase that led to no other room in the house.

“May I come in, Mistress Campbell?” said she, pausing on the threshold.

“Is it you, missy?” said a voice from behind a great basket of clothes that was standing on the floor. “Who would have expected to see you at this hour? Have you no’ got the play? It canna be that you have a lesson to get over again!”

“No,” said Frederica. “This is not a lesson book. But I have got a headache, and I am cross, and I can’t be bothered with the girls; but I shall be very quiet and good, and not be in the way, if you will let me stay.”

“Well, if you’ll promise no’ to fash me with your foolish talk while I am busy, you may stay.”

“Shall I fash you here?” said Frederica, laughing, and springing up into the wide seat of one of the large dormer windows by which the room was lighted.

“Whisht now, and no’ put me out of my count,” said Mistress Campbell.

She was sitting on a low stool, sorting and laying out on large trays at her side the clothes of pupils and teachers that had just come up from the laundress, a work which needed both patience and care, and Frederica knew that she must not be disturbed. Instead of opening her book, she sat for a moment watching her. She was a small, bowed woman, crippled by rheumatism, with a thin brown face, and deep-set, sharp, grey eyes. She wore a dark linsey gown, with a shawl of Campbell tartan over her shoulders, and she had a “mutch” with two or three rows of stiff borders on her head. She sung at her work, or rather chanted an old ballad which Frederica had heard before; but every now and then, as she counted and folded, and laid the different garments aside, she put their numbers and the names of their owners, and her thoughts about them, into the tune, without a pause; and Frederica knew by this that she had quite forgotten her presence in the room.

“A droll little person,” she called her to herself, and then she thought how strange a being “old Eppie” would seem to her mama and Selina, and wondered how it was that she had never told them about her. She had mentioned her to them, but now she looked at her, and around the low, wide room, with eyes that meant to see everything for their benefit. It was a large room, which yet did not seem very large, because of the many things crowded into it, and because of the sloping roof which on three sides came almost to the floor. It was the attic of the wing in which the large classroom and dining-room were. The walls were roughly plastered and whitewashed, and underneath were arranged old bureaux and boxes and chests of drawers, filled with such clothing as was not often needed, and under Eppie’s particular care. Besides these, there were articles of furniture, broken or out of use, such as will accumulate in a house where many people live—chairs and tables, pictures, and faded ornaments of all kinds.

There was a bed at that side of the room where the roof did not slope, but at this moment it was almost hidden by the great piles of linen arranged upon it. There was a small open stove, in which a coal fire smouldered, and over that part of the floor which was unencumbered by furniture a faded carpet was spread. There was not one beautiful thing in the room, Frederica thought, except a rose tree covered with buds and blossoms, that stood in the window opposite.

The windows were pleasant, but from them Eppie could only see the sky, they were so high above her. From the one on the high seat of which she sat, Frederica could see thousands and thousands of city roofs, with bits of open space here and there, and the river beyond. But it was not a fair sight under drizzling rain and a leaden sky, and so she turned her eyes into the room again. Order was gradually coming out of the confusion of the innumerable white garments by which the little old woman had been surrounded. One after another the great trays were carried and emptied, into the many drawers beneath the eaves; and then coming back to place her empty baskets in a recess made beneath the high window, Eppie saw Frederica.

“Preserve us a’ lassie! I had no mind o’ your being here. It is time for playing yourself now. Why should you be here at this hour?”

“I don’t care to play with children any more,” said Frederica gravely.

“Eh, sirs! You’ll be growing ower-womanly for the like of that, I suppose. Weel, weel! But you shouldna sit so quiet as to make me forget that you are here. I might be saying things that it wouldna be wise to say in your hearing. Are you no coming down out of that?”

“Yes, I am coming, Mrs Campbell. Don’t you ever get tired of this place? Is it not awfully dull?”

“Dull!” repeated Eppie, “and tired of it! Is it this chamber you mean? Where could I go if I tired of it? I am very

thankful to bide in it, I can tell you."

"Yes, I suppose so. But don't you get tired of it all the same? What do you look forward to? There is nothing in your life but mending, and keeping count, and—"

"Hear the disrespectful lassie! Folding and keeping count, said she. That's but for one day in the week. The mending whiles takes two or three, and there's many a thing besides that I canna be speaking to the likes of you about."

"Yes; but not pleasant things, Eppie."

"Pleasant things, quo' she! They're my duty. What other would I hae?"

"But, Mistress Campbell, dear, if I thought I had to live all my life here, even in this house, I should be miserable."

"But then it's no your duty to live here all your life, and that makes the difference. If I were to make myself miserable as you call it, it would be for fear that I mightna get leave to bide here all my life, but I daresay it will be time enough to fret when I'm bidden go."

"That will never be. What would Mrs Glencairn and Miss Robina do without you?"

"There's no telling," said Eppie, nodding her head many times; "but we'll say no more about it. Are you no coming down from that cold window when I bid you?"

"Yes, I'm coming. But, Eppie, how can you be content? Are your father and mother dead? Have you any brothers and sisters? Will it be just the same all your life till you die?"

"Now, missy, come down this moment when I bid you. That's an unwholesome book you've been reading, to put thoughts like that into your mind. It's no me that's like to grow discontented, it's you. And I was just thinking of inviting you to tea."

Frederica sprang down from the window so suddenly as to make the old woman start.

"Oh, do, Eppie dear," cried she eagerly, "that is just the thing I should like. I want to speak to you, and I don't want to go down to that rubbishing history; and I'll read to you. I have not read a page yet, and it's a very nice book they say."

"Is it a story book? But I would far rather hear about the wee beasties out of your lesson book. And I'm no just sure that Miss Robina would be pleased that you should take tea with me so soon again, and I'm no sure that I hae scones enew."

"Oh! Miss Robina will be sure to let me; and never mind the scones. I'll go down for whatever we need, and I'll ask Miss Robina. Let me stir the fire."

Frederica had forgotten the gloomy day, and the nun, and all imaginable subjects of discontent. She urged her petition eagerly; for she knew that Eppie liked to be entreated.

"Let be the fire, missy. You'll do mischief, and spoil your hands. You may bide if you get leave. But I doubt your sister will no be well pleased. It is 'making fish o' the one and flesh o' the other,' I doubt."

But Frederica did not stay to listen. It was a great honour and an exceptional one, to be asked to tea by Mrs Campbell. No other girl now in school, except Tessie and one or two of the elder pupils, had ever been asked to drink tea in the garret. Except for the fun of the thing, or for the sake of a change from the dreary school routine, few of them would have cared to do so. For Eppie was only a little old woman, bowed and lame, who even in her best days had only been a sort of upper servant in Mrs Glencairn's house. The present race of girls did not often see her. Some of them had never seen her; for her daily journey to the lower part of the house to get what she needed was accomplished with much labour and effort at time when the girls were sure to be in school.

Frederica was often in the garret. Miss Robina, whose pet, as Tessie had said, she was, seldom refused her permission when she wished to escape from the other girls, few of whose lessons she shared, either for work or amusement. But taking tea there was another matter; and Frederica, rather tired of being dismal, entered eagerly into the preparations. Miss Robina did not object; on the contrary, she was very glad to let her have the pleasure, heartily wishing that she might share it. She did share it for a little while, and added to it. For she came upstairs, carrying in her own hands a tray, on which were some fresh "scones" and a bit of "paddie," each wrapped up in a snowy napkin, as was absolutely necessary to their perfection. She could not stay long—only long enough to be thanked and petted, and called "bonny bird" and "good bairn" by Mistress Campbell. She had a beautiful and good face, though it was rather pale and tired-looking, Frederica thought, as she sat for a moment smiling in the flickering firelight; and the first thing she said, when she and Eppie were left alone, was,—

"How pretty and nice Miss Robina is! What a pity it is that she has to keep a school?"

To this no reply was given.

"It must be so tiresome to do the same thing over and over again every day of the year," added she.

"There are worse things than that in Miss Robina's life, I'm thinking," said Eppie gravely.

"Are there? Tell me about them," said Frederica, eager for a story.

"I doubt you are no speaking with your usual discretion," said Mistress Campbell gravely. "We'll take our tea, and not meddle with what doesna concern us. There are few lives in which there are no troubles. Let us be thankful for our mercies."

It was a very nice tea. Scones and fresh butter and honey, to say nothing of "paddies" and other nice things. And such delicious tea made in a funny little black teapot with a broken spout. Everything was charming, Frederica thought and declared. The novelty would have made it charming to her, though there had been nothing else to do so. They did not fall out of talk. Eppie asked questions about the holidays they had enjoyed; and entered with great interest into all the details Frederica gave her about her mother and Selina, and the drives they had had, and all they had enjoyed together. She grew grave as she went on to tell that her mother was not strong, but easily tired and troubled, and to wish that she could leave school, and stay at home with her always. Eppie was grave too, and occupied with her own thoughts for a little while; and as Frederica sat looking into the fire in silence, the unhappy feeling that had passed away in the interest of tea-drinking in such pleasant circumstances came back again.

"Are you no going to wash the cups?" asked Eppie in a little.

This was always in the evening's entertainment, and to-night it was happily accomplished, inasmuch as it dispelled the cloud which had hung for a moment over them.

"It must be nice to have things to do—useful things I mean," said Frederica.

"I doubt it is a liberty in me to let you wash my cups, or even to ask you to your tea," said Eppie. "For you are no longer the wee missy that came creeping up the stairs the first day you came to the school. You are growing a young lady now."

"That is just what I was telling mama," said Frederica eagerly. "I ought to have done with school now, and stay at home, ought I not? I don't suppose I should wash cups; but there are a great many things I could do for mama and Lina. Do you really think I am growing a young lady, Eppie? I am such a little thing, you know," said Frederica; "but I am nearly fifteen."

An odd smile flickered for a moment on Eppie's small wrinkled face.

"You needna be in any great hurry about being a young leddy. I doubt you're but a bairn to the most o' folk yet," said she.

"Not for myself—I am in no hurry to be grown up for myself; but for mama's sake."

"But there must be a heap o' things for you to learn yet," said Eppie gravely. "There's time enough."

"But I don't see the good of learning so many things, and I have gone through all the books the girls learn here. And mama does need me, I am sure of that."

Then Eppie went on to say how important the season of youth is, and how she had no doubt but Mrs Vane would rather deny herself the happiness of her little daughters' company for the sake of having them become wise and accomplished women, and so on. But Frederica did not seem to be noticing what she was saying; for she asked suddenly,—

"Eppie, do you know where Miss Baines is now? Will she ever come back again, do you think?"

Eppie shook her head.

"Have you not heard? She is dead, my dear."

"Dead!" repeated Frederica.

"Yes. She has gone to a better world, I have little doubt."

"To heaven!"

"Ay, I am sure of it, as far as a body can be sure of such a thing. She was a good woman. She had some curious notions about things, but she was a good woman."

"She was very religious," said Frederica.

"Yes, she was religious. She was a good woman."

"But then there are so many kinds of religion," said Frederica.

"But there is but one right kind I doubt," said Mistress Campbell gravely.

"And Miss Baines' was the right kind? It made her patient and gentle with us girls, even when we were naughty. And after her fall, when she suffered so much, it made her patient to bear her pain. And once she told me that she was not afraid to die. I wish I had asked her more about it. I don't know, but I am almost sure mama would be afraid to die."

Eppie gave her a startled glance; but Frederica did not look as though she had said anything to excite surprise.

"But your mama is a good woman. I have always heard you say that."

"Yes. She is very good and dear. But then we have no religion in our house—except Mrs Ascot; and I am afraid hers is not the right kind. It is *not* at all like Miss Baines', at any rate. But then how is one to know?"

"But I hope there are good people among all kinds," said Eppie, not knowing very well what to say.

"Yes. Mr St. Cyr is good, though Mrs Ascot is not. That is true. And it does not matter so much, so that we have a religion of some kind. Though, of course, one would wish to have the best."

"You are wrong there, missy. It matters much. And you should be thankful that you were sent here to the school, where the Bible is read, and where you may learn your duty to God and man. That is the best religion."

"But I have not learned it very well," I fear.

"Maybe that is your own fault. I have heard you say that you are not very fond of going to the kirk and reading your Bible."

"That is quite true. And that is the right way, is it? Were you fond of going to the kirk when you were young? We go to the church, you know."

"I would be very thankful to be able to go to the kirk," said Eppie evasively:

"And is your religion just like Miss Baines'? Hers must have been right, because it made her happy when she was in great trouble, and it made her not afraid to die. Is yours the same, Mistress Campbell?"

Eppie looked at her, wondering a little at her persistency, and then she said, "Ay is it—the very same. The same in kind, though not in degree. Miss Baines was a good woman, a far better woman than the like of me."

"Tell me about it," said Frederica.

Mistress Campbell looked sadly at a loss.

"How did they teach you to be religious when you were young?"

"We were taught to read our Bibles and to say the catechism, and to go to the kirk. And my father had worship morning and evening, and we were bidden do our duty, and be content with our lot."

Eppie hesitated, by no means satisfied with her attempt to make the matter clear, and then she said,—

"To be religious is to be good, and to do our duty to God and our fellow-creatures. Don't you mind what the Bible says? 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.' And in another place it says, 'Pure religion and undefiled is this, to visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction.' That is religion," said Eppie, with a pleased sense of having got well out of a difficulty.

Frederica nodded.

"Yes, I have read that. That is the way is it? Do good people all do that? But then they must begin at the very beginning of their lives."

Eppie shook her head.

"We are poor imperfect creatures at the best," said she. "But God's ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts. We are unprofitable servants. If we got what we deserve, it would go ill with us. But He is merciful and gracious, and full of compassion, and of tender mercy."

Frederica considered gravely for a little while.

"And is that all? I think I could manage to do all that, except perhaps to love my neighbour as myself," said she, thinking of Prickly Polly.

"But you would need to do that too, I doubt," said Eppie, not wishing to make religion seem a thing too easy. "And you would need to say your prayers, for the best of us need to be forgiven, and the strongest and wisest need to be helped and guided, and the Lord is good."

"And if I don't know very well at first. He will help me. But, Eppie dear, I think Miss Baines must have had something more than this. I wish I had asked her about it," said Frederica, regarding the old woman with wistful eyes.

"Dear me, lassie," said Eppie, at a loss what to say to her; "what has putten such like thoughts into your head? you are not an ill bairn, and you will learn as you grow older. You have no call to vex yourself with such thoughts more than usual."

"But, Eppie, it is for mama. She is ill, and suffers a great deal, and she has only Selina with her; and if I only knew what made Miss Baines so happy, I could tell mama. But mama could not begin at the beginning, and go to church, and visit poor and sick people. There must be some other away for her. For, Eppie, I am almost sure that mama would be afraid to die."

There were no tears in the great wistful eyes turned towards her, but there was something which the old woman found it quite as hard to meet.

"Poor body," murmured she; "the Lord help her!"

"And, Eppie, Miss Baines said something about the Lord Jesus caring for her. And He died, you know. It is in the service, 'Crucified, dead, and buried,' and in the Bible there is something about it."

"Surely," said Eppie, eagerly, "that is just it. We are sinners, both by Adam's fall and by actual transgression. And God sent His Son to die in our room and stead. And we must lippen to Him. He will save us."

"And it would not make any difference because mama is a Jewess, would it?"

"Preserve us a'! What will the lassie say next?" muttered the bewildered Eppie. "No difference but what would be in her favour, I would think. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, the Word says, and the apostles were bidden begin at Jerusalem," said she, the long-forgotten words coming back to her in the exigency of the moment. "And they are all to be gathered in, Paul says. I mind weel my father and our minister ay used to pray for the ingathering of the Jews. No, I'm sure it would be in her favour rather than the contrary," repeated Eppie confidently, growing more assured as she went on. "They were a grand people, the Jews—God's own chosen people. They did ill things. They killed our Lord, and I canna just reconcile it all, but I'm sure the Lord loves them yet."

Frederica did not reply, but sat gazing in among the dying embers in the grate. As she sat watching her abashed but anxious face, a great longing to help and counsel her came over the poor old woman's kind heart, but there came also sharply a sense of her utter inability to do so, a vague but painful doubt whether she had ever seen clearly the way of safety herself.

"I'm but a poor ignorant sinfu' woman, my dear bairn," said she humbly; "I havna lived up to the little light I have, and it's no for me to teach you. But one thing I can tell you: read your Bible, and ask the Lord Himself to teach you, and you'll need no other teaching, or if you do He'll provide it. But see, the fire's near out, and it's more than time you were down the stair, and I must go to my bed. So good night to you, and mind your prayers."

"Good night," said Frederica, and she went downstairs pondering many things.

Chapter Seven.

Attached to the large old-fashioned house in which Mrs Glencairn lived were a garden and orchard of very large old apple trees, which now in the spring time were full of wonderful possibilities for enjoyment and amusement to children who had for the most part been obliged to find amusement within doors during the long winter. And so no wonder that Frederica, without whom no game was complete, should forget her serious thoughts, and her troubles, and even her mother's doubtful state, unless something particularly recalled them to her mind. She was such a little creature, that, though she led the elder girls in their lessons, and was indeed far before them, she did not seem to be at all out of place when she led the plays and games of the little girls too.

Even in her visits to the garret, with her "Animated Nature" in her hand, she and Eppie kept to the safe subject of beasts and birds and creeping things, in the discussions into which they fell. She had taken up botany, too, in a less elementary form than had been given her before, and her interest was greatly quickened, and her attention happily given to it. And strange to say, Eppie, the recluse of the garret, who had not set her foot on a green thing growing beyond the orchard for many a year and day, even she gave eager interest and stimulus to the girl's pursuit, and with spectacles on nose peered into triticums and anemones brought from the mountain, and into apple blossoms, and even into dandelions and buttercups gathered in the orchard, for want of rarer flowers.

"And what for no," said Eppie, "when Solomon himself, the wisest of kings and men, spoke about green growing things from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop on the wall? And God made them a'. They mind me of my father's house and the fir belting, and the heather hills beyond. And they mind me o' the days o' my youth, that are gone like a blink," added she with a sigh.

"Yes," said Frederica, turning compassionate eyes on the kindly wrinkled old face.

"I'm no complainin' you'll understand. I hae had my day as you'll have," said Eppie, nodding her head gently a great many times. "But I was ay fond o' flowers. I liked to notice their likeness, and their difference, though I didna ken that they were a' written down in books. Eh! it's just wonderful how true nature is to herself. That bonny yellow flower might be the one that grew on the bush beside my father's door, and yon rosebush that Miss Robina brought up the stairs to-day is the very marrow o' the one that Sandy Gow the laird's gardener brought down and gave to my sister Annie more than fifty years ago. It's like a dream to look back upon."

"But, Eppie, I have often wondered that you only care for one or two flowers at a time, when you are so fond of them; you could have quite a greenhouse of them in this south window. I could bring you dozens of them," said Frederica.

But Eppie shook her head.

"I tried it, my dear, when sore against my will I had to betake myself to this place—a dismal place it seemed for a while. I tried having many flowers. Miss Isabel was here then, and she and Miss Robina took great pains to get me the best and the bonniest. But I soon saw that it wouldna do. I couldna get them kepit to my mind without troubling somebody. They were ay needing something done, and I couldna even get a spadeful of earth without another pair of hands. I was more helpless then than I am now, and even the bringing of water for them up the stairs was more than I could ay manage; so I just gave them up; for unless a body can do justice to the bonny things, they are more pain than pleasure. And I couldna bide to fash other folk. So now Miss Robina brings me one as it blooms, and I hae been few days without a flower all the seven years I have been in this room. I aye hae my wallflowers, and once I had heather, but it didna thrive, and I thought a pity to have it dying before my eyes, so I got no more."

It was growing too dark by this time to pore over either books or flowers. Eppie had had her tea, Frederica knew,

because she saw the tray with the dishes standing near the door, and she knew that she would be welcome to stay till the school bell rang again for prayers. So she sat in the window watching the clouds that were still bright, though the sun had disappeared. By-and-by she said,—

“Tell me something that happened when you were young, something that you never told me before.”

Eppie took up the stocking on which she could work as well in the dark as in the light.

“There was many a thing happened to me when I was young that I never told anybody, but I might happen on an old story that you have heard before, as is the way with old bodies like me. And I hae no feast o’ tellin’ bits out o’ my own life just for folk’s diversion.”

But Frederica knew that she would have a story for all that; she was not so sure that it would be a new one.

“Were there many flowers in your garden when you were a little girl?” asked she after a pause.

“Weel! there were na just so many, but eh, missy! they were awfu’ bonny flowers. But I mind the flowers among the hills, and by the burn sides best. The names of them? I canna mind a’ the names, and if I could they would seem like common flowers to you, but they gave us just a wonderful delight. And there were other things besides the flowers. We got many a day’s pleasure out of the rushes by the burn, and the brackens in the wood, and we ay had the heather. And, oh! wasna it a bonny sight to see when the summer began to wear over! Flowers! High above the glen where my father’s house stood, there whiles were miles and miles o’ the purple blossom. I can see it now when I shut my eyes,” said Eppie, leaning back in her chair, and letting her stocking fall upon her lap.

“And then there were the daisies that you told me about,” suggested Frederica in the pause that followed.

“Yes, the gowan, and the blue bell, and many a one beside. And I hae seen the hills in a bleeze o’ gold with the yellow broom. Though a broom bush is no’ to call a bonny thing, except a bit away. But a’ things are bonny to young happy eyes, and I daresay they are bonnier to me now, looking back to them over all the long years.”

And on she rambled, as she had done many a time before, on the very same theme, and if there had been an hour to spare, or if Frederica had been inclined, this was the time when she would have asked for a song, and the chances were she would have got ten of them chanted in a voice that had once been sweet, but which failed now both in sweetness and in power. Frederica always liked the songs, though she did not always like the singing, but there was something else in store for her tonight—something which she had ceased to expect, a bit out of Eppie’s life. She knew it was coming when the old woman went on to speak about the hills, and the grassy nooks hidden between them, and the days when she used to go out with her father, who was a shepherd, among them.

“And I mind one day we were sitting on the lowne side o’ a hill, and there came over it and down upon us, two lads with packs on their backs, and one of them with a book in his hand. When they saw us, they stopped to ask the road to the next town, for they had got in among the morning mists, having risen early for their journey, and so had lost their way. I mind how they both looked, as well as if I had seen them yesterday, and maybe better. One of them was shame-faced about having lost the way, which he said he had been over many a time before; but the other only laughed and said it was a good thing to be mistaken whiles, and for his part he was glad to lie down and rest. And so he lay down among the heather, and turned a thin fair face to the sky. He was an English lad, I think. His tongue was English any way. My father bade me take a plaid I had brought with me, and spread it over him, for there was a cold breath creeping now and then round the hill; and when I went and did what I was bidden, the lad gave me first a surprised look, and then a smile that made his eyes and his whole face beautiful. I see it now, though I have hardly thought of it these thirty years,” said Eppie with a sigh. “And I mind his deep sweet voice, and the sound of the smooth English words he used when he thanked me, and bade me sit down beside him, and tell him my name. I sat down as he bade me, but he took little heed of me for a while. For he looked sore weary and spent with more than just the tramp over the hills, and his eyes had a look as if they were seeing things far, far away.

“The other was a fine lad too, I daresay, though o’ a commoner nature. He and my father got very friendly together, he telling and my father listening to all they were doing out in the great world, whose voice came to our glen, not like a real voice, but like an echo casten back from the hills. And by-and-by the English lad’s eyes came back to mine, and what he saw in them I canna say, but he gave me the same smile that lighted his face in a way that was just wonderful—I can see it now—and he bade me look up to the sky, and see a ship that was sailin’, sailin’ away to the west, and what did I think it was carrying there? There was nothing in the sky that I could see, but a long trail of grey cloud, with here and there an edge of light upon it, and he only gave a bit laugh when I looked back at him again wondering. And then he plucked a wee curled head o’ the bracken that grew at his hand, and bade me look at it. Naught could I see but just a bit o’ bracken. I said not a word, only looked from it to his fair smiling face. But then he took out of his pouch a case, and out of the case a glass, and put it between the bracken and my eyes. And I thought, surely a great magician had come to our hills, for it was a bit o’ bracken no longer, but a wonderful network of cells, and veins, and feathery fringes, like nothing I had ever seen before. And next it was a bit of brown heather he took, and then a nodding bluebell, and then the wing of a May fly that had lighted on his hand.

“I looked and looked, and at last I cried out to my father to come and see. Even my father wondered. Ilken leaf and blade o’ grass, and even the wee stones that we took from the path were wonderful to see. And then he put the glass on my mother’s plaid, and on his own fine kerchief of lawn, and bade us see the difference between God’s works and man’s—how poor, and coarse, and common was the best that man could do, and how the more and the closer we looked into the works of God, the more worthy of admiration we should see them to be.

“And then him, and my father, and the other lad had things to say that I couldna make much of. He was a man of excellent understanding, my father. But just one thing I mind. It was the English lad that said it with a smile, and a great longing in his bonny een. ‘It may be,’ he said, ‘that when we get home to heaven, our glorified eyes shall see the mysteries of beauty hidden in even the least of the things that God has made without a glass between.’ And

when my father shook his head, saying that there was no such word in the Bible, and that there was such a thing as being wise above what is written, he smiled, and 'Ah well!' he said, 'our eyes will be opened to see the wonders of grace and the beauty of holiness, for we shall see our Lord Himself, and that will be enough.'

"I mind the words, because I heard my father telling them to my mother that night as they were sitting by the fireside. They come back to me now, as other words come, that I havena thought of for many a year and day, a sure sign that I am no' far from the foot o' the brae."

"And was that all?" asked Frederica softly, after a long pause, in which Eppie had taken up her knitting again.

"That was all, except that they wouldna go to my father's to bide all night, because they were expected elsewhere, they said; and then I ran home as my father bade me, and brought them milk and oaten cakes, which they ate to their refreshment, doubtless, and to our pleasure, and then they went away."

"And who were they? And did you never see them again?"

"We never saw nor heard of them, though doubtless they crossed our hills again. They were just two lads on their way home from the college in the north. We used whiles to see such, though our glen was a bit out of the way for most of them. But we never saw them again. It must be fifty years and more since then. It had gone clean out of my head, till your flowers and your pleasure in them brought it all back again."

There was nothing heard for a while but the "click, click," of Mistress Campbell's "wires," as she went on with her knitting. The old woman and the little girl were thinking their own thoughts.

"Eppie, dear," said Frederica, as she slipped from her high seat to the floor, "I like that about 'glorified eyes,' and one seeing hidden things; I mean things that are hidden from us now."

"Ay, the eyes o' man are never satisfied with seeing, nor his ears with hearing," said Eppie: "I doubt that is but a carnal notion o' heaven. This is what David says about it—

"But as for me, I Thine own face
In righteousness shall see;
And with Thy likeness when I wake,
I satisfied shall be."

"Satisfied!" repeated she; "ay, doubtless, they'll be satisfied that win there. But, eh me! 'Strait is the gate, and narrow the way, that leads to life,' and I doubt there will be some awfu' disappointments at that day."

"If one only knew just what to do," said Frederica gravely.

"Be a good bairn, and ay read your Bible, and mind your prayers," said Eppie. "But there's your bell, and you will need to go."

And so Frederica went downstairs with the grave thoughts that Eppie's words had awakened, stirring at her heart again. She read her Bible as Eppie had bidden her, and sometimes she read it with delight, because of the elevation of the thoughts and the beauty of the language; but she came upon nothing in these readings that touched her heart, or that she felt to be suited to her. She read the Old Testament, as the history of her mother's people. She had been often told of late that she was a Jewess in appearance, like her mother, and she took a real interest in the history of her people, and began to feel pride in being descended from a "nation of heroes." But pre-occupied with thoughts of this kind, she read on from day to day, seeing nothing in the wonderful words she read to enlighten her on all that she so much needed, and which she believed she so much desired to know.

She listened now with attention to such Bible lessons and readings as entered into the regular routine of school work, but the instructions connected with them were often of a kind to influence the reason and affect the imagination, rather than to touch the heart; and though her attention and interest enlarged her knowledge of the letter of Scripture, and won her many good marks and the chance of a prize at the end of the year, the lessons brought her no answer to the question as to which was the right religion, or how one was to get the good of it in the time of trouble, as Miss Baines had done.

Indeed, if it had not been for one thing, the grave and anxious thoughts that had been for some time occupying her mind might have passed away, as they pass from the mind and heart of so many of the young and thoughtless, leaving no trace in her life, no influence for good, either to herself or to others. If her mother had been well and happy, if there had been no shadow of dark days and painful nights hanging over her future, if she had not longed so earnestly to learn for her sake the secret of peace and joy, over which these have no power, she might have put all anxious thoughts away from her. But all her thoughts of her mother were anxious thoughts now; for in the only visit they had made since Easter, they had found her no better, but rather worse.

Chapter Eight.

Spring was passing into the loveliest part of summer. The school girls were beginning to count the days that must pass before the midsummer holidays; and none counted them more earnestly than did Frederica and her sister. What was to follow the holidays they did not know. There had been nothing more said about sending them to England. But whether they were to be sent there, or to come back again to Mrs Glencairn's, there were two months of holidays on which they might safely count, and no one knew what might happen before they were over.

Their one short visit since Easter had not been a very successful one. Their mother had been ill and Mrs Ascot had

been cross, and there was to be no other visit till holiday time. Dixen had come once or twice with a message from Selina, but the tidings he brought were neither very cheerful nor very definite; and no wonder that Frederica longed for more, and would not lose a chance to get them.

And so one morning, as Mr Vane and some of his friends were riding through one of the wide upper streets, which at that time looked more like the country than the town, they were startled by a voice calling, "Papa, papa," and out from a straggling line of school girls there sprang a little figure gesticulating eagerly. Mr Vane turned round, and so did the others.

"It is you, Fred, is it?" said he in surprise.

"Yes, papa, I beg your pardon for calling you, but it is so stupid walking along all in a row, and I want to ask you how mama is, and Selina."

"Oh! they are very well—just as usual. But what will madame the schoolmistress say to your escapade?"

"I am very naughty I know, papa, but I did so want to hear about mama. Is she really better? Why! here she is," said Frederica in surprise. "Here are Jack and Jill at any rate."

Yes, there were Jack and Jill, but there was not Mrs Vane nor Selina. A very pretty lady—two of them indeed—leaned back in the carriage. Frederica turned astonished and indignant eyes from them to her father as the carriage stopped.

"Your mama gave herself the pleasure of lending her carriage to Mrs Clifford to-day," said Mr Vane, and Frederica knew by his tone and manner that he was annoyed, though it would not have done to show it to the rest of the party.

"Let Miss Vane come with us," said one of the ladies. "We can easily make room for her, can we not, Mrs Clifford?"

Mrs Clifford was not quite sure, but Frederica declined the invitation with a stately little curtsy, and turned to her father again.

"Do come with us, Miss Frederica," said Major Hargrave, a gentleman whom Frederica had several times seen before: "the day is lovely, and you will enjoy it."

"Is it a pic-nic? Thank you. It would be very nice, I daresay, but I would rather not. Good-bye, papa; I am afraid Miss Pardie will be very angry with me."

"And no wonder," said her father, laughing. The admiring glances which he saw exchanged quite dispelled his momentary vexation.

"We could manage to soothe her, I think," said he. "Would you like to go, Fred? Where is Tessie?"

"Tessie is not walking to-day. She was naughty, and remained at home. No, I thank you, papa. If there were no other reason, I could not go because of Tessie. It would be too cruel to go and leave her."

"Naughty! what has she done? It would serve her right to leave her if she has been naughty."

"Oh! as to that, yes. She was very wrong. She was playing Madame Bulbat for the girls, and Madame heard her, and was in a rage of course. And Miss Robina was obliged to be very severe with the child to keep the peace. I cannot go, papa; but I daresay, if you were to ask her, Miss Pardie would let me go and see mama for a little while."

But Mr Vane shook his head with sufficient decision.

"No: mama is all right. You are far better at school. She does not need you."

But pleased with the whispered admiration of the foolish people who were with him, and willing to prolong the pleasure, he moved away with his little daughter in the direction of the line of returning school girls, saying he must make the child's peace with her teacher; and he quite won Miss Pardie's heart by his manner of entreating it at her hands.

"Was that your mama in the carriage, and your sister?" asked one of her companions, as they went on together. "I think they might have asked you to go with them."

"My mama, indeed! That great red woman!" said Frederica scornfully.

"She was very pretty," said her friend. "That is because she did not ask you to go with them."

"She did ask me. I did not choose to go."

"Because of your print dress? Of course you could not have gone in that."

Thus her friend chattered on, and Frederica answered at random or not at all, thinking of other things. For it did not make her sure that her mother was well again, that her father had said so. And though it was no new thing to her knowledge that her father should seek his own pleasure, without giving a thought to her mother in her enforced retirement, it struck her with new and sharp pain to-day, and her anxious and unhappy thoughts came back again with double force.

"I have a great mind to go home without asking anybody," she said to herself. But she knew she must not.

She was, for the moment, very unhappy, and it was with a slow step and a sad face that she went to make her confession to Miss Robina. For though Miss Pardie had graciously accepted Mr Vane's apologies for his daughter's behaviour, that was only as far as he was concerned. She had her confession to make to Miss Robina all the same; and it is possible that Miss Pardie was not without hope that, for the moral effect of the thing, she would not be permitted to escape without punishment, or at least without reproof. She got no punishment, however, and Miss Robina's reproof was of the gentlest, when it was explained to her that "she had been so anxious to hear about mama."

"And I am afraid it was not good news you heard, from the sad face I see," said Miss Robina, kissing her.

"Papa said she was well, so I suppose she is at least not worse. Am I to be punished, Miss Robina? I think Miss Pardie expects it."

"You mean you think you deserve it. Well, you must be sent upstairs for a while. Take these strawberries to Eppie, and save me the stairs, and you need not hasten down again."

So Frederica went slowly upstairs, believing herself to be very unhappy, little thinking how much more unhappy she was to be before she came down again. Eppie was not in her room, which was an unusual circumstance at that hour of the afternoon, and Frederica set down the tiny basket of strawberries on the table, and went to her favourite seat in the west window, with her lesson-book in her hand. In a little while she heard the slow, unequal steps of Eppie on the stairs, and saw her come in with a great bundle in her arms, and watched her as she carefully laid each garment in its place. She did not speak, and in a minute there were other footsteps on the stairs, and Mrs Glencairn came into the room.

