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He that is low no pride,
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide."

BY

JOANNA H. MATHEWS,
AUTHOR OF THE "BESSIE BOOKS" AND THE "FLOWERETS."

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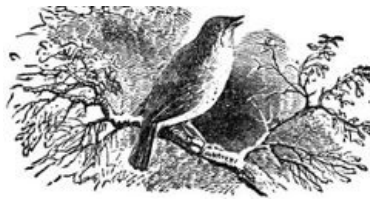
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[6]

JESSIE'S PARROT.

I.

THE NEW SCHOLAR.

FANNY LEROY is going away from our school," said Carrie Ransom one morning to Belle Powers and two or three more of her young schoolmates.

"Oh, dear! I'm sorry," said Belle.

"So am I," said Dora Johnson. "Why is she going?"

"Has she finished her education, and is she never going to school any more?" asked Mabel Walton.

"Why, no," said Belle; "she's nothing but a little girl; and you don't finish your education till you're quite grown up and have long dresses."

"Why is she going away?" asked Lily. "I don't want her to go. I like Fanny."

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"So do I. She's real nice," said Carrie; "but she is going, for all, 'cause her father and mother and all her family are going to Europe and she is going with them."

"I wish she wouldn't," said Belle; and one and another echoed their sorrow at the loss of their schoolmate.

Fanny had always been well liked in the school; but now that they were about to lose her the little girls found that they were even more fond of her than they had supposed, and many regrets were expressed when, a moment later, she came in accompanied by Gracie Howard.

Fanny herself was very melancholy and low, for this was to be the last day at school, as she informed the other children; the journey to Europe having been decided upon rather suddenly, and the departure was to take place within a few days. Nevertheless, although she was sorry to part with her teacher and classmates, and in mortal dread of the voyage, she felt herself rather of a heroine, and entitled to be made much of. [8]

"We'll have an empty place in our school then," said Belle.

"No," said Fanny, "for my cousin Hattie is coming to take my place; it is all arranged, and Miss Ashton says she can come."

"Is she nice?" asked Lily.

"Well—yes," answered Fanny, half doubtfully.

"You don't seem to think she's so *very*," said Belle.

No, Fanny evidently had her own opinion on this subject; but as she was not a child who was ready to speak ill of the absent, she would not say more than she could help. But the interest and curiosity of her schoolmates were aroused, and they could not be satisfied without hearing more.

"I know Hattie," said Gracie Howard, who was more intimate with Fanny and her family than any of the other children,—"I know Hattie, and I like her. She thinks I am very nice. She told me so." [9]

This was plainly the highest of recommendations in Gracie's eyes. Any one who admired her was sure of her favor; but this fact did not have quite as much weight with her companions as it did with herself, and they turned once more to Fanny.

"But tell us, Fanny," said Lily Norris, "why don't you like her so very much?"

Fanny looked, as she felt, uncomfortable at this close question.

"Why," she answered reluctantly, "I do like her; she's my cousin, you know, so I have to; but then—but then—I think I'll let you wait till she comes to find out the kind of girl she is. Maybe you'll like her very much. Gracie does."

Fanny had her own doubts whether Gracie or any of the others would always continue to like Hattie as well as they might do upon a first acquaintance; but she very properly and generously resolved not to tell tales and prejudice the minds of the other children against the new comer. Better to give Hattie all the chance she could and let it be her own fault if she were not popular with her classmates. [10]

I cannot say that Fanny reasoned this out in just such words; but the kind thought was in her mind, and she resolved to hold her peace and say nothing unkind about her cousin. Would Hattie have done as much for her or for any one else? You shall judge for yourself by and by.

The parting with Fanny was rather a sad one, for the children were all fond of her, and she took it so very hardly herself, declaring that she never expected to see any one of them again. For Fanny, though a very good and amiable little girl, was one who was apt to "borrow trouble," as the saying is; that is, she was always worrying herself about misfortunes which would, could, or might happen to herself or her friends.

Therefore she now expressed her expectation of never seeing any of her young friends again, and when Lily very naturally inquired if the family meant to stay "for ever an' ever an' ever," said, "No, but people were very often drowned when they went to Europe in a steamer, and very likely she would be." [11]

Nor was she to be persuaded to take a more cheerful view of the future, even when Dora Johnson suggested that many more people crossed the ocean and returned in safety than were lost upon it. She was determined to dwell upon the possibilities, and even probabilities of her being shipwrecked, and took leave of her schoolmates with a view to such a fate.

"Fanny did not act as if she thought we'd like her cousin Hattie very much, did she?" questioned Nellie Ransom as she walked homeward with Gracie Howard, Dora Johnson, and Laura Middleton.

"No, she did not," said Laura. "Fanny don't tell tales or say unkind things about people, but it was quite plain she does not think so very much of Hattie Leroy." [12]

"I know the reason why," said Gracie.

"What is it?" asked Laura.

"Fanny said something very hateful about me," answered Gracie, "and Hattie told me of it; and just for that Fanny was mad at Hattie."

"Well, I should think Fanny might be mad," said Laura. "Hattie had no right to tell you if Fanny didn't mean her to, and I don't believe she did."

"No," said Gracie, "I don't suppose Fanny did want me to know it; but then she had no business to say it."

"Hattie had no business to repeat it," said Dora indignantly; "if she is that kind of a girl I don't wonder Fanny don't like her, and I wish she was not coming to our school."

"What did Fanny say?" asked Laura, who had her full share of curiosity.

"She said—she-er—she-er—I'm not going to tell you what she said," answered Gracie, who was really ashamed to confess what slight cause for offence Fanny had given, and that it was her own wounded self-love which made it appear so "hateful."

[13]

But although Gracie would not tell her schoolmates, I shall tell you, for I know all about it.

The mighty trouble was just this.

Hattie Leroy had but lately come to live in the city, and just when her parents were looking around for a good school to send her to, Fanny's papa and mamma made up their minds to take her abroad. This left her place vacant in Miss Ashton's class, and, as you have heard, it was at once secured for her little cousin.

Meanwhile Gracie and Hattie, who had met at Fanny's house, had struck up a violent *intimate friendship* and were now much together.

As may be supposed, Hattie was very curious respecting her future teacher and classmates, and asked both Fanny and Gracie many questions about them.

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But, although the accounts given by the two children agreed in most points, yet, in some way, the story told by Gracie left a very different impression from that of Fanny. The latter thought her teacher and classmates very nearly, if not quite, perfect, and bestowed her praise freely and without stint. Well, and if you had heard Gracie's report you might have said that she did the same; but whenever Gracie said one good word for another she said a dozen for herself. One girl was a very bright scholar, but she stood second to Gracie; another was always punctual and steady, but Gracie had still a higher number of marks for these two virtues—or at least if she did not *have* them, she *deserved* them, and it was the fault of some one else that they had not fallen to her share. Nellie Ransom wrote such fine compositions; but then, they were by no means to be compared to Gracie's own,—oh, dear, no! So it was with each and every one; whatever merit any child in the class possessed, Gracie's went beyond it.

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So at last Hattie quite naturally asked Fanny if Gracie were really the best child, the finest scholar, and the most admired and praised of all her classmates.

"Why, no," answered Fanny; "Gracie is a very good scholar, and 'most always knows her lessons perfectly; but Nellie is even better than she is, and has kept the head of the spelling and history classes ever so long. And she generally writes the best compositions; but Gracie don't think so, and always says Miss Ashton is unjust if she gives Nellie the highest marks. But Gracie *is* very smart, and can learn quicker than any of the rest of us; and she 'most always behaves well in school too."

"Better than any one else?" asked Hattie.

"No," said Fanny, rather indignantly; "there's lots of the children that are just as good as she is. She's not the best one in the school at all. She's good enough, but not so wonderful."

"She thinks she is," said Hattie.

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"That's nothing," answered Fanny; "people's thinking they are a thing don't make them that thing, you know."

"Then you think Gracie is conceited and thinks a great deal of herself, do you?" asked Hattie.

"Why, yes," answered Fanny, though half reluctantly; "no one could help thinking that, you know."

Fanny expressed herself in this manner more as a way of *excusing* her own opinion of Gracie than as accusing her little playmate.

"Who do you think *is* the best child in all the school?" asked Hattie.

"Well," answered Fanny, after a moment's reflection, "I b'lieve Belle Powers is. At least I think it is the best in her to be as good as she is, for she has to try pretty hard sometimes."

"Why?" asked inquisitive Hattie again.

"Because she has no mother, and she has always been a good deal spoiled by her papa and her old nurse. But I never saw any child who wanted to be good more than Belle, and she tries very much; and we are all very fond of her, and Miss Ashton excuses her things sometimes because she is sorry for her."

[17]

"Don't that make you mad?" said Hattie.

"No," answered Fanny with much energy; "we'd be real mean if we were mad when Belle has no mother. No, indeed; no one could bear to have Belle scolded; we all love her too much."

Now this was seemingly a most innocent conversation; was it not? and one could hardly have supposed that it would have made trouble for poor Fanny as it did.

Gracie and Fanny lived within a few doors of one another, the latter a little nearer to Miss Ashton's house than the former; and Gracie was in the habit of stopping for Fanny on her way to school that they might walk there together.

But one morning a day or two after this, Fanny, standing by the window and watching for her young friend as usual, saw her go by with her maid without so much as turning her head or casting her eye up at the window where she must know Fanny awaited her.

[18]

"It is the queerest thing I ever knew," said Fanny to her father as she walked along by his side a few moments later; "it 'most seems as if Gracie was offended with me to do so; but then she can't be, for I have not done a thing to her. I shall ask her right away, as soon as I am at school."

But Fanny was only just in time to take off her hat and cloak and go to her seat before the bell rang, and so had no opportunity before school to inquire into the cause of Gracie's strange behavior.

There was no need of words, however, to show that Gracie was indeed offended with her, for averted looks and scornful tossings of the head showed that plainly enough. Poor Fanny was hurt and uncomfortable, and vainly tried to imagine what she could have done that offended Gracie so much.

She ran to her as soon as recess gave her liberty to speak.

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"Why, Gracie! what is the matter?" she asked. "Why did you not stop for me this morning?"

"'Cause I did not choose to," answered Gracie shortly.

"Are you mad with me?" asked Fanny, putting a very unnecessary question, for it was quite plain to all beholders that this was Gracie's state of mind.

"Yes, I am; and I have a good right to be too," answered Gracie, her eyes flashing at Fanny.

"What *have* I done?" asked the innocent Fanny.

"You need not pretend you don't know, Miss Hateful," replied Gracie, "nor pretend you haven't a guilty conscience. I've found you out! I'll never be friends with you again."

"You ought to tell Fanny what it is, and let her make it up," said Belle.

"She can't make it up. I've found her out before it was too late. She is a false, treacherous friend," said Gracie, waxing magnificent and severe in her reproaches, as she imagined.

[20]

Poor Fanny, a tender-hearted, sensitive little thing, was overwhelmed by these upbraidings, which she was not conscious of deserving; but neither her entreaties nor those of the other children could draw more than this from Gracie, who turned away from them with an air of great offence, and holding her head very high with insulted dignity.

"Augh!" said Lily Norris, who generally took up the cudgels in defence of any one whom she considered oppressed or injured, and who generally contrived to be quite as cutting and severe in her remarks as the offender had been; "you had better take care, Gracie; some day that nose of yours won't come down again, it is growing so used to sticking itself up at people. If when you're grown up people call you 'stuck-up-nose Miss Howard,' you won't feel very complimented; but you can just remember it is the consequence of your being such a proudy when you was young."

[21]

Gracie made no reply, except by raising both nose and head higher still, which expressive motion Lily answered by saying,—

"Oh, *don't* I feel like giving you a good slap!" with which she walked away, fearing perhaps that she might be too strongly tempted to put her desire into execution.

Fanny was a good deal distressed, and the other children all felt much sympathy for her, for, as you will doubtless do, they thought Gracie's behavior not only unkind but also unjust.

For, although such scenes as this were becoming quite too frequent in consequence of Gracie's ever increasing vanity and conceit, she generally was ready enough to

proclaim the cause of offence; but now she was not only "hateful," as Lily called it, but "mysterious" also, and would give Fanny no opportunity of explaining the supposed grievance.

Fanny went home both unhappy and vexed,—Gracie still carrying matters with a high hand and refusing even to walk on the same side of the street with her—and finding her cousin there, as was quite natural, she told her of the trouble with Gracie. [22]

Had Fanny not been too much disturbed to pay much attention to Hattie's manner, she might have seen that she looked uncomfortable when she told her story, fidgeting and coloring and having so little to say that Fanny thought her wanting in sympathy. But it was not until the next day that she discovered that Hattie was really the cause of the difficulty with Gracie. By that time she had heard that she was to sail for Europe in a few days, and this made her more unwilling than ever to be on bad terms with her young friend.

Meeting Gracie in the street, the poor little grieved heart overflowed, and rushing up to her, Fanny exclaimed, "Oh, Gracie! don't be cross with me any more, for I'm going to Europe, and I expect I'll be drowned in the steamer, and then you'll be sorry you did not make up with me." [23]

This affecting prospect somewhat mollified Gracie's vexation; but still she answered in a tone of strong resentment,—

"Well, then; and why did you say hateful things about me to Hattie?"

"I didn't," said Fanny, who had so little intention of making unkind remarks about Gracie that she had really forgotten her conversation with Hattie. "I didn't. I never said a thing about you."

"Hattie said you did," answered Gracie; "she says you told her I thought myself very wonderful, but I was not; and that 'most all the girls were better scholars than me.'"

"I didn't," said Fanny indignantly.

"And she says," continued Gracie, "that you said 'cause I thought myself good did not make me good, and that Nellie wrote better compositions than I did. And she says"—this was plainly the first and worst count in Gracie's eyes—"she says you said no one could help knowing I was conceited and stuck up." [24]

This last speech suddenly recalled to Fanny's mind what she *had* said, and she was dismayed; nor could she see how she was to explain it to Gracie.

She was fond of Gracie, who, when her self-conceit did not come in her way, was really a pleasant and lovable child; and, oh! how she did wish she had never allowed Hattie to lead her into that conversation about her schoolmates.

She colored violently and exclaimed,—

"Well, I did say that, but I did not say it in that way, Gracie. I don't quite know how it was, but it did not seem so bad as that when I said it. And Hattie asked me, so I couldn't help saying what I thought; but it wasn't of my own accord and—and—well, you know, Gracie, most all of us do think you think a good deal of yourself—but—oh, dear! it was too mean for Hattie to go and tell you; and somehow I suppose she's made you think it was worse than it was. 'Cause I didn't mean to say any thing hateful about you; but Hattie asked such a lot of questions, and I never thought she'd go and tell; and I'm going away, and I expect I'll never come back, and, oh, dear, it's too mean!" [25]

All this Fanny poured forth in a very distressed and excited manner, finishing by a burst of tears.

Yes, it was indeed "too mean," and Gracie felt that Fanny had been shabbily treated. She had listened to Hattie's tell-tale report with a half-ashamed feeling, knowing that Fanny could never have thought that her words would be repeated; and, although anger and mortification had taken a strong hold upon her heart, she could not help seeing that Fanny had more cause of complaint than she had.

So she put her arm about Fanny's neck, and, with what she considered magnanimous forgiveness, told her not to cry any more and she would "stop being mad."

And when they talked the matter over and Fanny recalled what she *had* said, both of Gracie and of the other children in the class, it could not but be seen that Hattie had exaggerated as well as "told tales," so making mischief and bringing discord between the two little friends. And had Fanny been revengeful, or too proud to overlook Gracie's unkindness and beg her to tell her what had come between them the trouble might have been lasting, and they have parted for a long time with bitterness and resentment rankling in their breasts. [26]

But now there was peace between them once more, though Gracie did still secretly feel some vexation at Fanny for even allowing that she could be wrong, and took great credit to herself for being so forgiving and generous.

And now you will not wonder that Fanny did not feel disposed to think Hattie "so very nice," although she, far more generous and charitable than her cousin, would not tell

tales and prejudice the minds of her future schoolmates against her.

But Gracie hardly thought the less of Hattie for what she had learned of her; for she always liked any one who admired her, and this Hattie professed to do; perhaps she really did so, for, as I have said, Gracie was a pleasant child, and very clever in many things.

[27]



[28]

II.

AN EXCURSION.



LARGE omnibus stood before the door of Miss Ashton's house, and had been waiting there some minutes. This was on a street where a line of omnibuses ran, and every now and then some would-be passenger made for the door of this one, when the driver would turn and say something which plainly disappointed him of his ride, at least in this particular stage.

If such an individual chanced to glance up at the windows of Miss Ashton's house, he saw there a row of little faces in each of the parlor windows; and these same faces brimming over with smiles and dimples at the sight of his discomfiture, and the consciousness that this omnibus had been chartered for their especial pleasure and convenience, and that no mere passer-by had any right or title therein.

[29]

Some people smiled in return to the happy little group, and nodded good-naturedly, as if to say,—

"Oh, yes! it is all right, and we are glad you are going to enjoy yourselves, and hope you will have a very pleasant time;" but one or two looked cross, frowning and shaking their heads or shoulders in a displeased manner, and as if they had no sympathy with any simple pleasure or frolic.

Upon each and all of these did the little observers pass remarks, according to what they believed to be their deserts.

"Look at that man," said Belle Powers, "how very displeased he looks. Just as cross as any thing, because the driver wouldn't let him go in our stage."

"I don't believe he likes children," said Bessie Bradford.

"No," said her sister Maggie, "I think he cannot be one of the happy kind the Bible speaks about, that have their 'quivers full of them,' for which he is to be pitied, and we need not be very severe with him."

[30]

"But can't people like children and be glad they are going to have a nice time, even if they don't have any in their own homes?" asked Carrie Ransom.

"Yes, of course," said Maggie, always ready to find excuses for others; "but then probably that gentleman never had nice times himself when he was a child, and so he does not know how to appreciate them."

Maggie's long words and elegant sentences always settled any doubtful point, and the "cross gentleman," who still stood upon the sidewalk waiting for the next passing omnibus, was now regarded with eyes of sympathy and pity, which were quite lost upon him as he scolded and grumbled at the "fuss that was made nowadays about children's pleasures."

"Chartered for a troop of youngsters," he growled forth to another gentleman, who coming up also opened the door of the omnibus, and would have jumped in.

[31]

Upon which the new-comer drew back, looked up smilingly at the windows of the house, nodded and waved his hand, receiving in return blushes and smiles for himself, with an answering nod or two from some of the least shy of the group.

"He's glad," said Lily; "he is a nice gentleman, and I expect he has lots of little children who love him dearly, and that he tries to give them a good time."

"And so is made happy himself," said Maggie. "There comes Patrick with the shawls and wraps."

And now came Miss Ashton and a couple of lady friends, who had volunteered to go with her and help take care of the little party, bound for an excursion and ramble in the Central Park; and the signal being given for the merry group to take their places in the stage, forth they all fluttered, like so many birds; and amid much laughing and chattering stowed themselves away in the roomy conveyance. [32]

They were all seated, and Patrick, Mrs. Bradford's man, who had been *lent* for the occasion, was mounting to his seat beside the driver, when another gentleman, coming up with a quick step, pulled open the door of the omnibus, and popped in. He was plainly shortsighted, and did not see how matters stood until he was fairly inside and looking about for a seat.

Perhaps, indeed, his hearing taugth him first, for he might almost have thought himself in a nest of sparrows with all that chirping and fluttering. A smothered laugh or two also broke forth as he entered, and he speedily saw that he had no right to a place there.

"Ah! private, I see. Beg your pardon, ladies," he said good-naturedly, and jumped out again, turning with a bow, and "I wish you a pleasant time." Then, as he caught sight of a roguish face and a pair of dancing eyes watching him with a look of recognition, he said,— [33]

"Why, Lily, my dear! Glad to see you. Bound for a frolic? I hope you may enjoy yourself; and your schoolmates as well. A merry day to you, birdies." With which he banged the door and watched them off.

"Who's that gentleman, Lily?" asked more than one voice.

"He is Kitty Raymond's father. His name is Mr. Raymond," answered Lily.

"He is a nice, pleasant gentleman, is he not?" asked Bessie.

"Well, yes, he is very pleasant," said Lily, "but then he is an awful liar."

"Oh-h-h! ah! ah!" broke from one and another of the children at Lily's very plain speaking; and Miss Ashton said reprovingly,—

"Lily, my child! what a very improper expression for you to use, and of one so much older than yourself, too."

"I don't care," said Lily, "it is true, Miss Ashton. I know he tells the most dreadful untrue stories, and that does make him a liar, I know. If children say what is very untrue, people say it is a lie; and when grown-ups say what is not true to children I don't see why they are not liars all the same. And Mr. Raymond don't tell little stories what you would call *fib*s, either, but real big, true *lies*, what Tom calls whoppers. So, though he is pleasant and good-natured, I don't think he is so very nice; and I'm glad he is not my papa." [34]

Miss Ashton hardly knew what to say, for if Lily's accusations were true,—and the child was not apt to accuse any one wrongfully,—her reasoning was quite just, and it was plainly to be seen that in some way her sense of right and truth had been grievously offended. But still she did not wish to have her speak in such an improper way, and she was about to say so again, when Lily broke forth once more with,—

"Miss Ashton, I'll tell you, and you can just judge for yourself. The other day I was spending the afternoon with Kitty, and her little brother wanted to go down stairs with us, and his papa did not want him to go; so he told him that the big black man in the closet in the hall would catch him and put him up the chimney. And it *was a lie!* I say it was a real, true lie," persisted Lily, who was apt to be emphatic in her choice of words, "for Mr. Raymond knew there was no black man there, and he just made it up." [35]

"Was the little boy frightened?" asked Belle.

"Yes, as frightened as any thing, and he really believes there is a black man in that closet; and Willie Raymond, who is six years old, will not go past that closet without some big person. And I did feel not very brave myself when I went past it," confessed Lily, "for all I knew there was no black man there—and if there was, he wouldn't hurt me, the poor, old fellow—and knew it was just a—well, if Miss Ashton says so, I'll call it a *fib*, but I shall *think* it was a lie."

Miss Ashton and the other ladies could hardly help smiling at Lily's tone; and the former felt that the child was so far right that she could scarcely reprove her again for her indignant attack upon this too common form of deceit. [36]

"And Mr. Raymond went and winked at me, just as if he thought *I* thought it was

funny," pursued Lily; "but I thought it was only horrid, and I didn't smile a bit, but looked back at him very solemn. No, I don't like him, and I'm not going to."

"You don't like him because you can't respect him," said Bessie with solemn gravity.

"No, I just don't," answered Lily; "and I'm not going to go and have a respect for a person who tells—who says what is not true, not if they are as big and as old as a mountain."

Lily's resolution was received with general approval; but now, at her suggestion, the subject was changed. There was enough to talk about without taking any unpleasant thing; and how those little tongues did go!

It was a mild, lovely day in the early spring, uncommonly warm for the season,—just the day for an excursion. Modest crocuses, lovely hyacinths and gay tulips were in bloom; the willows were just clothing themselves in their first tender green, and every stream and spring rippled and sparkled and sang as if it were rejoicing in its new life and liberty. [37]

The park was fairly alive with children, who, like our little party, seemed determined to enjoy this bright, spring day to the utmost; but perhaps none were so gleeful and merry as our young friends.

The windows of the omnibus were open, and the little girls had all scrambled upon their knees that they might the better see what was without; and many a grave countenance was won to smiles by the sight of the bright, joyous faces as they rolled past, and the merry peals of laughter which every now and then broke forth from the cumbrous vehicle. And they scattered not only smiles and bright looks wherever they went, but other good things also.

Mabel Walton, who considered it almost impossible to enjoy oneself without a quantity of candies and sugar-plums on hand, had been furnished by her over-indulgent mother with a large supply of these delicacies; nor were most of the others without their share; so that Miss Ashton looked with some dismay upon the treasures which were displayed by one and another, fearing that her little flock might surfeit themselves with too many sweets before the day was over. [38]

However, her mind was soon relieved, at least in a measure. For Mabel having doled out a handful of sugar-plums to each of her companions, Bessie Bradford called out as the carriage rolled slowly up a hilly part of the road,—

"Oh! see that little girl; what a nice face she has. But she looks so pale and sorry. I wish I had some pennies for her; but I will give her some of my sugar-plums. Perhaps she don't have many."