Frederica ought to have spoken then. She ought to have made them aware of her presence in the room. But almost the first words she heard startled her so much, as to take away her power of speech, and to make her forget how wrong it was for her to listen to that which was not meant for her ears.

She did not hear all that was said, nor did she know how long it had taken to say it, but when she saw the door close, and heard Mrs Glencairn's footsteps going slowly down the stairs, she slid from her seat on the window, and confronted Eppie with a white face and angry eyes. The old woman uttered an exclamation, and drew back with uplifted hands.

"Tell me what she meant, Eppie."

"Miss Frederica! Who would think that you would come and frighten a body out of their wits in that wild way? You have given me a turn that I winna get over this while."

"Tell me what she said," repeated Frederica.

But Eppie, hoping that she might have heard little, had no mind to tell her what her mistress had said.

"I would hae thought it o' any o' our young leddies rather than of you, pussy. Eh, fie! to be hearkening to what other folk are saying! What think you Miss Robina would say gin I were to tell her?"

But Frederica put her words aside with an impatient gesture.

"Tell me, or I will go to Mrs Glencairn."

"Deed you'll do nothing of the kind. She has had trouble enew already, and it just needs you to go with thae bleezing een o' yours to upset her altogether. Bide still where you are, like a good bairn."

Frederica sat down, and neither of them spoke for a while.

"Eppie," said she at last, "I think I understand, but I am not quite sure. Tell me, so that I need not make a mistake, or bring any one into trouble."

"Whisht, lassie! It's a matter you hae nothing to do with, and I counsel you no' to make nor meddle in it."

"You are mistaken, Eppie; there is no one but me to put this right, unless mama is to be troubled. And she shall not be troubled. Is this it? For more than a year and a half Mrs Glencairn has received nothing—absolutely nothing—for all that she has done for Tessie and me. She has asked for it more than once, but she has received nothing. I wish to understand."

Eppie looked at her, but did not answer. The shrewd old woman had seldom been so utterly at a loss before.

"My dear," said she, "it might have happened to anybody."

"And we have been living on charity—Tessie and I?"

"Hoot, lassie! dinna speak nonsense. It is all to the fore. And it is a good thing, for it might have been spent, and now it is waiting for Miss Robina to do what she likes with; to go and see her sister, maybe. It's a good thing that it's to the fore."

Frederica looked at her without a word.

"I would advise you no' to meddle in the matter. It will be all settled as it ought to be, and Miss Robina would be ill pleased that you should ken. And it will be all right, you may be sure," said Eppie cheerfully.

"It would do no good to go to-day, because papa is away, and mama is not to be troubled. But to-morrow—Has Mrs Glencairn been very much in need of it; Eppie? Why did they not send us away?"

"My dear, that's nonsense! What difference would one, or even two, make in a family like this? She would rather have you here than not, though she were never to see the colour of your father's money. And as for Miss Robina! But the money is safe enough; so just you sit down, and put the thought of it out of your head."

There was not another word said about it, and Mistress Campbell rejoiced in the readiness with which her counsel had been taken. But Frederica had no thought of "putting it out of her head" in the sense that Eppie hoped. The first sudden shock of anger and shame passed, but it was followed by a pain and doubt not more easily borne. She had only just been able to shut her lips closely, when the name of Mrs Ascot had risen to them; but as she sat there in silence, seeming to read quietly, her thoughts went beyond Mrs Ascot. They followed her father and his gay friends; away into the sunshine of the pleasant fields, and they went to her mother left solitary and suffering, with only Selina to comfort her, and with Mrs Ascot to vex her with cares which she ought never to know.

"It is not kind of papa," she said, over and over again.

She did not get further than this; for hitherto she had looked at their life and their household ways and cares with the unreasoning eyes of a child. Her father was gay and careless, and apt to forget about things that did not specially concern himself, even a child could see that; but she had never regarded all this as worthy of blame. She had not thought about it in that way at all. But she thought about a great many painful things as she sat with her head bent over her book in Eppie's garret that night.

There was nothing to be said by anybody. Frederica did not even tell Tessie, as she was almost sure to tell anything that vexed her, in the few minutes that were allowed them for talk before silence was commanded for the night. Tessie could not help her to do as she had determined to do, and Tessie was rather apt to exclaim about things, and to take other girls into her confidence, and such a thing was not to be thought of now.

It would not be easy for her to obtain permission to go home next day, she knew, but she determined to go all the same, whether she got permission or not. But something in the girl's face made Robina pause before she answered her in one way or the other.

"Has anything happened, love? You have heard no bad news, I hope," said she kindly.

Frederica did not find it easy to answer.

"Your mama is not worse, I hope."

"She is not better," said Frederica huskily. "Won't you let me go home, Miss Robina? I might go with Nora when she goes to the market, and Dixen will bring me back. Please do, dear Miss Robina, for a little while."

"I am by no means sure that I ought to say 'yes,'" said she; but she kissed the sweet pleading face and said it, notwithstanding.

Frederica did not go home first. She took Nora some distance out of her way to her father's office, and bade her good-bye at the door.

"Thank you, Nora, don't wait. Papa will take care of me now."

Her father looked surprised, and not very well pleased to see her. Not that she was interrupting his business, for she saw that he was only reading the newspaper. She did not give him time to express his surprise in words, nor did she greet him in her usual fashion, but said hurriedly, "I came on business, papa." She did not find it easy to say more for a minute; and something which he saw in her face kept her father silent also.

"Papa, do you know that Mrs Glencairn has not been paid for more than a year and a half? for Tessie and me, I mean."

Her father stared at her in astonishment, not understanding for the moment what she meant.

"What nonsense, Frederica!" said he: "and what have you to do with it?"

"It is quite true, papa, and of course I have to do with it. Mrs Glencairn must be paid."

"And did she send you here to say that to me? She has been paid. I cannot say that I admire either her taste or her judgment. I think we have had almost enough of madam the schoolmistress."

"I think she must have had quite enough of us, papa. But she did not send me. She is not aware that I know about it. I overheard her speaking about it to Mistress Campbell."

"Overheard! and you have been suffering the usual penalty of listeners."

"No, papa, and I did not mean to listen. But I was so shocked. Mrs Glencairn and Miss Robina have been very kind to us, papa, and they must be paid."

"I have not the least doubt that they have been paid, over and over again. Let them alone for that!"

"Did you pay them, papa?"

"No. I did not give the money to them, but I have a distinct recollection of its being provided."

"So have I, papa. Mama was obliged to ask Mr St. Cyr for more money, and she said it was very painful, and she could not do it again."

"All that relates to Mr St. Cyr's connection with our affairs is painful. You are old enough now, Frederica, to understand that it was never with my consent that he had to do with—with our affairs—with your grandfather's property. I can do nothing. If things go wrong, it is not my fault. I protested against such an arrangement at the time, and—and washed my hands of them. And it is a matter with which you can have nothing to do."

"Except about Mrs Glencairn's money, papa. I *must* have to do with that, you know. Tell me what I must do, papa."

"You can do nothing. There must be some mistake. A year and a half! It would be a large sum."

"Yes, indeed! But, papa, don't you think it possible that—that Mrs Ascot may have made some mistake?"

"She may certainly have made a mistake. I will see that it is put right. But you can do nothing, and you must not try. You will only make matters worse."

There was silence for some time, and then Frederica said hesitatingly,—

"I am afraid, papa—that Mrs Ascot is not a very good woman."

Mr Vane looked at her without speaking.

"I mean that she is too clever to make mistakes—that she must know if—if there is anything wrong about the money."

"She is clever, but she is not too clever to make mistakes. She has made one now—she will find."

"I think so, papa. Mrs Glencairn could not have been mistaken. She must know, of course. And, papa—it is not pleasant to speak about—but I don't think Mrs Ascot is nice with mama and Lina. I mean she is not considerate."

"That will do, Fred. We won't discuss Madame Ascot. It was not by my will that she was brought into the house. Your grandfather—but I can't speak to you about all that. Go home, or go back to your school. This matter shall be cleared up and put right."

"To-day, papa? Papa, I shall be ashamed to look at Miss Robina till this money is paid. Can you not give it to me to take back to-day? Please do, dear papa."

Mr Vane laughed a very unpleasant laugh.

"Don't be foolish, Fred. I have not the money to give you to-day, or any day. I must speak to Mrs Ascot: there must be some mistake. She and your mother have always managed these things, with Mr St. Cyr's help. I can do nothing."

"But, papa—" entreated Frederica.

"Hush, say nothing more. As Mrs Glencairn said nothing to you, you are not supposed to know anything about the matter. Go back to school at once. Or are you going home for the day?"

"I meant to do so, but I don't wish to trouble mama. I might speak to Mrs Ascot."

"Much good that would do," said her father, with his unpleasant laugh. "No, I will speak to her. Go now, there are people coming in."

As the door opened to admit some one, Frederica passed out, but she did not turn her face towards home, nor towards school.

"I will go to Cousin Cyprien," said she to herself. "I cannot trouble mama, and I cannot go back to Mrs Glencairn's without some hope that it will all be set right. Papa so soon forgets."

And not giving herself time to lose courage by thinking about the difficulties before her, she hastened away. But when she found herself in the dismal hall into which Mr St. Cyr's office opened, and from which the staircase to his house led, she wished herself well away again. It was late in the morning by this time, but Mr St. Cyr had not come down to his office, the man who opened the door told her, and Frederica went upstairs with a beating heart. She thought she had come at a wrong time, when she opened the door, and found that Mr St. Cyr was not alone. But her friend hastened to welcome her, and though he expressed some surprise at the sight of her, he expressed pleasure also.

"Only I fear you must be in trouble again," said he, kindly. "Is it something very serious this time? Ah! yes, your face says so. It is not—is it Prickly Polly? But first let me introduce my brother to you, whom you ought to know. Jerome, this is Theresa's daughter—Mr St. Hubert's grandchild."

"It must be Theresa herself, I think," said the dark man, who rose and held out his hand.

"No, I am Frederica. Theresa is younger than I."

"She is very like her, is she not? Just the same bright little creature. But she is not bright to-day. Tell me what is the matter, my little cousin."

Frederica hesitated. She did not like to speak before Mr St. Cyr's brother. She would not have liked to speak before anyone, but, as she told Tessie afterwards, the Reverend Mr St. Cyr had not a nice face. It was a face that somehow made her think of a mask, and she looked with a little startled curiosity at him, wondering what might be behind it.

"It brings back your youth, does it not? She is very like what her mother was in those days. But her mother is changed. Ah! so sadly changed," said Mr St. Cyr, with a sigh.

But the priest did not answer a word.

"Well, what can I do for you?" said Mr St. Cyr, turning to Frederica. "Who has been troubling you this time? Not Prickly Polly, sorely? I thought I had settled her affairs the other day. What is it now?"

"Did you?" said Frederica, eagerly. "And was it very disagreeable?"

"Well, for her, rather so, I fancy. What is it now? Is it a secret? And does Madame the Schoolmistress let you go here and there about the city by yourself? She thinks you 'sensible,' I suppose?"

Frederica shook her head.

"I was not alone. Nora took me to papa's office, and then I came here. It is not a secret, but—"

The Rev. Mr St. Cyr sat down, and took up a book.

"Regard him as if he were made of wood," said Cousin Cyprien, laughing; "and now tell me all your trouble."

"I don't know whether I ought to tell you, but I don't know what else to do."

And then she told him all her trouble; how she had heard by accident that Mrs Glencairn had received nothing for their board and education for a long time, and how she had gone to her father, and he had been angry, and said he could do nothing, and then she added,—

"I think Mrs Ascot, must know. Do you think Madame Ascot is a trustworthy person, Cousin Cyprien? Of course she is disagreeable, and cross, and all that; but not to be trustworthy is something quite different. And papa says it was not his fault that she came to our house. Do you think her a good woman. Mr St. Cyr? Is she trustworthy?"

He listened to her story without a word, only smiling and nodding now and then till she came to the end and asked those questions about Mrs Ascot. Then he looked uneasily towards his brother, but his brother never lifted his eyes from his book, nor seemed to hear a word.

"We must not speak evil of her, nor accuse her without sufficient grounds," said he gravely.

"No," said Frederica faintly. "But I do not mean because of this altogether. She is not always considerate towards mama, I am afraid, and mama is ill, and—alone. But I need not trouble you about it. Pardon me if I ought not to have come to you."

"You did right to come to me. I can set right all this mysterious affair. You shall not hear of it again. Of course you are to come to me."

"But, Cousin Cyprien," said Frederica, taking courage from his kindness, "ought I to need to come to you always? Is there not something wrong that might be remedied?"

"My dear child, almost everything in the world is wrong, and I very much fear must always remain so. But this can be remedied, and it shall be on one condition. You are not to trouble yourself about it. Are you the little girl who the other day nearly overturned me? You look like an old woman with that naughty wrinkle in your forehead."

Frederica laughed.

"What should I do, if I might not come to you? And yet I ought not to need to come. There must be something wrong," added she, the naughty wrinkle coming to her forehead again. "Was it grandpapa who put it all wrong, as papa says? or is it Madame Ascot? or perhaps papa himself?" added she, with some hesitation.

Mr St. Cyr answered her gravely.

"My little girl, we will not ask. I will set this matter right—no, not to-day, but soon, and you must not think of it any more."

His promise sounded very different in Frederica's ears, from the promise her father had made. Mr St. Cyr did not forget. Still she lingered as if she had more to say, and as if she were not quite sure whether she ought to say it.

"Do you wish Mrs Ascot to stay in our house, Cousin Cyprien? Papa said to-day it was not by his wish that she ever came. Do you like her, Mr St. Cyr? Have you confidence in her? I am quite sure I could make mama and Selina much happier than she makes them."

"This terrible Madame Ascot!" said Mr St. Cyr with a shrug. "No, I don't think I like her very much, or have much confidence in her. But we will not speak of her. When you are old enough and wise enough to take care of your mama and your sister, and the housekeeping, and all that, we shall dispense with madame altogether, I fancy. But this must be a secret till the right time comes, and we shall say no more about it."

"I am almost old enough, am I not? Well, I will wait patiently."

“Good child! that will be best,” said Mr St. Cyr.

Then he showed her several curious things that were in the cabinet, and a fine picture he had lately purchased, and then he rang for some fruit, and was very attentive and full of ceremony in serving her; and then he went downstairs with her, when she went away.

“Good day, my little cousin,” said he. “Be sure you come to me always. I wish I could put aside all trouble from you as easily as I can put aside this one. Though, indeed, I may have vexation more than enough, before I am done with it,” he muttered, as he went upstairs to his brother again.

And he did have vexation, and so had Mrs Ascot, and Mr Vane did not escape without his share. But Frederica had no more. In a day or two she gathered from various sources that Mrs Glencairn had been paid in full, and with interest, and that was enough for her. She never heard another word more about the matter.

Chapter Nine.

Mr St. Cyr’s vexation began the moment he went upstairs again into the room where his brother was sitting. A good many years before this time, Mr Jerome St. Cyr had known the St. Huberts, and had looked upon Theresa’s marriage with Mr Vane, as almost all her friends had done, as a terrible sacrifice. He had been a young man then, he was much younger than his brother. He had gone to Europe to pursue his studies soon after that, and had remained there after they were finished. His correspondence with his brother had not been very regular or frequent, and he knew little of what was passing among his friends all that time. He had only lately returned home, and he showed great interest in the Vane family, and asked his brother many questions concerning them. Mr St. Cyr gave him some particulars of them and their manner of life; of Mrs Vane’s ill-health, and the quiet way in which she and her blind daughter lived together.

“But, my brother,” said Jerome St. Cyr, “I do not understand how you should have permitted affairs to take such a course, you who have so long had the power in your own hand. Why should these girls be losing their time at a second or third-rate school, as seems to be the case? Why have they not been all these years with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart? And the boys, too! Think of them wasting their time with some foolish young person who goes to them daily! It is little less than disgraceful.”

“You mistake,” said Mr St. Cyr quietly. “I have had the management of their grandfathers property for their mother’s use, but I have had no power—no, nor the shadow of power, nor of influence, where Mr Vane’s children are concerned.”

“Then permit me to say that you have been very culpable in this matter, I should have obtained influence and power too.”

Mr St. Cyr shrugged his shoulders, but said nothing.

“And all this immense property that has been accumulating since Mr St. Hubert’s death, this rascally Englishman is to have?”

“No, his children are to have it—Theresa St. Hubert’s children. It has made the Englishman sufficiently miserable thus far—the sight of I mean, without the power to use it. Not but that he has had some good of it too.”

“But to think of these poor children growing up without Christian instruction! Did Mr St. Hubert make no condition as to their education—their religion? I cannot imagine how you and Pauline Precoe can reconcile it to your sense of duty, to your conscience, that it should be as it is with them. With Pauline Precoe’s help, I should have made it quite otherwise.”

Mr St. Cyr laughed in a way which was not pleasant to hear.

“You have not forgotten Pauline Precoe, it seems,” said he.

“I must see her,” said Jerome. “It may not be too late yet. These children must be saved.”

“It is too late to think of availing yourself of Pauline Precoe’s help in your good work, however. She is now in Mrs Vane’s house, but she shall not be there long. I have no influence with Mr Vane—he hates me like poison; but I think he may be made to see that it will not be for his interest that Madame Ascot should stay much longer in his family.”

“Why? What has she done, poor Pauline? You did not use to hate her so.”

“I never respected her. She was never worthy of respect. She was and is an utterly unscrupulous person. I say to you what I mean to say to her soon—she is a dishonest person. I might even say worse than that.”

“She has not been under right direction,” said his brother.

“And you would like to be her director henceforth. I wish you joy of the office. But you must not hope through her to gain influence over Theresa St. Hubert and her children.”

“And they and their wealth must be lost to the Church? You are not so good a Christian as you once were, Cyprien,” said his brother.

“That is as may be. I do not think it is my Christian duty, or yours, to seek to obtain possession of Mr St. Hubert’s wealth, or any part of it, by any means, or for any purpose whatever.”

"I seek nothing for myself," said his brother; "and we will discuss the subject no more."

"There is just this to be said more," said Mr St. Cyr, gravely and firmly: "Do not meddle with their affairs, my brother. No good can come of it, to you or to any one. You wish none of it for yourself? To wish for it for any purpose—yes, even to build churches, or to feed and clothe your orphans—is covetousness. To obtain possession of it would be dishonesty. Put it altogether from your thoughts."

There was a silence of several minutes, and Mr St. Cyr rose to leave the room.

"Brother," said Jerome, meekly, "I had hoped that after all these years of separation we might at least have lived in peace together—the last of our race as we are."

"With all my heart, let it be peace. Only there must be no meddling with this matter, or with any matter in which my honour as a gentleman and a man of business is involved. That must be clearly understood."

"I must be faithful with you," said Jerome, still speaking softly: "I consider that you have been Culpably negligent with regard to these children. It is their souls for which I am anxious, not their wealth. It is for you to render an account of them—not me."

"So be it! I will answer," said Mr St. Cyr. After a moment he added, "Do not, my brother, let us become unfriendly over this matter. When Mr St. Hubert left his property to me, in trust for his daughter and her children, I did all that was permitted me to do to have these children placed under Christian influence and teaching. In fact, I would have confided them to the care of the ladies of the Sacred Heart, as you suggest, if I had been consulted. Mr Vane had other plans, and I had no right to interfere. I cannot say that I now regret that my plans for them failed. They are good and sweet children, frank and loving, and conscientious, with far more strength of character and truthfulness, than would have been developed in them had they been educated within convent walls. And they will need these qualities, poor children."

"All that sounds strangely from the lips of one who has the reputation of being a religious man," said his brother gravely.

"Have I that reputation? Well, we will say no more, lest your next word be not so flattering. And now I must leave you to amuse yourself, while I without loss of time attend to this unpleasant business. We shall see each other again soon."

It truly was an unpleasant business to all concerned; and all the more so, that instead of shutting his eyes, and seeming not to see what was wrong, as he had often done before, in matters where Mr Vane was concerned, he was determined to search to the bottom the affair of the misappropriated money. He had no expectation that it would be restored; he did not care about that: the result he desired to bring about was the departure of Mrs Ascot from the house. She would have been sent away long before, if Mrs Vane in her ill-health could have found courage to dissent from the will of her dead father who had placed her there, or to oppose the expressed will of her husband, whose ease and interest Mrs Ascot in all things studied.

So Mr St. Cyr did his best to make it unpleasant business to both Mrs Ascot and Mr Vane, and they did the same for each other. With the details our story has nothing to do, but the result was matter of rejoicing to the Vanes. The very first thing that Fred and Tessie heard when they came home for the holidays was that Madame Ascot was going to be married! It was madame herself who told them. She was to marry her own cousin, Mr Joseph Precoe, who was a merchant in the city. It would have happened long ago, only she had never been able to induce herself to forsake dear Mrs Vane, who had been so much in need of her. But now in justice to Mr Precoe, who had waited so long, she must wait no longer.

Madame was determined to part in friendship with everybody, it seemed, and she would not see the joyful looks the girls exchanged, nor any other indications of delight at the prospect of her departure. She not only did not resent these things, but took the utmost pains to conciliate the young people and their mother as well. There was to be a fine wedding, and Mrs Ascot's earnest wish was that she should go directly from Mrs Vane's house to the church, and that her dear little cousins should go with her as bridesmaids; and she had so much to say about the charming dresses and ornaments that would be required, that they desired it too.

Their mother did not desire it and their father, with more decision than he usually displayed in matters that did not particularly affect his own comfort, put an end to the discussion of the subject at once. Madame Ascot, an inmate of their house, had been a person of some importance, but Madame Precoe would be like any other common person with whom they had nothing at all to do. This was made quite clear to the children by him, and there was no reason, except the pretty bridesmaids' dresses, why they should regret his decision. Madame was disappointed and angry. She showed her disappointment, but she did not show her anger. She was determined to part in friendship with them all, and she promised to come and see them often, and to render them assistance in all matters where assistance was needed.

"There must be none of that, however," said Mr Vane, when Frederica told him of Mrs Ascot's kindness. "It would suit her purpose, I daresay, to make good her position here, and it would suit other people's also; but it will not suit me; and she is not to be encouraged; remember that, Fred."

Frederica opened her eyes in astonishment at her father's unwonted warmth.

"It would not suit mama, if that is what you mean, papa—nor any of us. We are very glad to part with her, and Mr St. Cyr does not like her at all, I am sure."

"He may wish to make use of her, though he does not like her. But she is not to be encouraged to come here."

"Very well, papa," said Frederica: but she by no means understood what her father meant, nor did it matter much that she did not.

The girls saw the wedding after all. They went to the church in the early morning, and saw madame in her fine dress and veil, and her bridesmaids, who were much better suited to the office than they would have been. Madame did not see them. They kept out of sight, and watched the ceremony with great interest, rather pitying the good-natured-looking bridegroom, and exchanging serious doubts as to his chances of good times in madame's hands. The usual carriages drawn by white horses awaited them at the door; and as they watched them driving away, Tessie said,—

"There! she has really gone at last. I have been afraid all along that Mr Precoe would repent, or that somebody would do something to put a stop to it, and that we should have Prickly Polly back again. I should like to dance and sing for thankfulness."

But Frederica had no thought of dancing and singing.

"There is always, some drawback," said she gravely. "If everything does not go on well in the house,—dinners, and servants, and all that,—papa will not be pleased."

"Oh, well! Why should they not go on well? You are so sensible, you know," said Tessie, laughing. "You are equal to Mrs Ascot, surely."

"I mean to be good, and try to do everything right, and then all will go well. That is what Miss Robina said to me—at least, she said I must always try to do right, whatever happened. If one could always know what is right!"

Tessie laughed.

"I wonder if it was right for us to come and see the last of Madame Ascot, after what papa said."

"Oh! our coming in this way was quite different. We were not guests, and she did not see us. And after the first moment I daresay papa did not think about it."

"That is true. Papa does not mind about things."

"But he minds about his dinner, and about everything being right when his friends come to the house, and all that; and perhaps he might mind about our coming here too. I think I shall tell him that we were in the church."

Tessie said he would be sure not to care, and Frederica thought so too, or perhaps she would not have been so ready to tell him about it. It is possible he did not care very much; but he was rather cross about it, Frederica confessed, when she told Tessie afterward. His comfort had already been interfered with since Mrs Ascot's departure, for the affairs of the house did not go on very well for a while, and he had other causes for embarrassment which he could not tell to her. He only said it was not a proper thing for her to be going about the streets alone, or with no one but Tessie, and insisted that an end should be put to it.

"You are no longer a child," said he; "you are almost a woman."

"But surely, papa, I should be all the fitter to go about for that," said she, laughing.

"That is your idea, is it? Well, it is not mine. You must amuse yourselves within the bounds of the garden, while your vacation lasts."

"But, papa," said Frederica, with dignity, "it is not a question of amusement: you forget that I am housekeeper."

"No, I am not likely to forget that," said her father drily. "If you must go out, you must go in the carriage, or take Dixen with you. I cannot have you going here and there by yourself."

"Very well, papa: I will remember."

It was very agreeable to her that her father should acknowledge that she was no longer a child, but she was by no means sure that all the consequences of being almost a woman would be agreeable. However, she was determined to make the best of it.

"I am going to be very busy," said she. "You shall see what a housekeeper I shall be. I shall have no time to be going here and there. I shall like it, I am quite sure, better than school."

But Frederica had all her housekeeping to learn yet. She did not know what she was saying when she was speaking in this way to her father. It is not to be supposed that an inexperienced young girl like her could at once have rightly governed and guided so large a household, even had she set herself to the work with a full sense of its responsibility and difficulty. She had some misgivings in the direction of "papa," but all the rest seemed easy and pleasant. Indeed, she considered it "great fun" to keep the keys, and order dinner, and hold consultations with the cook over courses, and dishes, and sauces, of which she knew nothing at all.

It was "great fun" to the cook too, but she tired of it after a while, and so did Frederica. As a general thing, the cook heard the orders and took her own way about obeying them, which, on the whole, answered everybody's purpose best. But sometimes the young mistress forgot her orders, or did what was worse, issued orders which were contradictory or impossible to obey. And sometimes, in her ignorance, she was arbitrary and unreasonable, and assumed dignified "airs," and asserted her authority at wrong times, and made "no end" of trouble. "And as for standing the like of that from a child that didn't know white sauce from butter, it was not to be thought of for a minute," cook said, with sufficient emphasis.

It was the cook who was Frederica's greatest trouble, because she was the only servant in the house, except Dixen, who could in any measure interfere with the comfort or temper of her father; and in trying to keep things right for him, she put them often woefully wrong. So domestic affairs were in rather a troubled state for a while. Tessie was not altogether wrong, when she asserted that it would have been much more comfortable for everybody if she had left the servants of the house to do things in their own way, and of course it came to that at last.

Frederica grew tired of being anxious, and dignified, and out of temper, and by-and-by let the cook and all the rest of them take their own plans, and fell into the usual holiday ways, and devoted herself to her mother and Selina. She kept the keys still, and ordered dinner; but very often the store-room door was open, while the keys were safe in her little basket, and her orders for dinner were very apt to degenerate into amiable and undignified coaxings for certain favourite dishes at the cook's hands. This was a great deal more agreeable for all concerned, and was quite as well every way. For the servants had been well trained by Mrs Ascot, and they sufficiently appreciated the advantages of a good place and good wages, to be reasonably faithful in the performance of their duties. And besides, in a little time they grew quite fond and proud of their merry and pretty young mistress, and took pains to please her, when it did not involve too much trouble to themselves.

And so Mrs Ascot was less missed in the house than she would have believed possible. Even "papa" ceased to be critical and vexatious when he found that his dinner, and his boots, and his fine linen seemed to make their appearance at proper times with no trouble to himself. Household affairs settled into their new grooves quietly and regularly, and the young housekeeper gave herself not much trouble about them for a while. She had enough to do without them. Even in the busiest of housekeeping times, the sisters had never neglected their mother and Selina.

The presence of the girls in the house made a joyful difference to them. The sound of their voices, as they danced out and in the rooms, usually so silent and lonely, was music and medicine to their mother. She grew better and stronger in these weeks, and made efforts that she would have believed impossible before they came home.

Mr Vane's desire that the girls should confine themselves to the garden for their walks and amusements was not so disagreeable to them as it might have been. For the summer proved to be hot and dry, and the streets were dusty and close, and the large and beautiful garden, with its walks, and soft green turf and shady trees, was as pleasant a place as could well be imagined in which to pass the sultry days.

From the first day of her return home Frederica had been faithful with regard to the reading of the Bible with her mother and Selina. Eppie had said that this was one of the ways by which she had been taught to be religious. She knew that other good people valued the Bible for the wisdom it contained, or for the comfort it could give. She had heard it spoken of as the rule of life, and as the guide to heaven, and she determined to know what it contained, and to get the good of it for herself and for those she loved. So, beginning at the beginning, she read regularly a portion every day. She might have grown tired of it after a while, for though she found some of it full of interest, it was not all so, and she did not find in it what she had hoped to find. It did not tell her directly and plainly what she must do. She did not see the way to be good and serve God pointed out in words that she could understand, and she might have been tempted to betake herself to other books for instruction and amusement, if it had not been for Selina. But there was no doubt about her interest in what she heard.

Selina's life had been quiet and untroubled. There had been her mother's ill-health, and the occasional irritability and despondency consequent upon it, and there had been the vexations that from time to time had come on them through the agency, direct or indirect, of Mrs Ascot. But there had been nothing else to disturb in any painful way the uneventful days to her. And there had been as little to heighten beyond its usual quiet flow the contented current of daily occupation and pleasure. There had been her little brothers' daily visit to their mother's room, and the infrequent joyful holidays of her sisters, but her life had been still and monotonous. Her interests and occupations had not been of a kind to take her thoughts out of the house where she had always lived. Their few visitors brought little to her but the usual commonplace talk and superficial sympathy, and even the books that were read, and the tales that were told her, were not of a kind to move the unawakened heart and mind of one withdrawn by her blindness and isolation from a young girl's interest in the world around her.

And so when Frederica came with her eager interest in the reading, and her vague but joyful hopes of all that might spring out of it, Selina did not know what it meant, but prepared herself to take pleasure in the pleasure of her sisters, as she had often done before. But this state of mind did not survive even the first day's reading. All the wonderful new things to which she listened were for her, as well as for Frederica and the rest. They were not new to Frederica. She had often read before how in the beginning the heavens and the earth were made. The mother, too, had some vague remembrance of what the Book contained, for during the first years of her married life she had gone to church with her husband. But strange as it may seem, all was new to Selina, and to all that her sister read she listened eagerly, and thought and spoke of it afterwards with a wonder and delight that encouraged her sister to persevere in the reading; and whatever else was neglected or hurried over, to the reading was always given its full share of time and attention.

This was the beginning of a new life to Selina. If her beautiful blind eyes had been suddenly opened on the world around her, it could hardly have made a more entire change in her thoughts and feelings and enjoyments, than did this daily reading of the Bible. She did not say much about it. It had always been her way to listen to the others rather than to speak, and it was her way still. But a great many new thoughts came to her, and the knowledge of many wonderful truths. Her thoughts were often confused, and her reception of truth partial and imperfect, but her interest and enjoyment were real and deep. All that came to her through the reading did not come at once, and the best did not come first. The blessing for which Frederica hoped, and looked, and sometimes prayed, did not come in its fulness to any of them for a good while after that, but from the first the reading was a source of happiness to them, and most of all to Selina.

Mrs Vane's enjoyment of it was in the enjoyment of her children. To be sitting, free from pain, in the garden, where she had played as a child, with her own children around her, and with no care or fear pressing immediately upon her,

was enough to satisfy her. Their delight in the reading, and in the talk that often grew out of it, she did not share. She did not understand it, nor cared to do so at first. To watch her blind darling's bright absorbed face, and to see her sisters' tender affection, and their desire to give her a part in the pleasure from which her affliction tended to debar her, was happiness to the mother, who had grieved so much over her in the past.

Mrs Vane was not a very wise mother, nor indeed a very wise woman in any relation of life, and she wished nothing more for herself nor for her children than a continuation of just such days as these. She felt so safe and at rest in the sunshine of the dear old garden, shut in from the world, where trouble was, and danger. It was a new experience to her to have them all around her, with no one to interfere with their plans and pleasures, and she desired nothing beyond.

Mr Vane had gone away, as he always did for a month or two in the summer, and there were few interruptions in the quiet of their lives. Once or twice Frederica and Tessie went to visit their half-sister Mrs Brandon, who lived in a pretty house near the mountain. They went because they knew their father wished them to go, but they did not enjoy going very much. Their sister Caroline was very pretty and good, they thought, and she meant to be very kind to them; but she had a way of looking at them and listening to them as though she thought them odd little creatures, different from other young girls, which was not agreeable to them; and she had a way of speaking of their father as "poor papa" or "poor dear papa," which was especially distasteful to Frederica, and which she resented, not for her father's sake, but for her mother's, and she did not always conceal her displeasure. So they did not go often, nor stay long.

They drove out in the carriage when the days were clear and cool, and once or twice they had a visit from Madame Precoe. Mr St. Cyr's brother came several times; but for the most part they were alone, and the days passed quietly away. They read other books as well as the Bible. Selina took pleasure in them all, and Frederica promised, when her holidays were over, seriously to attend to her sister's neglected education, and even now favoured her with scraps of information remembered from her own lessons, historical and geographical facts, and bits of botany, and even grammatical rules. Selina declared herself ready to be taught all that her sister knew, but in the meantime it was the reading of the Bible about which she cared most.

Many grave discussions grew out of the reading. They made mistakes often, and said foolish things, and any one listening to them must have been sometimes amused and sometimes pained by the ignorance they displayed, and by the opinions they expressed; but no one could have failed to discern in them an eager desire to know the truth and to obey it. And they who earnestly desire to know the truth have an infallible teacher and guide, and it is certain of such, for He says it, that "they shall know the truth, and the truth shall make them free."

"I have heard that before, more than once," said Selina one day, when Frederica had read the promise of God to Isaac in Gen: "And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

"Yes, we have had it before," said Frederica. "The same promise was given to Abraham, you know."

"What does it mean, I wonder?" asked Selina. "Oh! it means that the children of Abraham were to become a great people, as they did afterwards. They were God's own chosen people. All the Bible is written about them, you know."