Poor child! she looked as if she had not many loaves of bread, as she ran by the side of the omnibus, holding up her thin hand. A pale, sorrowful little face it was that looked up into those, so rosy and happy, above it; pinched, careworn, and old above its years, with that look so often seen in the faces of the children of the poor. Yet, in spite of her extreme poverty, she was not very ragged or very dirty; and as little Bessie had said, she had "a nice face," an open, straightforward look, a gentle expression, and a clear, honest eye. [39]

As she saw Bessie's hand outstretched, her face brightened, and as the little girl dropped two or three sugar-plums, she stooped hastily to pick them up; but when she raised her head again, the old weary look had come back, deepened now by disappointment.

Just then the driver whipped up his horses and the omnibus rolled on faster, leaving the child looking sadly after it, and making no attempt to pick up the sugar-plums now thrown out freely by all the little girls.

"Why! she looks as if she didn't like sugar-plums," said Belle. [40]

"Impossible!" said Maggie. "There never could be a person so wanting in sense as not to like sugar-plums."

"Maybe that man who lived in a tub did not," said Lily. "Maggie, I was very much interested in that man when you wrote to me about him, and I meant to ask you a little more about him, but I did not think he could be a *wise* man. What was his name?"

"Mr. Diogenes," said Maggie; "and the reason they called the old cross-patch a wise man was because wise men were very scarce in those days. They only had seven in all that country; but when you are as far as I am in Parley's History you will learn all about them."

"I wonder what did make that little girl look so sorry," said Bessie, unable to forget the look of disappointment so plainly visible on the child's face.

"I think, darling," said Miss Ashton, "that she expected pennies when she saw you were about to throw something out, and so was not satisfied with the candies. There was something interesting and sweet in her face." [41]

"Here are some more poor children," said Bessie; "let's drop some sugar-plums to

them and see if they care about them."

There could be no doubt as to the approbation of these new recipients of the bounty of our little friends. At first it was difficult to tell whether the pleasure was most enjoyed by those within the omnibus who scattered with liberal hand, or by the outsiders who gathered the harvest; but as the enthusiasm of these last drew new claimants, and all waxed more and more clamorous, it soon became an annoyance, and Miss Ashton was obliged to put a stop to the shower, which had already received a check, as some of the younger children were becoming frightened.

But Patrick and the driver were forced to threaten the obstreperous crowd, and even to call for the aid of a policeman before they could be scattered, so that this diversion did not end so agreeably. [42]

There was one thing gained, however, in Miss Ashton's opinion; and this was that the greater part of the sugar-plums had been disposed of, without hurt to her young charge.

Not that she objected to sugar-plums altogether. Do not think, my little readers, that she was, as Maggie would have said, so "wanting in sense," as that; but she had been rather appalled by the sight of the numerous tempting looking parcels that were produced, to say nothing of Mabel's over-abundant supply.

Our gay party made the round of the park, stopping for a while at any place of interest, and now and then alighting if they were so inclined. They hung for some time about the paddock where the deer are kept, putting their little hands through the palings and trying to tempt the pretty, gentle creatures to come nearer. But the deer were not to be persuaded and although they watched the children with their mild, soft eyes in a very amiable manner, they held aloof and would not condescend to a closer acquaintance. [43]

The swans were less timid, and, as the children flocked down to the border of the lake with their hands full of crackers and bread, came swimming up, arching their graceful necks, and looking eagerly for the bits with which they were speedily treated. It was enchanting to see them so friendly, and to have them feed from one's very hand.

The old gray arsenal, with its collection of wild animals, was not to be visited until after they had taken their lunch. As they passed the Casino on their way up through the park, Patrick had been left there to make all ready for them; and now they drove back and alighted. Pleasant and mild though the day was, the ground was still too cold and the air too fresh to permit of lunching out of doors; and, although the children entreated that they might be permitted to do so, Miss Ashton was too wise to yield.

The lunch was not quite ready when they reached the Casino, and the children were permitted to wander around and amuse themselves as they pleased for a few moments, provided they did not lose sight of the house, or go beyond call. [44]

Bessie, Lily, and Belle had strolled a short distance away together, and had disappeared from the view of Maggie, Nellie, and Dora, who stood at the head of a short flight of stone steps leading up to the Casino. They had but gone around the other side of the hedge, however, and could not be far off.

Suddenly Lily and Belle came flying back with frightened faces, and rushed breathless and panting to where the other children stood.

Then Belle turned, and exclaimed,—

"Where's Bessie? Didn't Bessie come?"

No Bessie was to be seen, certainly; and Maggie, noticing the startled faces of the other children, took alarm at once for her little sister, and started forward, crying,—

"Where is she? What has happened? Where's my Bessie?"

Before Belle or Lily could speak, Hattie darted from behind the hedge, laughing and mischievous; and, pointing her finger at the crimson faces of the two little ones, cried triumphantly,— [45]

"Oh! didn't I take you in? Didn't I give you a fright, though?"

"What is it? Where's Bessie?" said Maggie again.

Hattie sat down upon the lower step, and doubling herself over and rocking back and forth, said between paroxysms of laughter,—

"Oh, dear! Bessie is round there talking to the old fellow. She's all right. Didn't I play you two geese a nice trick, though? How you did run! I didn't think you could be so taken in. Oh, what fun!"

"What!" exclaimed Lily, indignation taking the place of her alarm, "were you tricking us? Didn't he try to take your hair? Hattie, Hattie! you mean, mean girl! And you told us a real wicked story, too. How dare you do it?" And Lily stamped her foot at Hattie, in a real passion at the trick which had been played upon her. [46]

The effect was different upon Belle. She was a sensitive little thing, easily overcome

by any undue excitement; and, throwing herself upon Maggie, she burst into a violent fit of sobbing and crying.

Miss Ashton and her friends heard and came to inquire into the trouble; and Hattie was now rather frightened herself as she saw the effect of her foolish deceit.

Lily indignantly told the story, which amounted to this. It was a well-known fact, and had unfortunately come to the ears of our little girls, that some man had lately attacked several children, and suddenly severed the hair from their heads, making off as fast as possible after he had done so. He did this for the sake of the hair, which he probably sold; but he was, of course, a bad man and a thief, and the children all felt much dread of him.

So when Hattie had come flying up to Bessie, Belle, and Lily, without any hat, and seemingly in a state of the wildest excitement, and had told them, with every appearance of truth and of being herself excessively frightened, that "that old man there" had snatched off her hat and tried to cut her hair, they had readily believed her—as an old man was really there—and had turned about and run away in great alarm. They had been terrified half out of their senses; and now here was Hattie confessing—yes, glorying, till Miss Ashton came—that she had "tricked" them, that she was "only in fun," it was all "a joke."

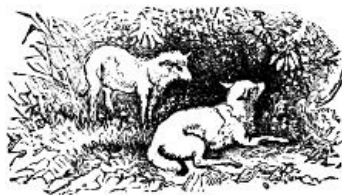
[47]

But her triumph was speedily brought to an end, when Miss Ashton saw Belle's state, and heard how it had been brought about. She sternly reprimanded Hattie, and bade her go into the house, and remain there.

But where was Bessie?

The other children declared that "an old man was really there;" and, in spite of Hattie's confession that she had only been joking, Maggie's mind was filled with visions of her little sister's sunny curls in the hands of a ruffian; and away she flew in search of her, quite regardless of any supposed risk to her own wealth of dark, waving ringlets.

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III.

JESSIE AND HER GRANDFATHER.



HERE was Bessie?

When Lily and Belle turned to run from the figure which Hattie pointed out as that of the man who attacked her, she started with them, quite as much alarmed as the other two; and, if they thought about it at all, they imagined she was close behind them. But she had gone only a few steps when she heard a voice, a weak voice, calling after herself and her companions, and saying,—

"Don't be afraid, little girls; don't run away, little ladies. Couldn't ye stop a minute to help an old man?"

Something in the tones touched the tender little heart of Bessie; and she checked her steps, ready to start again, however, on the shortest notice, and looked back at the old man.

[50]

A very old man he seemed, and a very feeble old man, scarcely able, if he had the will, to run after active little girls, or to do them any harm. His hair was very white, and his face pinched and thin; but he looked kind and gentle, as Bessie saw, even from the distance at which she stood; and her fears died away as she looked at him.

The old man sat upon a bank; and Bessie stood hesitating and watching him, trying to make up her mind to go and ask if he was in trouble. She saw that he had dropped his stick, which had rolled away, and lay on the ground just beyond his reach.

"Would you do an old man a kindness, and give him his stick, little Miss?" he called to her, pointing at the same time to the cane. "Why did ye all run that way? I wouldn't hurt a hair of your heads, more than I would of my own Jessie's."

[51]

This reference to the "hair on their heads" was rather unfortunate, for it startled Bessie again, and brought back the cause for alarm. Was the old man really in trouble, and unable to reach his stick? she thought, or was this only a trap to catch her, and deprive her of her curls?

So she stood still, hesitating; and the old man, as if in despair of receiving any help from her, tried to raise himself a little, and stretched out his trembling hand towards the stick. But it was useless; it lay too far; he could not rise without its aid, and he sank back again, looking more helpless and feeble than before. This was too much for Bessie. She could not bear to see suffering and not try to relieve it; and it seemed to her that it would be cruel and wicked not to lend a helping hand to this poor old creature.

"Please, dear Father in heaven, not to let him hurt me," she whispered softly to herself; and then walked slowly towards the old man, her little heart beating painfully, it must be confessed, in spite of her petition, and the trust that it would be heard.

[52]

Keeping at as great a distance as it would allow, she stooped for the stick, and held it out at arm's length to the owner.

"Now may He that blesses the cup of cold water given in His name reward you," said the old man, as he took it from the timid little hand; "but why are you frightened at me, dear, and why did the other little ones run as if they were scared half out of their lives? When you passed all in the big stage, laughing and so gay, it put a warmth into my heart that hasn't been there for many a day, and I b'lieve it was your own loving, little face that smiled back at me as I waved my hat to you for a blessing on your joy. Why, I wouldn't hurt a living thing; least of all, little girls that always mind me of my Jessie. Though it's different enough that you are from her, my poor lamb," he added in a lower tone, which Bessie could not have heard had she not now drawn nearer to him.

[53]

For with the first words of the old man's speech, all fear had vanished from her mind. He had called down a blessing on her in a name which she knew and loved, and she could not be afraid of him longer. Besides, now that she looked at him more closely and with unprejudiced eyes, she recognized him, and remembered how, as he said, when the stage had passed him with its merry load, he had taken off his hat and feebly cheered and waved to them as they went by.

"Don't you try to cut off little girls' hair?" she could not help asking, in spite of her new confidence.

"I?" answered the old man surprised; "and why would I do that? Ah! I see. Did you take me for *that* fellow? My little lady, they have him fast in jail, as he deserves; but how did you ever think I would do a thing like that?"

"A little girl said you tried to cut hers," answered the child.

"Then that little girl slandered an old man who had never harmed her," he said gravely. "I understand; she's frightened you for her own fun, or whatever it may be. Well, I'm up now,"—he had slowly and painfully raised himself by the help of his cane,— "and I'd better be moving away, or the sight of me after that may spoil your pleasure. It was hard in her to turn you against one who would never have harmed you; but you're a sensible little lady, and a kind, and you'll never be the worse for doing a good turn to an old man."

[54]

"Don't go away," said Bessie, "the other children won't be afraid of you when I tell them Hattie—was—was—mistaken." Bessie feared that Hattie's tale was more than a mistake, but she would not accuse her until she was sure. "They won't want you to go away, poor, lame man."

"Jessie stays so long," he answered, looking about him helplessly. "She sat me here to rest a while, and I think she can't know how long she's been gone."

Before Bessie could speak again, around the hedge came Maggie, who stopped short in amazement at seeing her sister standing talking sociably to the dreaded old man. And with her curls all safe!

[55]

Maggie could hardly believe her own eyes. She went forward more slowly, till Bessie called to her,—

"O Maggie, dear! this old man wouldn't hurt us, or cut our hair for any thing. He likes little girls, and it made him feel badly because we ran away from him, and he is going away now 'cause he thinks we don't like him. Come and tell him not to."

Timid Maggie, feeling very doubtful, but determined to share her sister's risk,

whatever that might be—she had almost forgotten that Hattie had confessed she only wanted to trick them all—drew still nearer, and taking Bessie's hand, gazed up at the old man with eyes in which pity and sympathy began to struggle with her former fear. He looked so poor and feeble and helpless, so little like doing harm to any one.

And now came Dora and Gracie, who had followed Maggie in search of Bessie; and as the little group gathered about the old man, Bessie said,—

[56]

"Where is your Jessie? Can we call her to you?"

"I can't tell, little Miss," he answered. "I've been sitting here more than an hour, I take it. Jessie was so eager about her parrot that she has maybe forgotten how long she's been away. Ah! there she comes now."

As he spoke, a child came running towards them, but seeing the group about her grandfather, paused in amazement at a short distance.

It was the very same little girl to whom they had thrown sugar-plums but an hour since, and who had looked so disappointed. The children recognized her immediately.

"Why! that's the little girl who was not pleased with our sugar-plums," said Bessie. "Is that your Jessie?"

The old man beckoned to her, and she came forward.

"This is my Jessie, Miss," he answered, "and a good girl she is too. I don't know what her old grandfather would do without her. She's given up the dearest thing she had for me, bless her!"

[57]

Jessie was now standing beside her grandfather, blushing and hanging her head at the notice thus drawn upon her.

"What was that?" asked Dora.

"Her parrot, Miss. A splendid parrot that her father, who's now dead and gone, brought her from beyond the seas. You'd think he was a human creature 'most, to hear him talk, and she loved him next to her old grandfather; but she parted with him for my sake."

"Didn't you like him?" asked Bessie.

"Yes, indeed, Miss. I was 'most as fond of the bird as she was herself; but it wasn't to be helped. You see I was sick so long, and the doctor bid me take a medicine that cost a deal of money, to drive the pain out of my bones; and how were we to get it when we'd not enough to buy bread from day to day, or to pay the rent that was due? So she sold her bird, for I can't do a hand's turn of work just yet."

[58]

"That was good of her," said Gracie; "did she get all the money she wanted for him?"

"More than we expected, Miss, for the man that keeps the house here," pointing to the Casino, "gave her ten dollars for him. And he lets her see him every day, and says when the summer is over she may have him back for eight dollars if she can raise it. For Poll draws people to the refreshment place, you see, with his funny ways, and his wonderful talk, and the keeper thinks he'll get two dollars worth out of him before the summer is over. But, Jessie 'll never raise all that money, though I have put by my pride, and let her ask charity here of the folks in the Park."

"And I don't feel that I ought to take it for that, either," said Jessie, as soon as the talkative old man paused for breath, and let her have a chance to speak, "'cause grandfather needs so many things, and the rent will be falling due before long again, so I must save up for straws and ribbon."

[59]

"For what?" asked Bessie, while at the same moment Dora said,—

"Why don't you find some work and earn money that way?"

"For straws and ribbon, Miss," said Jessie, answering Bessie's question first; then turning to Dora, she added,—

"I would work, Miss, and I do, when I have the things. I make little baskets and catchalls, and allumette holders of ribbon and straw and beads, and I sell them wherever I can; but the stock was all gone long ago, and I've no more to begin on."

"But," said Dora, "if people give you money, why don't you take that to buy your materials?"

Jessie shook her head sadly.

"It has taken every cent that's been given to me to buy just bread enough for me and grandfather to eat, Miss," she said; "there was nothing to spare for any thing else, and any way it is an uncertain thing, the selling of the baskets, till the weather is pleasant and warm, and people like to stop. Now, you see, is the time for me to be making them ready; but there's no use in thinking about it, and as for Poll,—"

[60]

Jessie's sigh and filling eyes told of the despair with which she thought of the recovery of her pet.

"I have some money in my charity-box at home," said Maggie eagerly; "I'll give you some to buy straws and ribbon. I have no money with me, but Miss Ashton will lend

me some for such a good purpose, I know, and I'll pay her as soon as we go home. I'll run and ask her."

But there was no need, for there was Miss Ashton come in search of her stray lambs, and in two minutes she had heard the story.

Heard it, but scarcely understood it, for that was difficult with one and another putting in a word, patching it out in various bits; to say nothing of the circumstance that our little girls themselves scarcely understood what they were talking about.

[61]

Jessie and her grandfather—who had nothing to say now that the lady had come, and who stood close to one another, the old man holding his hat in his hand and leaning on his stick—were somewhat confused themselves by the chatter and flutter of the eager little talkers; and when Miss Ashton turned to the latter and began to inquire into his story, his usual flow of words seemed to have failed him.

Miss Ashton spoke to Jessie.

"Grandfather was just telling the little ladies about my Polly, ma'am," she said modestly. "If they'd like to see him he's in the house there. And if you'd like to have him show off he'll talk better for me than for any one else, and I'll go and coax him."

"Oh! can we go and see him?" said Bessie; and Jessie once more saying, yes, and that she would go with them, the little girls ran off, while Miss Ashton remained to hear the old man's story.

It was a sad, but by no means an uncommon one. Jessie's mother had died when she was a baby. Her father, who was mate on a sailing-vessel, had been drowned at sea about two years ago. Until his death, his wages, together with what the old man made at stone-cutting, had supported them all in comfort. And even after that, the grandfather and the child had continued to keep along on what the former earned. Jessie, who was twelve years old, had been to school pretty steadily till a year ago, could "read and write and do up sums," and had also learned to sew.

[62]

But about that time the grandfather had taken a heavy cold, from being thoroughly wet with rain while at his work; and, neglecting to change his clothes, it had settled in all his joints, and a long and painful rheumatic illness followed. All the last summer he had lain bound hand and foot, the pretty trifles which Jessie had learned to make the sole support of the two. But with the winter the sale of her little wares had fallen off, poverty and suffering had increased upon them, and they had gone from bad to worse, till, as he had told the little girls, Jessie had been forced to sell her beloved parrot to keep a roof above their heads, and to buy the medicine so much needed for her grandfather. They had some help from the church at which they attended, but that was little. And now that it was warmer weather, and Jessie could begin to sell her wares, she had no money to buy materials, and he had consented that she should ask charity of passers-by, and so gain a few shillings to begin her trade.

[63]

They lived over there in a sad, tumble-down place, the old man said, "and he never thought to bring his Jessie to that; but the Lord had His own ways, and when He saw fit, He could take them out of this trouble."

The story was told with a straightforward simplicity, and a natural pathos which went far to convince Miss Ashton that it must be true; but she took down the name and address of the clergyman of whom the old man spoke. This gentleman lived in one of the streets bordering on the Park, and Miss Ashton resolved to see him and hear his report before she left for home. If these poor people were really in such need, and deserving of help, she could not let them suffer longer than was necessary.

[64]

She told old Malcolm—for that he said was his name—that he did not do well to rest upon the bank. The ground, she said, was not yet warm enough for his aching bones.

But he answered that it was far better than the damp, cold shanty where he and Jessie had lived for the last two months, for here on a bright day he had the sunshine, and the fresh, clear air, and little of either of these ever found their way into the miserable cabin.

Malcolm's language and manner, as well as those of his grand-daughter, showed that he had indeed been used to "better days;" and he seemed so patient and uncomplaining that Miss Ashton felt much interested in him, and anxious to do something for his relief.

She bade him come farther on, and find a seat upon a pleasant, sunny bench, where she would furnish him and Jessie with some food; but when she said this, he told her some of the little ones of her party were afraid of him, and he did not wish to trouble them.

[65]

He looked troubled himself when he said this; and Miss Ashton had to tell him that one of her young scholars had been so foolish and wrong as to tell a falsehood—she could call it nothing less—to frighten the others; but that they all knew the truth now, and would be afraid of him no longer.



[66]

IV.

THE PARROT.

MEANWHILE the children were amusing themselves with the parrot. The whole flock had followed Jessie to make his acquaintance, Maggie having called the others to join them; and even the still sobbing Belle forgot her troubles in this new object of interest.

The bird proved to be in a most amiable and sociable humor; and, to the great delight of his former little mistress, exhibited himself in a most gratifying manner.

His cage was placed before a little stand just outside of a window opening upon the verandah; and when the children first saw him he was swinging head downwards from one of the bars, hanging by one claw, and appearing to take no notice of any thing until Jessie called to him.

[67]

Then he put out the other claw, and swung himself upright; immediately commencing a kind of dance upon his perch, as if in an ecstasy, and calling out,—

"Jessie! Jessie! pretty Jessie, good Jessie."

"Good Polly," said Jessie, while the children gathered around in great delight. "How are you, Polly?"

"Polly pretty well; Polly all right," answered the bird.

The little girls were astonished, as indeed were the ladies who had accompanied them. Not one among the group but had often seen parrots who would repeat certain set phrases, but this bird actually answered questions, and as if he understood them too.

"What does Polly want?" asked Jessie, delighted at the sensation her pet was producing.

"Polly want a bit of sugar," answered the bird.

[68]

Jessie put her hand into her pocket, and produced one of the sugar-plums the children had thrown to her, and held it up before the parrot's greedy eyes.

"Dance a jig then, and sing a song, Polly," she said.

Polly forthwith commenced a kind of seesaw on his perch, swaying his body back and forth, balancing himself first on one foot, then on the other, in a measured sort of way which he probably supposed to be dancing. At any rate, his audience were contented to accept it as such, and he met with continued applause, until suddenly bringing his gyrations to a close he screamed in a loud, discordant voice,—

"Sugar!"

"Sing then," said Jessie.

In a sharp, cracked, but very distinct voice, and with some resemblance to a tune, the parrot began,—

"Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that"—

[69]

Here he came to an abrupt close, eying the sugar-plum wistfully.

"Sing it," said Jessie; and he began again.

"Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went,
The lamb—sugar—sugar—sugar,"

screamed the creature, amid peals of laughter from the children, who now begged that he might have the coveted reward, which Jessie accordingly gave him.

"He knows it all," she said; "but I can hardly ever make him sing it through."

Poll took the sugar-plum gingerly in one claw, and sat nibbling at it till it was all gone, while the children crowded around him, admiring his gay, bright-colored feathers, and expressing their wonder at his accomplishments and sense.

"Now you must show off some more," said Jessie, when the bird had disposed of his feast. "Polly, where is the naughty child?" [70]

To the intense delight of the children, Poll began to scream and cry exactly like a passionate child, after which he laughed and chuckled with satisfaction at his own performances, then crowed like a rooster, baa-ed like a nanny-goat, barked like a dog, and mewed like a cat. After all this he took up intelligent conversation again.

"Polly's a pr-r-r-etty bird; Polly's a good bird; Polly's a wise bird," he screamed, in all of which his little hearers entirely agreed.

"Who do you love, Polly?" asked Jessie.

"Polly love Jessie; Jessie a good girl," was the answer.

"Where's your master, Polly?"

"Bob Malcolm gone to sea. Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye," screamed the parrot.

"Sing a song of"—began Jessie, and the parrot took up the strain.

"Sing a song of sixpence,
A pocket full of rye"—

Here he came to a stop, nor could he be coaxed to finish the couplet, though Jessie assured the audience that he could, if he chose, sing the first four lines of the old song all through. [71]

However, he condescended to repeat some of his former performances. But it would take too long to tell all the feats of this remarkable bird; and you must not think that these I have related are quite impossible, for I have seen a parrot who could do all that is here described, and more too. The children were so interested and amused that they could scarcely be persuaded to leave him when Patrick announced that their lunch was ready; and Jessie, who was bidden by Miss Ashton to join her grandfather and share the meal provided for him, was begged to keep within call, so that they might return to the entertainment when they had finished their lunch.