"Yes, but how are all the nations of the earth to be blessed through them?"

"I have heard something about it," said Frederica meditatively. "Let me think a minute. Oh, yes! it was because the Saviour was to come among them. The Bible is all about the Jewish people, because Jesus was a Jew."

"Was He?" said Selina wistfully.

"Yes, and of course that is what it means. Jesus died for all men. Jesus is the Son of God, and the son of Mary, you know."

"No," said Selina gravely; "I don't know."

"Well, never mind, we can read about it," said Frederica, turning the leaves of the Bible till she came to the first chapter of Matthew. "It is all here, and we will read it."

Going rapidly over the first verses to herself, till she came to the eighteenth, she then read, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise," and so on. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins. And they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."

Frederica lingered over these passages, reading them many times, and trying to remember all that she had heard about them.

"Jesus is God, you know, and He became man that He might die for us, and save us from our sins, as the verse says; and we ought to love Him, and obey Him, and serve Him."

"Yes," said Selina, "if we only knew the way. If we had any one to teach us."

"We are going to learn the way. It is all here; in the Bible, I mean," said Frederica.

"They all say that—Miss Robina, and Miss Pardie, and all of them. And the clergymen say it in church. And Mrs Glencairn said always that we must not mind what people say about religion, unless it is in the Bible. And Eppie told me once that God Himself would teach us."

"And do you think He will?"

"Yes, if we ask Him—when we say our prayers, you know."

"When we say 'Our Father,' you mean?"

Every night and morning since she was a little child, Selina had said "Our Father."

"Yes, and we may ask for other things, and God will give them. We learned texts about it once, only I can't quite remember them. This is one—"Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you.' Jesus Himself says that."

"And will He?" asked Selina.

"Yes," said Frederica, with a little hesitation, "if we ask right things, I suppose."

"And would He make me see, if I were to ask Him? Oh, mama I only think if He would!"

Mrs Vane clasped the eager little hand that touched hers, and sighed.

"But, mama, He could do it. He opened blind eyes many times while He was on earth, and His being in heaven now would make no difference. He *could* do it, I suppose," said Frederica, not knowing very well what to say.

"And will He, do you think, if I ask Him? Mama will ask Him too, and you and Tessie."

"He could do it if He chose. But perhaps it means not such things we are to ask for, but that He would teach us, and make us wise and good, and forgive us our sins, and take us to heaven when we die," said Frederica. "And you are very happy as you are, dear! You don't care very much about it, do you?" said she, kissing softly the beautiful blind eyes that were wet, though they were smiling, too.

"Frederica, love, you are making your sister unhappy, I fear," said her mother anxiously. "My darling, come to me!"

Selina kissed her mother gently two or three times. "Unhappy! no, mama. It was only for a moment, and it was for you that I wished it, mama, more than for myself."

Her mother could only murmur fond words over her, as she caressed her tenderly.

"But it cannot be true, all that Fred has been saying," broke in Tessie. "It is a pity. But it is only one of Fred's ideas."

"But it must be true, because Jesus said those very words, only I suppose we do not understand it yet," said Frederica. "We will read more. And, mama, Selina will see when she gets to heaven."

Mrs Vane uttered an exclamation of impatience and astonishment.

"Frederica! why do you say such things?"

"Let us read more," said Selina, for she saw that her mother was troubled at the discussion.

And so they read on. Not in the Old Testament, but in the New. They read of the wonderful words and deeds of our Lord, and Selina drank in the strange glad tidings with awe and delight. She never in her mother's presence said anything more about her wish to see. She spoke of it to her sisters, and for a little while the desire disturbed the gentle current of her thoughts and enjoyments. But it passed away, and the sweet content that had brightened all these years to her mother came back again. She listened, and mused, and wondered at all she heard, and by-and-by, as her mind opened, and she understood better the nature of those things that are promised without reserve to those who ask for them aright, she never ceased to ask humbly yet undoubtingly that to her and to those whom she loved, they might be given in due time.

Chapter Ten.

And so the untroubled days passed, till Mr Vane came home again. They were glad to see him, and indeed made a jubilee of the day of his return. But there was an unconfessed fear in the heart of each that a change was at hand, and that their untroubled days were at an end.

But the holidays were over, and nothing was said about the girls' return to Mrs Glencairn's. If Mrs Ascot had been among them, that would have been settled long ago, but there was no one now eager to get them away, and no one to make the necessary arrangements, except their father, and so Tessie comforted herself with the thought that "there was always a chance that he would forget all about it." Still she rejoiced with trembling, and went softly through the house, and kept out of sight, that he might not be unpleasantly reminded of his neglected duty. This was not difficult to do, for their early breakfast was over before he came down in the morning, and he did not return to dinner till the hour at which the children took tea in their mother's parlour, and except during his brief visit after dinner, there was little chance of his seeing any of them. And when one week was safely passed, and then another, Tessie began to think the danger of going back to school was over.

Frederica had not shared her anxiety as far as being sent to Mrs Glencairn's was concerned, and the possibility of going to England involved so much more that would need consideration, and care, and expense, that she was not much afraid that her father would decide upon it at present. So she took no pains to keep out of the way, but, on the contrary, assumed again the responsibility and dignity of housekeeper, and wore her key-basket at her waist, and made grave suggestions about housekeeping matters for his benefit. She tried to amuse him, too, on such evenings as he did not go out after dinner, and had no one with him, and she succeeded so well that he missed her greatly

when she did not come to him; and if it had not been for one unfortunate circumstance, a quiet winter might have followed the pleasant summer, and they might have all been at home together for a little longer.

One night Mr Vane told Frederica that there was on the next day to be a grand review of troops at L— farm, and to her delight he promised to take her with him. Unfortunately, however, as had happened before, the promise of the night was forgotten in the morning. Frederica was disappointed of course, and a little angry, but she recovered her good temper immediately when Tessie suggested that she might go still, and take them all with her. To be sure she could, and she congratulated herself on her father's forgetfulness; for now the pleasure would be doubled, and more than doubled; for not only Tessie and Selina could go, but their little brothers as well. So Dixen, nothing loth, had the carriage at the door in less time than usual. They did not even have the thought of leaving their mother alone to mar the prospect of their enjoyment; for Miss Grant, having given the boys a holiday, kindly offered to stay with Mrs Vane till they all came home again.

It never came into their minds that they might be doing wrong, or that their father might be displeased with them for venturing into such a crowd, or they might have placed themselves in a less conspicuous position, and at a greater distance from that part of the grounds where many of the fashionable people of the town had stationed themselves. It never occurred to them either, that while they found so much interest and amusement in watching and commenting upon the people and the equipages crowded so closely round them, others might find the same interest in regarding them. Indeed, they made rather a remarkable group, the young girls and their brothers, and old Dixen, and Jack and Jill together, and it is not likely that Mr Vane and his daughter Mrs Brandon, or the party of equestrians who were with them, would have passed without observing them, even if little Hubert had not at the sight of them called out,—

“Papa, papa, here we are! come this way, papa.”

The little boy had clambered up on the high seat of the carriage beside Dixen. Tessie was leaning over them, and Frederica was standing on the low step of the carriage, eagerly describing to Selina all that was going on around them. But it was Selina who was the central figure of the group, to which all eyes turned. The younger girls were simply and quietly dressed in proper school-girl fashion, but they had decked their fair blind sister in beautiful and costly things; and her bright serene face, and her long golden curls shading it, made a very lovely picture. No one would have imagined that those clear sweet eyes were blind, except that she sat so still and so unconscious of the looks that were bent upon her.

“Hush, Hubert?” whispered Tessie. “Do not call again. Papa does not look pleased.”

He looked by no means pleased. Unfortunately for his good temper, he did not hear the murmur of surprise and admiration that rose from some of the party, because he was listening to Mrs Brandon, who was saying,—

“How foolish and wrong, and what bad taste, for these girls to be here alone! Papa, I am surprised that you should allow it! The horses are not taken from the carriage. There will be an accident certainly.”

Mr Vane laughed.

“With Jack and Jill! Hardly, while old Dixen is by them.”

“But they ought not to have come without a gentleman to take care of them. You should send them home.”

“Through this crowd? They are safer where they are at present.”

A movement in the throng of people permitted a nearer approach to the carriage. Tessie, who had seen her father's face, seated herself to watch him as he came near, but Frederica was still talking rapidly and eagerly to Selina. She started as he touched her on the shoulder with the end of his riding-whip, but she did not look at all as if she expected to be reproved. She smiled and nodded gaily to him and Mrs Brandon.

“You see we are all here, papa. I wish they would begin.”

There was some delay in the bringing up of the soldiers. The crowd was getting impatient, and moved to and fro about them; and in the movement, some of Mr Vane's friends, having dismounted and given their horses into safe keeping, came round the carriage, and, as Mr Vane whispered to Mrs Brandon, there were soon gentlemen enough about them. Frederica had seen most of them before, but they were not people that she cared for, and she whispered to Selina that she was sadly afraid their pleasure was to be spoiled. She greeted them politely, however, and mentioned their names to Selina.

“But you need not mind them,” added she, in a whisper. “They'll go away directly, I daresay. Now the soldiers are ready to begin, and I will tell you what they do.”

And so she did. Standing on the seat where her sister sat, that she might see the better, she described in a low rapid voice the marching and countermarching, and all the movements of the men; and when she became silent, Tessie spoke, and the boys sometimes broke eagerly in. And through all, Selina listened and smiled with a face of such sweet content, such seeming unconsciousness of misfortune or loss, that tears came to the eyes of some that were looking on. Even her father saw her wonderful beauty and sweetness, and her affliction, with a new sense of surprise and pain, and sighed as he regarded her.

It grew tiresome at last to those who did not understand the movements of the soldiers, or the skill and drill needed to ensure success in all the wonderful evolutions through which they were put; and so, when at length a clear space was made near the carriage, they began to speak of going home.

"Mama will be getting anxious," said Selina softly to one who urged them to stay longer.

"And there will be nothing more. It will be the same thing over and over again," said Tessie. "There will be music, I suppose, and you will like that, Lina."

"Still, if Hubert and Charlie are ready, I think we should go," said Selina.

The boys were by no means ready to go, but their indignant outcry was interrupted by their father.

"Now that the way is clear you must go," said he, "or you may get entangled among the carriages and be hurt."

And then the misfortune of the day happened. Mrs Brandon, meaning to be very kind, and meaning also to gratify the curiosity of some of her friends, who had been expressing a wish to see more of her young sisters, invited them all to luncheon before they should return home. Frederica politely but promptly declined for them all.

"We said we should be home to dinner, and mama will be anxious," said she.

"But the boys can tell her that you have stayed with me. Papa is coming, and several others. She will not care."

"No, I suppose not, but we are tired, and it will be much nicer to visit you some time when you are alone. Excuse me. It is quite impossible," added Frederica, as Mrs Brandon continued to urge her.

Her last words were spoken in an air and manner "not in the least like Fred," her father said to himself, as he listened. But Mrs Brandon thought it was exactly like Fred—"the naughty little thing." She had more than once noticed this disagreeable manner in her intercourse with her younger sister, and had spoken of it to her father, and to him she now turned her disapproving eyes. So Mr Vane interposed.

"Nonsense, Fred! What difference can it make? Stay of course—not you, Tessie, nor the boys! Dixen can come for you later. Now, Dixen, take care."

Frederica was indignant, and said quite enough to her sisters on their way down, but to her father she only said, "Very well, papa," with an air of offended dignity that made him laugh.

"However," added she, when she had said all that was necessary, and a little more, "I may as well make the best of it, and amuse myself as well as I can."

So when Mrs Brandon arrived a little while afterwards, they found her walking about on the lawn, quite ready to amuse, and to be amused. But her troubles were not over. It was Selina especially, it seemed, whom Mrs Brandon had wished to stay, and she had gone home. There were many regrets expressed by her and by the others. They had been so desirous to know Miss Vane, and to hear her sing, and so on.

"It is a pity you were not more explicit, Caroline," said Frederica. "However, it would have made no difference. Selina's staying was quite out of the question."

"I am sure I can't understand why," said Mrs Brandon.

"Can you not? It is quite true, however."

Mrs Brandon turned her eyes on her father, who had just entered the room. It must be acknowledged that Fred was not behaving well. Her manner was by no means respectful to her elder sister, and her tones and the flash of her eye showed that she was out of temper.

"What is the matter, Fred?" asked her father.

"We are all disappointed that Miss Vane did not stay," said some one, with the kind intention of smoothing matters for Fred.

"Fred thinks Selina would not have enjoyed it," said Mrs Brandon.

"Mama would not have wished it," said Frederica, walking away, as though there was nothing more to be said.

Of course, it was all a failure after this, as far as Frederica was concerned. At another time she would have looked and listened, and amused herself with all that was going on. But she felt cross; and what was worse, she knew that all these people must be thinking her very rude and ill-bred. No one noticed her much nor spoke to her, and though she knew she deserved it, she was indignant at being treated like an ill-tempered child. Especially was she indignant with her sister for bringing all this upon her. So at the first possible moment she excused herself from the table, at which the rest seemed inclined to linger, and went out into the garden.

Her ill-temper and discomfort did not trouble her after that. She forgot it utterly; for here she found the nurse with her sister's beautiful baby, and every trace of annoyance vanished at the sight. Here her sister found her in a little while. She had come in search of her, intending to speak a few serious words to her about her foolish conduct. But when she saw the girl's bright face as she knelt on the grass, clasping and kissing the pretty boy, she too forgot her vexation.

"O Caroline I was there ever so lovely a child before? How happy you must be?"

And then she wondered over him—his beauty, his murmuring and cooing, and pretty baby ways, and her delight was perfect, when he refused to go to his mother from her arms. Was there ever such a triumph? The baby was a very pretty baby, and the young girl's delight over him was pretty too, and in the midst of it Dixen came for her, and Mrs

Brandon had no time for the serious words which she felt it to be her duty to speak, "for poor papa's sake." But she set her conscience at rest by saying all the more to papa himself, and the immediate result of her advice was that Tessie was sent at once back to Mrs Glencairn's, and Frederica was advised to prepare herself to be sent elsewhere very soon.

Poor Tessie thought it rather hard that she should be made to suffer for Fred's faults. That was the way she put the matter to herself, but it was a very good thing for her to be sent to school again. She begged hard to go with her sister, wherever she should be sent, but this could not be; and her dissatisfaction did not continue long after she was fairly back at school, for Mrs Glencairn's house was a very good place to be in, and Tessie was reasonable, and by-and-by content.

As for Frederica, it would have been as well for her if she had been sent to Mrs Glencairn's too, for she and her mother and Selina made themselves unhappy in their uncertainty as to where she was to be sent. But when week after week passed, and nothing more was said on the subject, they began to take courage again, and to hope that she might not be sent away at all. And she was not, but it would have been much better for her if she had.

For this was not a profitable winter to Frederica. They had a happy month or two, she and her mother and Selina; they lived the same uneventful quiet life that the summer had brought them, and every little pleasure they enjoyed was doubled to Mrs Vane and Selina, because Frederica enjoyed it with them. They went on faithfully and regularly with their reading of the Bible, and for a time Frederica fulfilled her promise; and went over her old school lessons with her sister, and took great pride and pleasure in the progress that she made. They practised their music together, and a teacher came to give them lessons; and Frederica assured her father, that instead of losing her time, as Mrs Brandon had declared, she had never been so well and so happily employed as now. Whether he thought so too, or whether he was prevented by other reasons besides indolence from deciding on a proper school for her, could not be told, but the winter was nearly over before another word was said about her going away.

It was near Christmas time that Frederica began to be a good deal at the house of her half-sister, Mrs Brandon, and to go with her a good deal to other houses, and then the tenor of her life for a time was quite changed. It began very naturally and simply. There was a children's party at Mrs Brandon's house, to celebrate the first birthday of her little boy. Frederica was asked, and her brothers, and they all went and enjoyed it. Frederica threw herself into the pleasure of amusing the little people with all her heart. It was a delight to her, and her success was entire. The enjoyment was perfect to them all. The evening passed without one of the unfortunate incidents so likely to occur on such occasions, and no child enjoyed it better than Frederica.

It was called a children's party, but there were many people there besides children, and it is not surprising that the bright young girl, "with the playfulness of a child and the sense of a woman," should attract admiring attention. She threw herself so heartily and prettily into the amusement of the little ones, they said to one another and to Mrs Brandon. She was so clever and charming, and so unconscious of it. A great many foolish things were said, and some of them were said to Frederica. Of course she thought it all very agreeable, and showed herself equal to the entertainment of grown people as well as children, and enjoyed it all.

This "children's party" led to others, and to parties of grown people as well, and by-and-by the character of these gay doings changed altogether. The simple dresses and ornaments that had at first been considered quite sufficient were laid aside for dresses of a different kind. Her mother's long-neglected treasures of laces, and silks, and other fine things, were turned over in search of materials for her adornment, and even her jewel cases were examined, and certain of their contents appropriated for the same purpose.

Frederica had always taken pride in knowing that Mrs Glencairn spoke of her as "sensible" and as "a discreet young person," and she had been very much in earnest to prove to her father and mother that Mrs Glencairn was right. But notwithstanding her sense and her discretion, no one will be surprised to hear that for a time she enjoyed greatly the excitement and gaiety of her life. For though it is quite true that no real and lasting happiness can be obtained in the pursuit of pleasures such as these, yet it cannot be denied that to a young girl like Frederica, the first experience of a life of this kind gives a delight which seems real, and sweet, and satisfying, and which, in a certain sense, is so while it lasts. And so she threw herself into all these things with all her heart, and enjoyed them, without a thought that she was in danger from such a life.

Her mother, remembering her own youth, her brief triumphs, and long disappointments, sent her thoughts after her into those gay scenes with vague but painful anxiety. But this always vanished in Frederica's presence. If she made a feeble attempt now and then to remonstrate with her, or with her father, against such constant gaiety, it was only because the child was so young, and not at all because she thought such a life of pleasure wrong in itself. She knew of no other kind of life for the rich and well-born; and though she could not look forward to such a life for her daughters without anxiety, yet she was incapable of planning, or even of imagining, any other for them. If they all could have remained together content with the quiet enjoyments that had come to them in the past summer, while their father was away, she would have sought no other life for them. But that was quite impossible, she thought with a sigh.

There was no one to tell Frederica that she was in danger. All her mother's fears were vague and indistinct. They seemed to her daughter, and even to herself, when she spoke of them, to be nervous fancies, natural enough in her state of illness and seclusion, a natural shrinking from any possible cause of change or pain. And so they both put away such thoughts, and the mother strove to take pleasure in the many costly and beautiful things brought for her approval for the adornment of her daughter.

Even Selina listened happily to her sister's merry recitals of all she saw and heard and enjoyed, and offered her soft touch to the rich and delicate fabrics, to the laces and flowers and jewels that she wore, without a thought of trouble or danger to the sister whom she loved so well.

But Frederica was in danger all the same. She was in danger of losing that sweet naturalness and girlish simplicity which even to the worldly people with whom she mingled made her chief charm; she was in danger of growing vain and frivolous and foolish, of forgetting all the serious views of life that had so filled her thoughts, of ceasing to strive for, or to value, a knowledge of those truths which were to bring such peace and patience; such blessed hopes to her suffering mother, and such happiness to them all. Nay, she was in danger even of neglecting her mother and her blind sister, of giving up the sweet office so eagerly coveted and claimed, of being their comforter and guardian, and of living to herself and her own selfish enjoyment.

All this has happened to others who have given themselves up to a life of worldly pleasure, and this must have been the end to Frederica, if such a life had continued long.

Chapter Eleven.

In the beginning of March, there came a letter to Mr Vane, announcing the approaching marriage of his second daughter Cecilia, and begging him to be present at the ceremony, which was to take place at the end of April. Something had been said by Mr Vane, every year for the last ten, about going home to England; but sometimes for one reason, and sometimes for another, he had never carried out his design. This announcement and invitation induced him to take the matter into serious consideration this time, and Mrs Brandon's suggestion that the opportunity would be a good one to take Frederica home for the completion of her education, decided him to make arrangements at once for going. Indeed, he by-and-by convinced himself, and endeavoured to convince others, that it was for Frederica's sake, and not at all for his own pleasure, that the voyage was to be undertaken, and thus especially was it represented to Mr St. Cyr.

Frederica was not so pained by her father's sudden determination as she would have been in the autumn. Of course, the thought of school was not quite agreeable to her after the winter she had spent, but there was the voyage, and possibly a gay wedding to come first; and if it had not been for the thought of leaving her mother and Selina, the prospect would not have been disagreeable. And she could not help thinking that they would miss her less than they would have done six months before.

But it did not seem so to them. The thought of losing her was almost more than her mother could bear. But there was nothing to be said: discussion would make no difference to Mr Vane's decision. There was little time for discussion or preparation. All that Frederica needed, could be got as well in England, her father said, and there was no time to lose.

A suitable person to take charge of the home, and of all household matters during the year, had to be sought, and through the kind exertions of Mr Jerome St. Cyr, such a one was found, a very pleasing person she seemed, and she came highly recommended. She was a large fair woman, with a pale face that was very pleasing when she smiled, and her eyes were at the same time kind and searching. Her voice in speaking, and her manner and movements, were very soft and gentle, and she was, Frederica though the very opposite of Mrs Ascot in all respects.

But her gentleness did not give one the idea that she was weak. On the contrary, she was very strong and firm, as well as gentle, as they all had an opportunity of seeing, even the first day of her coming among them. For the two boys were ill when she came. They had taken cold, it was supposed, and little Hubert, from his persistent refusal to take his medicine, seemed to be becoming very ill indeed. But there was an end to all this, as soon as ever Miss Agnace understood the matter. In a moment the refractory little lad was placed in her lap, and by some extraordinary exertion of skill and will on her part, the bitter draught was swallowed by him, and he was laid quietly and comfortably in bed again. Frederica looked on with mingled astonishment and admiration.

"I have been accustomed to be with sick children," said Miss Agnace quietly.

"I wonder if that is the way she would take with mama or Selina," said Frederica to herself. "I can easily imagine her taking me up and dealing with me in that peremptory way; but mama, who must be so gently managed—oh! how can I ever go away, and leave her? oh! I cannot?" and though she knew her tears were vain, she wept bitterly for a long time.

She had an opportunity very soon of knowing how Miss Agnace would deal with her in little Hubert's place. For the illness of her brothers proved to be not mere colds, as was at first supposed, but a severe form of one of those diseases of childhood, which generally pass through a whole household when one has been seized. In a few days Frederica was very ill, much more ill than either of the boys had been, and helpless, and miserable, she was entirely given up to the care of Miss Agnace; for neither her mother nor Selina was permitted to enter her room.

Gentle and firm. That exactly described her nurse's treatment. She was taken entirely out of her own hands, which was indeed the very best thing that could have happened to her, and found herself yielding in all things to the firm and gentle rule of Miss Agnace. She was not always quite herself, and slept and woke, and tossed and murmured, with the vaguest possible idea of what was happening around her, or how the time was passing. She had the strangest dreams and fancies, and said things, and asked questions, which her nurse could only meet by her calm surprised look and silence.

Once she saw, just within the door of her room, some one whom she at first supposed was the doctor, but then it seemed to be Mr St. Cyr's brother who was speaking with Miss Agnace, and she thought she heard him say that she must not go to England with her father, and that God had sent this sickness to keep her at home. She said to herself she was surely dreaming, and shut her eyes; and when she opened them again, there was only Miss Agnace offering her the bitter medicine with a smile.

And so one day passed after another, till the day fixed for their departure drew near. Nothing could be clearer, however, than that no departure was possible for Frederica. Nor was there much hope of her being so far recovered

as to be able to leave at the latest day that would admit of their reaching England in time for the wedding. So Mr Vane spoke rather vaguely of making arrangements for her to go by some other opportunity, and set out alone. Frederica did not know whether she was glad or sorry at being left at home. She was too restless and weak to take pleasure in anything, and longed so for a change of some kind, that she could very easily have persuaded herself that she was disappointed at being left. But she had no thought to think about it or about anything for a time. She could only toss restlessly on her bed, or sit listlessly in the large easy-chair, when she was at last permitted to rise.

Her little brothers were well and strong by this time, and came to see her every day. They tried to wait upon her, and to amuse her gently and quietly, but they tired her inexpressibly, and she could not endure them long. Her mother came ice a day to see her, but she was only allowed to remain a few minutes with her, and Selina was not permitted to come near her, lest she also should take the disease. So she was left almost entirely with Miss Agnace, who was very kind to her, she told her mother, who never failed to ask the question when she came.

Yes, she was very kind; that did not prevent the days from being long and tedious; and Frederica, forgetting that she had been counted a young lady all the winter, grew childish, and petulant, and ill to please. But Miss Agnace never lost patience, and was never otherwise than gentle with her, even when she was most firm in making her do all that the doctor desired.

Books were entirely forbidden. The doctor said her eyes were quite too weak to be used, and that her sight might be permanently injured if she were to read much now. Miss Agnace in this matter obeyed the doctor to the letter, and carried every book—even little Hubert's large-print Testament—away.

Now and then, as she grew stronger, Miss Agnace told her stories, to which she liked to listen. They were almost all about *very* good people who lived a great many years ago—wonderful stories some of them were, "If one only could believe them," Frederica used to say to herself. One day she said it to Miss Agnace, and for the first time her fair still face lost its calm, and looked angry.

"Well, but that does sound rather like a fairy story, now doesn't it?" said Frederica, moved from her usual indifference by the unwonted sight of the nurse's indignation. "Of course it does not really mean that the loaves of bread all turned to roses in the lady's lap, when her cruel husband made her afraid. It is an allegory, is it not? Not exactly to be received as having really happened. It is a very pretty story, and you must not be angry, because I did not mean to offend you."

All this was not said at once, but with a pause now and then.

"Angry! no, why should I be angry? You know no better, poor child, poor unhappy child!"

Frederica did not consider herself particularly happy just at this time, but it was not at all for the reason that Miss Agnace seemed to intimate.

"Why do you say so? Why am I so unhappy?" asked she.

"Because you have no religion," said Miss Agnace solemnly; "because you do not believe."

It was perfectly true, and Frederica acknowledged in her heart, but not in the sense or for the reason that Miss Agnace seemed to imagine; so she said lightly,—

"A great many religious people refuse to believe such tales as these. They are very pretty, you know, and perhaps they have valuable lessons, but as for having, really happened! Such things don't happen now."

"That is not true. Such things do happen still. Not frequently, but when God has a purpose to accomplish, a blessing to convey."

"Tell me something that has happened lately," said Frederica, forgetting all else in her eagerness for a story.

And so she did, and sometimes Frederica was interested, and sometimes she was amused. She heard of lame people who had been made to walk, of pictures which had spoken, of images which had wept, and many more of the same kind.

"But I don't quite see the good of it, even if these things were all true," she said at last.

"My child," said Miss Agnace gravely, "they are true. We have for their truth the authority of men to whom a lie is impossible. Do not say, 'If they are true.'"

"And does it make you happy to believe these things?" asked Frederica.

"Happy?" repeated Miss Agnace; "can any one be happy who does not believe? Are you happy? Were you happy when you were so ill, when you thought you might die? Were you not afraid?"

"Was I so ill as that?" asked Frederica, startled. "I never thought of dying. If I had, I daresay I should have been afraid. Did mama think so, and Selina? How sorry they must have been! And papa went away all the same."

She had no heart for any more wonderful stories that day. She lay quite silent for a long time after that, but she was not resting or at ease, for her face was flushed, and she grew restless and impatient; nothing pleased her, and she thought the day would never be done. She had all the impatience to herself, however, for Miss Agnace was as gentle and helpful as ever, and bathed her hot hands and head, and soothed her till she lost the sense of her troubles in sleep.

But another day came after that, and many days that had to be got through somehow. Her mother could not be much with her, and her brothers tired her. The cold March winds made it not safe for her to drive out, and poor Fred longed for Tessie, and would have given half her treasures to be transported to Mistress Campbell's garret for a single day. And thus thinking of Eppie, and of "the days of her youth," of which she used to tell her, it came into Frederica's mind to wonder what had happened to Miss Agnace when she was a child. For though she had talked much with her, both by night and by day, she had a way of falling back on one theme—the good deeds which the saints had done, and which all people ought to strive to do: and all this grew tedious when it was repeated over and over again, and Frederica longed for something else, and so she asked her,—

"When were you born, Miss Agnace? Have you brothers and sisters? Tell me about the days when you were young, as Eppie used to do. Has anything wonderful ever happened to you?"

Miss Agnace looked at her in smiling surprise.

"I have nothing to tell. Nothing wonderful ever happened to me."

"But still tell me about your childhood."

Miss Agnace told her a good many things, but certainly nothing wonderful. She was one of a large family. She had been sent to a convent school at the age of nine, and remained a pupil till she was nearly seventeen. There had been no incidents in her school life. Everything went on quietly, and happily that was all. Yes, she had favourite companions. One died, and one married, and the best loved one of all was lost on a steamer on one of the great lakes. She could tell no more than that.

"And since you left school?" asked Frederica.

"Nothing has happened to me since then. I have had a busy life, and have been content with it," said Miss Agnace, rising to leave the room. She was away a good while; but when she came back, carrying Frederica's tea on a tray, the young girl said, as though there had been no pause,—

"Well, and what have you been busy about and content with since then?"

Miss Agnace did not answer immediately. It was evident that she did not wish to continue the conversation, only she did not know how to help it. She was not a clever person, and she could not "make up" an answer in a moment. So she said,—"I have been nursing sick people much of the time—sometimes in one place and sometimes in another. Yes, I have been a good deal in St. P.'s Hospital."

"Oh!" said Frederica eagerly, "you are one of the sisters?"

"I am a nursing sister, yes."

"And were they willing to let you come here? You do not wear the sisters' dress. It was a very good thing you came here. What should we have done all this time? Was it Mr St. Cyr who sent you? Do you like to stay here, better than in the Hospital?"

Frederica could not expect that all her questions should be answered. Miss Agnace looked relieved as she listened to her.

"Yes, it was Mr St. Cyr who sent me. I like to stay here very well. I am glad to be of use."

"You are very kind. I ought to call you Sister Agnace, ought I not? or 'Ma tante,' as the convent girls do? How odd that you should be here! And have you been nursing sick people all your life? You must have seen a great many sorrowful sights."

"Yes, a great many sorrowful sights," repeated Miss Agnace gravely; "but not all sorrowful. I have seen the joyful ending of many a troubled life, which is a happy thing to see."

And she told her that night, and afterwards, about many sorrowful and joyful things, sickness and pain, grief and disappointment, and the blessed endings of all these; and a new view of life was presented to Frederica as she listened. She was getting better by this time, but not rapidly, and she did not grow cheerful and bright, as she ought to have done, when she was able to go out with her little brothers in the fine April days. Mrs Brandon came to see her, and would have taken her home with her for a few days, for a change, but because of baby it was not considered safe to do so, and she was obliged to content herself with the company of Miss Agnace and an hour's reading now and then.

She was not very happy these days. She did not look back with much satisfaction on the winter. It had been agreeable enough in passing, and she had not been taught that such a life was wrong, or might lead to wrong—that "she who liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." But somehow she was not content with herself. She had a feeling that she had "been weighed in the balance, and found wanting;" that she had not proved herself wise, or sensible, or discreet, as she had sometimes been called; that she had been seeking her own pleasure rather than the comfort of her mother and Selina. She had even been able to look forward to the prospect of leaving them for a long time, not without pain, certainly, but still with a vague expectation of enjoying the change for herself. She had failed them, and thinking about it made her more unhappy than she had ever been in all her life before.

But the root of her trouble lay deeper than any of these things. A year ago she had pleased herself with the thought that she wished to become religious, to become a Christian, not in name merely, but in reality. She then wished this less for herself than for her mother. She had felt the need less for herself, because she was young, and strong, and happy. But she had been near death, they told her, since then; and now, as her thoughts went back to that time, she

could not but ask herself, What if she had died? would it have been the end of all trouble to her, as Miss Agnace said it was to so many of the suffering poor creatures, whose eyes she had closed? She hoped so. She had never done anything very wrong. She wished to be good.

But she was not religious. At least, she had not the religion that would make her happy in the midst of suffering and in the prospect of death. And when she thought of it in this way, she was not so sure that it would have been well with her if she had died.

“But how am I to know?” said she, as she had many times said before. “People think so differently. Eppie said, If I asked Him, God would teach me, or send me a teacher. I have asked Him, though not so often as I might have done. But I will ask Him. Perhaps He has sent Miss Agnace.”

She sat up in the easy-chair in which she had been reclining.

“Miss Agnace, tell me about your religion. There are so many different sorts, you know; and I want to know about yours.”

Miss Agnace shook her head gravely.

“There is only one true religion—one true Church. There are many sects, but there is but one Church.”

“And that is yours? Eppie thought it was hers. But tell me about yours.”

She had plenty to tell her, such as it was. She told her about the only true Church, the only place of happiness and safety. She told her about its ceremonies, and worship, and sacraments. She told her about confession and penance, and of the blessedness of those who have their sins forgiven. She told her about Mary and the saints in heaven, and about our blessed Lord who may be approached through them. She said a great deal about the good works of all kinds that would win the favour of these. Above all, she insisted on the necessity of submitting implicitly to the requirements of the Church, of having no will of one’s own in such matters, and spoke severely of the pride and folly of those who ventured to take the law of God, and interpret it for themselves, without availing themselves of the teaching of those whom God had appointed for the work. She grew very earnest as she went on, but she did not speak very wisely. She certainly did not say anything that touched the heart, or gave light to the eyes of Frederica.

It is possible that if the Rev. Mr St. Cyr had known the state of Frederica’s mind, or if he could have contemplated the possibility of such an opportunity occurring for influencing her heart or her opinions, it would not have been Sister Agnace who would have been sent to Mrs Vane’s house. It would have been some one whose natural powers and acquirements better fitted her for the work of proselytism, which was, indeed, the work he had in view. But that was to come later, as time and events might permit. In the meantime Miss Agnace was a perfect instrument for the work he had given her to do. She was a born nurse, with strong nerves and a tender heart, gentle, patient, and firm. She was disciplined, experienced, and skilful, just the nurse to make life tolerable, even pleasant, to a confined invalid like Mrs Vane, and this was the office for which she was intended.