While this was going on, Miss Ashton told the story she had heard from old Malcolm, and said that she was so much interested in him and his grandchild, that she would go after lunch and see the clergyman, while the little girls amused themselves for a while under the care of the other ladies. She carried out this purpose, and went on her kind errand, followed by many a hope that she would find the story all correct. [72]

But when the children went back to the parrot they were disappointed, for he proved cross or tired or in a less sociable mood than he had been before, and he very rudely turned his back upon them, and would utter no words save,—

"Hold your tongue! Hold your tongue!" every time any one spoke to him. So, finding this neither polite nor amusing, the company left him and scattered themselves in search of other entertainment.

"How sober you look, Maggie; what are you thinking about?" asked Hattie Leroy, coming up to where Maggie Bradford stood leaning upon a stone railing.

Maggie looked thoughtful, it may be, but hardly sober, for her thoughts seemed pleasant ones, to judge by the light in her eye, and the half smile upon her lip. [73]

"I have an idea," said Maggie, "and I think it's a nice one, at least if we are allowed to do it."

"What is it?" asked Hattie.

"Well," said Maggie, "I don't care to have it talked about very much till we know if we can do it; but I was thinking it would be so nice if we could have a little fair, just ourselves, you know, the school-children and Bessie and me. I know some children who had a fair in their own house, and they made money enough to pay for a bed in St. Luke's Hospital for a poor, lame child; and I thought perhaps we could make enough to buy back Jessie's parrot for her; and to make a more comfortable home for them. We could make things for the fair, and ask our friends to help us. Mamma would make some for us, I know, and so will Aunt Annie, and, I think, Aunt Bessie and Aunt May." [74]

"Where could we have it?" asked Hattie, who seemed much interested.

"In one of our own houses," said Maggie, "or,—that was another thought I had,—perhaps Miss Ashton would be so very good as to let us have it at her house. The piazza would be lovely for it; and she generally lets us have some party-ish kind of a thing when school breaks up. Last year we had a giving of prizes; and at Christmas we had a Christmas festival, and a queen both times."

"Yes," said Hattie, "and Gracie said it was shameful that you were queen both times. She thinks it was very selfish in you."

Maggie colored violently.

"The queen was chosen," she said, "and the girls chose me. I did not make myself queen."

"Well, Gracie did not like it one bit," said Hattie, "and she thinks you had no right to be queen when you did not go to the school the last time."

Maggie was silent, but the gladness was gone from her face.

"Wouldn't it be too cold to have the fair on the piazza?" asked Hattie.

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"Not by the time we are ready," said Maggie. "You know it will take a good while to make enough things, and Miss Ashton does not close the school till the first of June. I heard her tell mamma so the other day. And by that time it will be quite warm and pleasant, and there will be plenty of flowers. I was thinking we could dress the piazza with wreaths and festoons and flags; and we could make some kind of a throne and canopy at one end. And there we could have the flower-table and the queen behind it, with some maids of honor to sell flowers."

If Maggie imagined that Hattie would express any admiration or approval of her plan, she was mistaken. Hattie seemed interested, and asked a great many questions, as to how Maggie would arrange such and such matters, but she did not act as if she thought the "idea" very fine after all, and this was rather different from the way in which Maggie was accustomed to have her plans received. But she did not care for that; she was not a vain child, constantly seeking for admiration, and she was too full of her subject to pay much heed to Hattie's cool way of hearing this one.

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"I'm not going to say much about it till I see if mamma approves," she said. "Then I'll ask Miss Ashton and tell all the children about it. There are Bessie and Lily beckoning to me; let us go and see what they want."

And away she ran, intending to tell her sister and Belle and Lily of her plan on the first convenient opportunity; but not willing, as she had said, to make it public till she learned if it could be carried out. She did not yet feel as if she knew Hattie very well, and she was rather astonished at herself for having talked so freely to her; but the truth was, that Hattie had come upon her rather unawares, and asked her what she was thinking of, at the moment when she was turning her "idea" over in her mind, and she had told her almost without reflection. Still she did not exactly regret having done so, and, after what she had said, never supposed that Hattie would mention what she had told her.

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Upright, honorable Maggie judged others by herself, and was entirely unsuspecting of evil.

It would take too much space in this little book, and you would not care to have a particular description of all the various points of interest visited by our party throughout the day,—the Arsenal with its collection of wild beasts and monkeys; the great reservoir with its blue water, looking like a lake within walls, as indeed it is; the lovely Ramble through which they wandered for a long time, and many another pleasant spot. They are all familiar to many of you, and those to whom they are not, may make acquaintance with them some day.

You may be sure that Miss Ashton did not leave old Malcolm and his grand-daughter without some remembrance of this day, for she was not only very sorry for them and felt that they were really in need of assistance, but she also knew that Jessie and her wonderful bird had added much to the entertainment of her little flock. She gave Jessie money enough to furnish herself with materials to begin her little trade again, and, leaving her address with her, bade her bring some of her pretty toys to her house when they should be made.

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They were all in the omnibus once more, and had started on their homeward way, all rather tired and quiet with the day's ramble, when what was Maggie's astonishment to hear Hattie say,—

"Miss Ashton, Maggie and I have such a very nice plan. We thought we might have a fair, just us children, and ask our friends to help us; and then we could sell the things we made, or that were given to us, and so earn a good deal of money to help Jessie and her grandfather, and to buy back the parrot for her. And we might have it when the weather is warm and pleasant, just before school closes, so that we could have it out of doors; and perhaps, Miss Ashton, you would not mind letting us hold it on your piazza and in the garden. And Jessie might make some of her pretty baskets and things for it, and we could sell them for her. We thought we could raise a good deal

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of money that way, for almost all our friends would be glad to come."

It would be hard to tell whether indignation or surprise was uppermost in Maggie's mind, as she sat utterly speechless and confounded, while Hattie ran on thus, disclosing in this public manner the plans which she had said were to be kept secret until her own mamma and Miss Ashton had heard and approved of them.

Yes, here was Hattie not only doing this, but speaking as if she had been the inventor of the cherished "idea," and as if Maggie had only fallen in with it, perhaps helped it out a little.

Maggie was too shy to speak out as many children would have done, and to say,—

"That was my plan, Miss Ashton. I was the first one to think of that;" and she sat with her color changing, and her eyes fixed wonderingly and reproachfully on Hattie as she spoke, feeling somehow as if she had been wronged, and yet not exactly seeing the way to right herself.

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"Oh! that would be delightful," said Gracie. "Miss Ashton, do you think you could let us do it?"

"Well, I might," said Miss Ashton. "That is not a bad idea, Hattie. I will talk to my mother about it and see what she thinks, and you may all tell your friends at home, and learn if they approve."

"If we could have the fair on your piazza," continued Hattie eagerly, "we could dress it up very prettily with wreaths and flowers, and we could make a kind of a bower at one end, and choose one of the girls for a queen, and let it be her throne-room, and there we could have the flower-table. Some of the children told me you always let them have a festival before vacation, Miss Ashton; and we might put it off till a little later, so that it would be warm and pleasant, and we should have plenty of flowers."

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There was not one of the children who did not raise her voice in favor of the new plan except Nellie Ransom, who sat opposite to Maggie, and who watched her changing face, and looked from her to Hattie with inquiring and rather suspicious looks.

Lily clapped her hands, and almost sprang from her seat.

"I'll begin to work for the fair this very evening!" she said. "No more of your putting off for me. I'll bring down mamma's ribbon-box and worsted-box, if she'll let me, and ask her what I can have, and to-morrow I'll ask her to let me make something."

"And we'll ask mamma and Aunt Annie, won't we, Maggie?" said Bessie; "and Belle, we'll ask them for some things for you too."

Bessie received no answer from Maggie, who, feeling as if the whole matter had been taken out of her hands, poor child, and as if she had been robbed of her property, dared not speak, lest she should burst into tears.

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"I have a whole lot of money saved up," said Lily, "and I'll take some of it to buy what I want to make pretty things, and keep the rest to spend at the fair."

"Haven't you to pay your missionary money to our box yet?" asked Bessie.

"Well, I haven't paid it yet," said Lily, "but I don't know if I will give a dollar this year. I've supported the heathen for two years now, and I think I'd like a little change of charity. Wouldn't you, Maggie?"

Maggie only nodded assent, scarce knowing what question she was replying to.

"Maggie," said Belle, "you don't seem very interested; why don't you talk about the fair and give us new ideas, as you 'most always do?"

"Does something provoke you or trouble you, Maggie, dear?" asked Bessie, looking into her sister's perplexed face.

"Hattie," said Nellie suddenly, fixing her eyes searchingly on the little girl she addressed, "what put that idea of the fair into your head?"

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"Oh!" answered Hattie in some confusion, "I—that is, we, Maggie and I, just thought it would be nice, and so we talked about it a little, and made up our minds to ask Miss Ashton about it."

Quick-witted Lily caught Nellie's suspicion, and so did Bessie; and the former, who had worn an air of displeasure with Hattie ever since the affair of the morning, asked promptly,—

"Who was the *first* to make up that idea,—the fair and the queen in the flower bower, and dressing the piazza and all? Who was it, I say?"

"Well," answered Hattie reluctantly, "Maggie was the first to think about it, and we talked it over together and arranged it all."

"I knew it!" cried Lily triumphantly; "I just knew it was Maggie. It sounds just like her making up. Hattie," she added reproachfully, "you tried to make us think it was yours."

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"I didn't," said Hattie. "I never said so."

"You didn't just *say so*," said Bessie solemnly, "but you tried to give that *depression*."

"I didn't," pouted Hattie again; "and we did talk about it together, didn't we, Maggie?"

Maggie only gave a faint smile by way of answer, for she felt that she could not honestly allow that Hattie had suggested one single idea; and still she was too generous to wish to blame her more than she could avoid.

And for the second time that day was Hattie made to feel that her want of strict truthfulness had lowered her in the eyes of her young companions.

"Umph!" said Lily severely; "appears to me, Miss Hattie"—

But she was not allowed to finish the intended reproach, for Miss Ashton, seeing symptoms of a quarrel, hastened to avert it, and gently bade Lily be quiet.

Lily obeyed; but her eye still rested sternly upon Hattie, and the latter was forced to bear more than one disapproving gaze during the remainder of the drive home. [85]

"I am afraid," said Miss Ashton to her mother that evening, "that Hattie Leroy is by no means a truthful child;" and she told of the occurrences of the day, adding that it was not the first time she had noticed a want of openness and uprightness, little acted deceits, a keeping back of the whole truth, and even, now and then a deliberate falsehood; and more than all, a manner of repeating a thing which gave it a very different meaning from what the speaker intended, so often making mischief and discomfort.

"That is bad, very bad," said Mrs. Ashton; "it may affect the other children."

"I would rather hope that they may have a good influence on her," answered her daughter. "The standard of truth is so high in our school, thanks, I believe, to dear little Bessie Bradford, Maggie, Belle, and one or two others, that any departure from it is considered a very serious offence. Lily, with all her thoughtlessness and love of mischief, is strictly truthful; so are Dora and Nellie. Gracie is the only one for whom I fear, for, although I think she would be shocked at the idea of telling a deliberate untruth, her conceit and wish to be first are so great that they often lead her to exaggerate and give a false coloring to what she says of herself as compared with others." [86]



V.

GRANDMAMMA HOWARD.



HE proposal for the fair met with a pretty general approval from the parents and friends of the little girls, and they received many promises of help.

"Aunt Annie" undertook to show Maggie, Bessie, and Belle how to make any pretty articles they might wish to undertake. Lily's mamma did the same for her, and none of the children were left entirely without assistance.

When Jessie came to Miss Ashton with her pretty little wares, she was told what was proposed, and bidden to have as large a supply as possible, so that they might be offered for sale with the other articles; and the lady and some of her friends kindly bought so many of those already on hand that Jessie was furnished with the means of procuring her materials at once. [88]

The older class in Mrs. Ashton's room also entered with spirit into the affair,

promising all the assistance that they could give, so that there was good prospect it would be a success. The time fixed was the first day of June, if the weather should be pleasant; if not, the first fair day after that.

One morning Gracie Howard came to school in a state of great excitement.

"My grandmamma," she said to the other children, "takes the greatest interest in our fair, and she is going to give us ever so many things for it. She told me to invite you all to come to her house this afternoon, and she has a whole lot of pieces of silk and ribbons, and worsteds and beads, and ever so many lovely things to divide among us. And what is better still, she says she would like each child to make some article expressly for her, and she will buy it."

"Oh, delightful!" "How kind! how nice!" "What a great help!" came from one and another of her little hearers. [89]

"And," continued Gracie, warming with her subject, "she wants some particular things. Two toilet sets of lace and muslin, one lined and trimmed with blue, the other with pink; and two mats for flower vases, to be exactly alike. I am going to do one of the mats, and grandmamma says she thinks the other one and both the toilet sets had better be made by some of us older children, because she thinks the little ones can scarcely do them. And she will give ten dollars for the mat that is worked the most nicely and evenly, and nine for the other; eight for the best toilet set, and seven for the second; and she will give us all the materials. Just think of that! Why, whoever has the best mat will earn more than the price of Jessie's parrot! I wanted grandmamma to say that one might have the buying of the parrot for her own part; but she said that would not be just to the rest who had a share in the fair; and that she had no right to say so, either. I don't see why, and I think she might have let me." [90]

"Why, you don't know that you will have the nicest mat," said Lily.

"See if I don't then," said Gracie. "I can work much better than any of you, I know."

"If I didn't live in such a very glass house myself, I'd say *petticoat* to you," said Lily, who had lately shown a fancy for the use of proverbs, after the manner of Maggie Bradford.

Gracie tossed her head, and put on the expression which children call, "turning up their noses."

She knew very well what Lily meant, how not long since she had boasted of herself, and been so very sure that she would outdo all others, and how she had miserably failed in the end.

But, in spite of this consciousness, she was not at all taken down by Lily's reminder, for she felt herself a person of more than usual consideration and importance that morning; not without more than ordinary reason, was thought by most of her companions, for it was really a fine thing to have such a munificent grandmamma, who was ready to do so much for the grand object at present in the minds of each and every one. [91]

It was true also, and well known in the school that Gracie did worsted work remarkably well and evenly for a little girl, and that there was more reason than common for her belief that she should outshine all the others. Still her constant boasting was never agreeable, and Lily always would set herself to combat it with all her might.

"Are not Maggie and Bessie to try with us too?" she asked.

"Of course," answered Gracie; "they are just as much in the fair as we are; and Maggie works so nicely."

"Should think she did," said Lily; "better than *a-ny-child-in-the-whole-world*."

The extreme deliberation with which this was said, made it very forcible, and gave the remark all the point which was intended. Woe to the person who, in Lily's hearing, ventured to deny that her particular friends, Maggie and Bessie Bradford, were not all that was wisest, best, and prettiest. [92]

"Besides," said Belle, "Bessie was the first to find out Jessie and her grandfather, so it seems as if it was very much her charity and Maggie's. Good-morning, dear Miss Ashton;" and little Belle flew to meet her teacher, whom she dearly loved, and began to tell her of this new and delightful arrangement.

But she had hardly commenced when she checked herself, and saying,—

"But it is Gracie's to tell about, and I expect she would like to," turned to her schoolmate, and allowed her, nothing loath, to take up the tale.

Miss Ashton approved, and readily consented to what was proposed; but she was sorry to see that, as usual, Gracie took the chief credit, and claimed the first place for herself in the new plan; seeming, as before, not to have the slightest doubt that her work would be the best, and bring the highest premium. However, she would say nothing now to damp the general pleasure and enthusiasm, but called her young flock to the business of the day without reproof or remonstrance. [93]

On the way home from school, Gracie called to invite Maggie and Bessie to her grandmamma's house that afternoon; and at the appointed hour the whole "committee," as Maggie called it, were assembled in the drawing-room of the kind old lady.

"Now," said Mrs. Howard, "we will settle first who among you are to take these pieces of work. Gracie seemed to think that all who were able to work nicely would prefer worsted work, so I have here two pairs of mats, as well as the toilet sets; and you may decide for yourselves which you will take. As for the younger ones, I will leave it to them to choose the things they will make for me, as each one knows what she is best able to do."

Gracie looked dismayed and displeased at the first part of her grandmother's speech; and, not daring to object aloud, she whispered to Hattie, who stood next her,—

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"It's too bad! There grandmamma goes and gives three chances against me."

"Never mind, you'll have the first," answered Hattie; "you know you work better than any of the others."

"How many of you," continued the old lady, "are able to do worsted work nicely?"

"I can, grandmamma, *very* nicely," said Gracie promptly, while the others, more modest and shy, looked from one to another.

"Maggie Bradford works very nicely, ma'am," said Nellie Ransom.

"And so do you too, my dear, if I'm not mistaken," said Mrs. Howard. "Would you like to do one of the mats?"

"If you please, ma'am," said Nellie, and stepping up, Mrs. Howard gave her her choice among the mats.

"Ah! you have made the same choice as Gracie," said the old lady. "Well, we shall see who will do the best. Gracie, take the mat, my dear. Now for the other pair. Maggie, will you have one?"

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But Maggie held back a little; and at length, with many blushes said, that she would prefer to take one of the toilet sets, because Bessie was anxious to help her, and she could do some of the easy sewing on the ruffles, but she could not do worsted work evenly enough to go with her own.

Dora took one of the second pair of mats; and Hattie, who was next in age, and who knew very little about embroidering, chose the other toilet set, as she believed she could do that better than the mat.

Maggie looked wishfully at this, and Mrs. Howard saw the look.

"Would you like to take this also, Maggie, dear?" she said. "You deserve some reward for being so unselfish, and if it is not too much for you to undertake, you are quite welcome to try it."

"Oh no, ma'am!" said Maggie with brightening eyes; "we have nearly seven weeks, you know, and with Bessie's help, and Aunt Annie to arrange all the work for me, I think I could do both. But I don't care for a reward, Mrs. Howard, for you know if Jessie and her grandfather have the money, it does not make much difference who does the most."

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"No, truly," said Mrs. Howard; "and it is not that you may strive to outdo one another that I make these offers, but only that you may all try your best to have the work well done. I am an old-fashioned woman, my dears, and I like to see every little girl brought up to use her needle properly, and to keep her things in order; so I say that it is not so much the beauty of the work, as the care and neatness with which it is done that I shall look at. Keep it from spot or stain, or from being frayed or rubbed; this you can all do with proper care."

Then Mrs. Howard repeated how much she would give for each article, promising also once more to buy some pretty trifle from each of the younger children; and they all felt as if a large sum was already secure for Jessie and her grandfather.

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After this, the treasures of lace, muslin, ribbons, flowers, beads, and worsteds of all colors were displayed to their delighted eyes, and divided with as much fairness as was possible. Not a child but carried home with her a most precious package, already in the eyes of the little ones transformed into many an article of use and beauty for the benefit of old Malcolm and his grandchild. The fair was now the all-absorbing subject of thought and conversation among Miss Ashton's young scholars and their little friends, Maggie and Bessie Bradford; and a fit of uncommon industry had seized upon each and every one.

But, one morning, only two days after the meeting of the young people at her house, Mrs. Howard was surprised to hear that Maggie Bradford wanted to see her; and ordering her to be shown in, the little girl entered, followed by her sister and nurse.



Maggie looked flushed and uncomfortable, and held a small parcel in her hand; but, after she had said good-morning to Mrs. Howard a fit of shyness came over her, and she could not tell her errand.

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So Bessie spoke for her.

"Mrs. Howard," said the little girl, who was herself rather confused, but who felt bound to help Maggie out of her trouble, "Maggie has come to bring you back the mat. She thinks it is rather better for her not to do it."

"Did you find you had undertaken too much, Maggie, my dear?" asked the old lady encouragingly.

"N-n-no, ma'am," whispered Maggie, plucking up a few crumbs of courage as she heard the kind tone, "no, it was not that; but we thought I'd better bring it back to you."

"But you must have some reason," said Mrs. Howard. "Can you not tell me what it is? Has Gracie been saying any thing unkind to you?"

"Gracie has not said any thing to me about it, ma'am," said Maggie rather evasively.

"Please don't ask us, Mrs. Howard," said Bessie gravely. "Maggie and I overturned our minds about it, and thought we'd better bring back the mat; but we do not want to tell tales."

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"Then I shall not ask," said Mrs. Howard; but from the very fact that Bessie had innocently begged that they might not be pressed to "tell tales," she felt that her suspicions were tolerably correct. Gracie's desire to be *first*, and the fear that others should excel, or even equal her, were becoming so great that they often blinded her to what was just and kind.

"There are plenty of pretty things that we can make, Mrs. Howard," said Maggie, "and I would rather not do any thing that any one might think was not my share."

"Very well, dear, as you please," answered the old lady; "but since you do not choose to make this I shall not give it to any one else."

When Maggie and Bessie had gone, the old lady put on her bonnet and went around to her son's house, where she found her little grand-daughter at home.

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"Gracie," she said, after a little talk, "Maggie Bradford came to see me just now, bringing back the mat which she was to have worked for the fair. Do you know any reason why she should have done so?"

"Why, no, grandmamma!" answered Gracie, turning her eyes upon her grandmother

in unfeigned and unmistakable surprise, which left no doubt of the perfect truth of her answer.

"Think," said the old lady, believing that she might have forgotten. "You know you were not pleased that I should give Maggie the two things to make for me; have you said any thing that could hurt her feelings, and show her that you were displeased?"

"I never said one word to Maggie about the mat, grandmamma," said Gracie, "and I can't see how"—she paused, as if struck by some sudden thought, and coloring, added uneasily—"I did talk to Hattie about it, and I was rather provoked, because I did not see why Maggie should have a better chance than the rest to make so much for the fair. And—and—perhaps Hattie went and told Maggie; but it was real mean of her if she did; and besides there was nothing for Maggie to be so mad at, and make such a fuss about."

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"Maggie was not 'mad,' as you call it, Gracie; so far from it that she would say nothing to throw blame upon you or any one else," said her grandmother; "but it was plain that she had been vexed and hurt."

"Gracie," said her mother who sat by, "it would be a sad thing if *you* should show yourself so wanting in feeling and gratitude as to say unkind things of Maggie, or to injure her in any way, especially in such a matter as this."

"Well, mamma, and I'm sure I wouldn't," said Gracie, with a little pout. "I am very fond of Maggie, and I wouldn't do a thing to her; but I did feel rather provoked about the mat, only I did not mean her to know it. I'm just going to ask Hattie if she told her what I said."

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Gracie was really uncomfortable. She remembered that she had in a moment of pettishness, made one or two remarks to Hattie which she would not have cared to make in Maggie's hearing; but she would not willingly have offended the latter. She knew very well to what her mother referred when she spoke of Maggie. How a year ago when a prize had been offered for composition by Miss Ashton's uncle, she and Maggie had been believed to stand far ahead of the rest; how her own composition, all ready for presentation, had been lost, and that through her own inordinate vanity; how Maggie and Bessie had found it, and like the honorable little girls they were, had brought it at once to her, although they believed that by so doing Maggie was deprived of all chance of the much wished-for prize. It was true that neither she nor Maggie had gained it, for it had fallen to Nellie Ransom; but that did not lessen, or should not have lessened, Gracie's gratitude to her little friend; and as her mother said, it ill became her to nurse any feeling of jealousy towards Maggie.

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"Gracie," said her mother, "can you remember exactly what you said about Maggie?"

"No, mamma," answered the child, looking thoughtful and a little troubled; "but it was not much, I think."

"I am afraid," said Mrs. Howard, "that a very little sometimes becomes much in Hattie's keeping. I do not know that she really wishes to make mischief, but her love of talking and her want of strict truthfulness lead her to exaggerate, and also, I fear, to repeat many a thing with a very different meaning from that which the speaker intended. The more I see of her, the plainer does this become to me; and I fear, Gracie, that she is not a safe friend for you."

"Mamma," said Gracie, in a tone of some offence, "you'd never think that Hattie could make *me* learn to tell stories, do you? Why, I never told a falsehood in my life, and I'm sure I'd never think of doing such a thing."

"I am sure I hope not, my child," said her mother, "but I fear temptation for you, Gracie; and I think Hattie encourages you in your great fault, your self-conceit and desire for admiration. And, although I do not think that you ever mean to be untruthful, my daughter, your idea of your own merits often leads you into exaggeration of these, and makes you unwilling to see them in others."