She was not clever, nor intelligent, nor very devout, but she had learned obedience. She was not her own. She had no will or judgment of her own on many matters. Her confessor was her conscience. Her idea of right was implicit obedience to him, and to the Superior of her order. Whatever they required her to do was right in her esteem, and hitherto nothing had been required of her likely to suggest questions to her mind. Her life had hitherto been so busy and so useful as to leave her no time for questioning; and in coming to Mrs Vane’s, she was conscious only of a wish to do her duty to her employer on the one hand, and to those who had sent her on the other, without an idea that it might be difficult to do both.

She grew very fond of Frederica during these days. Frederica was impatient often, and grew tired alike of her silence, and of her soft voice murmuring on about the blessed saints; but Miss Agnace never lost patience with her. She saw that the young girl was not at rest, and that she wished for something else, even more than she longed for health or society; and she longed to lead her into those paths where alone, she believed, true happiness could be found—the paths of entire submission of heart and will and judgment to the only true Church. But she did not succeed, and she was not surprised. She was a humble woman, with no wise words on her tongue, by which she might convince or teach one brought up in error, or bring her into the right way, and one day she told her so, and added,—

“But you should let me send for some one who is wise, and who has authority; and when you are well, you must go with me to church, and tell all your troubled thoughts to the blessed Mother. You should let me ask the Rev. Mr St. Cyr to come and talk with you.”

“I should like to see almost any one, it is so dull,” said Frederica with a sigh, “but I don’t like the Rev. Mr St. Cyr. Oh! I daresay he is very good and all that,” added she, as she saw that Miss Agnace looked displeased, “but I don’t know him, and he certainly has not a nice face.”

“But that is a small matter,” said Miss Agnace severely. “He is wise, and he has authority, and he would know what to say to you. He would show you the truth.”

Frederica was by no means sure that she cared about having the truth shown to her by Mr Jerome St. Cyr, or that her father would be pleased to have him visit her.

“I like you to teach me far better than I should like Mr Jerome St. Cyr,” said Frederica, “because, I know you believe what you say; and besides, I can trust you. And I always feel uncomfortable with Mr Jerome.”

“You may trust Mr Jerome. He loves you dearly,” said Miss Agnace, but she said no more at that time.

She quite believed that Mr Jerome loved them, and sought their good. Was he not interested in all that took place among them? It never came into her thoughts that she was betraying confidence, or acting in any way unworthily, by telling him every incident of their daily life. She was not always aware how much, in answer to his apparently careless questioning, she made known; for there was little to tell—trifling details of their daily life, incidents that had no significance, except as they tended to show the tastes or tempers of the children of the house, which could only interest one who loved them, as she was sure he did.

By-and-by he permitted her to see that he had a definite motive and plan in listening to all the details which seemed so trifling. He wished to gather from them some means of judging in what manner they might best be influenced in the right direction, should an opportunity to do so present itself at some future time.

Miss Agnace strongly desired for these children and their mother, that they should be brought to a knowledge of the truth, and she assented when the priest told her that it was a blessed thing for her to be permitted to aid, even indirectly, in this good work. She did not doubt the excellence of his motives, or his right to claim her help, and she never thought of refusing obedience to his lightest word. But when Frederica said, "I can trust *you*," a painful sense of being not worthy of the girl's confidence came upon her for a moment. It was only for a moment, however; at least, it was only till she spoke to Father Jerome about it—then she believed, as he told her, that it was a temptation of Satan to hinder her from doing God's work, and she prayed and strove against it with success.

Soon after this Mr Jerome came to see Frederica, but he brought none of the strong arguments, none of the words of wisdom, that Miss Agnace had promised. He made himself very agreeable to the young girl, told her amusing tales of the lands in which he had travelled, and made an attempt at teaching her the interesting game of "Tric trac," before he went away. Frederica acknowledged that he was agreeable, and that his face was not so bad when he was speaking and smiling, as when it was quite at rest. He came often after that; but Frederica was soon able to leave her room and become one of the family again, so that she only shared his visits with the rest. He made himself very agreeable to them all. He was a fine musician, and proposed to teach Selina to play, as he had seen the blind taught in Europe; and of course this gave pleasure to them all. He laid himself out especially to please the boys, Charles and Hubert, and succeeded. Even Tessie who was inclined to be critical and even rude to him at first, yielded to his determined attempts to please.

Frederica would have liked him too, if it had not come into her mind that he was taking all this pains for some other reason than the mere wish to be agreeable. And the same thought came into the mind of her mother. Mrs Vane had some unpleasant remembrances of him, in the days when she had known him better than she did now, and his visits did not give her unmingled satisfaction. But they did not speak to one another about him for a long time. They enjoyed Selina's pleasure, and the pleasure of the little boys, who shared his attention, and went with him on expeditions of various kinds. They had a very quiet time till Tessie came home for the holidays. Frederica was not long in throwing off all invalid habits, and growing well and strong again, but she was quieter and graver than she used to be before her illness, and the summer did not, even after Tessie's returning, promise to be so merry or so idle as the last had been.

Chapter Twelve.

Mr Vane's first letter brought an account of the wedding, and of the gaieties attending it, and his next told them that he had made up his mind to pass the summer on the Continent, returning to spend a month in England in the autumn, before he went home. They heard afterwards from Paris, and then from Rome, but for a time nothing more was said about Frederica's going to England.

As for Frederica, she said less than she used to do about being "grown up" and "sensible," but she was more thoughtful and quiet than she had ever been before; and, with the advice and assistance of Miss Robina, laid out for herself a regular course of reading, which she pursued with praiseworthy diligence, considering all things. The reading of the Bible with her mother and Selina was commenced again, and nothing was permitted to interfere with it. She began also to take her little brothers regularly to church, and to listen and try to understand all that she heard there. She did not get discouraged, though there was not much to interest or to instruct in the sermons she often heard.

There was little hope of a happy summer to them, as the days went on. The heat which last year seemed to bring healing to Mrs Vane, brought this year weakness and nervous prostration painful to see. And something even worse than these came with them, to make the days and nights terrible to her—the fear of death,—death, which she knew to be drawing near. It had come to her in former illnesses, but never as it came now.

Mr Jerome. St. Cyr never spoke many words to her in private, but they had been strong words that she could not forget, about her godless marriage and her godless life, which had brought on her, he said, the double curse of ill-health and neglect, and which must end in still deeper misery. She could not forget them, and they woke terrible fears for the future. She told her fears to her children, hoping that they might chase them away as they had chased so many troubles of hers in past years, with playful or loving words, but they knew not what to say, for they too were afraid.

"God is good, and Christ died for us," repeated Selina many times. "Surely that is enough, mama."

They read the Testament daily to her still, and Frederica searched it carefully for her sake, bringing to her such sweet words as these:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

"For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.

"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? The sting of Death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The clergyman of the church they attended came to see her, and read prayers solemnly and tenderly, and answered the appeal of her anxious eyes with vague words about God's goodness and compassion, and how He would save all who came to Him. But his words did not comfort her.

"How can I come to Him? I do not know the way."

"Mama, Jesus is the way—He says it," said Selina, who never seemed to forget the words she heard.

"But I do not know Him; I have not thought about Him all my life; I have done nothing good, and it is too late now."

"But the thief on the cross had done nothing good, even to the very last, and yet Jesus says to him, 'To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise,'" said Selina.

"Yes; let me read it for you," said Frederica eagerly.

"But he could do nothing, and Mr Jerome says I could give money to clothe the naked and feed the hungry, and that I could give my children to the Church, and then I should be safe. But I never trusted Mr Jerome; I am afraid of him; and yet he may be right."

"Miss Agnace says something like that too," said Tessie, "and I think we ought to ask Mr St. Cyr to give some money, if it would set mama's mind at rest."

"But it does not say that is the way in the Bible," said Frederica gravely.

"Yes, it says something like that. Some one was told to sell all his goods to give to the poor. Don't you remember?"

"But it says, 'Thanks be to God, who *giveth* us the victory!'" said Selina. "And there must be some people so poor that they have nothing to give Him back."

"Yes, and in another place He says, 'I *give* unto my sheep eternal life,'" said Frederica. "It cannot be that one can buy it."

"And in another place it says, 'He that believeth shall be saved,'" said Selina.

The mother's eyes turned eagerly from one to another. They knew little, but they knew far more than she did about that which she was so anxious to learn.

"Miss Agnace always says I must send for a priest, and confess to him, but my father hated all that, and your father would be very angry."

"But mama, if it would make you happy, he need not be told," said Tessie; "and we might send for some one else than Mr St. Cyr's brother."

"But that would be giving up what the Bible says; for it does not tell us to confess to priests, or that they can pardon us," said Frederica.

"It says something, I think," said Selina, "'Whosoever sins ye remit, they shall be remitted.' Oh, if we only had some one to tell us what we ought to do?"

And was there no one among a whole cityful to tell these children and their mother how they might be saved? Doubtless there were many who would gladly have pointed them to Jesus as the only hope of the sinner, if they had made known their need to such. But it was quite true of those with whom they came in contact, the way was not clear to them.

"I spoke to Caroline about it," said Frederica, "and she said we must be good, and say our prayers, and go to church, and do our duty always. But there must be some other way; for mama can do nothing now. She cannot even give money, unless Mr St. Cyr is willing; and it would do no good, if she could."

"Miss Agnace says that she knows a sister who is very good and wise, and who would gladly teach us. Mama, shall we send for Sister Magdalen?" asked Selina.

But Mrs Vane was less able to say what should or what should not be done, than the youngest child among them. No one sent for Sister Magdalen, unless Miss Agnace did, which was very likely; for she seemed always to know what they wished for, whether they told her or not; but she came. A very different woman she was from Miss Agnace. A thin, dark, thoughtful woman, with a face which was calm now, but which suggested thoughts of troubles passed through, and struggles encountered in past days.

She came to see Miss Agnace at first, or she said so; but she had some beautiful specimens of needlework which she wished the young ladies to see, and while they were admiring it she was speaking gentle and sympathising words to their mother.

She came a good many times after that, and by-and-by she had much to say to them all about the peace and rest that were to be found in the bosom of the true Church, and of the safety and happiness that were to be purchased by

the performance of such good works as the Church commanded. She told them how, by penance, and prayer, and the confession of sin, pardon might be obtained, and how, through the intercession of Mary and the saints, they might hope to get safe to heaven.

She was a wiser woman than Miss Agnace, and knew how to put all these things in the fairest light, so as not to startle them. But she was as grieved and indignant as Miss Agnace had been at the pride and self-will of children who ventured to read, and who strove to understand, the Bible for themselves. It was just Miss Agnace's teaching over again, except that all was more clearly and firmly announced, and more decidedly pressed home, by Sister Magdalen.

If Mrs Vane had been left a little while to her instructions and influence, she might have led her where she would, and induced her, in the hope of finding peace, to give herself altogether into the guidance of those who believe that they have the keys of heaven in their keeping. But her children never left her side when Sister Magdalen was there, and there was no assent in Frederica's anxious watchful eyes, and Selina was always ready with some word from the Book, which even Sister Magdalen could not but acknowledge was the very word of God. Nor did it avail for her to say that God had other words than were written there, and other ways of teaching those who wished to know His will. If Frederica had learned little else from the Scriptural lessons of Mrs Glencairn and Miss Pardie, she had learned this, that the Bible is the only source of our knowledge of God as the Saviour of sinners, and to distrust all other teaching.

"What you say may be true, I cannot tell, but it is not here in the Gospels. And surely there is all here that is necessary, if we could only understand," said Frederica gently. And Selina added,—

"I know we are very ignorant; but I do not think it is wrong in us to read and to try to understand God's Word for ourselves, and I believe God will teach us, and mama too. We will not fear."

In the meantime Mr Jerome had still been making frequent visits to Mrs Vane's house, where he made himself very agreeable to the children. Selina's music progressed rapidly, and she had increasing pleasure in it. The boys and even Tessie welcomed him with the indiscriminating liking which children bestow on those who take pains to please and win them. Frederica said to herself, that this liking and Selina's progress ought to be sufficient reason for her liking him too. And it might have been so if the priest had been content to treat her as a child.

But she was not a child, and he touched with her on graver matters than a child could comprehend. He was aware of her reading the Bible with her mother and the rest, and of her anxious questionings of Sister Agnace, and her wish to be religious and do right, and he was more than willing to give counsel and direction with regard to these matters. But on these things Frederica would never enter with him. At first she could give no better reason for this, than that "he had not a nice face," which she acknowledged was a very foolish reason. But afterwards she had a reason which was all-powerful with her: he made her mother unhappy. He spoke softly and soothingly to her, as far as words and manners went: but he never came but he said some words that left her anxious and troubled either for herself or her children. He intimated his belief that she had forsaken the true Church—the Church of her fathers—when she married Mr Vane, and that all her ill-health and unhappiness had come upon her as a punishment for this wrong step. He never said all this to her in words at one time; but he uttered a word now and then, breathed a sigh, spoke a soft regret, or as soft a warning, that left the poor soul never quite at ease. He never spoke thus to her in the presence of her children. Without them there is little doubt that he could easily have bent the poor broken-spirited woman to his will—brought her to repentance and a better mind, he would have called it. But Selina's gentleness, and Frederica's sense of her mother's helplessness and dependence, were a strong defence to their mother. At this time Frederica saw that she was unhappy a good while before she knew that the priest had anything to do with it. When she did know it, she resented it angrily, and told him with more than sufficient warmth, that it was neither kind nor wise of him to come with his hard words and harder judgments, to unsettle and perplex the mind of one so tender and delicate.

"Perhaps you mean it kindly, but it is not real kindness to make poor mama unhappy and afraid. You have your religion, and we have ours. We will not interfere with each other," said Frederica, with trembling dignity.

"Have you then any religion?" asked the priest. "Because it has been intimated to me that you are in search of one, and know not where it is to be found. Is your mother then happier than you?"

Frederica looked at him in amazement and anger, yet other feelings also were in her heart.

"Mama is good," said she. "One does not need to be very wise, or to have fine words to offer, in order to be a Christian."

"And you? are you a Christian, dear?"

"I am not good," said Frederica humbly; "but I wish to be, and God will teach me, and mama also."

"And how long will it take you to learn? a year? two years? And the chances are your mother will not live many months. Will it be well with her, do you think, when she shall go away into another world alone?"

Frederica turned upon him a white face and wide-open eyes of horror.

"Yes," said Selina's soft voice behind them, "it will be well. God is good, and Christ has died."

Frederica uttered a glad cry, and clasped her sister in her arms.

"Yes," said the priest, "God is good, and Christ has died. This is our only hope. But then all these years have you been thinking of this? You have been forgetting God, and even now you are trusting to your own wisdom to find Him. You are refusing counsel. You are walking in your own ways. Oh! poor ignorant erring children, it is because I love you

so much, you and your mother, that I dare to make you unhappy by telling you the truth. I would gladly lead you in the right way."

"Is mama so very ill?" said Frederica, forgetting everything else, in the misery that his words had suggested.

"Do you not see yourselves that she is very ill? Dear children, death is a happy change to those who have the care and blessing of the Church. Death is nothing of which a Christian need be afraid."

He spoke gently and tenderly, and laid his hand softly on the blind girl's head; but his eyes were hard and angry, and Frederica shrank from him with a repugnance which she did not try to conceal.

"I would so gladly help you," said he again. "It is your happiness I seek, and the happiness of your dear mistaken mother." And in a little he added, "God bless you with humble minds." And then went silently away.

And he left two very unhappy girls behind him. Could it be that their mother was going to die; and that she had cause to be afraid?

"I never wish to see him again," said Frederica. "He shall never see mama again, if I can prevent it."

But her anger went away with the departure of the priest, and now she was very miserable.

"But, Fred, if it is true that we are all wrong, and that mama is going to die before—"

Selina shuddered.

"Selina! God is good, and Christ has died; you said it yourself."

"Yes, God is good. He will teach us."

"And He will take care of mama and all of us. And if mama does not go to heaven, I am sure I do not care to go there either," said Frederica, with a great bout of weeping.

"God is good, and Christ has died," repeated Selina softly. "He will teach us."

"But I never wish to see Mr Jerome St. Cyr again," said Frederica.

But he came again, just as usual, in a day or two. Mr St. Cyr was there with the mother and the children when he came in, and the brothers exchanged looks of surprise at the encounter, for they had never met in Mrs Vane's house before. Mr St. Cyr looked on with a little amused curiosity to see how his brother would be received.

Very cordially by the young people it seemed, but he noticed a troubled look pass over the face of their mother; and Frederica rose and went over to her sofa, and took her seat beside her, with an air that seemed to say she needed protection, and she was there to give it. Mr Jerome took no notice of the movement, but occupied himself with Selina and her music, and with the little boys, who soon came in.

Mr St. Cyr asked Frederica about her illness, and her employments and amusements, and she told him about Miss Agnace, and how much nicer she was than Mrs Ascot used to be.

"And we all hope she will stay," said Tessie. "But they don't usually let the sisters stay long out of their convents. Do you think they will let her stay?" asked Tessie, addressing Mr Jerome. "Fred did not know she was a sister at first, but she found it out from something she said. She is very nice, however, and we all hope she may stay."

Mr St. Cyr asked no questions about Miss Agnace; but when his brother rose to go, he rose also. He had something to say to him.

"Who is Sister Agnace? and why is she here?" asked he. "It is not wise in you to wish to make any change in Mrs Vane's family affairs, my brother. You will not succeed."

"I have succeeded already. Miss Agnace has made a great change for the better in this ill-regulated household, especially in the comfort of Mrs Vane. Your little friend is a clever child, but she cannot be expected to act with sense or judgment in certain affairs. She has not been complaining of Miss Agnace has she?"

"By no means. On the contrary, they seem to value her highly. But who is she? Why is she here?"

"Do you not know! Mr Vane advertised for a housekeeper, and she applied. She has excellent references, and he was fortunate in getting her."

"Still you have not answered my question. The sisters are not permitted to answer advertisements, and take situations, without some special purpose in view. What was your motive in placing her among these children?"

"A desire to serve them would not seem to you a sufficient motive, I suppose?"

"No," said Mr St. Cyr, with a shrug, "not in your case. You may wish to serve them, but you have another motive. Who is Sister Agnace?"

"A simple, pious, affectionate creature, just the nurse for a nervous invalid like Mrs Vane. See her, and satisfy yourself with regard to her."

"I shall do so," said Mr St. Cyr; "and, my brother, let me say one word to you. Nothing good will come of your trying

to gain influence in this house. Mrs Vane has nothing in her power as to the disposal of her father's wealth. All that is quite beyond her power."

"Don't you remember you told me all that long ago? Is it not conceivable that for other reasons I might wish to influence that unhappy woman, who is so near death, and who is so unprepared to meet it? What is her wealth to me, who am not permitted to possess aught beyond the necessaries of life? Why should I wish to influence her, except to turn her thoughts to the God whom she must soon meet, and of whom she knows nothing? And these poor neglected children! Brother Cyprien, it is terrible to me to see you so indifferent to their highest interests, and your own."

"Let all that pass. What I wish to say is this—No influence that you may bring to bear on her can possibly make any change in the arrangement of her affairs. The guardians of her children's interests are already chosen by my advice, and with her husband's consent, and they are such men as will not please you. She might change them, it is true, but she will not without my advice. You have already made her unhappy, I think. It is cruel, and will avail you nothing. This is what I wish you to understand."

"I clearly understand. You will not see that it is only their good I wish for. They have no religion. They are ignorant of the first principles of truth. These young girls are neither fit for this world nor the next. And St. Hubert's grandsons are losing the best years of their life, under the foolish teaching of an ignorant woman."

"That is your opinion," said Mr St. Cyr coldly. "Well, you are not responsible, and need not interfere. No good can come of it to any one concerned."

But he had no fault to find with Miss Agnace when he saw her. She was simple and affectionate, and as far as he could judge, faithful. She was eager for the spiritual good of Mrs Vane and her children, and prayed for them, and told them tales of the saints, and of miracles performed by their relics even at the present day. She took the children with her to mass, on high days and holidays, and evidently had full faith in the success of her efforts in their behalf at last. But of all this Mr St. Cyr had no fear. Indeed, he might have rejoiced over the prospect of the spiritual change, for which Sister Agnace and his brother were so anxious, in poor Mrs Vane and her children, provided it were a real change, and that no wrong influence were brought to bear upon them to bring it about.

But though Mr St. Cyr was looked upon as a very religious man, he was far more liberal in his opinions, and charitable in his judgments, than the greater number of those who admired his devotion. It did not seem impossible to him that beyond the pale of his own church there might be truth and safety. He knew that Mr Vane was not a religious man. He gave him no credit for religious motives, or even for conscientious motives, in the care with which, in the education of his daughters, he had tried to keep them away from Roman Catholic influence; and it would have troubled him very little on his account that they should leave their father's church. He would not have pitied him, but he would have dreaded the pain to them, the discomfort which their father's anger would bring upon them.

But he was not anxious for them to change. They were good little things, he thought, desirous to do right, and quite as likely to do right by themselves as they would be under such guidance as a change might involve,—such guidance, for instance, as that of his brother Jerome. He did not wish to be hard on his brother, even in his thoughts, but he did not trust him. He did not trust him, either as regarded the means he might use to influence the delicate nervous mother and her children towards a change of faith, or as regarded the end he had in view in desiring such a change.

He cared for their souls, doubtless, and believed them to be in danger, but he cared for something else more. He knew that he coveted some part of the wealth that Mr St. Hubert had left, and which had been accumulating since his death, for his own purposes; that is, for the purposes of the Church; and he feared that he would not be scrupulous as to the means he made use of to obtain it.

So he went oftener to see them than he had been accustomed to do, and assured himself of the good faith of Miss Agnace, and listened to the earnest talk of the sisters, and sometimes even to the reading of the Bible. He was amused sometimes, but oftener he was moved and interested, and in his heart prayed to Him whom he believed to be the God of all who sincerely sought to serve and honour Him, that He might guard, and guide, and keep safe from all evil, these children whom he was learning to love so well.

Chapter Thirteen.

September was not a pleasant month this year. There were not the usual clear, bright days, all the lovelier and more enjoyable that the frost in the morning air, and a tinge of brilliant colour here and there among the trees, gave warning that there could not be many more of them in the season. They were hot, oppressive days. The air was close, and the sky was hidden by a thick haze, which told of the coming of a storm.

It was no wonder, the children said, that their mother was worse than usual. Every one felt dull, and languid, and out of sorts. They would all feel better when the rain which had been gathering so many days should come, and it could not be long now. This was what Frederica said to her sister, Mrs Brandon, when she came to see them after her return from the seaside, where she had passed the summer. Mrs Brandon assented, and regretted for baby's sake that she had returned home so soon. She regretted it for another reason. She did not know how to tell the business that had brought her to them that day. Their father had decided not to return home till spring, and had written to her to say that there would be an opportunity for Fred to travel with a Mrs Bury, who was about to return to England, and he wished her to hasten her preparations. Mrs Brandon was to tell Mrs Vane of the change of plan, and to help Fred in all necessary arrangements.

She did not like the task he had assigned her, and she liked it less when she saw the mother and her daughters together. She could not but feel that her father was exposing himself to remark—nay, to just censure—by remaining away so long in the circumstances of his family; and she felt the greatest unwillingness to say a word to Fred about

leaving home. But Fred did not even take the matter into consideration. She dismissed the subject with a single word.

"I'm not going," said she quietly. But an angry spot burned on her cheek. She would not say to Mrs Brandon, or even to Selina, that she thought it unkind of their father to ask such a thing—more than unkind to remain longer away. She checked the hasty words of blame that rose to Tessie's lips in Caroline's presence. But she was grieved and vexed too.

"I am not going," said she, "and nobody must tell mama that papa, wished it. He ought to know that—"

She stopped suddenly, not sure of her voice.

"She has been ill so long," said Mrs Brandon. "I suppose papa thinks she is as she always has been, now a little better, now worse. He thinks you are over-anxious, and I am afraid he does not understand. What does Dr Gerard say?"

"If you were to tell him, Caroline, he might understand," said Selina. "Will you not write and tell him how we all want him home?"

"I will write certainly, and I will also see Mrs Bury. It would make you too unhappy to leave now, though I trust your mother is not really worse."

"Thank you. No, I could not go now. Even Mr St. Cyr is ill, and they have no one but me—" said Fred, speaking with difficulty.

"My darling," said Mrs Brandon, moved to unwonted tenderness by the sight of Frederica's tears, "you are not to be discouraged. Remember how often your mother has been worse than she is now; and papa will be sure to come when I write and tell him how much you all want him. And, dear, if you break down, what will become of the rest?"

"I am not going to break down," said Fred, swallowing her tears, and trying to smile. "Be sure and bring baby next time, and hasten now, for the rain is near. Good-bye?"

She went to the gate, and stood looking after the carriage for a minute or two. Then, instead of going into the house, she walked round the garden several times, telling herself that there was no one but her to care for the rest, and that she must be strong and not discouraged for their sake. But for the moment she was utterly discouraged and afraid.

Though it was still early in the afternoon, it had grown very dark, and there was first the silence, and then the low sighing of the wind among the trees, that tells of the near approach of a storm; and the sudden recollection that her little brothers had not returned from their walk hastened Frederica's footsteps again to the gate. A few large drops of rain fell before she reached it, and as she looked out a cloud of dust and leaves came whirling down the street, and a strong gust of wind made it necessary for her to cling for a moment to the gate, lest she should be thrown down.

There was nothing to be seen of her brothers; but, fighting against the wind, and shielding his eyes from the clouds of dust which it bore, came a slender bowed figure that made her forget them. For just a moment she thought it was Mr St. Cyr, but even before he came near, she saw it was not he, but an older man. His hair was snowy white, and he walked with a great effort, bowing his head low to meet the blast. Opposite the gate, a sudden gust nearly overthrew him. He let fall a book which he carried in his hand, and in stooping to recover it his cane slipped from his grasp. Frederica sprang forward to lift it for him; and when she met the sweet, grave smile that thanked her, she quite forgot that the face was the face of a stranger.

"Come in," said she eagerly. "You are not strong enough to meet this terrible wind. And see, the rain has begun to fall already. Come in and rest."

"I shall be glad to rest," said the stranger; and so, at Frederica's bidding, there passed over their threshold an angel unawares.

The brothers came home with a run and a shout, only in time to escape the rain that soon fell in torrents. In the house it grew as dark as night for a little while, and then the lightning flashed, and the thunder broke over the roof with a peal that seemed to shake the foundations. The servants of the house, awed and anxious, flocked into the hall where the stranger sat, and where the children had gathered. Their mother was there too, trembling and white with nervous terror. For a minute or two the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled continuously, and for a time not a word was spoken. Then that cloud passed, and it grew light.

"You are not afraid," said Hubert, looking up into the face of the stranger.

"No," said he gently, "I have no cause."

"But we are afraid, except Selina," said the boy, looking round on the terrified faces. "Selina does not see the lightning. But why are not you afraid?"

"'God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in trouble. Therefore shall not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.' No, I am not afraid."

"But the lightning might kill you."

"Yes, it might kill me."

"And yet you are not afraid! Why are you not afraid?"

"Because I hope—yes, I believe, that when death shall come to me, it will be as God's messenger, not to hurt, but to take me beyond all reach of hurt for ever and for ever. Truly, my little lad, death is the last thing of which one whom God loves need be afraid."

Another cloud was passing, and Hubert's face was hidden in his sister's lap as once more the thunder broke over them. But the worst of the storm was over. There were now longer pauses between the gradually receding peals, and in the silence of one of them Selina asked softly,—

"Frederica, who is he that is not afraid of death?"

And Frederica answered in the same tone, "One whom God loves, he says."

"And surely He loves us all."

Gradually the storm passed over. The servants went away to their duties, and Miss Agnace took the little boys to change their coats, which she only now discovered were quite wet. The girls helped their mother into her room again, and Tessie opened the window. There were clouds heavy and dark still in the sky, but beyond the clouds there was brightness, and the cool sweet air brought refreshment to them all. The stranger stood on the threshold, regarding with grave, compassionate eyes the group which the mother and daughters made.

"Mama," said Frederica, answering her mother's look of surprise, "I brought him in because of the rain."

"Who is it?" said Selina eagerly. "Is it he whom God loves, and who has no cause to be afraid of death? Frederica, ask him why he is not afraid. And does not God love us all?"

"God is our Father. Truly He loves all His children."

Drawn by his voice, Selina approached, and took in both hers his outstretched hand. Not once in a hundred times did the blind girl seek to get by the sense of touch a knowledge of strangers. But now she gently passed her hand over his, and over his face, and his soft white hair; and then she drew him gently into the room, and over towards her mother's chair.

"Come and tell mama why you are not afraid."

"Because 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' No one need fear death, who has the promise of life everlasting."

"No," said Selina. "And have you that promise? And is it for us too? for mama, and all of us?"

For answer, the old man repeated the text again, "God so loved the world," and so on to the end.

"It is the world He loves; and the promise is to whosoever believeth."

"Do you hear, mama? It says, 'Whosoever believeth.' Are you listening, mama?" said Selina eagerly.

"My darling, I know not what to believe, or what to do," said Mrs Vane sadly. "I have never in all my life thought about these things."

"No," said Selina, turning her eager face towards the stranger. "We have never thought about these things. Could we begin now, do you think? and what must we do?"

Frederica and Tessie looked and listened in amazement. It was so unlike Selina to have anything to say to a stranger. Their mother looked as eager as she did, and very anxious; and she said, before the stranger could reply,—

"Yes, the children might begin now. As for me, I can do nothing."

"But," said the old man gently, "it does not say *do*, but believe."

"Surely, mama, 'Whosoever believeth.' And what are we to believe?"

"The text says, 'Whosoever believeth in Him'."

"Yes—that is Jesus. And what are we to believe?"

"All that the Bible says of Him. Have you heard about Him at all, my child?"

"Yes. In the New Testament. We believe all that. What is the first, Fred? Oh! I remember: 'Thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins.'"

And Frederica added, "'And they shall call His name Emmanuel, which is, being interpreted, God with us.'"

"We are to believe that He saves His people from their sins," said Selina. "Does that mean us too? Who are God's people?"

"They who seek to know Him. They who love Him, and do His will. They whom He loves and will save."

There was a pause of some minutes; then Selina said,—

"We seek to know Him, and—I love Him. I do not know how to do His will."

"His will is written in His Word, and He Himself will teach you," said the stranger.

Then Tessie broke in flippantly,—

"But how are we to know? Some say one thing, and some another. Father Jerome says it is the last thing we should do—to read the Bible for ourselves. And how are we to know?"

"But we do read it," said Frederica. "And there is no use in asking what Mr Jerome St. Cyr would wish us to do."

"But for my part, I think he is quite as likely to be right as those others," said Tessie. "There are many more who are of his opinion than of ours. And it would be a shocking thing to say that all the crowds of people who go to his church are all wrong."

"Hush, Tessie dear, and listen," said Selina. "Mama dear, are you very tired? Would you like to hear more?"

If Selina could have seen her mother's face, she would not have asked.

"Tell us more!" said she.

"Begin at the beginning," said Fred, and she read, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise."

But the beginning was before that, he showed them. The beginning was when, because of sin, man's need began—when the first promise was given, and God said "that the woman's seed should bruise the head of the serpent." He showed them how, the Divine law being broken, Divine justice required satisfaction, and how One had said, "Lo! I come to do Thy will, O God!" He went on from promise to promise, from prophecy to prophecy, showing how all that went before was but a preparation for the coming of Him who was promised, who was "to save His people from their sins."

Much that had been mysterious, even meaningless, in the things which they had read—the sacrifices, the ceremonies, the prophecies—became significant and beautiful as types of Him who was both sacrifice and priest, dying that His people might live. The old man did not use many words, and almost all of them were words with which the reading of the Bible had made them familiar, but they came to them with new meaning and power from his lips.

He told them how the ages had been waiting for Him who was called "Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace;" and how, "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son;" how "He bare our griefs, and carried our sorrows; He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was on Him, and by His stripes we are healed."

He spoke to them of Him as the son of Mary, as the babe in Bethlehem, and yet the Leader and Commander of His people. He reminded them how He lived and suffered; how He spake wonderful words, and did wonderful works; how He pitied, and taught, and healed the people; how He loved them, and how He died for them at last.

At last? No, that was not the last. He told them how the grave, that had held in bonds all the generations that had passed away, had no power to hold Him; how He had broken the chains of death, nay, had slain death, and how He had ascended up to heaven, to be still the Priest of His people, and their King. He told them that it was His delight to pardon and receive sinners who came to Him; that He would not only pardon and save from the punishment of sin, but take away the power of sin over the heart; so that instead of loving it, and yielding to it, sin would become hateful to the forgiven child of God, because God hated it. He told them how God kept His people safe in the midst of a world at enmity with Him, and how all things were theirs, because they were Christ's; and how nothing, "neither life, nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, can separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

He told them that He was preparing a place for those who had loved Him, and that Death—no longer an enemy—was to come as His messenger to take them into His presence, there to dwell for evermore. And most wonderful, all this was God's free gift. None were too sinful, or weak, or wayward, to be saved by Him, who asked only to be trusted and loved by those to whom He freely offered so much. Wonderful indeed, beyond the power of words to utter.

"Mama," said Selina, touching her mother's hand, "I think I see it now."

The mother turned her eyes from the radiant face of the blind girl to the face of the stranger again.

"Will you trust Him?" asked he gently. "He is able and willing to save."

"May I?" said she eagerly; "I, who can do nothing? I, who have never in all my life thought about these things? Ah! if it were possible!"

"Believe it. It is true."

"But is there nothing we must do?" said Frederica doubtfully.

"There is nothing you need do to win His love. There is much you can do to prove your love to Him. 'If ye love me, keep my commandments,' He said. And 'we love Him because He first loved us.'"

"And is there no good in all that Miss Agnace has told us?" said Tessie. "Indeed, Fred, it is not that I wish to be disagreeable. But Miss Agnace prays to the Virgin and to the saints, and she goes to confession. She says that is the only right way, and you know Miss Agnace is a good woman. And Mr Jerome—"

Mrs Vane's eyes and Frederica's were turned on the stranger; and Miss Agnace, who had been listening unseen,

came forward at the sound of her name. The old man looked gravely from one to the other, and said,—

“‘He that believeth on the Son hath life.’ Of Him it is said, ‘Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name given under heaven among men, whereby we can be saved.’ Of Him it is said, that He ‘hath redeemed us not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with His precious blood. Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree.’ Of Him it is said, ‘In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.’ Truly He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto Him by faith. They who put their trust in Him need no other saviour. ‘Other foundation can no man lay, than is laid down, which is Jesus Christ.’”