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Gracie pouted, and put on the expression she always wore if she were found fault with.

"Mamma," she said, "I think that is a very horrid character to give any one; and I am sure you need not think I ever could tell a falsehood or do any thing mean to any one."

"I do not say you would, Gracie. I only want you to beware of temptation."

"I shan't fall into temptation, no fear of that," said Gracie almost scornfully; not scorn of her mother, but of the idea that she was not quite able to take care of herself, and that she could be led into wrong-doing.

"And I shall be obliged to say," continued Mrs. Howard, "that I do not think it best for you to be so much with Hattie. She is doing you no good. I cannot keep you apart altogether, but you must not ask me to let you have her here so often, nor can I allow you to go to her house as much as you have done. When I see you have a more gentle and humble spirit, Gracie, and learning to stand by another strength than your own, I may not so much fear evil companionship for you; but this very belief that you cannot fall makes you all the more ready to do so."

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Gracie flounced out of the room in high displeasure, muttering to herself as she went upstairs that her mother always thought "every one better than me," and "it was very unjust," and "just as if I could fall into the temptation of telling a story."

Mrs. Howard sighed, and looked troubled, as she well might; and so did grandmamma, as they talked together on this subject, and considered what was best to be done with Gracie. Her overwhelming desire for admiration; her wish to be first in every thing; her self-conceit and impatience of reproof were day by day growing stronger and stronger, and overrunning all that was fair and lovely in her character. It was, as the mother had said, difficult to break off all intercourse between her and Hattie, although it was certain that the latter was exercising no good influence on Gracie; for the two families were intimate, and it was impossible, without giving offence, to keep the two children entirely apart. Moreover, they were schoolmates, and had grown really fond of one another, although Gracie was losing confidence in Hattie, as she could not but perceive that she had by no means a strict regard for truth.

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But little did Gracie dream that Hattie's influence or example could ever lead her astray in this way.



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VI.

JEALOUSY.

DAYS went by, and all was progressing famously for the fair; at least so thought the little workers. New offers of help came in; new articles were promised, and some even sent, early as it was, and these were committed to Miss Ashton's keeping until the appointed day—the first of June—should arrive. Mrs. Bradford promised all the ice-cream that should be needed for the refreshment table; Mrs. Howard the strawberries; another mamma offered jelly; two or three cake; Mr. Powers promised a quantity of French bonbons; and from all sides came offers of flowers. Mr. Stanton, the little Bradfords' "Uncle Ruthven," said he would furnish flags and banners enough to deck the piazza; and mammas, grandmamas, aunts, and cousins were coaxed and wheedled out of so many bright ribbons for the same purpose, that it might have been supposed that they were expected to go in grave colors for the remainder of their days.

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And if you had seen the doll that Miss Annie Stanton and her sister-in-law were dressing as a baby!

If you had but seen that doll!

With a face so sweet, and so like a "real live baby" that it almost startled one to come upon it unawares in some place where the real live baby could not have been found! such hands and feet! and oh, such a fitting out! Day by day the progress of that doll's wardrobe was watched with eager, delighted eyes by Maggie, Bessie, Belle, and Lily, who had more opportunities for this than the rest of the children. These last were, however, invited in every now and then, to see the wonder as it grew; and that doll became the great object of interest, in comparison with which the remainder of the fair arrangements were as nothing. Every thing that was dainty and pretty and cunning was furnished for the baby doll; not only clothes without number, but also a tasteful cradle lined and trimmed with blue silk, white muslin, and lace; and a baby basket, furnished completely with all that the most exacting infant could require. In short, this was plainly to be the grand attraction of the fair, at least in the eyes of the younger portion of its patrons, for the fame of the doll spread far and wide, and great was the curiosity of those who had never had the opportunity of witnessing its

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beauties.

And the question arose and was eagerly discussed, who was to be the munificent purchaser? who, oh! who, the fortunate possessor? Papas and mammas were besieged with petitions and coaxings, but wisely declined making positive promises till the price of the wonderful prize should be fixed, and the doll herself put up for sale. Money-jugs were broken, and "savings banks" emptied, that the contents might be counted over and over to ascertain if there was any possibility that they might reach the sum which would probably be required; allowances were saved up in the same hope.

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The only trouble about it was, that as Maggie Bradford said, "only one could have the doll, and so all the rest were doomed to disappointment, which made it a case in which it would be well if one man's meat were every other man's poison."

Jessie and her grandfather were cared for in the meanwhile. Miss Ashton had interested several of her friends in them; the children had done the same with their parents; and Mr. Bradford, Mr. Norris, and one or two other gentlemen had been to see old Malcolm, and finding that there was little or no probability of his cure while he remained in the cold, damp shanty, where he had been living for the last few months, had furnished him with more comfortable lodging.

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Jessie's wares were also finding a good market, and every week she came down into the city with a number. Some of these she sold to such purchasers as came in her way, and whatever were left over she carried to Miss Ashton, and put in her hands for the fair.

She was also making some particularly choice articles which she kept back for exhibition and sale on that occasion; and among them were half a dozen boxes of straw and bright-colored ribbons, with an initial letter woven in beads upon the top of each. There had been but four of them at first, bearing respectively an M, a B, a G, and a D, standing for Maggie, Bessie, Gracie, and Dora; for Jessie looked upon these as her first friends, because they had first become interested in her story. But Bessie having mentioned that Belle and Lily were "just like ourselves, and my sister and I would be pleased to buy boxes for them at the fair," Jessie completed two more with an L for Lily, and a B for Belle. There was a delightful amount of mystery respecting these boxes, for each one of the six knew what had been done for the other five; Jessie telling her in confidence, and leaving her with the suspicion that the same pleasure was in store for her. Not on any account would any one of them have spoken of this suspicion; oh dear, no! but was quite prepared to be very much surprised if a box bearing her initial should turn up at the fair.

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Maggie and Bessie owned a pretty little pony, the gift of their Uncle Ruthven; at least Fred said it was "Uncle Ruthven's present," but Mr. Stanton said it was Fred's. For, having offered Fred the choice of a present for himself as a reward for the pains he had taken to break himself of some troublesome faults, the generous brother asked for a pony for his little sisters. He and his brother Harry each owned one, and he wished Maggie and Bessie to enjoy the same pleasure. So Uncle Ruthven had bought the pony and equipped him, but he declared it was Fred's gift to the little girls, and I think he was about right.

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However that was, the pony had given no small amount of pleasure, and this was still farther increased when Belle's papa gave her one.

It was a pretty sight to see two of the little girls on these ponies, escorted by Harry and Fred, and the whole party under the care of one of the papas, or Uncle Ruthven, or sometimes of old James, the coachman. Belle and Bessie rode as yet with a leading string to the pony's rein, but Maggie had grown to be a fearless little rider, and had no idea of being led. Lily would have been welcome to a ride now and then if she had chosen, but "the one thing in the world" which Lily feared was a horse, and she declined the most pressing offers of this nature.

Now that the days were becoming so mild and pleasant, these rides took place quite frequently, and they were hardly looked forward to more eagerly by the children than they were by old Malcolm and Jessie, who delighted to see the little girls on horseback, and were always on the watch to meet them and receive a kind word.

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"I know who I think will have the best piece of work," said Lily, one day after school, when the little girls were discussing the arrangements for the fair as they prepared to go home.

"Who?" asked Gracie quickly. "Maggie, I s'pose. You always think Maggie and Bessie do every thing better than anybody else."

"Well, and so they do," answered Lily, unwilling to allow that her favorite playmates could be outdone in any thing by another,— "so they do; but it's not Maggie this time."

"Who then?" asked Dora.

"Nellie Ransom," said Lily. "Have you seen her mat?"

No: none of the others had seen Nellie's mat; but now curiosity was all on tiptoe, and

a general desire to see her work took possession of the class.

"Bring all your works to-morrow, and let's see which is the best," said Lily. [115]

"Gracie's is, I know," said Hattie.

"If you have not seen the others you *don't* know," said Lily.

Hattie whispered something to Gracie and laughed; but Gracie still wore the displeased look she had put on when Lily declared Nellie's work must be the best.

For, during the whole of the last year, Gracie had been nourishing an intense and bitter jealousy of Nellie Ransom. As has been said before, Nellie was by no means as quick and brilliant a child as Gracie, but she was more persevering and industrious, and so made up for the lack of natural talent. She was the only child in the school who could keep up with Gracie in several studies, such as composition and arithmetic; and in all they learned these two generally stood in advance of the rest.

And to outstrip Nellie, to be always the *first*, the *very first* was Gracie's great ambition. She believed herself to be by far the wiser and cleverer of the two, but she was anxious that every one else should acknowledge it also. [116]

A year ago, when Miss Ashton's uncle had offered a prize for the best composition,—the occasion to which Mrs. Howard had referred when warning her little daughter against jealousy of Maggie Bradford,—the chances had seemed to lie between Maggie and herself; but to the astonishment of every one, Nellie's composition had proved the most deserving, and taken the much-coveted prize.

Since that time Gracie's wish to excel Nellie in all things had known no bounds, and it is really to be feared that she was rejoiced at heart when her painstaking and industrious little schoolmate missed in her lessons, or failed in any work she undertook.

So now the fear that Nellie's mat should prove to be more neatly worked than her own took complete possession of her, for it was not only the desire to be first, but the desire to outstrip Nellie especially, that filled her heart and made her envious and jealous.

It was agreed that Nellie, Gracie, and Dora should each bring her mat to school the next morning, so as to compare their work and see which was likely to bring the highest price. [117]

Accordingly this was done, and the children all gathered early, anxious to decide on the respective merits of the three pieces of embroidery.

All were well done, neatly and evenly worked; but there could be no doubt of it, even to Gracie's unwilling eyes,—Nellie Ransom's was somewhat the best. It was really astonishing for a child of her age. She was naturally handy with her needle, and had taken so much pains with this mat that it would have done credit to a much older person. The simple pattern was straight and even, and the stitches of the filling lay in neat, regular rows, the worsted smooth and unfrayed, and not a speck or spot of any description to be seen upon the whole piece.

Gracie's was very nearly a match for it; indeed, had the two pieces been looked at separately it might have seemed that there was nothing to choose between them; but laid side by side and closely compared, Nellie's would certainly bear off the palm. [118]

"Why, Nellie," said Dora, whose own work was by no means despicable, "how beautifully you have done it. I don't believe a grown-up lady could have worked it better. I know Mrs. Howard will say it's the best."

Quiet Nellie colored and dimpled with pleasure. Praise was pleasant to her, as it is to all; but, although she would have been glad to have her work pronounced the best, it was with no overwhelming desire to outdo her companions. Nellie did her very best, but when another did better, she could be content with the feeling that it was not her own fault that she was excelled, and was ready to sympathize with her more fortunate classmate.

"That will be priced ten dollars for certain and positive," said Lily, holding up the mat and regarding it with admiration. "It is lovely, Nellie. They are all very nice, 'specially Gracie's, but yours is the best." [119]

"It's not a bit better than Gracie's," said Hattie.

"Don't you encourage Gracie more than she deserves," said Lily admonishingly. "She's pretty nice, but don't you puff her up too much."

"I know something about you," said Hattie teasingly.

"Well, know away," answered Lily scornfully. "You're always knowing something about somebody; and you want me to ask you what you know about me; but I don't want to know, and I'm not going to have you say some of the girls said hateful things of me. Besides—oh! I forgot; I b'lieve I was rather *anti-politing*;" and Lily, who was about to say that Hattie always made things seem worse than they were, put a check upon her saucy little tongue and turned once more to Nellie.

One might have thought that Lily had worked the mat herself to see her pride and

satisfaction in it.

"Dora has done more on hers than Nellie and Gracie," said Belle. "Their two are pretty nearly the same. Let's see; Gracie has only two more rows done than Nellie; no, Nellie has two more done than Gracie—oh!—why—this is Gracie's, isn't it? I can hardly tell them apart, they are both so very nice."