“This is God’s truth, taught us in His Word. I do not desire to judge those of whom you speak. It is through Christ, once offered for sins, that they too can be saved.”

Mrs Vane made a movement to enjoin silence when Miss Agnace would have spoken; and then the stranger, kneeling down, said, “Let us pray;” and Mrs Vane and Selina for the first time heard the pouring out of a good man’s heart to God. What he asked for them need hardly be told: that Christ might reveal Himself to them as one mighty to save; that He might dwell in them by His Spirit, to make them holy and happy, and ready for an entrance into “the inheritance which is incorruptible, and undefiled, and which fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who love Him;” that even *now*, believing in Him, they might have “joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

Every heart went up with his as he prayed. Even Miss Agnace listened and joined in supplication, wondering and moved.

“And shall we never see you again?” said Frederica, as he took her mother’s hand to say farewell.

“I cannot tell. I am only passing through the town, and but for the storm I should have been already on the way. I shall never forget you.”

“I think God sent you to us,” said Selina.

Once more the blind girl touched softly his hand, and his face, and his silver hair. Praying, “God bless all beneath this roof,” he went away.

But they never forgot him, nor the words he had spoken to them.

For Selina after that there was neither doubt nor fear. The way which God has opened for the return of sinners to Himself was clearly revealed to her. She had much to learn yet, with regard to His will and His dealings in providence; but this she knew and declared, “I love Him because He first loved me.”

There were for her no anxious questionings, no groping in the dark, after that. Day by day the light grew clearer and brighter to the eyes of her soul, and she saw “wondrous things out of His law.” She was at peace, and with all the power of her loving and gentle nature she set herself to help her mother toward the same peace. There was the daily reading still, and daily also, kneeling by her mother’s bed, Selina asked for the blessing of peace to her mother’s heart. And she did not ask in vain. As the days went on the blessing came—God gave His own answer of peace.

Peace with God! That which all those weary years of sickness and solitude this poor soul had needed came to her at last, and all was changed. Her waiting for the end, that was slowly, but surely drawing near, was peaceful, at times it was joyful. Even Miss Agnace saw the change, and thanked God for it. Sister Magdalen saw it, and doubted its reality and its sufficiency. But she was suffered to utter no word of doubt in Mrs Vane’s hearing. Indeed, she hardly wished to do so.

“God may have ways of dealing with sinners of which we do not know,” said she, in answer to Miss Agnace’s anxious looks, not knowing what to say.

“Yes, truly,” said Miss Agnace to herself, with a sigh of relief and comfort.

It had come to her many times of late, that the dying mother’s peace must be from God, even though it had not come to her through the Church or its ministers; but she had hardly dared to believe it possible. She needed Sister Magdalen’s confirming word, and took more comfort from it than Sister Magdalen had meant it to convey.

Chapter Fourteen.

Frederica was the least happy of them all at this time. They had heard nothing as yet about Mr Vane’s return; and, as must be the case in every household at every changing season, there were many things to be arranged, and some of them required a decision which Frederica was neither old enough nor wise enough to exercise; and she was troubled in various ways. She rejoiced in the new rest and peace that had come to her mother and Selina, and said to herself often, that all the rest mattered little, since it was well with them; but other things sometimes pressed on her heavily.

Tessie had grown impatient under the restraint of circumstances, and also under the control which Frederica, not always with the best judgment, sought to exercise over her for her good. She was wilful, and sought the companionship of young people whom her sister did not know, or of whom she did not approve. Madame Precoe, who as Mrs Ascot had been Tessie’s pet aversion, invited her often; and she liked going there better than to the house of her sister, Mrs Brandon, who did not ask her very often.

Her little brothers, too, were getting beyond her control. The lady who had taught them daily for some years, being obliged, for family reasons, to leave them, her place was not found easy to supply, and it was decided that it was best to send them to school. Not to a day-school; that would not have answered in the circumstances. They were sent

to a school which Mrs Brandon recommended, and which Frederica had heard her father mention with favour. It was a small private school in the village of T., at some distance from M. But the little lads went willingly enough, eager as children usually are for change, and for a time Frederica was quite at rest about them.

All this time she could not avail herself of the doubtful help which the telling of her troubles to Mr St. Cyr would have given her; for he was ill. She went to see him more than once, but they would not let her in, and Mr Jerome's grave looks and assurances that the sight of her old friend would be no pleasure to her now, filled Frederica with sorrow, and with a dread of what might happen to them all when Mr St. Cyr should be no more.

But over the sea there were coming, even then, tidings that made all else seem of little moment to Frederica and them all. One mail brought word that Mr Vane was coming home; but the next brought word that made it doubtful whether he ever would come home again. At the first reading, the tidings of evil seemed scarcely to admit of hope. Still they tried to speak hopefully in their mother's presence, and none more hopefully than Frederica. But enclosed in the letter of her English brother, telling them of the accident and danger of her father, were a few lines to Frederica written by his own hand, that left little room for hope in her heart.

"My darling," he wrote, "they will have no one but you. I cannot recall the past. You must stand by your mother, and make her understand that I would like Colonel Bentham to be appointed your guardian in my stead. He is an honourable and upright man, and he is about to return to Canada to remain; and I do not think Mr St. Cyr, who knows him well, will object. Do not lose a day after you receive this. If I live, it need make no difference. I trust to you, Frederica, in all things. Lose no time. Oh, if I could only recall the past!"

That was all. Not even his name was written after it.

"Oh! papa! papa!" sobbed the girl, as she lay alone in the darkness. "Shall I never see you any more? And how shall I ever tell mama?"

Mrs Vane was at first only told that an accident had happened to her husband, which would probably delay his return for a little while. He had been thrown from his horse while riding. They could only wait for another mail to hear more, and the first telling alarmed her less than they had feared it might do.

One good thing came out of this sad event to Tessie. Startled by Frederica's giving way so utterly at the news of their father's danger, and conscience-stricken at the knowledge that she had been disobeying his known wishes all these weeks she at once proposed to return to Mrs Glencairn's, and all agreed that there was no better thing for her to do. So that anxiety was set at rest.

To no one, not even to Mrs Brandon, did Frederica show her father's letter. Moved by a fear which she could not put in words, she kept secret the commission he had given her, and at the first moment that it was possible for her to do so, took her way to Mr St. Cyr's house. She had not seen him for a long time. He was not well enough to see any one, she had always been told whenever she had called to enquire for him, and yet she had heard by chance of others who had been allowed to enter his room. Miss Agnace had been there, and Sister Magdalen; and she had heard indirectly of his being able to transact business of importance, and she went determined to see him, if it were possible to do so.

She entered the outer door with some one who was going into the office, and went upstairs unquestioned. She opened one door, and then another, and there sat Mr St. Cyr, looking ill and changed certainly, but with his papers about him, not at all as though he were unequal to any work. He greeted her with a pleased exclamation, and then playfully reproached her with having forgotten him in his illness.

"But I have been here often, Cousin Cyprien," said she, eagerly; "and they would not let me come up to you. Did they not tell you? Mr Jerome always said you were too ill to be disturbed. Are you better, Cousin Cyprien?"

"Yes, I am better. And did they let you come up now?"

"I did not ask. I came up and opened the door. I left Mr Jerome at our house."

"Ah, my dear! I fear your trouble is beyond my power to remove this time. I have heard of your father. Let us hope the accident to him was not so serious as was feared."

"It is very serious, I am afraid. But, Mr St. Cyr, you *can* help me, and him;" and she offered him her father's letter.

"Is it so bad?" said he, when he had read it, and he said nothing more for a long time.

"I have not told mama yet," said Frederica.

"Will you do as papa wishes, Cousin Cyprien? Is it necessary?"

"Since he wishes it, the change may be made. It will be better."

"But whoever may be appointed, you will always take care of mama and us all?"

"While I live, dear child, yes; so help me God. But I have had a warning, too; and I must leave you in good hands. There is no time to lose."

No time was lost. The proper steps were at once taken, and the necessary papers prepared in the shortest time possible. At some risk to himself, Mr St. Cyr went to Mrs Vane's house, and the whole affair was arranged to his satisfaction. It was all done during a temporary absence of Mr Jerome from the city, and Mr St. Cyr did not see it necessary to intimate to him that any change had been made in regard to Mrs Vane's children. But one night Mr

Jerome found on the table, among other papers, one which he did not think it beneath him to glance at—a paper properly drawn, and signed, and witnessed, by which Mrs Vane and Mr St. Cyr had appointed three trustees, who were to have the oversight of the property left to Mr St. Hubert's grandchildren till they should come of age. But it was torn across. It was dated several years back; and seeing it, Mr Jerome said to himself, "There is another to be prepared."

Strangely enough, it never occurred to him that this had been already done. He did not speak to his brother about it; but he kept the matter in his thoughts, and watched the course of events. It was a matter in which he took much interest; and when his brother grew worse, and day after day passed without anything being done or even said with regard to it, he was surprised; but he was not sorry at the delay. He had by this time become convinced that no influence of his could move Mr St. Cyr in the arrangement of the Vanes' affairs, and he wisely refrained from attempting it. If trustees were not appointed for carrying out the will of Mr St. Hubert in the manner specified by himself, there must still be guardians appointed for the Vane children, should they be left orphans, and it must be done by a power possibly more open to such influence as his, and it would be far better to say no word to remind his brother, but, let things take their course. He brooded over this in his silent way, till something like a plan for changing all the future relations of these children wrought itself out in his mind, and he prepared himself, and, as far as he could venture to do so, endeavoured to prepare others, to act on this plan when the right time should come.

The next mail brought no good news from England. Colonel Bentham wrote to Mrs Vane, telling her of her husband's wishes with regard to their children, and saying that, should she see fit to name him as one of their guardians, he would faithfully fulfil the duties of the trust. This letter, through means of Miss Agnace, Mr Jerome read, and it confirmed him in the opinion that nothing had been done to supply the place of the legal document which had been destroyed.

Frederica also received a letter from her sister Cecilia, who had married Colonel Bentham's son. It was a very kind letter, but over it Frederica shed many tears. It told her how her father longed for them all; and the poor girl blamed herself that she had not obeyed his wish, and gone home with Mrs Bury, so that she might have been with him now. But for the sake of her mother and the rest, Frederica had done well to stay at home.

For every day made it more plain to them all that Mrs Vane's death was near. Sorrowful days they were; but joy mingled with their sorrow; for her peace flowed still and deep.

She had never been a person of strong mind, and the training of her early days had not been of a kind to strengthen her mentally or morally. Out of the pain and weariness of these last years there had come no strength, but a great longing for rest, and a fear, vague but horrible, of death, and the unknown future beyond.

And so the words of peace, spoken by the old man whom Frederica had brought in for shelter, had come as a message from God to her soul. To the trembling hope of a Saviour which it awakened she clung, as a child in the dark clings to the unseen hand that holds it; and by-and-by, as the light of truth grew clearer to her eyes, she knew the hand she held was the hand of Jesus, strong and tender, with power to hold her safe for ever, and then she was at rest.

From the very first the light had been clear to Selina, and she was never weary of telling the wondrous story of Christ's love and life and death to her mother. Over and over daily, sometimes hourly, the same words were repeated with patient nay, with joyful iteration, and Selina became God's messenger to her mother. He spake to the dying woman through her child's voice; and peace, beyond all power of earthly things to trouble, rested on her. In her state of weakness she was less capable than ever of continued thought on any subject; but she saw clearly, and held firmly to this, "He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*" and His promise was made good to her, "My peace I leave with you."

What strange, still, dream-like days they were which followed till the end came! Frederica, standing, in her care for them all, a little apart from her mother and sister, looked on with wonder. Selina was doing for her mother all that she used to dream of doing. She was comforting, sustaining, and showing her the way to heaven, which was drawing near. She did not grudge Selina this joy. Far from that! Seeing their mother's constant peace; seeing the sudden sweet gleams of something that was more than peace that shone sometimes in the beautiful wasted face, Frederica was ready to say that nothing else mattered much. In the certainty of her mother's blessedness, she wished to forget—she did forget at times—all else that could trouble her.

"If only papa could come home," she said a hundred times a day to herself. To her mother she spoke hopefully and cheerfully of his return. The tidings that came mail by mail varied. Sometimes he was better, and sometimes worse, and the time seemed long to them all.

"We shall meet again," said his wife often; and once she added, "and we shall not misunderstand or vex one another any more." But whether she meant in this world or in heaven, her children did not know.

So day after day they waited. Miss Agnace, strong, and gentle, and patient, with watchful eyes and silent lips, went in and out among them—an angel of help and kindness. To her, even more than to Frederica, the change that had come over the dying woman was wonderful.

"She is no longer the same," said she, in one of her many confidences to Father Jerome. "They were reading about 'a new creature' the other day. That is what she has become. 'Old things have passed away, all things have become new.' I do not understand it. Is it well with her, think you, father? If at the end you are with her, to lay hands on her and touch her with the oil of blessing, do you not think it may be well with her? It is Jesus on whom she relies. Is that enough, father?"

"Let us wait until the end," said Father Jerome gravely, and to Sister Agnace he would say no more.

Nor did he say a word now to disturb the peace of the dying woman. He could hardly have done so; for whenever he

came he found one or both of the girls sitting by her side, and they would suffer no word to be uttered to trouble her. Indeed, he seemed to have no wish to utter any such word, and he came but seldom as the end drew near.

His brother was ill again, "failing fast," he told Frederica, when she enquired. It was Mr Jerome who did for them all that Mr St. Cyr would have done, had he been well. He sent for their brothers when their mother grew worse. He was kind and thoughtful for them in many ways, and said never a word to remind them that he believed them to be all wrong, or that their mother, dying out of the true Church, was going to no certainty of rest or happiness.

Did he doubt it? Who can tell? He stood beside the dying bed in wonder. "A new creature!" Yes, there was no better word for it than that. She was changed. Instead of the fears, and cares, and anxious questionings of former days, there was in her heart and in her face "the peace that passeth understanding," "the joy unspeakable," which is theirs whom God loves.

"I am not afraid. 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me,'" she said with difficulty, as he stooped for a moment over her.

Afraid! No. There was no shadow of fear on the radiant face turned towards him, and in his heart, for the moment at least, he acknowledged that she had no cause for fear. That there was need or room for any man to come between this passing soul and the Saviour who loved her, whom she loved, whom she hoped so soon to behold, could not surely be. It was as though she already beheld Him, he could not but acknowledge. But looking up, and meeting the gaze of Sister Agnace's asking eyes, he spoke no such word to her.

"Is she safe?" asked she eagerly. "Will you let her die unblessed of the Church? and must she perish?"

But he did not answer.

"May God have mercy on us all," said he solemnly.

"Amen!" said Miss Agnace, crossing herself. "Is it enough, I wonder? 'He loved us, and gave Himself for us.' 'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.' That is what these children are always saying to her and to one another. And surely she is cleansed and saved. Ah, well! I will send at the very last for Father Jerome, and for Sister Magdalen, and it will be well, let us hope. It ought to be enough, the blood of Jesus Christ."

But neither Father Jerome nor Sister Magdalen was with her at the end. A very peaceful end to a troubled life it was. Her children were all there, and Mr and Mrs Brandon. They thought her dying early in the afternoon, but she revived again, and spoke to them all, and sent a message to their father.

"Tell him I shall be waiting for him till he comes. Are you here, Frederica? Write it now beside me, that no time may be lost. Tell him, 'He loved us, and gave Himself for us.'"

If she spoke after that, they did not catch the words. They waited on, hour after hour, and so gently came the messenger, they scarce knew the moment when she was called.

"They thought her dying when she slept,
And sleeping when she died."

Then "a change" came over the beautiful worn face. Tessie uttered a startled cry, and Selina laid down her face on the hand growing cold in hers, Frederica, taking a step toward the door, said, "Now I must go to papa." But she would have fallen, had not Miss Agnace put her arm around her.

Then there were long, long days of waiting. Awed by the remembrance of their mother's face, and the unwonted quiet of the house, the little boys now and then broke into momentary tears, and Tessie gave way sometimes, and cried bitterly. Selina comforted them all. She hardly realised yet what had befallen her. She only thought that her mother was at rest—that the weariness of earth was over, and the joy of heaven begun, and she said to the others how blessed their mother was now, how safe, and satisfied, and how she was waiting for them all there. Frederica listened as the rest did, and watched with grave, attentive eyes all that was done in preparation for the funeral, but she hardly ever spoke a word.

So Mrs Vane was carried away from the house where she was born, and where she had lived all her life. Her little sons followed her to the grave, but her daughters remained at home, as is the custom in M. among people of their class. They sat silent in the room where their mother had lain, refusing to leave it till their brothers came home. Mrs Brandon was with them, and by-and-by Miss Agnace came and sat down by the door. It grew dark, for the days were at the shortest, and it seemed a long time before the little boys came home.

"And now I must go to papa," said Frederica that night, before Mrs Brandon went away. Mrs Brandon looked in perplexity at Miss Agnace, who whispered,—

"Say nothing to-night. Look at her eyes and her changing colour. She is not fit to be spoken to to-night. Poor child! There are weary days before her."

Chapter Fifteen.

Miss Agnace was right. The next day Frederica began with her own hands the preparations for the voyage she was determined to make, and Miss Agnace, going up in a little while to her room, found her lying on the floor, among the garments she had gathered together, quite insensible. She had come to the end of her strength now. For the next few weeks she knew little of what was going on in the house. Except that Selina was with her now, as well as Miss

Agnace, the days passed very much as they had done after her father went away.

Tessie went willingly back to school, for Madame Precoe's presence in the house was altogether distasteful to her. Madame had taken up her abode with them, no one knew at whose request or suggestion. Her stay gave pleasure to no one. Mrs Brandon was more than displeased, she was indignant. But there was no one to whom appeal could be made. It was to be presumed that Mr Jerome was carrying out the plans of Mr St. Cyr, who was the proper person to act for Mrs Vane's children, and Mr Jerome approved of Madame's residence with them. There was nothing to be done therefore but to wait patiently till their father came home.

The boys were sent to school again within a few days after their mother's funeral. Mr Jerome took them away, saying that school was the best place for them, and so no doubt it was. The boys went away willingly, for their home was altogether changed now.

For a good while Frederica was not sufficiently able to notice what was going on about her, to be unhappy because of these things. Selina was constantly saying to herself and her sister, that it would be well with them, and they need not fear, and she believed it, and Frederica came to believe it too.

But whether it was to be well with them or not, Frederica knew there was nothing she could do to help it. What a poor weak little creature she felt herself to be! Even Selina, whom she had meant to care for and comfort, was stronger than she—stronger and wiser, and more to be relied on in a time of trouble; and she found it difficult sometimes not to murmur at her weakness.

She was very weak. The slightest exertion tired her. A word brought tears to her eyes. She needed quite another kind of discipline than that which she was getting at the hands of her sister and Miss Agnace, Madame Precoe hinted to Mr Jerome, and she also hinted what sort of discipline it ought to be. But either he did not agree with her, or had not the power to put her plans in practice, for the girls were left undisturbed together under Miss Agnace's care.

"Selina," said Frederica one day, after a hint from Madame Precoe, "I had forgotten how very disagreeable Mrs Ascot used to be. Her visit has taken away all the good effect of Miss Agnace's medicine."

"Don't be foolish, Fred dear," said her sister.

"Oh! you did not see her face, or the horrible shrug of her shoulders. You cannot know. Has she quite taken possession of us and the house. I wonder what her beloved Precoe can do without her!"

"Fred," said Selina, laughing, and kissing her, "you are almost your old self again. It delights me to see you vexed with Prickly Polly."

Frederica laughed, partly at the old nickname, and partly at Selina's way of saying it; for French had always been Selina's language with her mother, and she spoke English with an accent not at all like the rest.

"But she is not 'Prickly Polly' now. She is not easily offended as she used to be. I have not tried certainly; but she has a grand and satisfied air, as though she had but to speak to put things on a pleasant footing—for herself at least."

"You must rise, Fred, and sit on this chair. You are quite well, I am sure. She was not ten minutes in the room, and you saw all that."

"Oh! Selina," said Frederica, with a sigh, "it is very sad to think now of the days when we were young and had no trouble."

"But then, we are still rather young, are we not?" said Selina gravely. "And if you remember, there never was a time when we were quite without trouble. Always mama was ill, and there were other things sometimes."

"Yes, that is true."

"Mama will not suffer any more, and I am glad for her."

But it was a tearful smile that bore witness to her gladness, and Frederica broke into weeping as she looked at her sister's face.

"Oh! Lena! Lena!" she gasped, "are we never to have her with us any more? nor papa—"

"Hush, Fred! Don't cry like that," said Selina, crying herself, but more gently. "Think how well she is, and how satisfied. And papa may come home; but I don't think he will: I think he will go to mama. He has had all this long time to think, and to be sorry. And Jesus loves him too. He gave Himself for *him*."

"Oh! Lena! Lena!" was all that Frederica could say.

"And, darling, think how glad mama will be! and nothing shall grieve them any more. We shall be with them there; and you may go very soon, for you are not strong."

Frederica was startled by her sister's words.

"No. I am not strong: but to die! Lena, I must not die. I must live to take care of you all. Oh! what a foolish girl I am! As though I could do anything!" and her tears fell fast as her sister tried to soothe her.

"And, Lena, I would not like to die yet, even to see mama. I am not good like you."

"Hush, dear. I think God will let you live to take care of us all. And you are not to cry any more to-night. For indeed,

except that you are weak and tired, there is no cause.”

But Frederica was weak in body and mind, and cried herself to sleep, and Miss Agnace saw with anxiety her flushed wet cheeks when she came in.

“I almost wish she might have her desire, and go away to England,” said she as she stood looking at her. “She needs something to rouse and interest her. But perhaps Madame’s plan for her would be best.”

“What is her plan?” asked Selina quickly. “My child, Madame has given me no authority to speak of any plan of hers. But I wish there could come a change of some kind for this poor Miss Frederica.”

“She is better, and I don’t know why Madame Precoe should take trouble in making plans for us. What has she to do with us, or our plans?”

“Nay, my child! It is not well to say anything in that voice and manner. It is not like you. It will all be well, as you often say. Why should you be afraid?”

“Yes, it will be well,” said Selina, and she thought so still, though she felt that her sister’s eyes were wet beneath her kiss. “We must have patience a little while. It will all be well.”

“Yes, it will be well,” said Miss Agnace, thinking how Father Jerome had set himself to the work of saving these children. Yet she sighed, too; for she had learned to love them dearly, and she longed that they should be happy, as well as safe. If Father Jerome were permitted to have his will as to their future life, she feared that suffering must come before the happiness. She could not help them much, she knew, still she gave them good counsel, repeated her little legends, and prayed earnestly to Mary and the saints in their behalf. In her heart she believed it would be well with them in the end, and in the meantime she longed to comfort them and to teach them as well. So that night, as the young girls sat in the darkening room a little sad and dreary, with the tears not very far from the eyes of either of them, she said softly,—

“My children, do you never comfort yourselves and one another by praying for your dear mother’s soul?”

Frederica looked at her in astonishment, not quite free from anger.

“I do not understand you, Miss Agnace,” said Selina gently.

“It would soothe and comfort you, would it not, to feel that you might still do something for your dear mama?”

“We do what we think would please her by loving one another, and caring for our brothers and Tessie. We can do nothing more,” said Selina.

“Ah! who knows?” said Miss Agnace. “It is dark beyond the grave.”

“The grave is dark, but beyond the grave is heaven. Do you know what is said of it, Miss Agnace? ‘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.’ Frederica, read about it to Miss Agnace.”

But Frederica made no movement.

“Miss Agnace does not care for the Bible. Father Jerome is her Bible. I am glad he is not mine,” said Frederica contemptuously; for she was not pleased with what Miss Agnace had said. Miss Agnace took no notice.

“We know so little,” said she. “But the Church teaches us that there are purifying fires through which some, even some of the saints, have had to pass to heaven. Every day I pray that if your dear mother is not yet safe and happy, the time may be hastened.”

Frederica uttered an angry cry.

“Nay, but I fear Father Jerome would say all that was wrong—to pray for the soul of a heretic.”

“Fred dear, that is quite wrong,” said Selina, but she was herself very pale. “If you please, Miss Agnace will not speak of these things on which we do not think alike. But, Frederica, it is foolish to be angry.”

“But, my dear children, though we may keep silence, or forget, that will change nothing. And the Church teaches no doctrine more clearly than that some must enter heaven through purifying fires.”

“We will not talk about it,” said Frederica.

If they had talked all night about it, Miss Agnace could have said no more. The Church taught the doctrine—none more plainly—and there were examples enough, of which she could have told them.

“No, we will speak no more,” said Selina. “Only this, Miss Agnace. There is a word which you believe as well as we: ‘The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.’ Now surely those who are cleansed in this precious blood need no purifying fires. And there is nothing else. The Book of God tells of no other way.”

“Yes, I know it is the blood of Jesus. Still the Church is clear in her teaching, and it would do no harm to ask. It might comfort you, and who knows—?”

“It would be mockery; for we do not believe in it,” said Frederica.

"It would be wrong," said Selina. "It would dishonour the Lord Jesus. He has done all for His people. He saves to the uttermost, He needs no help from purifying fires. Could any one say, could even David have said, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley and shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me,' if there had been any danger that after all he might be left behind? And the old man told us, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'"

"The Bible is what we go by," said Frederica, "and we do not mind what else is said."

"But, dear child," said Miss Agnace, showing no anger, though Frederica's manner might well have provoked it, "you have not read even all the Bible carefully; and besides, how can children like you interpret what is written there? Indeed, it is because I love you that I speak of these things."

"We know you love us," said Selina. "But there is only this to be said: Jesus died that we might live for ever. This is for you, and for us, and for all who believe on Him and love Him. All other words are vain."

Nothing more was said; but that Miss Agnace was grieved and anxious about them, they could plainly see.

"Selina," said Frederica, when they were left alone, "did her words make you afraid?"

"No," said Selina slowly, "I am not afraid."

"But how did you know how to answer her? I could only be angry. But we will not speak about it. Oh, dear! I am so tired of Miss Agnace and her teaching. I wish—"

"But you like her better than Madame Precoe."

"Much better, but why should we have either?"

"I do not know. But now we have both, and there seems to be no one else," said Selina, with a sigh.

"Oh! if papa could only come! We should have no more of Madame Precoe, or Father Jerome, or any of them. Everybody seems to have forsaken us."

"No. A great many people have called. But you have been so ill—and Madame does not care to have even Miss Robina come up. Oh! Fred dear, if you were only quite well again?"

"I shall be well, I am determined. I shall be equal to Madame Precoe very soon."

"I do not know why she is here. We do not need her more than we did before. When you are well, you must ask Mr St. Cyr."

"I shall be well I feel quite strong when I think of Madame Ascot Precoe. And we can get Tessie home."

"But that is not a very sure strength, I am afraid. And the best way will be to wait patiently till papa comes home, or till—"

Selina stopped suddenly, and Frederica, notwithstanding her boasted strength, burst into tears. They felt very forlorn and friendless, these young girls. There were many in M— who cared for them, and who would gladly have come to them with help and counsel. But they seemed to be under other guardianship. No offered kindness to them was well received either by Mr Jerome St. Cyr, or by Madame Precoe. To the young people themselves there was little chance of access, and those who felt kindly towards them had no opportunity of showing their feelings. Even Mrs Brandon was kept at home by the care of an infant daughter, and no wonder that they began to feel their loneliness press sadly on them.

"We can have Tessie home for awhile. I will write a note to Miss Robina, and she will let her come. Then she can read to us, and go out in the sleigh with you."

The note was written, and Tessie came home, well pleased to be made useful, and they brightened up a little. Frederica grew better, and was soon able to drive with her sisters. She made several attempts, more or less successful, to let Madame Precoe see that she was not the mistress of the house, nor even the housekeeper, as she once had been. She was too well bred, and heeded too entirely the peacemaking suggestions of Selina, to say or do anything to make her aware that she was not altogether a welcome visitor. To all appearance Madame was quite content with her ill-defined position in the house, and willing to be on the best of terms with them all. Tessie took less pains than the rest to be agreeable to her, but Madame would take no offence; and beyond a suggestion, that it was not wise to have Tessie losing so much of her time from school, she did not interfere with their arrangements with regard to her.

But though there was nothing to disturb the outward quiet of the time, it was a time of trial to them all. There was in every one of them a feeling that they were waiting for something—a sense of dread and doubt, that went deeper than the fear that they might never see their father again. Of that there was little hope. The tidings that came from him varied with every mail, and did not become more hopeful. There never had been much hope that he would be quite well, and now it seemed doubtful whether he would be able to return home again; and gradually, as the winter wore away, there fell on them a dread of what might follow his death to them all.

Mr St. Cyr was still an invalid, quite confined to the house. They used to go round that way when they went to drive, and several times Frederica had made an attempt to see him. But he was able to see no one, she was always told: His brother seemed to have taken his place with them, as far as the guidance of their affairs was concerned; but they did not trust Mr Jerome as they had been taught to trust Mr St. Cyr. He was kind in many ways, granting without hesitation almost all the requests made to him, and refusing, when he was obliged to refuse, in a way which ought

not to have offended them. But it was not clear to them, that he had a right to assume any guardianship or authority over them, and they made one another unhappy, and sometimes angry, by discussing his possible motives, and the designs he might have with regard to them.

If there had been nothing else, the stand he took with regard to Madame Precoe's residence with them would have made them dislike him. He said decidedly, when appealed to, that she must remain. A family of young girls in their circumstances could not well be left without some responsible person to take charge of them. There was no one so well fitted for the position as Madame. Her former residence in the house made this evident. Her society was not, it seemed, indispensable to the happiness of Mr Precoe. At least, she could be spared, and was willing to devote herself to their interests. What complaint had they against her?

They had no complaints, except that Tessie detested her, and Frederica did not trust her; but neither the one nor the other could give any satisfactory reason for the feelings entertained toward her, and she remained.

She had taken the affairs of the house into her own hands from the very first. There were changes made in various respects. Old servants were dismissed for reasons which commended themselves to her judgment and the judgment of Mr Jerome, and she did not trouble the young ladies about the matter. Still she was not unreasonable with regard to this, nor arbitrary, as the priest took pains to point out to them. For when they indignantly exclaimed against the dismissal of old Dixen, Madame certainly did not look pleased, but she did not insist. Dixen still kept his place in the house, and came and went at everybody's bidding, but he was no longer permitted to drive the young ladies as he had always done before. It was dangerous in the crowded streets, Madame said, for Dixen was getting both deaf and blind, and his place was given to one whom she considered in every way worthy of confidence.

Madame did not trouble herself to answer expostulations or objections. She did not resent Frederica's but half-concealed distrust, or Tessie's open impertinence. Like every one else in the house, she seemed waiting for something—"biding her time," as Tessie said, and knowing her as they did, they were hardly to be blamed for looking forward with dread, and for the determination, daily strengthening, to resist her influence and interference when the time for change should come.

Miss Agnace was with them still, but she was very grave and silent at this time. Any day or hour she might be recalled to her hospital and her sick people again, and she was sad at the thought of leaving the children whom she had learned to love so well. But she was sad for another reason too—a reason which ought *not* to have troubled her. This silent, patient, humble woman, who had long ago forgotten what it was to have hopes, or fears, or wishes of her own, had her heart stirred to its utmost depths for the sake of these orphan children. She was afraid for them. And yet, why should she be afraid? Why should she look forward with such dread to the change and separation that sooner or later must come to them? Were they not to be in good keeping? Had not Father Jerome given himself to the work of caring for their souls, of bringing them into the true Church? thus ensuring their happiness, both in this world and the next. They must suffer a little while, being separated from each other; but with such good and gentle children the struggle would not be long. Why should she fear for them? So blessed an end would justify the use of any means, and who was she that she should judge the actions of one like Father Jerome?

But in spite of her confidence in the priest, in spite of her reasonings and her indignation at herself because of her misgivings, she had painful sinkings of heart for the children's sakes. Sometimes, as she sat listening to their conversation, or watched Frederica writing to their little brothers letters which would never reach them, because she knew they must be given by her into Father Jerome's hands, to be read and smiled at, and put into the fire, she had a feeling of pain and shame which no confidence in the priest, no belief in the good work he was to do in the saving of these children's souls, could quite put away. She knew that, with the will of Father Jerome, the sisters would not for years see their brothers again. She knew that into his plans for them the entire separation of the sisters entered. It might be best for them, she acknowledged, but it was very, very sad.

The boys had not been sent back to the school from which they had been brought at the time of their mother's death. They were in one of the great Catholic schools of the city, where hundreds of boys of all ages and classes were taught. It was a good school, Miss Agnace believed, and they would be well taught and well disciplined, and where no evil could befall them. It was the best place in the world for them, she was sure. But she shrank with a feeling of pain and shame from the thought that their sisters were being deceived with regard to them. And if it was wrong for Father Jerome and Madame Precoe, what was it for her, whom they loved and trusted, to deceive them? Many a painful question, which she could not answer, came into Miss Agnace's thoughts during these days of waiting—questions which she called sinful—but which she could neither answer nor put quite away.

Chapter Sixteen.

The winter wore slowly away. The snow was fast disappearing from mountain and fields, and the streets were growing dirty and uneven, as, under the influence of the sun in the lengthening days of March, the ice began to yield, and an early spring was anticipated.

Except for the sunshine, which is usually bright, this is not a pleasant time of the year in the city of M—. It is a time for high winds, and the streets are rough when the frost is strong, and very wet and slippery when the thaw sets in; and people who are not obliged to go out, usually keep within doors for a week or two, till the season advances, and the streets are cleared. But when, as happens in most seasons, a heavy fall of snow comes to restore for a day the reign of winter, few fail to avail themselves of the opportunity to renew the winter's chief enjoyment. Sleigh bells tinkle merrily, and the streets are full of gay equipages gliding smoothly and noiselessly to and fro.

Such a day came after a week of alternate rain and wind and sleet, and the sisters gladly found themselves speeding away from home and from the city streets. The fresh air, the sunshine, and the rapid motion had an exhilarating effect upon their spirits after the confinement of the last few days, and the burden of doubt and dread that had fallen

on them grew lighter. The last English letter had been less discouraging than the former ones; Frederica was growing better and stronger, and they were more cheerful and lively than they had been for a long time. Neither Madame Precoe nor Miss Agnace was with them, and they amused themselves with making plans as to what they were to do when their father came home. For a long time it had been, "If papa comes home," but to-day they said cheerfully, "When papa comes home."

"Oh, how glad papa will be to see us all again!" said Frederica. "And, Lena and Tessie, I think he must have changed in some things."

"He will be glad to get home, I am sure; but as to his being changed—I don't know about that," said Tessie.

"He has suffered so much," said Frederica; "and God sends suffering to do people good. And besides, Cecilia's letters make me think so."

"And his little letters to us," said Selina.

"Oh! if he were only safe home with us again!" said Frederica. "This has been such a long winter, and I am afraid to think of the summer without papa or any one."

"Any one! We have only too many people;" and Tessie went on to say something not at all polite about Madame and Father Jerome, and they were in danger of taking up their burden again as they came back to the town.

"Where are we?" asked Selina as the street noises told her they were near home.

"We are in M— Street, near where the tall poplars are. They are building a new house, and the fence has fallen down, and there are a great many sleighs passing along," said Frederica, as her manner was, using her eyes for her sister's benefit; and then Tessie went on,—

"And here are school-boys, hundreds of them, I should think. Listen to the noise as they pass. A shabby lot they are. The Brothers should dress their boys in uniform—they would look much nicer. One would think all the old clothes in the town had been collected for their benefit."

"Listen," said Selina suddenly, "Some one is calling Fred."

They listened, but amid the jingling of bells and the trampling of feet nothing was heard.

"It was Charlie's voice. I am quite sure it was Charlie's voice," said Selina.

"But Lena dear, it is quite impossible," said Tessie. "Charlie is far away."

"It was Charlie's voice. First he called 'Fred,' and then 'Lena, Lena.'"

The horses' heads were turned, and they drove slowly along by the line of boys. There was noise enough, laughing, talking, and exclaiming, but no voice called 'Fred' or 'Lena.' When they had passed, they turned again, and waited as the boys moved on, and both Fred and Tessie eagerly scanned each face as it came near. There were all sorts of faces, dark and fair, handsome and ugly, bright, eager, laughing faces, and faces stupid, dull, and unhappy. But the face of Charlie was not among them.

"It was Charlie's voice," said Selina, and nothing could move her from that.

They went home full of wonder and anxiety. They told Miss Agnace about the voice that Selina had heard, but Miss Agnace said nothing. They told Madame Precoe, when she came in, and she expressed more surprise than she needed to have expressed, seeing she had already heard all about the incident from Louis the coachman, as indeed, she generally heard of the incidents, and even of the conversations, that attended their drives, when she was not with them.

By-and-by Mr Jerome came in, and he was interested too, but laughed a little at Selina's fancy.

"You were thinking of your brother, and imagined the voice," said he.

Selina said nothing.

"Or rather, you heard many voices, and the names were a fancy, or why should not your sisters have heard them also? It is nothing to look so grave about, my child."

"It was Charlie's voice," said Selina.

"And we were not thinking of our brothers, but looking and talking. And Selina hears much more readily than we do," said Tessie.

Frederica said nothing. She was not strong yet, and she was in that nervous anxious state when nothing in the way of trouble seems impossible, and she looked pale and unhappy.

"Could we not go to the school and ask if Charlie was among the boys?" said Tessie.

"We could certainly do that," said Father Jerome, "if it would set your minds at rest. Shall we go at once?"

But Madame said the girls needed rest, and they must wait till to-morrow, or at least till afternoon, and this was acquiesced in by them all.

Of course, when they went there, they found no Charlie. They found a great many boys, who scanned them with sharp, attentive eyes, as they passed down the long class-room. They heard them sing and do some of their lessons, and they saw them file down to the long dining-hall to their supper of dry bread and pease coffee. Then they went through other long rooms, and through the great dormitory, where the little grey beds stood close together in long rows, and where nothing else was seen. They went up many stairs, and looked down on numberless city roofs, and that was all.

Everybody was polite and attentive, and thanked them for coming, and asked them to come again. Then Madame Precoe and each of the girls put a piece of money in the charity box that hung on the wall near the door, and then they went away.

That was all. Of course it had been very foolish in them to expect to see their brother, Fred and Tessie said to one another as they walked down the stairs; but when they came home and saw Selina's expectant face, they looked at one another in doubt again.

Madame sat with them that evening, and exerted herself to amuse them and to withdraw their thoughts from their brother, and from Selina's foolish fancy about the voice she had heard. Miss Agnace was rarely with them when Madame was there, and when she went upstairs with them she would not linger to talk with them as she sometimes did.

"You are not to listen to them or speak about this foolish fancy, and they will forget it," said Madame to her. "In a few days it will not matter what they know. But in the meantime they might complicate matters by discussing their affairs with other people. And remember, should any one call when I am out, the young ladies are engaged. And should it be impossible to deny any one, remember you must know all that may be said."

Miss Agnace assented silently.

"And when you go as usual to Mr St. Cyr's, remember you are to say nothing of this foolish fancy of Miss Selina's. He could do nothing, even if he understood; and they will soon be out of his hands, and the sooner the better for all concerned. You understand what I wish, do you not?"

Again Miss Agnace assented in silence. She was by no means sure how all this would seem to her, when she should have time to think it over, but there was nothing to be said. She was not bound to obey blindly Madame Precoe's commands, except as they expressed the will of Father Jerome also; and in the single moment in which she permitted herself to question, a great many unhappy thoughts rushed into her mind. And they would not be put away, even when it became clear to her that for the plans with regard to the future of these children, and all that they involved, Father Jerome was responsible. Madame Precoe was but an instrument in his hands, as she herself was. Father Jerome must not be accused of doing wrong—at least, the end he had in view was right, and that ought to be enough.

Ought it to be enough? Poor Sister Agnace had never been in the habit of deciding between right and wrong for herself, and she was sadly puzzled now. It was such a pity, she thought, that it was necessary to deceive these children for their good. There would be strong resistance on their part, she began to fear, to the power that was shaping their fate.

"And they will suffer. Oh! how they will suffer?" said the poor anxious creature to herself. "But it is for their souls' sake, and their suffering will only be for this world; and surely, Mary and the saints will soften their trouble, poor darlings! Father Jerome must, of course, be right. But it hurts me to deceive them, because they love me a little, and trust me."

She went that night to pay her usual monthly visit to Mr St. Cyr. She answered his questions. She told him no lie, but she kept silence, as Madame had bidden her, about all that could have awakened the anxiety of their friend and guardian on their account. Unintentionally she made him aware that Madame Precoe was living with them; but he said nothing.

He thanked Miss Agnace for her care of the girls and their mother, and for her love and faithfulness to them, and expressed a hope that as long as they should need her, she might be permitted to remain with them. Poor Miss Agnace! She went into a church on her way home, and knelt for a long hour or two in the cold and darkness, but she carried still her burden of doubt and care when she went away.

A few more weeks passed away. Frederica said nothing now about going to her father, for they were not without hope that when the spring came he might return home. He longed very much to come, they knew, and they permitted themselves to hope, almost to believe, that they would see him again, and waited for his coming with what patience they could command.

Tessie went to school again after the Easter holidays, and they missed her sadly. But they both strove conscientiously, not only to be patient, but to be happy, in the great lonely house that had so changed to them. But waiting is weary work to young and eager hearts, and time passed slowly.

The day for Tessie's first visit came, and they amused themselves making preparations for her entertainment. But hour after hour passed, and she did not appear. Instead of Tessie, came Madame with her work-basket in her hand, and with the evident intention of remaining. It was not a pleasant prospect, and it is to be feared they were not quite able to hide their discomfort under it.

"Frederica," said Madame, "pray do not be so restless—so unsettled. You had much better take your work, and be content to sit still." But Frederica could settle to nothing till Tessie came.

"Expect Tessie? Nay, you need not do that Tessie is not coming home."

"Excuse me, Madame, but it was certainly to-day that we agreed on for her visit, and Miss Glencairn will be sure to allow her."

"But unfortunately it is not a question of Miss Glencairn's kindness. It has long been evident that Miss Tessie has got beyond Miss Glencairn and her little attempts at education; and she has been sent elsewhere—to the ladies of the Sacred Heart, where you all should have been sent long ago. I have no doubt she will be quite happy there. She will, at all events, be judiciously dealt with."

Astonishment kept the sisters silent, and Madame went on—

"A most necessary and important step, I consider it. It is only to be regretted that so much time has been lost."

Frederica so trembled with indignation, that she could not speak. Selina made a movement toward her, and holding her hand firmly, said,—

"Remember, Fred, nothing can really harm Tessie, or any of us. And, Madame, you will excuse us from discussing this matter with *you*. It is painful to us, and it cannot concern you."

"Except as I approve of it entirely. You do me injustice. I take the greatest possible interest in this matter, and in you."

"And who took the responsibility to advise such a step?" asked Frederica. "Does Mr St. Cyr know it? What do you suppose papa will say?"

"I advised it, and Mr Jerome St. Cyr saw the propriety of it. Mr St. Cyr is in no state of health to say anything about such a matter. As for Mr Vane—" added Madame, and paused, with a look that sent a chill to the girls' hearts. There had no letter come to them by the last mail.

"What of papa?" said Selina, "Have you heard anything that we do not know?"

"As to this affair of Tessie? No, I have heard nothing. Should he ever return, he will doubtless recall her, unless she should wish to remain. I dare say she is quite happy there by this time."

"Fred, love, do not let us vex ourselves. Tessie is at least quite safe there. But, Madame, why was it thought necessary to conceal her going there from us? Why did you deceive us?"

"Nay, you forget—I have nothing to do in this affair. I suppose Father Jerome feared that you might make yourselves unhappy. It was for your sakes that his intentions were not explained to you. Now that your sister is there, you must acknowledge that the convent is quite the best place for her. At all events, no change will be made now."

Frederica was sick at heart. If she were to utter the angry words that rose to her lips, she knew it would do no good. She knew not what to do.

"Fortunately, here comes Father Jerome; you may discuss the matter with him, and I will leave you;" and Madame rose to leave the room.

"At this moment it would not be agreeable to us," said Selina. "He has deceived us, and we decline to see him just now."

"What right has he to intermeddle in our affairs?" burst in Frederica; "a man whom neither our father nor mother ever trusted."

Madame laughed.

"It is as well to decline his visit at this moment. Later he will, I think, make you understand his right to meddle in your affairs, and his power to do so," said Madame, as she left the room.

"Selina, what shall we do? Selina, I am beginning to be afraid."

"But then you know, dear, nothing can really harm us. You read it yesterday—'Who is he that can harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?'"

"Oh! I don't remember, and that may not mean us. Selina, I am afraid."

"But, Fred, love, it must mean us, I think. We must not let the promise go, as though God would change. Read it, dear—to please me;" and she put the Bible into her sister's hand. "And in another place it is said, 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God.' We love Him, Fred. He has been very good to us."

Frederica took the Bible and read,—

"'For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers. But the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

"'And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?'"

Selina's face grew bright as she listened.

"Fred, love, why should we be afraid? It is wrong to be afraid."

"Well," said Frederica, with a long breath, "I will not be afraid. I think I am more angry than afraid."

"But anger will not help us. Read what you read yesterday," said Selina.

Frederica read on to the end of the chapter, and then turned back to the one before it, the second of First Peter. They could not have explained all those beautiful and wonderful words—nay, they knew that most of them they understood very imperfectly. But they could take comfort from them, lingering over a verse here and there, and speaking to one another words which might not have been very wise, but which were always reverent and trustful.

"It is 'as new-born babes' that He speaks to us. And babes are neither wise nor strong. But He cares for them all the same, and surely we 'have tasted that the Lord is gracious,'" said Selina.

And so she went on to the end. It quieted them, and they went out to the garden to get the good of the sunshine, not less cheerfully than usual. The faces that the priest caught sight of as they passed were brighter than he had seen them for a good while.

"See, they have forgotten their troubles already," said he, smiling. "You are mistaken in thinking they will resist. Sister Agnace is mistaken in thinking they will suffer. They will yield to circumstances and a strong will. From whom could they have inherited strength? Neither from father nor mother."

"Frederica is like the little Jewess her grandmother. She may have inherited her strength," said Madame. "I wish you could have seen her as I saw her a little while ago."

"Ah, well! She has forgotten her anger already. See the little butterfly flitting about in the garden. There is nothing to fear from her."

"I will send Sister Agnace to keep an eye on your butterfly. It is not necessary that they should tell their affairs to old Dixen who is there."

She returned immediately.

"Of what are you then afraid, if not of the 'little Jewess'?" asked she.

"There is nothing to fear. Everything is prospering beyond my hopes."

"And your brother?"

"He is better. But I do not think he will seriously object to the plans I have in view for these children. Indeed, I have no plans for them. That will be for those who are to be appointed as their guardians. I hope to name these guardians. Cyprien may not agree with me, but still I think it can be arranged to suit us both."

"And are you sure that their mother and your brother did not appoint them, even after you found the torn paper on your brother's table?"

"It is impossible. If indeed there were any guardians legally appointed, that might make the work I have set myself more difficult. Other means would have to be used."

"Ah, well! I doubt if ever you can make a nun of 'the little Jewess,'" said Madame.

"Nothing is farther from my wish than to do that. Her sister shall be a nun and a saint, and if by any miracle of science and skill her blindness may be cured, it shall be so done, that even by that the Church shall receive honour, and her power be extended and strengthened. Your 'little Jewess,' your 'butterfly,' shall be allowed to shine in society, and to take her fill of the pleasure she tasted last year. A few years with the good sisters first will do much for her. When she is properly submissive to those who have a right to direct her, she shall have her own way. I am not afraid."

"And her brothers: what are they to be?"

"After ten, or even seven years with the good fathers, they shall choose for themselves."

"And if Mr Vane should return? It is not impossible."

"It *is* impossible. Mr Vane is dead."

"Dead!" repeated Madame. Even she was shocked at the tidings, or the suddenness of the announcement.

"I have known it for a week. Cyprien does not know it yet, but all must know it soon."

"And have you come to tell these girls?"

"No. They will probably have letters to-night,—the steamer has arrived, I see,—and then no time must be lost. They must not have a chance to talk over their affairs with all the world, who will come to condole with them."

"And will you not see them?"

"You forget. They decline to see me," said the priest laughing. "I hope to find them in better humour another time."

Madame did not laugh.

"It is not impossible that all your plans for them may be frustrated after all," said she.

"For the moment, it is not impossible. But I shall never, while I live, give up the hope of making them and their wealth of use to the Church, and when I die others will take up the work. There is nothing impossible. They, or their children, or their children's children—and their wealth must be ours."

"There is only God Himself stronger than you and the Church, and these children believe Him to be on their side."

"They are but children," said the priest, but he frowned darkly at her words, as he turned to go away.

Madame sat still, looking after him in silence, Mr Jerome's tidings had moved her more than she would have thought possible. She sat lost in painful thoughts till Miss Agnace came in. She felt that she could not yet meet the questioning eyes of these orphan girls.

"I am going out," said she, rising hastily. "If any one calls, the young ladies are not to be seen."

She went out immediately and Miss Agnace did not follow her to say to her what she had come to say.

"It will keep. Perhaps she need not be told," said she to herself.

It seemed that Miss Agnace had not been needed in the garden, or rather the need for her was past, before she had been sent out. She met the girls returning to the house. They were very quiet but there was some restrained excitement in their manners, as she remembered afterwards. They went to their own room, where she had supposed they both remained till she went to tell them that luncheon was served. But only Selina was there. Frederica had gone to see their sister Caroline, she told Miss Agnace.

"But my dear, should she not have asked permission, or at least have said that she was going, or have taken the carriage. It is not well that a young lady should go out alone, and she is not strong."

"Of whom should she ask permission?" said Selina coldly.

And so Miss Agnace had gone to let Madame know, as Madame expected her to let her know everything that went on in the house. But she had not waited to hear, and Frederica had been allowed to have her own way.

Chapter Seventeen.

Madame Precoe's care in sending Sister Agnace into the garden because of old Dixen, had been more needed than she supposed, but it came too late to be of use. The old man had been busy near one of the walks as they entered, and he had answered their greeting very briefly. But as he stooped again he said hurriedly,—

"She thinks I am blind, but I can see her and the priest at the window looking out. Go round to the other side behind the hedge, young ladies dear, for I have something to tell you."

He worked on for a little while after they had disappeared. He worked his way along the walk till he was out of sight of the windows, then coming close to them he said in a whisper, as though he feared to be overheard,—

"I have seen the little lads. Mrs Hearn told me something that made me think they were at the school with her boys. I never let on that it was not all right, and I watched afterwards, and saw them walking with the rest. But they do not always walk, and they are well watched."

"I knew it was Charlie's voice," said Selina.

"Oh! Lena! Oh! Dixen! What shall we do?" said Frederica, clasping her hands.

"Fred love! God will take care of them." But Selina herself grew pale.

"And is it true that Miss Tessie was sent away to the convent without a word to you two?" went on Dixen. "I'm sore feared that something must have happened to the master, or they would never have dared to do that."

"But it cannot be that, Dixen. For the boys must have been there a long time. They were never sent back, I suppose," said Frederica.

"And we have heard nothing from papa for a fortnight," said Selina.

"It does not look well," said Dixen. "But, children dear, you are not to fret. The boys are safe enough. No harm can come to them. We are living in the Queen's dominions, thank God, and evil things can only be done in secret. And, Miss Fred dear, you should go to Mrs Brandon, and tell her about Miss Tessie and the little lads. And somebody that is wise in the law should be told. I would have gone myself, but nobody would heed such a story from the like of me. I am sore feared that no good is meant to you all. And the priests are everywhere, and have the means of making men do their will, that we know nothing of. Only here they must keep things quieter than in some places. But don't let them smuggle you all off without a word. They will tell you it is your souls they would save, but it is your grandfather's money they want as well. And here is that soft-spoken nun coming to hear what I may be saying. Be sure you go to your sister this very day."

In his increasing excitement the old man used some words that are not put down, and he went muttering to himself away.

"Here is Miss Agnace," said Frederica.

"We must be very quiet, and let her see nothing. Let us walk round the other way to the house," said Selina.

"And I will go to Caroline. Anything is better than to sit still and think about it," said Frederica excitedly.

They walked very quietly into the house, and went to their room.

"I will go at once, as Dixen said," and Frederica's preparations were soon made.

The room where Madame and the priest were sitting looked back upon the garden, so she got away without being seen. She had gone but a few steps, when she heard Dixen's voice behind her.

"You are but weakly yet, Miss Frederica," said he, when she waited for him, "and I will come with you. Just you go on without heeding me. I will keep in sight. Can you walk all the way, think you?"

Frederica was doubtful about it. She was excited, and trembling, hot and cold by turns. She was not very hopeful as to any help she could get from her sister. She was ill, and her husband was cautious, and not easily moved, and above all averse to interfere in matters where his right to do so was not acknowledged.

"And he will say it is Mr St. Cyr that is doing all this—and it is not impossible," said Frederica, with a new pang of terror. "But I don't think he would deceive us. I will go to the school myself. I will take them by surprise, and they will not have time to hide them as they must have done before, and I will take them away."

It was not a very wise idea. Dixen shook his head, but Frederica persisted, and the old man followed her up the street. But before they had gone far they heard the hum of many voices, and the long line of boys came in sight. Frederica turned into a doorway, and waited till they passed, scanning each face eagerly. They were for the most part bigger boys than her brothers. She looked in vain for the face of either of them, and stood gazing blankly after the long line as it passed down the street. The gate stood open, and she went and looked in. The side door stood open also.

"Dixen," said she hurriedly, "I am going in. They cannot do me any harm, and I may see Charlie, or little Hubert."

But this seemed a dreadful thing to Dixen.

"Miss Frederica, I cannot think it would be well to go. No one knows what might happen," said he in distress.

"I am not afraid, Dixen. Yes, I am a little afraid. But I have prayed to God, and so has Selina, and He will take care of me. Wait at the corner; and if I don't come out in half an hour; you must tell some one, and come for me."

But she did not keep him half that time. She went slowly up the steps and in at the door. She did not go forward into the wide hall as she had done when they came with Father Jerome, but turned at once, and went up a narrow stair, down which the sound of voices came. Still following the sound, she came to a room where a score or two of little boys were amusing themselves. They did not see her at first, and she stood watching them for a little while. She did not see her brothers, but she called softly several times,—

"Charlie! Hubert! are you here?" And as she spoke, a little hand touched hers, and she turned to meet the wondering eyes of her youngest brother. Without a word, she drew him outside of the room, and along the passage toward the stairs.

"Where is Charlie?" uttered she with difficulty. "No, we must not look for him. I have one safe, and I can come again for Charlie."

It does not sound possible that this should have happened, but it is perfectly true. The stairs were passed, and the hall, and they ran across the yard, and into the street, and no eye had seen them. At least, no hand had stopped them. It would not have been easy to stop them, Frederica thought; for her courage rose to the occasion the moment she felt the touch of her little brother's hand. It was a happy thing that no one tried. Dixen rubbed his eyes as they passed him without a word, but he lost not a moment in following them. After they had crossed a good many streets, they paused, and he overtook them.

"Where shall we go? Not home. To Mrs Brandon's? Yes. And you must go home and tell Selina. Go quickly, Dixen, before you are missed."

In her haste she had not noticed the way she was taking. The streets were not familiar to her and as she hurried on, hardly daring to speak to her brother, or even to look at him, she became bewildered and anxious, and her courage failed a little.

"I am afraid Caroline will think I have been foolish. And they will be sure to look in her house, as they will not find him at home. Oh! if I only had a safe place in which to hide him for a few days!"

She thought of Mr St. Cyr's house. But then she was not sure that their old friend had remained true to them. And besides, he was ill, and Father Jerome was often there, and the house was no place for Hubert.

"A safe place," repeated she, and then there came into her mind the thought of Mistress Campbell and her garret, where there never entered a creature, but Eppie herself. Without a moment's hesitation, she turned her steps in the direction of Mrs Glencairn's house.

"Hubert dear," said she coaxingly, "you will be very good, won't you, and stay with Mistress Campbell till I know what

I ought to do. No one will think of looking for you there.”

“But are we not going home? Why should we not go home?” demanded Hubert.

“It is quite impossible to-night,” said Fred firmly. “Father Jerome would have you back at school again this very night. You cannot go home.”

“Father Jerome? What has he to do with it? I don’t know what you mean, Fred.”

“Was it not he who took you there, when he should have taken you back to your former school again?”

No, Hubert thought not. He did not remember very well about it. But Father Jerome had nothing to do with their going to school. But Frederica had her doubts about it all the same, and hurried on.

“But we cannot go home, because mama is not there, nor papa. But Madame is there, and you may be sure she would not let you even stay one night, but send you back at once, and they would be sure to punish you for coming without leave.”

“It is you they ought to punish, Fred, I think,” said Hubert.

“Ah! wouldn’t they. If they could! And tell me about about Charlie. Where was he?”

“But Hubert knew very little about his brother. They very seldom saw each other. They were not in the same class.”

“And are they good to you? Are you glad to come away?”

It was not so, bad as it might be. Still, Hubert was very glad to get away. Some of the boys were not nice, and they had queer ways there. But of his life there he had no complaint to make. In the midst of his talk they reached Mrs Glencairn’s house. They went round to the door at the wing at which the pupils entered. They stumbled over a scrubbing-brush and a pail of water at the open door, but they saw no one; and went up till they reached the attic unseen.

“Where are we going?” said Hubert, holding fast his sister’s hand in the dimness, of the little passage. “Into the spider’s parlour, I think.”

“By no means,” said Frederica, as she knocked. “We are going to see Mistress Campbell; who used to be so good to Tessie and me when we were at school. And you must not look surprised at anything you may see. And, Hubert dear, you will be a good boy, won’t you?”

“Oh, yes, of course. Why should I not be good?” said Hubert impatiently.

“Eh, Missy! is this you?” exclaimed the old woman, holding up her hands in astonishment. “And this is your wee brother?—a bonny laddie, but—”

Mistress Campbell could not finish her sentence; for, excited and tired beyond her strength, Frederica burst into tears.

“My bairn! what is it?” said Eppie. “To think of my folly in speiring that I after all that has come to you and yours, since we saw you here. But, my dear, you have no cause to grieve—for your mama—”

Frederica put up her hand to stop her.

“No—I am glad for mama—but—I am frightened—and tired.”

“Sit down and rest you, my bairn,” said her old friend tenderly. “Go away yonder to your window, and I’ll make acquaintance with your brother here—a fine lad he is.”

Hubert, though a little startled at the sight of Frederica’s tears, had never taken his eyes from the small brown wrinkled face of the old woman, and he met her look with an undisguised curiosity and wonder that amused her.

“Your wee brother, did I say? No, this must be the elder of the two—and a fine well-grown lad he is,” said Mistress Campbell admiringly.

“No, Charlie is bigger than I am,” said Hubert gravely.

“Dear me! I ay thought Miss Frederica’s brothers were but wee boys; but you have had time to grow, it’s true, since I have been in the way of hearing about you. You’re near hand as big as Miss Frederica herself.”

This was not saying very much, but it won the good-will of Hubert, whether she meant it to do so or not. And some interesting confidences followed on his part, in the midst of which his sister found him, when she recovered herself.

“And you’ll bide to your tea with me,” said Mistress Campbell. “I’m sore failed since you were here, Miss Frederica, but I am not altogether helpless yet. So you’ll bide still a wee while.”

But Frederica was not sure that they ought to stay.

“First, I must tell you why we came,” said she.

She told the story hurriedly, and it was doubtful whether Mrs Campbell followed her closely through it all. She

understood, however, that Miss Tessie had been "spirited away," as she called it, and that from some dread mysterious fate Frederica had courageously rescued her little brother, and that in some way she was relied on for help.

"But I thought the days for such things were long past, and that they only whiles happen in books," said he wondering. "But dear! dear! What is the like o' me to ken about what is going on in the world? And one has but to look out, first at one window and then another, at the great buildings that are rising up on every hand, to be sure that the 'scarlet woman' has this for a favoured abiding-place. And I doubt she's no' much changed since the old days, though her hands are a wee tied. And you rescued your brother, did you? 'Deed you're a brave lassie."

But Hubert had no idea of being looked on as rescued.

"If I had known you cared about it, Fred, I could have run away any time—I could have done it quite easily."

"I'm no' just so sure o' that," said Mistress Campbell gravely. "If these long-coated gentry had a motive for keeping you, they wouldna have let you go, or they would have had you back again."

"Yes, and no one must know where he is," said Frederica anxiously. "I could think of no other safe place to bring him to. And, Hubert dear, if Mistress Campbell will have you, you will stay here quietly till I can see Caroline and Mr Brandon, or till papa comes home."

"There has nothing happened to your papa, has there? They're bold, these folk, or they're sure o' their ground," said Mistress Campbell gravely.

"Dixen said that about papa. But we have had no more news. We had no letter last mail."

"Oh well! No news is good news, they say; and it's utter nonsense to think that anything can really happen to harm you in a Christian country like this."

"And in the Queen's dominions, as Dixen said," echoed Frederica hopefully.

"And I'll keep the laddie safe, though the whole Inquisition were after him. That's no' just the name they get here, I daresay; but I'll keep the laddie, if he'll bide."

"You cannot go home, Hubert dear; for Madame Precoe is there, and Father Jerome; and though he is so smooth and pleasant, I do not trust him; and, indeed, I don't know what to do. Will you stay, dear Hubert?"

"Oh, yes, I'll stay, if you make a point of it. But there is no danger for me," said Hubert loftily.

"Did you like staying at the school, my lad? Were they good to you?"

"At first I did not like it. Oh, yes, they were kind enough. They're a rough lot, however, and I would not like to go back, since Fred objects to it."

The door opened, and Frederica uttered a cry. It was only Miss Robina, however, not one of the servants, as she had feared. Of course there were more exclamations, and the story was told again, but the part dwelt on now was the taking away of Tessie from Mrs Glencairn's, and sending her to the convent, without even telling her sisters.

"We did not know it till this morning, and I was angry and frightened. We could have done nothing, even if we had known. There is no one but Mr Brandon who has a right to say anything, and he does not like to interfere with Mr St. Cyr. But I think that has been done by Mr Jerome and Madame Precoe, and not Mr St. Cyr. I should be in despair if I thought Mr St. Cyr had turned against us."

"Have they heard that Mr Vane is worse?" asked Miss Robina anxiously.

Frederica turned pale: "They all ask that. Dear Miss Robina, do you think he is really worse. What must we then do?"

"My darling, don't be troubled. No harm can really come to you. It is not to be believed. Have you seen Mr St. Cyr? He is a man of high character. He will do nothing wrong—nothing unlawful, surely."

"He has been ill. They thought him dying. I have not seen him for a long time. Oh! if papa would only come home! No, I am not going to cry. But I am tired, and—yes—I am afraid."

"When had you your dinner?" asked Mistress Campbell gravely. Frederica laughed.

"I don't know; I don't think I had any."

"And no wonder you are faint-hearted. Just you lie down and rest you, and you will be another creature when you get your tea."

But Frederica was too excited and anxious to rest. She enjoyed her tea, however, and so did Hubert. He had evidently not been used to dainty fare of late, and he yielded to Mistress Campbell's entreaties to eat, with entire willingness and enjoyment. Fred found her strength and courage renewed when she rose to go. "I will come again soon, if I am not carried away too," said she laughing.

"My dear, it is no laughing matter," said Mistress Campbell gravely. "May the Lord preserve you all?"

"He will, Selina says. She is not afraid. Selina is better than I am," said Fred humbly.

"But then it's no' our deserts we are to lippen to. You'll be cared for, never fear. He'll give His angels charge, and He'll no' leave it altogether to them either. He'll raise some one up to take the orphan's part."

Miss Robina promised to come and see her soon, and bring her tidings of Hubert, who was already so sound asleep, that he could not be awakened to say good-bye; and somewhat reassured and comforted, Frederica went away.

But how lonely and friendless she felt, as she went down the familiar street! By some association, which it would not have been easy to trace, there came back to her the remembrance of their unexpected holiday at Easter. Oh, how long it seemed, since these two happy children had gone dancing down the street! How light-hearted they had been! how fearless of all possible evil!

At the corner of the street down which she and Tessie had run to avoid the chance of meeting Mrs Ascot, she paused a moment. Could it be possible that their old friend who had been so kind to them that day, should have turned against them? She remembered how he had walked on with them, and the promise he had made to help her if ever she were in trouble.

"And he did help me ever so many times. I cannot believe that he knows all that is making us unhappy and afraid. I will go and see him now."

In a minute she was standing on the steps that went down to the wide door of the house. It was not open as she had found it once before, when she came to him with her troubles. But when it opened at the sound of the bell, she gave the servant no time to say as usual, that her master could see no one; but passing her softly and quickly, sprang upstairs like a bird. It was still quite light out of doors, but the passage was dark, and so was the room into which she went. There was a fire in the grate, however; and before she saw Mr St. Cyr, she saw his shadow on the wall, and paused a moment to get breath. Then as she heard a footstep at the door, she came forward. Mr St. Cyr must have been asleep, she thought, for at first he looked at her in a wondering way, as though he did not know her, and she therefore hastened to speak.

"Are you better, Cousin Cyprien?"

"It is not Theresa—is it?" said he, with little pauses between the words, as though he did not find it easy to utter them.

"Not Theresa, but Fred. Are you better, cousin?"

"Ah! my little cousin—who comes to me—in her trouble—but who does not come to me in mine."

"I have been here often, but you were too ill to see me, they said always. Are you better now?"

"Yes—I am better, I think. Once they told me—I was dying—" He paused.

"And were you afraid, Cousin Cyprien?" said Frederica, looking with awe into his changed face.

"Was it fear that I felt? There was fear, and a thrill of something that was not fear. Now—I said—I shall know the mystery of death—and the beyond."

"Cousin, mania was not afraid. Even at the last, when death was very near, she was not afraid, because—"

In her earnestness she had knelt down beside the old man; and now, as her voice failed, she laid her face down on his knee. His trembling right hand was laid on her head.

"So—she has gone! She has solved the mystery."

"Did you not know, Cousin Cyprien? Did not Mr Jerome tell you? He feared to grieve you."

"Doubtless—it was for that or for some other good reason. I am glad I did not die."

"But mama was not afraid, after she knew how Jesus loved us and came to die for us."

"Tell me of your mother, and the end."

"She was not afraid," repeated Frederica. "Miss Agnace was afraid for her, and Mr Jerome and Sister Magdalen came often, and told her many things she ought to do. But she was never afraid, after the old man told us how 'the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.' It is in the Bible, you know, and God taught her, I think God and Selina. And it is for us all—the blood of Jesus—for those who think as Miss Agnace does, and you, and all of us. Selina will tell you. May I bring Selina, Mr St. Cyr?"

"Tell me about your mother," said he.

Frederica told him about how afraid her mother had been, and how she longed to know the way to heaven. And then she told how she had brought the old man in from the storm, never thinking what wonderful things he was to tell them, and how after that her mother was at rest. She told him how she had grown weaker, so slowly that they could see no change in her from day to day, and how calm and peaceful she was through all the time.

"Not even the thought of leaving us alone, when we feared papa was dying, made her unhappy; for she said, 'God will take care of my children, against all who would do them harm.' And so He will," added Frederica earnestly; and as she raised her eyes, they fell on the face of Mr Jerome, standing in the shadow of the door. She rose hastily.

"Must you go? Sit by me for a little while," said her old friend.

The door closed softly, shutting out the priest, as she believed, and Frederica sat down at the old man's feet again.

"Does the time seem long, Cousin Cyprien?" asked she.

"It seemed long in passing, but to look back on, it seems like a blank. I must get strong again. Is your father dead too?"

"Papa! Oh, no! He was better when we heard last, but it is a long time now. You have not heard that papa is worse?"

"I have heard nothing, and I can do nothing. Why have you come to-day? Is it because of some new unhappiness? Madame Ascot is with you, I hear. Are you unhappy, my child?"

Frederica paused a moment before she answered.

"Mama is gone, and papa, and sometimes we are afraid. But I did not come because of Madame. I thought that you had forgotten us, and I came to see. I am not afraid now that you are getting well."

"Ah! we will trust so. And have you nothing to tell me?—no trouble to be helped through?"

"No," said Frederica thoughtfully. "I will wait till you are quite well again, and then I will tell you all. And will you tell Babette that we may come upstairs—Selina and I? I may bring Selina, may I not?"

"By all means, and I will warn Babette, you may be sure. Must you go how?"

"It is growing dark, I think. Yes, I must go. So good night, Cousin Cyprien."

"Are you alone? My child, it is not well for you to be alone in the street at this hour."

"It was not dark when I came. It is only a little way. I am not afraid."

"Well, be sure and come again. Good night, my child."

"I will see Miss Vane safely home, I have something to say to her," said a voice from the darkness. Frederica with great difficulty suppressed a cry as Mr Jerome stepped forward.

"Is it you, my brother? Ah, well, she need not be in haste, though it is growing dark. You will see her safely home."

But Frederica bent hastily over Mr St. Cyr's hand.

"Good night, Cousin Cyprien. I do not fear the dark," said she; "but I do fear Mr Jerome," added she, in an undertone, as she sprang out of the room and down the stairs. She sped along the street like one pursued by an enemy. But Mr Jerome did not follow her across the threshold. He lingered a moment, looking out after her, and then went up through the darkness to his brother's room.

"And so Theresa St. Hubert is gone!" said Mr St. Cyr, as he entered the room, which was no longer dark.

"Yes," said his brother; "she is gone, and so is her husband."

"Dead! His daughter does not know."

"No. Why tell her sooner than needful? He, at least, is no loss to his children."

"And yet they loved him, and they ought to know."

"They will be told when the right time comes."

"There will be much to do. There are many documents relating to their affairs that must be looked over and arranged, and I have still so little strength."

"My strength is yours in their cause;" said Mr Jerome.

"Brother," said Mr St. Cyr, "why did you not tell me of poor Theresa's death?"

"Did I not tell you? Did not Sister Agnace? You were too ill at that time to be told, I suppose. Or you have forgotten. Your memory fails you at times, I fear, my brother."

"It may be," said Mr St. Cyr, after a moment's thought. "And yet I think I should not have forgotten this."

"There is no time to be lost in the settlement of their affairs, you must see," said Jerome.

"No, certainly."

"There must be guardians appointed."

"They are appointed."

"In your illness, having to act for them, I examined such papers relating to their affairs as I had access to. I found none having reference to what was to follow the death of their mother. None entire, I mean. Was there not to be some change? some new choice? I found some torn morsels of paper, a cancelled instrument of some sort. It is quite

as well. The court will be happier in the selection of guardians than that unhappy woman was.”

“There are guardians appointed!” repeated Mr St. Cyr.

“You have forgotten. Your illness has impaired your memory. There was to be a change of names. The former appointment was set aside. You yourself must have had some knowledge of it. You have forgotten.”

Mr St. Cyr looked at his brother with a strange emotion visible in his face.

“My brother, you are not glad of my weakness, are you? Have patience with me. I *am* weak.”

“That is easily seen. Yes, I will be gentle with you, but I must be faithful too: your weakness shall be helped and shielded by my strength.”

“Yes, but not to-night. I am tired to-night,” said Mr St. Cyr, leaning back wearily in his chair.

“You shall not be troubled. See, I have thought of the men whose names are written here, and at an early day I shall see the judges as to their legal appointment. And you shall not be troubled. If you are not satisfied with my suggestions, of course you are at liberty to make what change in the names you please.”

“But their mother, by my advice, appointed their guardians in the manner prescribed by Mr St. Hubert’s will; and nothing can supersede that appointment, you are aware.”

“If any trace of such an instrument is to be found,” said Mr Jerome.

“It is to be hoped it is to be found, or it may go badly with some of us,” said Mr St. Cyr gravely.

“As to that I cannot say. But the court, under your direction and mine, can do all that is necessary, without reference to documents of doubtful justice.”

“The appointment must stand as it is,” said Mr St. Cyr impatiently.

“It is time you were retiring, is it not? You seem tired. Shall I help you?”

“Thanks, I am not inclined to go yet.”

“Still I think you had better go. I shall speak to Babette, shall I not?”

There was no reply; and he left the room. Listening intently to his receding footsteps, Mr St. Cyr rose with difficulty, and holding by the furniture, crossed the room to the cabinet in which Frederica, on her first visit, had seen so many beautiful and curious things. From a hidden compartment in one of its sides, he drew forth several papers, and looked eagerly and attentively over them. He had only time to replace them and return to his seat, before his brother came in again.

“Your fire is bright in yon chamber. My brother, I entreat you to allow me to assist you thither, before I leave. I cannot divest myself of a feeling of responsibility with regard to that foolish young girl lingering in the street at this unseemly hour. I must see that she is safe at home. And I must hasten.”

“Thanks,” said Mr St. Cyr, rising meekly. “You are most kind, but pray do not stay. Babette can do all that is necessary for me. I fancy myself better to-night.”

“Better,” repeated his brother, as he went down the stairs. “I do not see it. For the present it is not necessary that you should be better. I can do your work for you, better than you can do it yourself. I have succeeded beyond hope—unless indeed, by some unimaginable chance, there should exist such an instrument as Cyprien asserts. Even then something might be done to put matters right, should I, and not Cyprien, guide them. We shall see.”

Chapter Eighteen.

Frederica reached home excited and breathless, and sat down to rest for a moment on the steps, before she went in.

“Miss Frederica—Thank God,” said old Dixen, coming out of the shadow where he had been waiting for the return of his young mistress in great anxiety.

“All right, Dixen—only I am so tired, I cannot tell you about it now.”

The hall door opened, and Miss Agnace came out. She, too, was watching, it seemed. Dixen fell back into the shadow again.

“My child, is it you? Where have you been? Not at Mrs Brandon’s, for she has been here. We have been in such terror for you.”

“You need not have been,” said Frederica. “Where is Selina? No, Miss Agnace, I am not going in there, for I am very tired.”

She paused a moment at the foot of the stairs, looking up. A kind, half-familiar face looked down on her from above.

“Is it Col. Bentham?” said she, going up slowly. “And papa has come. Oh! papa! papa!”

Was it her father's face she saw? It was such a face as her father's might have been in his youth, a nobler and better face than his had ever been to her knowledge, though no such thought came into Frederica's mind as she gazed. And who was this beside him, looking at her with Selina's eyes, smiling on her with Selina's smile, and calling her sister? Frederica grew pale, and trembled more and more.

"Lena," she faltered. "Lena, is it that I am going to be ill again? or am I dreaming?"

"Fred love," said Selina, putting her arms around her, "it is our elder brother Edgar, who has come, and our sister Cecilia, and poor papa—"

But Frederica heard no more, for there was a mist before her eyes, and a buzzing in her ears, and by-and-by she found that Miss Agnace was bathing her face, and Selina was holding her hand, with a pale anxious face. Then she heard a strange voice say,—

"She must drink this, and go to bed at once and no one is to talk to her to-night." And that was almost the last thing she knew, till she awoke next morning with the sunshine on her face.

It was well that the rest of the night came before the excitement of the day that awaited her. For poor Fred had yet to be told that she would never see her father on earth again. Col. Bentham told her first, and then her sister Cecilia told her about his last days; and as she listened, Frederica's thought was—

"Now he is with mama, and nothing will ever happen to make them grieve one another any more."

This thought softened her grief, and made her tears flow gently, as Cecilia went on to tell how sorry he had been about some things; and how he had longed to return to his children and their mother, when it was no longer possible to do so; and how unwillingly he resigned himself to the sad necessity at last.

She told them how his restlessness and impatience went away, and a great change came over him towards the end. He longed to live for his children's sake, but he ceased to be afraid of death, nay, he welcomed the messenger of the King as he drew near.

"Papa must have known all along what mama only learned towards the last, that Jesus died to save His people," said Selina. "Was it that which made him not afraid?"

"He learned it in a new way as he lay upon his bed," said Cecilia. "It was that from which he took comfort at the last. Many a time he said to me, he had nothing else in which to trust."

"And, Fred love, we must not grieve too much. Think how glad mama must be to see him there," said Selina.

All this, and more, was told on that first Sunday morning, but Frederica was not told that day that they had brought her father's body home. Careless as he had in the old days been about all that did not minister to his own pleasure, in the time of suffering his heart turned with longing unspeakable to those he had left behind, and strange to say, he had entreated to be taken back, to be laid by the side of the wife he had too often neglected and forgotten. And so they had brought him home.

"And did papa ask you to come and take care of us? It was very good in you to come."

"Col. Bentham came to take care of you, and Edgar is to help him. My husband and I came because we wished so much to see you, and because we hoped we might have you home with us for a little while. But that will be decided later."

Frederica had not spoken all this time. She was afraid if she said a word she would break into tears and sobs beyond her power to stay, as had happened once or twice before. But when their brother Edgar came in, she gave a cry, and clasped her sister's hand.

"He is so like papa," she uttered faintly.

"Is he?" said Selina. "I have not seen him yet."

She took her brother's hand, pressing her own small fingers softly and rapidly over it, and then over his face and hair. "Is he like papa?" asked she doubtfully.

"Like, and yet not like," said Cecilia, and Frederica said the same. But neither of them said that the likeness was of features only, or of expression.

"Are you better?" asked he of Frederica. "Do you know that it was I who prescribed for you last night?"

"Are you a physician?" asked she.

"I hope to be one some day. Indeed, I am one already, in a way. I am going to take you into my special care, till you are the rosy little girl we used to hear of long ago."

Frederica shook her head sadly. "I am quite changed. I never used to know what it was to be tired. Now I can do nothing, and I am so foolish, that the least thing makes me cry. I am quite ashamed."

"But all that is to be changed now that I am come to take care of you. You will soon be well and strong again."

And so they talked on, till they were on friendly and familiar terms with each other; and Frederica, reassured and comparatively cheerful, was able without undue excitement to make the acquaintance of Cecilia's husband, when

later he and Col. Bentham came in together.

"Fred love," said Selina, "tell them about Charlie and Hubert."

"Ought I, Selina? must I? I am afraid everybody will think I have been very foolish—perhaps wrong."

"We were alone, and frightened," said Selina. "And there was no one to tell us what we ought to do."

"Of course, if we had known that you were all coming to take care of us, it would not have mattered. We could have waited; but we did not know," said Fred deprecatingly.

And then the story was told, partly by one, and partly by the other, how startled they had been when Selina had heard Charlie's voice calling to her in the street. They told of their visit to the school out of which the long procession of boys had come, with Madame Precoe and Father Jerome, and how the people there had been so polite and kind, and how they had put all thoughts of the boys being there out of their minds, till Dixen had told them yesterday that he had seen one of them in the long procession of boys again going up the street.

"Was it yesterday, Lena? It seems a long time ago, since Dixen spoke to us in the garden."

"And the foolish part of the matter is yet to be told," said her brother.

"Then Fred ran away to tell Caroline. But she did not go there, and I only know that she told Dixen it was 'all right,'" said Selina.

"It was foolish, I suppose, but then I did not know what else to do."

They listened to the account she gave them of little Hubert's 'rescue,' with mingled astonishment and amusement, at a loss, when all was told, to decide whether Fred had been very brave or very foolish—inclined rather to agree with the child himself, that no "rescue" had been needed, yet admiring the courage which had accomplished it, and the modesty which deprecated blame rather than claimed admiration for what she had done.

"I daresay Hubert thinks himself a prisoner now, and that he needs to be rescued much more than he did before," said she doubtfully.

"But, indeed, if you knew how anxious and unhappy we had sometimes been about some things, you would not call us altogether foolish," said Selina.

"And it came so suddenly upon us. First we heard that Tessie had been to the convent, and then Dixen told us he had seen Charlie, and then I went away."

"But who has taken the ordering of all these matters?" said Col. Bentham. "Where is the responsibility? Mr St. Cyr must have known the wishes of your father and mother with regard to these children."

"It was not Mr St. Cyr," said Frederica eagerly. "At least, I don't think it was he. That was worst of all when we thought that he had turned against mama's wishes, because he had always been so kind to us before. But last night I went to see him."

"What! more adventures!" said Edgar. "You went to beard another lion in his den?"

"Oh! I have been there before. But he has been very ill this winter, and they would not let us in. But last night I did not ask leave. I ran upstairs and into the room where he was sitting."

"And was he glad to see you?" asked Selina eagerly, "and did you tell him about Tessie and the boys?"

"No, Lena. He looked so changed and weak, I could not ask him. Was I very foolish? But then I am quite sure he knew nothing about them. And, Lena, he did not know about mama, though it was so long ago—Mr Jerome had not told him."

"And was he very kind still?"

"Very kind, and he asked about papa, and said he hoped he would come home soon. And he asked about mama—and by-and-by I saw that Mr Jerome had come in, and then I came home."

"And now it does not matter since you have all come to take care of us," said Selina.

That their coming would put an end to all cause for apprehension in the settlement of these children's affairs, did not seem by any means certain to those who listened. However, nothing was said to lessen their confidence. Nothing could be certainly known till Col. Bentham should see Mr St. Cyr, and as the arrangements for Mr Vane's burial must be made at once, he determined to lose no time in visiting him, and Edgar Vane went with him.

The interview was necessarily short, but it made Edgar quite sure that Mr St. Cyr knew nothing of the change of arrangements for the children after their mother's death. He spoke as though he supposed the boys to be at a distance, and requested Mr Jerome to take the necessary steps for bringing them home. Mr Jerome assented at once, but said very little during their stay.

"I wish I could be as sure of his good faith as I am of Mr St. Cyr's," said Edgar, when he spoke to his sisters about it afterward. "However, it signifies little to us, as now he need have little to do with their affairs."

"But did he say nothing about the boys being in town when you spoke of their coming home?" asked Mrs Brandon.

"Nothing—and we said nothing to him. But I cannot help wondering what he will say, when little Hubert shall not be forthcoming to-morrow."

"I confess I should like to see that man put to confusion, if such a thing were possible," said Mrs Brandon.

"Which is doubtful," said her husband.

"Still, he will have to account for his non-appearance in some way, which will be rather difficult, I imagine," said Edgar.

But Mr Jerome was not destined to be put to confusion by the non-appearance of little Hubert; for, as they were speaking, he walked in among them.

"You did not come for me, Fred, as you promised. And I thought your old woman had had enough of me, and so I came away," said he.

Mr Jerome had no account to render to any of them. Whatever he said on the subject was said to Mr St. Cyr, not that he considered it necessary to give an account of his actions even to him. He was accountable only to a tribunal, which would acquit him of all wrong-doing in the matter. He uttered some angry and bitter words, because of his brother's weakness and folly, where poor Mrs Vane and her children were concerned. The children were, in his opinion, in a fair way to be ruined. The only hope for them, both for this world and the next, lay in the proper choice of guardians.

"And for you to tell Colonel Bentham, even before he alluded to the subject, that he was one of the three persons charged with the responsibility of their future welfare was monstrous. If any instrument appointing him to this office exists, you should never let it see the light. I do not believe it exists. It is one of the many dreams of your illness. Why did you not produce it to-day, if it is here?"

"It will be produced at the right time. I scarcely think you know what you are counselling, my brother," said Mr St. Cyr, gravely. "I could not, without committing a villainy, do as you bid me do in this."

"I will take the responsibility. You are not capable of deciding such a question. Your illness has weakened your mind, as well as your body. You will be wise to let yourself be guided by me!"

"You forget we did not agree about this thing before my illness. I am weak, I know, but I am not weak enough for your purpose. And my yielding would avail nothing. The business is known to others, as well as to me."

Mr Jerome gave him an evil look. Mr St. Cyr was much weakened by his illness, and a terrible thought, that he was not safe in his brother's hands, came into his mind, and showed in his face.

"The business is now in other hands," said he feebly.

"I do not believe you," said Jerome, restraining himself with a great effort. The look of terror in his brother's face shocked him. The tacit accusation was an awful one, but that it was not altogether unjust, he could not but acknowledge. For in his heart at that moment he was saying, "If Cyprien had died, all might have been made to go well."

"A further discussion of this subject can do no good now. But I warn you that whatever can be done to save these children and their wealth to the Church shall be done. It is not I who say it. A power which it is impossible to defeat or circumvent, stands pledged for a successful issue. It will be wise for you to yield before a heavy hand is laid upon you."

"An idle threat," said Mr St. Cyr.

"No threat, my brother. That power, as you know, never yields. Its triumph is certain. It may come to-morrow, or ten years hence, or twenty, but ultimate triumph is certain."

"An idle threat," repeated Mr St. Cyr.

And probably it was only a threat. If anything was done to bring into the life and destiny of these children the change which Father Jerome so earnestly desired, it was done in secret, and it failed. If the "power," with whose heavy hand he had been threatened ever touched him to his hurt, Mr St. Cyr never complained of it, or revealed it. Certainly he never yielded to it, in the matter of the trust which Mrs Vane had given him.

With more promptness and decision than he might have considered necessary had he been in perfect health, or had the circumstances been different, he transferred to the guardians whom the mother had appointed for her children, all the responsibility which their acceptance of the office involved. The responsibility was not a light one, but it was assumed cheerfully and faithfully, and successfully borne; and as yet no harm has come, either from Father Jerome, or from the power he serves, to Mrs Vane's children.

But all this took time, and of the details they who were most interested in the matter knew nothing, and thought nothing, except that it was a happy thing for them that to Colonel Bentham, and not to Father Jerome, the arrangement of their affairs had been committed.

Tessie came home from the convent none the worse for her fortnight's seclusion. For a little while his sisters found that the same thing could not be said of Charlie. Poor Charlie had rebelled, and had been hardly dealt with, though he said little about it for a time. Into his eyes came now and then the look, half-deprecating, half-defiant, which they have who are only learning to yield obedience to the government of a strong hand and will, which no love softens.

He had gone into the strange uncongenial world of the great school, with his heart sore with the thought of his mother's death, and angry with the suspicion that he who had brought them there had done so less for their good than for his own pleasure; and, child though he was, he suffered terribly. Grief, and home sickness, and disgust at many things which now became part of his daily experience, made him irritable and rebellious, and would have made him difficult to manage anywhere else. There the "strong hand" touched him, and a few months longer of the discipline he underwent would doubtless, in all things, have moulded him to the will of those who taught and governed him. As it was, those at home believed that he had come back to them none too soon for his good.

As for Tessie, though she indignantly resented having been taken away without her own consent, she had nothing to complain of with regard to the treatment she had received. Indeed, she had been flattered and made much of by all with whom she had come in contact, and doubtless would, in time, have yielded with passable grace to the necessity of submission, and contented herself with her circumstances. But she was glad enough to find herself at home again, and to make the acquaintance of their elder brother and sister, whose coming was as joyful an event to her, and as unexpected as it had been to them all.

Chapter Nineteen.

The brothers followed their father to the grave, and the sisters sat at home waiting, as they had done when their mother was carried away. But this time Cecilia was with them, and that made a wonderful difference. She read with them the beautiful burial service of their Church, and comforted them sweetly with words which were not her own, showing them how they, being fatherless and motherless, could claim in a new way the love and care of their Father in Heaven, because of His promise to the orphan. There was no room for fear, or even for doubt, in their future, she told them, because of this; and it was the easier for them to believe it, and rejoice in it; coming from her loving lips.

Before they saw the graves of their father and mother, they were beautiful with soft green turf and the fairest of spring flowers.

They all went there together, on one of the loveliest and last of the April days; and though their tears fell fast for a little while, there was no bitterness in them; and the elder brother and sisters, sitting a little apart, saw smiles on their faces before their tears were dry.

"It is all past for them," said Frederica; "the troubles of their life, I mean. And now mama is as strong and well as the other happy people up there, and not anxious or afraid any more."

"And papa is satisfied, and does not mind things now, I suppose," said Tessie. "For my part, I cannot think what heaven is like."

"Jesus is there, we know," said Selina, "and that is enough."

"Yes, I suppose so. But still mama must have been glad to see papa coming in through the gate. But, as Tessie says, we cannot tell what heaven is like, or how it seems to them there."

"Jesus is there," repeated Selina, "and they are like Him. 'And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying;' and they shall go no more out. We know a little, Tessie dear, I think."

"But I cannot think of mama being quite happy without you, Lena. And has she forgotten us all, do you think?"

"She knows that I shall be coming by-and-by," said Selina, with a smile, wonderful for its sweet content. "Yes, and all of us—'to go no more out.' She will not think the time long, we may be sure of that. And I shall *see her face there?*"

"If mama could have known about Cecilia and Edgar, and how good they would be to us, before she went away."

"Papa knew," said Tessie, "and he will tell her."

"And, Fred love, mama was not afraid for us at the last," said Selina. "She did not know that they would care for us and love us, but she knew that Jesus would; and I daresay He has told her about our brother and sister also."

"And we needn't fret about Madame Precoe or Father Jerome any more," said Tessie.

"No; but we will not speak of them *here*," said Selina gently; "and we need not be afraid of anything any more."

By-and-by there was a little movement among them, and then the others heard Selina say,—

"Tell me about it, so that I may know the place where they lie."

So one told her one thing, and one told her another, about the lonely spot where the two graves were side by side. Tessie told of the green turf and the lovely flowers that covered them, and of the budding trees, and the dark shadows which the evergreens made, and the many, many graves and white monuments that could be seen. And then Frederica told her of the far-away view, of the great level over which they could look to the river and the hills beyond. And they both said how peaceful the place was, and how fair and sweet, till Selina smiled, saying,—"*I think I can see it all now.*"

"And, please God, she shall see it yet as clearly as it lies before us all," said Edgar softly.

"Do you mean it, Edgar? Can such a thing be possible?" said Mrs Brandon in amaze.

"Please God, she may yet see," said the young man gravely.

"Ah I do not disturb the sweet quiet of her heart by a hope that may never be realised," said Cecilia.

"By no means at present," said her brother; "there is no need for that."

"It would be a miracle," said Mrs Brandon.

"A miracle of science and skill," said Edgar. "We will not speak of this to her, or to any of them, yet; but I cannot but hope that she may see, even before she enters the city by the gates of pearl."

After that they had a very quiet summer. Madame Precoe went home to her own house, and they did not see her very often. But Miss Agnace was allowed still to remain with them, and the affairs of the household went well and smoothly in her hands. Mr Jerome they never saw, for he had been sent on a mission to a distant city, and they only heard of him now and then through Mr St. Cyr; but they were none the less happy that he was away.

Mr St. Cyr did not grow strong very fast. It was, indeed, doubtful whether he would ever be very strong again; and so all through the summer he was making arrangements to give up his business for a while into the hands of his partner, and he purposed to take a long holiday, to go to Paris, where he had not been since he was a young man, and perhaps to Rome, where he had never been. But he found time, amid all his preparations, to come often to see the young people; for he still considered himself their guardian, and in a certain sense responsible for their well-being. And besides, he loved them dearly, and they trusted him, and depended on him as they had always done, and loved him better every day.

Edgar and young Mr Bentham, Cecilia's husband, had much to do, and many places to visit, before the time set for their return to England, and sometimes Cecilia went with them. But it generally pleased her best to stay quietly at home with her young sisters, and it pleased them also.

It was a very quiet summer, but it was a very busy one. For it had been decided that when their elder brother and sister went back to England, they should all go with them; and there was much to be thought of, and much to be done, in preparation. To say that they were glad at the prospect, would be saying little. To go anywhere with the brother and sister who had been so kind to them, and whom they had learned to love so dearly, would have been pleasant; but to go to England, the country of which they had heard so much, where there were so many wonderful and beautiful things to see, was more than pleasant.

"And papa's home was there, and it was the last place he saw," said Selina, who had no hope of beholding the beautiful and wonderful things of which her brother and Tessie were never weary of talking. "And the kind people who cared for him are there. Yes, I am glad to go."

"And we shall come home again. I am glad to go away for a while, because there are some things here I want to forget," said Frederica, a little tremulously. "But we must come home again by-and-by, and begin all over again."

"Unless we should like England best," said Tessie. "I should not be at all surprised."

But Frederica said that would be quite impossible. When their brothers should be quite grown up, and able to take care of themselves, they would all come back and be happy at home. They made many plans as to what they were to do and enjoy, but Frederica's plans all had reference to their return home, and the life they were to live afterwards. She was as glad to go as any of them, but it was always with thought of coming home again.

They had not many friends to whom it was sad to say good-bye. Mr St. Cyr was going with them, on his way to Paris. Miss Agnace was going with them too, to be Selina's special attendant and friend. For though little was said about it, it was more for Selina's sake than for anything else that they were going to England. Edgar had taken Mr St. Cyr into his confidence as to the hope he entertained of bringing back the light, to her sweet eyes, and so all plans with regard to their going were made easy by him.

They went to school to say good-bye to Miss Robina and her mother, and Cecilia went with them to thank them for all their kindness to her little sisters. But this was not Frederica's last visit. She went again with Selina, and Mistress Campbell made tea for them in her room, as she used to do when Frederica was a child. It was not so very long ago, but it seemed a great while to her, and she was very quiet and grave all the afternoon. Selina had more to say than she had, and asked many questions about what her sister used to do when she was a pupil in the school.

"A bonny bit wilful creature she was," said Mistress Campbell, "very wilful whiles. But it was just a pleasure to see her for all that. Many a good advice I had occasion to give her at one time and another, but she did me more good than ever I did to her, I think. She is one of His little lambs, as you are yourself doubtless, and none shall pluck you out of His hand. You are ay safe with Him, but still it is a grand thing to have a brother and sister like those you have found to trust to, and to be obedient to. You'll ay mind that, Miss Frederica, my dear, when you are far away."

"I shall never be wilful or disobedient any more, Mistress Campbell," said Fred gravely, quite believing it.

Mistress Campbell nodded her head a good many times.

"You are in God's keeping, my bairn. That's ay a comfort. But walk softly, my lammie, when your light heart comes back again. And mind the rest will ay look to you for an example, and so on." Mistress Campbell had "many an advice" to give still, and Frederica received them more meekly than she used sometimes to do in the old times.

"And though I never see you more on earth, we'll meet in a better place, my bonny bairns, and God go with you wherever you go," said the old woman, kissing them when they were ready to go away. "And there is nothing to grieve about, though it is the last time."

Nothing to grieve about. It could not be long that the kind old woman would have to stay in her garret, and there

were no partings where she was going to dwell.

After that they spent a day with their sister Caroline and her little children, and this was the saddest parting of all. But even this was not so very sad, for they were coming back again by-and-by to their home and their friends, and the graves of their father and mother, and there was no bitterness in the tears they shed when the day of departure came.

The summer was quite over by that time. The sun of a bright still autumn day was near its setting as they stood on the deck of the steamer to take their last look of the city, and of the mountain which makes so grand a background to the view. Grand indeed it was that night, for the frost spirit had breathed on the unfallen leaves, and changed their summer green to colours wonderful for glory and beauty, and few words were spoken for a good while as they gazed.

"Tell me about it," said Selina softly.

So one told her about the bright clouds in the west, and the mountain growing dim already in the distance, and another told of the gleaming city roofs and spires; and the great cathedral towers looking down upon them all, and little Hubert told her of the long shaft of light that the sun sent over the water, and of the white sails that were passing out of sight.

"Which of us all is so happy as she?" said Cecilia softly, as she watched the smile of sweet content on the blind girl's listening face.

"But please God, when she comes home again, she shall see it all," said her brother. And so she did.

Chapter Twenty.

Cecilia's home was in London, and there until Christmas-time her brothers and sisters remained. It was not the best season of the year for sight-seeing, but by taking advantage of such gleams of sunshine as now and then came to brighten the general dullness, a good deal was enjoyed even in that way. Nothing came amiss in the way of amusement to any of them. Everything was new and full of interest, and in their eyes wonderful. A drive through London streets gave matter for discussion for days afterwards.

It was all new and strange to them, the crowds of people hurrying to and fro, the great dingy houses, the queer narrow courts into which they sometimes peeped, the splendour of the shop windows, the monuments and public buildings afforded never-ending themes for talk, and the bright quaint remarks which were now and then made, amused their elders greatly.

But there were many dull days during that autumn, when all things were seen dimly through rain or fog, and there were some days when nothing at all could be seen, when the gas burned at noon, and when the carts and carriages that rumbled through the streets all day long, were quite invisible to the eager eyes of the little boys. On such days, no wonder that they grew impatient and even fretful, now and then, or that their sisters were not always so bright and cheerful themselves, as to be able to beguile their brothers back to cheerfulness and good-humour again. They were all a little homesick on such days; and so, when the time came to accept Col. Bentham's invitation for Christmas, they were glad to leave the dull dark streets behind them, and to get a glimpse of blue sky and green fields again.

For in sheltered places the fields were green still, almost with the greenness of summer. In their own country at Christmas-time the snow lies thick on the ground, and the smaller streams, and sometimes even the great rivers, are covered with ice. Not a leaf is to be seen or a blade of grass, but great snowdrifts on the hill-sides, and icicles hanging from the bare boughs of the trees.

The skaters are out on the ice, and the snow-shoe clubs are beginning to think of long tramps over the fields. Hundreds of sleighs are gliding along the city streets, and over the country roads, and the air is full of the music of sleigh-bells, and the merry voices of people enjoying the holidays.

And Jack and Jill used to be out with the rest, with a sleighful of happy children behind them. The children's faces grew grave as they told one another of all this. How bright it used to be! How delightful! Oh, yes! Of course it was cold sometimes, but who would mind the cold, with furs and wraps, great buffalo robes, and bearskins to keep them warm!

No, it did not seem like Christmas-time to them here. In some of the sunny glades of Eastwood Park, the little Canadians could have forgotten that it was not summer, except when they looked up at the great leafless oaks and elms and beeches, which made a wide dark network of boughs between them and the sky. There were no flowers in the open park, but the grass was green, and there was ivy on the wall, and there were great holly bushes and laurels, and in Grandmamma Bentham's garden, shut in from the winds, and having the sunshine full upon it, there were heartsease and Christmas roses. It was all very different, out of doors, from Christmas time at home. But within doors it was like the best of Christmas-times.

There was a large party assembled at Eastwood Park—sons and daughters of Col. Bentham, grandchildren, nephews and nieces, and friends of the family. Their brother Edgar was there for a few days, and his friend Captain Clare. Everard Bentham, the Colonel's youngest son, was Edgar's dear friend, though they were not at all alike in most respects. Everard was gay and inclined to be idle, and had caused his father some anxiety during the last year or two. But of all this nothing was known to the young Vanes. He was very kind to them, very merry and light-hearted, and they liked him dearly—almost as well as they liked Captain Clare, who was a very different sort of man.

He was older than their other friend, though not so much older as they fancied, because his hair was a little grey, and

he was often grave and silent when there were others besides the children present. He was a soldier, and had been in battle many times, and had the Victoria cross and medals to show that he had done his duty on the field. He had other tokens as well. There was a faintly traced scar extending along his temple, which his hair only partially concealed, and he always wore a glove on his left hand to hide the traces of another wound.

He had much to tell the little lads about many things. He had been in their own country, had spent a winter in their own city. He had known their father and their mother, and remembered Jack and Jill, and never tired listening to all they had to tell about them, and this was one secret of his popularity doubtless.

The sisters liked him also, for similar reasons, and for better reasons. For he was a true soldier of Christ, as well as of the Queen, and had fought and won battles for Him in his day, and the very first words that he spoke to them, as he came upon them one day in old Mrs Bentham's garden, made Selina and Frederica glad in the hope of having him for their friend.

All who came to Eastwood Park were interested in these children and very kind to them. They were kind, and they were a little curious also—that is, they watched with interest, and sometimes with amusement, the words and ways of these young Canadians, who were not in all respects just like English children. I speak of them all as children, for with all their womanliness and decision of manner, the sisters were in some respects quite as childlike as were little Hubert and Charlie. Selina was like no one else in her never-failing sweetness and cheerfulness. Tessie's frankness and independence of speech might, under the encouragement of amused listeners, have fallen into undesirable freeness, had it not been for the gentle check of her eldest sister's influence. She rebelled sometimes under Fred's rather imperative hints as to what was desirable and right or otherwise, but Selina's lightest half-spoken remonstrance never passed unheeded.

It was the same with the little lads. It was Frederica who assumed authority over them; and her little motherly ways and words, at once coaxing and determined, generally answered well with them. They were obedient and teachable usually; but they now and then appealed from her rather arbitrary rule to the gentler rule of Selina; and the way in which she used to soften and modify her sister's decisions, while she gravely and firmly upheld her sister's authority with their brothers, was a pretty thing to see. Frederica was careful and troubled over them and their future often; Selina was trustful and cheerful always, and not afraid.

Everybody was kind to them, and much was done to make their Christmas, not only a merry one, but a happy one. Everybody was kind to them; but, after Cecilia and her husband and their brother Edgar, they liked no one so well as Captain Clare. A good many people went away when the holidays ended, but Captain Clare stayed on, and so did Everard Bentham. Everard had been thrown from his horse, and so seriously hurt, that, much against his will, he was obliged to remain at home several weeks longer than it had been his intention to stay. He made the best of it, and amused himself as well as he could, and by-and-by got "great fun," as he called it, out of the little Canadians. But he gave them quite as much as he got from them in the way of amusement; for he was kind as well as merry. In the way of real and lasting benefit, his intercourse with these young people did much to change his character, and influence his future life; but all this came later.

In the meantime Captain Clare was their dearest friend after their brother Edgar went away; and it was in this way that their friendship began: They were sitting—Selina and Frederica—one day in old Mrs Bentham's garden, where the sunshine made it, to Selina at least, just like a summer day. Frederica had been reading a word or two, as her sister liked to have her do when they were alone together; and to-day it had been the first verses of the twelfth of Hebrews that she had chosen. They had not gone beyond the first two or three verses; there was enough in them to talk and wonder over.

"Perhaps it means this, Fred," said Selina, after a minute's silence; "these people, 'so great a cloud of witnesses'—the people in the last chapter, you know—are all looking at us, and so we must 'run with patience the race set before us.' Or is it that all these people looked to Jesus, and so got strength and patience to 'subdue kingdoms,' to 'stop the mouths of lions'? Don't you remember? They were 'destitute, afflicted, tormented,—of whom the world was not worthy.' Oh! Fred dear, how little we know!"

But it was not Fred that answered her, but Captain Clare. Fred had gone down the garden path, not caring less than her sister for the reading, or for the meaning of what they read, but less intent upon it for the moment, because she could see so much that was beautiful around her. For even in winter Grandmamma Bentham's garden was beautiful, and not every visitor at Eastwood Park was admitted to it. But when Captain Clare took up the book which Frederica had laid down, and reading over again the words Selina had found so difficult, added afterwards a few words of his own, she came back again, and leaned on the garden chair on which her sister sat.

It was nothing very new or very wonderful that he said to them. He only told them in a few clear words what he thought the apostle meant in writing thus to the suffering Hebrews, touching incidentally on other points of interest in other parts of the Bible, over which the sisters had pondered together with varying interest and profit. Selina listened eagerly, only saying now and then with smiling lips, "Do you hear, Frederica?"

"Are you listening, dear Fred?"

Fred was listening, forgetting the holly leaves and the bright berries with which she had filled her apron to make wreaths for some young friends in the house. She listened silently. She had less to say on all subjects than she used to have in the old days, before care had been laid so heavily upon her. But she listened earnestly, for she knew that all would have to be gone over again with her sister when they were alone. They listened till Miss Agnace came to warn them that the sun had gone behind the clouds, and that they must return to the house.

"But you will tell us more," said Selina, softly passing her fingers over the hand that had taken hers in saying good-bye. "Another day you will tell us more."

It was an easy promise to make, and a pleasant promise to keep.

“We know so little,” said Frederica, as, with Captain Clare, she followed her sister and Miss Agnace up the avenue to the other side of the house. “We had no one to teach us, and at first we did not care to learn,” added she humbly. “It was for mama’s sake at first—because—she was going to die—and—she was afraid—” and the tears rushed to her eyes.

She hardly ever spoke of her mother to any one but her sisters, and she wondered a little at herself that she should do so now. She wondered less when she looked up and met the kind eyes looking down upon her.

“Some day you must tell me more about your mother,” said Captain Clare.

This was the beginning. After that, while they were at Eastwood, not a day passed in which Captain Clare did not pass an hour with them. When the weather did not allow them to go out of doors, they sat in the library or in one of the deep windows of the hall. The party was variable as to numbers; but Selina was always there, and almost always Miss Agnace. She was never far away from her charge, unless her sisters were with her; and although she would sit with her face averted, apparently absorbed with her work, she never lost a word which Captain Clare said about the truth which she was beginning to love, though she hardly knew it yet. She was never in the way, and because of Selina’s blindness it did not seem out of place that she should be constantly with her. Besides, her service was a service of love.

She did not listen now as she had done at first to the reading and the talk, that she might detect errors, and warn these children against them. She said little to them now of the “true Church,” or its teachings. She only listened, saying to herself, that however at variance with these teachings some things which she heard might seem to be, there could not be any real difference, seeing the same fruits of the Spirit—love, peace, joy—which flourished and showed in the life of many a saint of old, showed fair and sweet in the lives of these children growing so dear to her. So she always listened when she could, and Selina made it easy for her to be near her at such times.

Cecilia was with them often, and Edgar, but most of their intercourse with Captain Clare as a near friend and teacher took place after Edgar went away. Mr Everard Bentham, when he began to limp about the house again after his hurt, found his time pass more rapidly among these young people, who asked questions, and discussed subjects as little likely to interest young people as could well be imagined, he thought. It seemed to him the oddest fancy in the world that kept these girls intent on Captain Clare’s words, as he made clear to them how the Old Testament and the New were one, how the truths dimly foretold in the one found fulfilment in the other, and showed how in all things written in both Christ appeared. What could it matter to them to be wise about such things? he questioned laughing. But he never laughed at them. It might be odd and foolish, but at the same time he liked to see it all; and though he listened for a while, that he might catch the wonderful brightness on the blind girl’s face, as some new thought was made clear to her; and though he asked questions in his turn, that he might provoke Frederica’s eager defence of her opinions and beliefs, the Word did not “return void,” as far as he was concerned. Now and then a bow drawn at a venture sent an arrow home to his conscience, and none of them had better reason to remember those days than the hitherto careless Everard Bentham.

Sometimes the little lads heard tales of marches and battles, of suffering bravely borne, of good work well done for the sake of duty. But rarely a day passed in which there did not fall to the share of the sisters some good word about the Lord they loved, and about whom they longed to know more. These children knew already that Christ was the only Saviour from sin, and from its consequences,—the Friend of sinners—the Conqueror of death. They knew and they rejoiced in all that He had done for them and for all, and in all that He had promised still to do. They knew what they owed Him, but they knew less of what He expected from them. They loved Him, and for His sake they loved His friends and followers. But they had never been taught the duty of self-denial for His sake, the blessedness of a life given up to Him in the doing of service to His little ones.

Of all this Captain Clare told them, and they were apt scholars. Frederica displayed something like her old bright eagerness in explaining some of the plans of usefulness which her imagination suggested as wise and possible to be carried out in the future. Some foolish things might have been done, if they had been left to their own counsels. But it did not need severity, nor even great firmness, to check Frederica now. She was not unwilling to acknowledge that they were yet too young and inexperienced to undertake on their own responsibility any of the schemes of usefulness so well carried out for the benefit of the ignorant and the suffering by others who were wiser and fitter for the work than they.

All this might come later. In the meantime Frederica had her brothers and sisters to live for and to influence. She had her own education to complete. She laughed now at the remembrance of the time when she had boasted of having “gone through all the books” in Miss Robina’s class. There was enough to do for herself, as well as for the others, she acknowledged; and she listened earnestly when Colonel Bentham, as her guardian, spoke to her of the serious responsibilities which the possession of wealth would involve in her case, and that of them all.

In the meantime she and Selina had much to say between themselves of all they meant to do when they should go home. Selina’s wish was to gather together all the blind people who were poor, and who needed a home—the old people and little children—and teach them about Jesus, and about the land where all shall see His face. In this work her sister was to help her, and Miss Agnace. In all her plans for the future Miss Agnace had a place.

In her heart Miss Agnace knew that in such a home as these young girls were planning she would be suffered to have no part, unless, indeed, Father Jerome, or others who thought as he did, should have the guidance of it all. But she did faithfully her duty to her blind friend and mistress, loving her more dearly every day, content with the present, and willing to accept without question whatever the future might bring.

Chapter Twenty One.

After Christmas the boys went to school—to the great public school where their father and their elder brother had been educated, and a great quietness fell on the sisters after they went away. It was their first separation since the day their father had been, laid beside their mother on the hillside far away, and they missed them sadly for awhile. They all missed them, but Frederica especially felt lost without the constant sense of responsibility which had rested on her with regard to them since that day. It was well that they still lingered in beautiful Eastwood. Cecilia did not like to think of how dull the days would have been in London at this time. But every one in the large and happy household of Colonel Bentham strove more than ever to interest and amuse them, so as to beguile them from regretful thoughts; and when there came first one letter and then another from the little lads, showing that they were falling more easily and happily than could have been supposed into their right places, and taking the good of the pleasant things in school, even Frederica became content about them, and confessed that it was a relief to know that they were safe and well, and to let the sense of responsibility slip from her for a time.

But a greater trial was before her than the parting from their brothers. By-and-by they returned to London, and she and Tessie were soon as earnestly engaged with lessons and masters as could be desired. It was partly from a sense of duty, and from a desire to make the most of the exceptional advantages afforded them, that they worked so well, but they also enjoyed their work. It was made pleasant to them, and they were not allowed to do too much. Walks and drives, visits and sight-seeing prevented their work from becoming monotonous, or from injuring them in any way, and the time to them passed quickly.

But Selina drooped. She missed her brothers, and though she shared Frederica's reading as far as was possible, and enjoyed the sight-seeing at second-hand, still she was not so bright and cheerful as usual; and strange to say, Frederica was not the first to see it Selina's best time was when they were all together, so that this was not surprising; but Cecilia became anxious about her, and longed for the time when their brother Edgar should be at home again.

He came at Easter, and in a day or two declared himself at liberty to do as he pleased for three months at least. After that he was to settle down to the practice of his profession in another part of London, and then there would be no more leisure days for him.

"And you are going to make the most of these three months," said Tessie, "and have a great deal of pleasure."

"I hope so," said Edgar, but he looked more grave than people usually do who are anticipating three months of pleasure; and when Tessie went on to suggest, that instead of going away by himself, as he had proposed, he should take them all with him, he looked grave still, and said that would be impossible. He could not take them all at this time, but it was his intention to take Selina away for a little while. They all looked grave at that, and there came a look over Frederica's face which neither he nor Cecilia had ever seen before, but which made Tessie think of the rule of Madame Ascot, and the days when Fred took her own way in spite of her. It would not be right, Edgar went on to say, to interrupt the studies of the others so happily and successfully commenced, for though their company might be agreeable to Selina, it was not necessary to her, as he would care for her, and Miss Agnace was to go with her.

Frederica uttered an impatient exclamation. "Studies! In comparison with Selina's happiness her studies and masters counted for nothing. Selina must come first always. They had never been separated since—since—" Fred could get no further. It was only by a great effort that she kept back her tears. And her brother said gently,—

"But if it were to be for Selina's good that she should go away for a little while, and that you should remain at home, surely you would be willing to deny yourself? At this time it is better for our sister to be in my care, and in the care of Miss Agnace."

"That is because you do not know," broke in Frederica. "Ask Selina. Let her decide."

"No, we will not ask Selina this time. Of course it will be a trial for her to leave you both; but still it is best."

"And, Fred darling, you will not make the trial harder for her by objecting," said Cecilia. "Believe me, dear, Edgar is right. You must trust him."

"Edgar does not know," persisted Frederica. "Selina cannot go alone. It would break her heart. Selina alone! without me or mama—"

Frederica was determined she would not cry, and she stopped suddenly. Edgar was very gentle with her, but he was very firm also, and when he forbade her or Tessie alluding to the subject in Selina's presence till he should give them leave, Frederica rose and walked out of the room, carrying her head very highland with a look on her face that made Cecilia regard her brother anxiously as the door closed upon her. Edgar smiled reassuringly. He was surprised, but he was amused also, Tessie could see as she rose to follow her sister. He looked grave enough in a moment.

The case stood thus. Selina was not looking well, and the change was necessary for her, but that was not all. It was of the utmost importance that she should be strong and cheerful just now, because the time had come when her brother hoped to get the opinion of a friend of his, a celebrated oculist who resided in a German city, as to the state of her eyes, and the possibility of something being done to restore to her some measure of sight. The prospect of success was not so assured as to make it wise to say anything about his plans and wishes to his sisters. The suspense would not be good for them, and the trial of remaining behind would be all the greater to Frederica, should she be made aware that her sister might have doubt and anxiety, and perhaps pain and disappointment, to undergo alone. Her being with her sister at such a time would not be good for either of them, he thought; and should his brotherly influence fail, her guardian's authority must be exercised over Frederica.

"But Colonel Bentham's authority will not be needed. Fred will think better of it; and be reasonable."

But Cecilia was not so sure. "You give her no reasons," said she. And then she went on to repeat some instances of Frederica's wilfulness in the old days, of which their sister Caroline had told her, how she used to rule the household, and set Madame Ascot at defiance. Some of these it was not easy to believe, in view of Frederica's almost uniform gentleness and sweetness since they had known her, but they were doubtless quite true; and remembering her face and air as she walked out of the room, some trouble with her seemed not impossible.

"But all the same she must yield," said her brother.

But it was not the wilful little Fred of the old days that had walked out of the room with her head held high and haughtily. She was as angry and indignant as ever the Fred of those days could have been, so angry that she utterly forgot for the moment how dear was the love that had grown up during the last year between her and her brother, or how perfect the confidence she had had in his affection and wisdom until now. She was so angry that she would not let the tears come even when she was alone; and when Tessie ran in upon her, exclaiming indignantly about their brother's unkindness, Frederica sat with a face that changed from red to white and from white to red every moment, but she did not utter a word. As she listened to her sister, she grew less angry and more unhappy, for there was an echo of triumph mingling with Tessie's indignation, that smote painfully on Frederica's heart.

"I have been wondering for a long time when all this was to come to an end—your 'docility and humility,' your 'sweet bright gentleness,' as your friend Captain Clare calls it. Oh, yes, I have been expecting it. It is all very well within reasonable limits, obedience and submission, and all that; but Edgar has not a particle of authority over us, and you can wind Colonel Bentham round your finger, as you used to do with Mr St. Cyr. It is just as well to make a stand about Selina as anything. It must have come some time, and now we shall have the pleasant old days back again." And so on. Yes, she grew very unhappy as she listened. Were the old times coming back again?—the times when she did not know where to turn to find a friend when anxiety for her little brothers and Tessie made her heart-sick. Obedience! submission! She had not been conscious of any such thing all this time. She had felt so safe, so comforted, so at home with her brother and sister. They had no authority certainly. But would it be a wise or happy thing to take even the smallest of these affairs out of their hands into her own?

If only Edgar would be reasonable about Selina! No, she could not part from her. She could bear it for herself; but what could Selina do without her?

"I cannot, cannot let her go."

Tessie's voice startled her again. She was laughing merrily.

"I declare, Fred, I could quite have fancied myself at home again. I had forgotten how *grand* you could be;" and she threw back her head with an air, and marched to the door as her sister had done. "You quite frightened Cecilia, I could see. As for Edgar, I think he was laughing a little. He cannot be harder to overcome than Madame Ascot. This 'turning the other cheek' is all very well to talk about; but Edgar has no real authority over us, and if you are firm now, Fred, we shall have it all our own way."

Did she want to have it all her own way? Had Edgar no authority over them? Would her father have said that? And without him what was to be done with the brothers or with Tessie, should she grow wilful, as she used to be? And as to "the other cheek"! Had Edgar smitten her on the one cheek? Was she right in resenting what he had planned and what he had said to her? And now here was Tessie laughing and delighted at her anger and her pride. Poor Fred! The very foundations seemed to be removing. The tears she had kept back with such difficulty flowed freely; but all this time she had never uttered a word.

"I thought it was all over and at an end, my foolish anger and pride and disobedience, and now, at the very first word of opposition, I am as bad as ever. Oh! if it were anything else, I would give up, and not mind! Hush, Tessie," she said aloud, "you do not understand. No, you are not to speak to Selina. I must think about it first. Edgar never was unkind before. Perhaps to-morrow he may change his plans."

To-morrow found Frederica not at all well; a restless night had given her a headache; and when she did not appear at breakfast, Edgar went up to see her, only half convinced that real illness was keeping her in her room. She was ill certainly, and very silent, but she was not angry any longer. Selina was with her, and Edgar knew in a moment that nothing had been said between them with regard to the coming separation. He was very gentle and kind, but Fred could not look up and meet his eye, because she had not fought out the battle with herself yet. She had got so far as to acknowledge that it was very ungrateful in her to act and speak as though Edgar had no right to interfere in their affairs, after all his kindness to them. Every hour she had felt more deeply how dearly she loved him, and how entirely she trusted him, and how terrible a thing it would be for them if their brother were to leave them to their own guidance, as she had yesterday wished him to do.

But she had not been able during the wakeful night to persuade herself that he was right with regard to Selina. She had thought of many things that she would like to say to him about her to make him change his mind; but when she saw his face in the morning, so kind and yet so firm in its expression, she doubted whether her words would avail, and so she did not look up, and scarcely uttered a word. Tessie waited eagerly to hear what might be said, but she heard nothing, and their brother took her and Selina away with him, leaving Frederica to Miss Agnace's care. So she had time to think over her trouble, and the longer she thought the more clearly she saw how foolish had been her anger, and how wrong her example to Tessie.

Still she could not yield the point in question. Edgar could not know as well as she what was best for Selina. It would be like forsaking her sister, were she to consent to his plan. It would be breaking her promise to her mother, that Selina should always be considered before herself. She could not do it.

And yet something made her feel sure that she must do as her brother wished, and feeling confidence in his love and in his wisdom, she thought if it had been anything else she would have yielded to him so gladly. But she lay and

turned about restless and feverish, more unhappy than she had ever been since the days of her illness after her father went away. Miss Agnace came in and went out softly, saying little, but very gentle and kind.

"Is it something that you cannot tell to your best friend?" she said at last, as she bathed her hot brow with cool water, and smoothed the hair that lay in confusion on the pillow.

Frederica gave her a quick look. She longed to ask her about her brother's plans, but it would not be right to do so. And besides, Miss Agnace might not know, and might not tell her if she did.

"After all He has brought you through to these happy days, you are surely not forgetting to bring your trouble to Him, are you?"

It was not just the way Miss Agnace was wont to speak; but even Miss Agnace was beginning to see things differently, in the new light that was shining on them, and for a minute Frederica forgot her own trouble, looking at her wistfully.

"Are you glad to be here, Miss Agnace? Are you happy here?" said she. "Will you never go away from us any more?"

"Oh! as to going away—no, while my young lady needs me," said Miss Agnace.

"Not even if Father Jerome said you must?"

The name had not been mentioned for a long time between them. An odd look came over Miss Agnace's face.

"He will not say it," said she.

"Did he wish you to come? I am very glad you came; but was he not afraid to let you come? Was it for our sakes?" said Frederica, wishing to get away from her own troubled thoughts, and speaking very much at random.

"My dear, Father Jerome loved you, though you doubted it, and he wished you well always, though perhaps he made mistakes," said Miss Agnace; "but you are to rest, and not think of anything to vex you, and I will leave you for a little while."

But though Miss Agnace went, Frederica's troubled thoughts stayed with her, and she said to herself she must find courage to write to Colonel Bentham, and ask him to interfere between her and her brother. Could she ask it? would it do? oh! how helpless and miserable she felt! Suddenly there came into her mind Miss Agnace's question: "Is it then anything you cannot carry to your best Friend?—to Him who has brought you through all to such happy days?"

Had she brought it to Him? Could she bring it? Not her anger, and her pride, and her determination to rebel—to have her own way; but her trouble—her fear for Selina being far away and unhappy. If Edgar did not know what would be best for her, surely Jesus did, and He would help them. But then it might not be in her way. They might have to be separated all the same. Frederica cried bitterly as she thought about it; but she did bring her trouble to her Friend, and the bitterness had all gone out of her tears, and out of her heart too, before she fell asleep. When she woke, her brother was looking down upon her with a very grave face. Frederica smiled, though her tears came again.

"I am going to be good," said she, and she took the hand that rested on hers, and carried it to her lips.

"My darling! my precious little sister!" said her brother, moved by her gentleness as her anger could not move him. "It grieves me sorely to have to grieve you; but trust me, Frederica, this once."

"Ah! must you grieve us? I do trust you: I could bear it, but Selina! I do not think I am vain, but I cannot think what she will do without me," she pleaded. "No, I am not going to be naughty, and I do trust you—"

Edgar soothed her with his touch and his voice. He was very gentle with her.

"If I were sure—"

"But, darling, if you were sure, there would be no need to trust me. And our Elder Brother—do you think He will forget Selina and you?"

"Oh, no," said Fred, but her tears fell fast. He was very tender with her, and firm too, telling her that he depended on her to make the parting easy to her sister, saying it would only be for a little while, and in the meantime she could not be very unhappy, having many and pleasant duties, and a willing mind. And then there was Tessie, who needed her more even than Selina. And Frederica's conscience told her that Tessie had been none the better for her influence for the last two days at least.

"I will try and be good," she said, and her brother could not but wonder at her gentleness; and as he went out he said softly to himself, "Except ye become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."

In one sense Frederica's trouble was over now. Her anger was over, and her rebellion; and in trying to speak cheerfully of their separation, for Selina's sake, she did much to strengthen herself for the trial. Selina was startled and grieved at the thought of going away from her sisters, but she was gentle and yielding, as she always had been, and never doubted that their brother was wise and right in the plans he had made for them.

So she said "Good-bye," cheerfully enough, and so did the others for that matter; but when she was gone, and Frederica found herself standing looking after the departing carriage, it seemed to her that the feeling of loss and loneliness was more than she could bear.

"And now we shall have our drive in the Park," said Colonel Bentham cheerfully, as though nothing particular had

happened, and Selina's going away was an event of every-day occurrence. But Frederica stood very white and still.

"I am—tired—I think. If Tessie would go without me to-day," said she with difficulty, but she walked very quietly by Captain Clare's side till they came to the drawing-room door. "I think I must—rest for a little while. Will you excuse me to Colonel Bentham?"

She spoke quietly; but when she looked up and met the kind eyes that were looking down on her, she gave a little cry, and ran upstairs into her room, not at all sure that she was not rebellious and angry still. Tessie came in soon, all ready for the drive, and found her sister crying on the bed. She was quite inclined to feel aggrieved at the delay. She went at her sister's entreaty to carry her excuses to Colonel Bentham. Her guardian seemed quite to understand, and they went out without her.

True to her determination to be good, Frederica did not long indulge her tears, and within the hour she came downstairs, and walking sedately into the drawing-room, found Captain Clare waiting for her. Her elaborate cheerfulness was quite as pathetic, he thought, as her grief had been, and so were her fears that her guardian might believe her to be ungrateful for his kindness. Captain Clare laughed at her a little.

"You speak as though you were a child to be punished for being naughty by being put in a corner," said he. "Shall we go and walk? we may meet the carriage, and you can still have your drive."

Frederica hesitated, but only a moment.

"You were reading," said she.

"I was waiting for you, and now we must hasten, for the best of the afternoon is passing."

They did not meet the carriage, though they went a long way round, hoping to do so. Frederica was not sorry: she never forgot that walk home in the twilight. As it grew dark she put her hand into that of her friend, as simply as a little child might have done, and for a while she had most of the talk to herself. She told him more than she had ever told any one before about their mother, and their old home and their way of life; and sometimes he smiled, and sometimes he was deeply touched, as she dwelt with quite unconscious pathos on some of the incidents of those days. Her face clouded as they drew near the house.

"I am almost afraid to go in," said she.

"Lest you should be naughty again? No, you will not," said her friend. "See, I will give you something to prevent it: 'Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.'"

"Thank you," said Frederica, without looking up. "A month is a long time, two months perhaps."

"But it will soon pass, and summer will soon be here, and who knows what summer may bring?"

"And this afternoon has not been so bad," said Frederica.

No time after that was so very bad. Frederica kept herself conscientiously busy for one thing, and she kept Tessie busy also. Their friends made pleasures for them. They had walks with Captain Clare which were always delightful, and drives with their sister Cecilia, and one day they went with them to visit their brothers, whose school was not so very far away, and this they enjoyed wonderfully. Frederica, who had had few letters in the course of her life, took great delight in those of her brother Edgar. Besides bringing good news of her sister's health and happiness, they were full of interest for other reasons, and they never failed to contain just a word or two to remind the sisters at home that all were alike safe in the best keeping.

And better than all other helps towards patience and content was the young girl's trust in Him who had brought them to a safe place. On Him she was learning to rest more lovingly every day. She suffered a good deal at first; but peace came and stayed, not quite the perfect peace promised to them whose trust is entire and full, but even that came later.

Tessie watched her sister narrowly, and expressed her opinion of her way of taking it all by little shrugs and laughing protests, in which Frederica sometimes fancied there was a contemptuous echo. But Tessie was subdued at last by her sister's never-failing gentleness and sweetness, and showed it by devotion to her duties, and by deference to her sister's wishes in little things.

The time of Selina's absence extended beyond what was first planned. But this was not so great a trial as it seemed beforehand. Spring passed into summer before a word was said of their going home, and the time came to leave hot and dusty London, and to return to Eastwood Park again, and the sisters went gladly, though they had no thought of the joyful surprise awaiting them there.

Chapter Twenty Two.

If Eastwood had been beautiful to the eyes of the sisters when seen under Christmas skies, what was it now in the prime of summer? The pony carriage awaited them at the station, and in it they drove to the Park the nearest way through the loveliest lanes, in the hedges of which Tessie counted nearly a score of different green growing things besides honeysuckle and foxgloves and bluebells and many a flower that she could not name. How wide and still the Park was, with only green grass and great trees to see at first, and by-and-by shrubbery, and then flowers, and then the house itself came in sight. There were open doors and windows, and people coming and going over the lawn, and Grandmamma Bentham sitting in a garden chair, in full sight of the gate.

Some one was coming to meet them, as the carriage stopped at the east gate, and they came in. Some one! There were many people. Colonel Bentham was there, and Captain Clare, and Everard, and their brothers Charlie and Hubert. But "some one" was Selina, not led by Miss Agnace, as might have seemed natural, not led by any one, though Everard Bentham walked at a little distance from her, regarding her with the strangest wondering smile upon his face. Their brother Edgar was there too, a little in advance of the rest. But Selina walked alone, and came forward to them, holding her hand a little out before her, as she always used to do, walking softly and slowly to the very gate, for Frederica stood still and waited. Tessie waited too a moment, and then sprang forward with a cry.

"Selina! Do you see me? Oh! Fred. Oh! mama! mama?"

And then she clasped and kissed her, clinging to her, and sobbing wildly, moved as no one had ever seen the sharp little Tessie moved before.

"Gently, Tessie love," said her guardian, putting his arms about her, and drawing her aside from the rest. Frederica stood still and white at the gate, so still and white that her brother Edgar drawing near looked anxiously at her. But she only looked at Selina, who paused at a little distance.

"Frederica," she said, "I can see you."

Then Frederica awoke out of her dream; but before she sprang forward to clasp her sister, she turned and kissed the hand her brother had laid on her shoulder. She did not cry out as Tessie had done, nor speak a word, but she held her sister's hand firmly as they walked towards the house, looking at her with eyes in which the wonder hardly left room for the pleasure to appear.

The meeting had not happened just as their elder brother had desired and planned. He had meant to prepare his sisters for the happy change in Selina, but perhaps it happened just as well. They were left very much to themselves for the rest of the day; and as their way was at such times, they talked in their mother tongue fast and eagerly. That is, Tessie and the little brothers talked, and Selina also, who had much to tell them, though she told it in few words. The beginning and the end of all was her brother Edgar's kindness to her during the time she had been away.

As to how it all came about—how through the wonderful skill, and unfailing gentle care of her brother's friend, and of her brother as well, the blessed gift of sight was restored to her, need not be told here. The sweet blue eyes looked just as they had always looked, but there was light in them now. Her face was changed. It was not so peaceful and serene—it could hardly be brighter than it used to be. But it had an expectant look, and its expression varied every moment. Her constant movements towards this and that, in her attempts at a nearer acquaintance with things which she had hitherto only known by touch or by sound, gave her an air of restlessness not at all like Selina, and for a little while Frederica watched her doubtfully. But when Edgar came among them, hushing the eager buzz of talk, and saying gently to Selina that she had seen enough for one day, the old look came back, sweet and serene, and she lay down at his bidding, with closed eyes and a smile on her lips that reassured her sisters. And then Edgar said in response to the brightening of Frederica's face,—

"Yes, it is a new world to her. But she has had the best things all along—the peace and the joy—and she is not going to lose them because she can see. I think you may let yourself be glad for her."

"Yes, I am glad! for her," said Frederica gravely, "very glad, I think; or I shall be glad by-and-by."

"Are you sure you are glad now?" said Captain Clare to her when a few days had passed, and they had in some measure become accustomed to the knowledge that Selina could see; "because I do not think you always look very glad."

"I am glad for Selina, I am glad for us all: But then, you see, I do not quite know what I am going to do with myself and my life now," said she gravely. "I have it all to plan over again, now that Selina will not need me to take care of her."

"You need not be afraid, I think," said her friend. "Your work will come to you; and indeed, your sister needs you as much as ever. She does not seem to be able to do without you."

"She likes to look at me, because I am like mama, she says. She has not forgotten mama all these years since she was a little child. And I am to teach her all I know; and that will not take me long," added she, laughing. "And besides, she has been learning all the time, though not with her eyes. Oh, yes! I am glad!"

In the midst of their rejoicing Mr St. Cyr came to Eastwood Park; and if Frederica had had her choice of all the pleasant things that might happen to them, she would certainly have chosen this. It was almost like being at home again, and having the old times back. Not but that they were all quite content at Eastwood; but their old friend, who had also been their mother's friend, was very welcome and dear. They had some things to say to him that it would not have been easy to say to any one else; and his odd ways with them, sometimes merry and sometimes grave, always old-fashioned and friendly, had a wonderful charm for them all, and even for those who were looking on.

Frederica no longer doubted her joy over her sister when she presented her to Mr St. Cyr. Her tears fell, it is true, in a sudden shower, as she said to him, "If mama had only known!" But her tears were soon dry; and in his society, responding to his quaint ways and speeches, she grew more talkative and merry than ever her English friends had seen her before. She was more like the Fred who used to drive "Jack and Jill," and amuse the children in Miss Robina's orchard, than like the grave little monitress of her brothers and Tessie, inclined to be careful and troubled about many things.

Mr St. Cyr stayed at Eastwood till the summer days began to grow short, and then he went away, not to Canada, but to some mild climate, for another winter, till his health should be more firmly re-established. It was quite as well, for

the peace of mind of the young people, that he should have so decided; for they might have longed to return with him, had he been going home.

If I were to carry my story over the next three years, I should have little more to say than this: they were happy and profitable years for them all. Selina learned all that Frederica could teach her, and some things besides. Sometimes they were in London, and at Christmas times and during the summer they were at beautiful Eastwood. They went through some of the prettiest parts of England with their brothers, to their great delight; and after a time their travels extended beyond England. They saw just what other travellers see, and enjoyed it more than most travellers do, being young and full of life, with no weight of care pressing upon them.

And after their travels were over they began seriously to consider and plan what their life-work was to be, and on which side of the sea it was to be done. Selina still spoke of the blind old people and little children whom she would like to gather into their old home, to care for and to teach. But her plans went farther than these now.

“For surely,” said she, “if we were to tell our people about Jesus and all He has done for them, they would turn to Him rather than to those who bid them look to Mary and the Saints in time of need. It is because they do not know Him that they look to be saved in some other way, and I would like to teach them. It is at home that we ought to be, Miss Agnace, is it not?”

But Miss Agnace had little to say, knowing better than they all that would make it impossible for these young girls to influence directly any one among a people so docile in the hands of their spiritual guides.

“God will prepare your work for you,” said Miss Agnace gravely. “It matters little where it is, so that it is done for Him. We must wait and see.”

Selina’s work came to her in an unexpected way, but by a sure token she knew it to be God-given work when it came. It was no new work. Ever since the happy Christmas-time when the blind girl went softly about the great house at Eastwood, and sat in the sunshine in Grandmamma Bentham’s garden, she had been doing a good work for Everard Bentham. Her influence was exerted quite unconsciously. She did not know how much every gentle word of hers meant to him, how dear she became to him day by day. But when he left his father’s house after that time, it was with a new resolve for the future—to the living of a new life, to a new end. Three years of earnest devotion to the duties of his profession, and to the still higher duties of a Christian gentleman, had placed him on different ground from that which he had occupied in the days when his father had suffered deep anxiety with regard to him. Edgar Vane had always loved him, now he respected and trusted him; and when he found courage to ask Selina to become his wife, neither her guardian nor her brother said him nay. Selina had no doubt then on which side of the sea her work was to lie.

All their friends were surprised when it came to be known that Captain Clare had persuaded Frederica to share a soldier’s fortunes as his wife. Not that it needed much persuasion. For though he was older and graver than she, one who might be thought little likely to take a young girl’s fancy, Frederica knew his worth, and had long loved him, first as her brother’s friend, and then as her own. Her husband took her to Canada for a time, where his regiment was stationed, and Tessie accompanied them. Selina and her husband also went with them for a summer holiday.

And so Selina saw her old home, as Edgar had foretold. It was she who, through the lifting morning mists, first caught sight of the city roofs and the cathedral towers, and the mountain beyond, beautiful with the level light of the sunrise on them. She saw her old home, and the two graves, and the faces of some people who had only been as names to her in the old days. She saw her home, and for a time she wished she had not seen it, but that she had allowed it still to stand in her memory as the sweetest and loveliest spot on earth, made beautiful in her thought by the remembrance of her mother and of all they had been to each other there.

For the old home was changed. The great warehouses pressed closer and closer upon it. The garden had been encroached upon, and the shadows of great chimneys and workshops darkened the lawn. It was very little like the home she had been remembering so lovely all these years. It was little like home to many of them now.

There were few people that they remembered well. They saw Miss Robina again, but her mother was dead, and so was Mistress Campbell. Madame Precoe was very friendly with them, in her unpleasant way. She smiled, and was polite, and spoke softly to them, but she never allowed them to forget that she believed them to have wandered far from the truth, and that days of darkness awaited them.

Father Jerome did not come to see them, but one day Frederica met him in the street. He had grown very old and bowed, and walked wearily, with his eyes fixed upon the ground, so that he did not see her when she passed. For the moment she was glad, but afterwards she could not forget his face, nor the look it wore,—a look not peaceful, but silent—blank—unresponsive.

Mr St. Cyr was home by this time, and they saw him often. But he would not speak much about his brother.

“He is not happy,” said he; “but that is a small matter. I pray God to give him His peace.”

And these young people, who had only just escaped great suffering and sorrow at his hand, remembering all the way by which they had been led and guided since then, could only join heartily in the prayer that God’s peace might indeed come upon him, and God’s light as well.

Selina and her husband had only a summer holiday to give to her native country, and they did not linger long in M—. Selina had been glad to come, but she was not sorry to go. On the spot she did not find it easy to identify herself with the little blind child who had lived so happily with her mother there. She seemed to herself to be a different person now. She might have been quite content to remain, if her lot had been cast in her old home, but she returned gladly to the land of her adoption. Miss Agnace returned with her. Whether she asked and obtained leave from those whom

in former days she had vowed to obey, or whether she broke her bonds of her own free will, no one asked her. She is happy in the loving service of one whom she so faithfully cared for when she was in need of care, and happier still in the higher service of a Lord and Master whom she has better learned to know.

Tessie stayed in Canada with her sister Caroline; and when the brothers have thoroughly prepared themselves for the work that awaits them, one or both of them may join her there. They both give fair promise that they mean to do faithfully that which is given them to do.

Frederica's work lies wherever her husband's duty calls him. It is among the women and the little children of the regiment, who need her care; and the same gentle brightness that endeared her to her friends in the old days, makes her a messenger of blessing to many a suffering soul. The message that brought peace to the troubled heart of her mother, when the shadows of the valley of death began to darken around her, has—spoken by Frederica's lips—brought peace to many a troubled heart since then.

This is her work, and her happiness as well, and it does not matter on which side of the sea such work is done.

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