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For, handing the mats about from one to another, the same mistake occurred more than once, Gracie's being taken for Nellie's or Nellie's for Gracie's, and they had to be held side by side before they could be distinguished. The children laughed and thought this rather funny; and it gave Gracie some hope that hers might be judged to be the best, after all. She would take more pains than ever.

The thought of the mats and of outdoing Nellie was so busy with her that she did not give her usual attention to her lessons that morning; and, as the consequence, lost her place in the spelling-class, and was in a peevish humor for the rest of the day.

Fresh cause of displeasure befell her at the close of school, when Miss Ashton said she thought it as well that the May Queen should be chosen soon.

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"Oh! we want Maggie, of course," said Lily.

"Maggie again?" said Miss Ashton, smiling.

"Yes'm," said Belle. "Maggie is used to it, and she makes the prettiest queen, so we'd rather have her; wouldn't we, girls?"

There was a general murmur of assent, save from two voices.

"Why don't we make some one else May Queen this year?" asked Hattie. "We might have Gracie."

"Hattie," said Lily, endeavoring to make her voice of reproof one of extreme mildness, "as you have not been so very long in the school, it would be better if you let the old inhabitants be the judges."

"Well, anyhow, I don't see why Maggie always has to be May Queen, and when she don't go to the school either," said Gracie pouting, and leaning back against her desk with a discontented air, till, catching Miss Ashton's eye fixed sadly and reproachfully upon her, she hung her head and looked ashamed.

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"Be-cause," said Lily with emphasis, "she's the prettiest child of our acquaintance. Not all the prettiness of all the rest of us make up one-half Maggie's prettiness, and she's not one bit vain or stuck-up about it either; and if she and Bessie don't just belong to the school, they belong to us, and so it's just the same. Whoever wants Maggie, hold up their hand."

Up went every hand at once, save those of Gracie and Hattie, and presently Gracie's followed the example of the others, though half unwillingly.

"Now," said Lily triumphantly, "that's voted, and for ever after let him hold his peace."

The last allusion was perhaps not exactly clear either to Lily or her hearers; but it was thought extremely fine, and as having clinched the matter without farther argument. Miss Ashton laughed, and asked if Lily and Belle would undertake to let Maggie know that she was elected May Queen, which they readily promised to do.

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But the next morning these two little friends returned to school, and told their astonished and disappointed classmates that Maggie positively refused to be May Queen. Why they could not say, but all their persuasions had proved of no avail. Maggie was not to be "coaxed," and would give no reason for her refusal, though she had "seemed to feel awfully about it," Lily said, and had "cried about it" before they left. Bessie had been as much mystified as they were, and even Maggie's mamma, when appealed to, said that she knew of no reason why Maggie should decline the offered honor. Maggie, however, had said she would "tell mamma and Bessie," but she could tell no one else.

Miss Ashton, when informed of Maggie's refusal, said that she would call on her and see what could be done, and until then the matter might rest.

"Hattie," said Gracie, drawing her "intimate friend" into a corner during recess, "did you tell Maggie Bradford what I said about her being Queen twice?"

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"Well—no," said Hattie, hesitating at first, but then uttering her denial boldly as she saw the frown gathering upon Gracie's brow.

Gracie looked at her as if she only half believed her, for she was learning to doubt Hattie's word, and although she was greedy of her flattery, she could not help feeling that her chosen friend was not sincere.

"You know you've told a good many things I did not mean you to," said Gracie, "and I wouldn't like not to be friends with Maggie, or to let her think I'm hateful."

And Hattie declared over and over again that she had never said one word to Maggie on the subject.

"I do feel badly about it," said Gracie remorsefully. "I wish I had never said I thought

Maggie ought not to be May Queen. Maggie's been my friend this ever so long, since I was quite little; and I believe I had rather the girls chose her. I've a good mind to write her a note, and tell her I wish she would be Queen."

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All the other children had left the school-room to go down and play on the piazza, and Gracie and Hattie were alone together.

"I wouldn't," said Hattie; "you are the one who ought to be May Queen, 'cause you are the smartest child in the school."

Gracie believed this, and thought Hattie gave her no more than her due; still, although she liked to hear Hattie say it, the compliment did not turn her from her purpose.



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VII.

A MISFORTUNE.



AS the two children talked, Gracie had been putting a few stitches in her mat.

"I b'lieve I'll do it," she said. "I'll tell Maggie we *all* want her to be May Queen."

"Then she'll know you've said something about it," said Hattie anxiously, feeling that this proceeding was likely to bring her into trouble.

"No, she needn't," said Gracie; "perhaps she does think I don't want her to be, 'cause at Christmas she knew I was mad about it."

"Are you going to beg her pardon?" asked Hattie.

"No," said Gracie, with one of her scornful tosses of her head. "I think I see myself doing such a thing! But I can write her a little note, and tell her we are all sorry because she won't be May Queen, and beg her to change her mind. I might do as much as that for Maggie," she added to herself.

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Hattie tried to dissuade her no longer, and Gracie laid the mat down upon her desk, opened the lid, and took out a slip of paper and a pen. She dipped the pen in the ink, wrote, "My dear Maggie," at the top of the sheet, and then paused, biting the top of her pen.

"I can't think what to say, or how to begin it," she said. "My dear Maggie, I am very sorry—no. I had better say *we*—we are very sorry that you—that you—oh, pshaw! I've a great mind not to do it"—here she dipped her pen in the ink again, and so carelessly that it came forth quite too full. "Oh, bother!" she exclaimed with increasing ill-humor; "look at this hateful pen;" and, forgetting the precious piece of work which lay so near at hand, she gave a careless fillip to the pen which spattered forth the ink.

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Gracie gave another impatient exclamation, and pushed away the paper, saying,—

"I shan't do it; if Maggie likes to be so foolish about nothing, she just can;" but she did not see the extent of the mischief she had done till Hattie said in a tone of great dismay,—

"O Gracie! just see what you've done!"

And there upon her beautiful mat was a great spot of ink.

Gracie gave a horrified little cry, and, snatching up the mat, thoughtlessly sopped up the spot with her handkerchief, thereby spreading and smearing it till it grew to the

size of a two-cent piece, and left an ugly blotch on the bright blue worsted.

"What shall I do? oh! what shall I do? It's spoiled; it's quite spoiled!" she said despairingly.

"I don't believe it is; maybe it can be taken out," said Hattie, though she was almost as much startled as her little companion. "I'll bring some water, and we'll try to take it out." [129]

"No, no," said Gracie; "I wish I had not touched it at all. We'll only make it worse; and I'll ask mamma to try as soon as I go home. Oh, dear, dear, dear! what shall I do? Grandmamma will surely say Nellie's is the best now. That hateful girl!"

"It's a great shame if she does," said Hattie. "Nellie is always trying to get ahead of you; and she don't deserve it, and I don't think your grandmamma is fair to you. She ought to think her own grandchild's work is the best."

"I suppose Nellie will just be glad when she sees what has happened to me," said Gracie, whose jealous eyes could now see nothing that was good or fair in Nellie's conduct.

Innocent, kind-hearted Nellie, who would not willingly harbor an unkind or unjust thought of another!

"I shan't let her see it," she continued, hastily rolling up the mat and putting it into her desk, as she heard the other children coming. "Don't say a word about it, Hattie, not to any one." [130]

Hattie promised, really grieving herself for Gracie's misfortune, for she truly loved her, and was anxious that she should be the first.

This was to be a black day for Gracie; but all through her own jealousy and pride.

Her mind was so taken up with the remembrance of the defaced mat that she could not keep her thoughts upon her lessons; and, although she had known her history very well, her attention wandered so much that she answered incorrectly more than once.

Seeing, however, that something had disturbed her, Miss Ashton made allowances, and gave her one or two opportunities to correct herself and bring her thoughts back to the task before her.

But it was all in vain; Gracie had already lost her place in the spelling-class, and gone down below Dora Johnson and Laura Middleton; and now the fear of a fresh mortification, and of giving Nellie her place at the head of the history class added to her confusion, and she floundered more and more hopelessly. Nellie begged too that she might have still another chance, when at last Miss Ashton passed the question to her; but again Gracie failed and was obliged to yield her place. [131]

Angry, mortified, and jealous, Gracie showed such determined ill-temper towards her generous little classmate, that Miss Ashton was obliged to reprove her, but without effect.

Again she called Gracie to order, and this time more severely.

The angry and wilful child hesitated for one moment, then pride and passion burst all bounds, and she answered Miss Ashton with such insolence, such ungoverned and unjustifiable impertinence that the whole class stood aghast.

There was a moment's perfect stillness. Miss Ashton turned very pale, and laying her book down upon the table, covered her face with her hand, while the children looked from her to Gracie and back again, in utter dismay and astonishment. [132]

Then the stillness was broken by a piteous, "Oh, dear!" from poor little Belle, who finished with a burst of tears, and her example was followed by more than one of the others.

Miss Ashton raised her head.

"Go into the cloak-room, Grace," she said quietly.

Gracie was herself frightened at what she had done; but her pride and temper were still farther roused by the shocked and disapproving looks of her schoolmates, and she stood for an instant with determined stubbornness, while the words, "I won't," formed themselves upon her lips.

But they were not uttered, for there was something in Miss Ashton's face which checked her; something which not one of the little flock had ever seen before; and when the lady repeated her words in the same calm tone,—

"Go into the cloak-room," Gracie turned away and obeyed.

It was with head held high, and scornful look, however, that she passed out, although bitter shame and regret were burning in the poor, foolish little heart. But she called up all her pride and jealousy to stifle the better feeling which urged her to run to her teacher, and, in the face of the whole school, confess her fault, and beg Miss Ashton's pardon for the insulting words she had spoken. [133]

"What will she do, I wonder," she said to herself; "will she tell mamma? What will mamma say, and papa too?" and, as the recollection of her parents' oft-repeated warnings against the pride and vanity which were her besetting sins came back to her mind, she could not but feel that this was the consequence of allowing them to gain such a hold upon her.

She *felt* it, for conscience would make itself heard; but she would not acknowledge it even to herself, and drowned the reproving whisper with such thoughts as,—

"Well, then, why is Miss Ashton so unjust? She is always trying to make me miss and lose my place. She is always glad when any one goes above me. She never praises me as much as I deserve;" and such unjust and untrue accusations. [134]

It might be that Miss Ashton did not always bestow upon Gracie all the praise she would have given to another for a perfect lesson or good composition, for she did not think much praise good for her, as it only seemed to minister to Gracie's overweening vanity. But only eyes that were wilfully blind and suspicious could find the slightest injustice or unkindness in her treatment of any one of her little scholars, and her gentleness and patience might have won gratitude from the most stubborn young heart.

But Gracie would not listen to the promptings of her better spirit; and the recollection of the dismayed and averted looks of her schoolmates added fuel to the flame of her angry pride. Even the ever admiring Hattie had looked shocked at her outburst.

"I don't care," she said again to herself. "It's only 'cause they know I am so much cleverer than any of them, and they are jealous of me. That hateful Nellie! She was so proud to go above me." [135]

Wretched and unhappy, she spent the time in her solitude till the close of school, when the other children came into the cloak-room for their hats.

No one said a word to her, for they had been forbidden to do so; and if they had occasion to speak to one another they did so in whispers, as if something terrible had happened, and a great awe had fallen upon them. She sat in a corner, sullen and defiant, trying to put on an appearance of the utmost indifference, but succeeding very poorly. She even tried to hum a tune, but something rose in her throat and choked her. She scarcely knew what to do; whether or no to rise, and take her hat, and go down as usual to find the nurse, who was probably waiting for her below; and while she sat hesitating, one and another of her young companions passed out, as if glad to hurry from her presence, and she was left once more alone.

She had just taken down her hat, when Miss Ashton came in, and, handing her a note, said gravely,— [136]

"Give this to your mother, Gracie," and left her again.

Ashamed and alarmed at the thought of what might follow when she should reach home, but with her pride and anger not one whit abated, Gracie went slowly on, giving short and snappish answers to the inquiries of her nurse, who plainly saw that something was wrong.

But she dared not face her mother when she should hear of her misconduct; and when they entered the house, she thrust the note into the hand of the maid, bidding her give it to Mrs. Howard, and ran quickly up to her own little room.

There she stayed, wondering and waiting. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes, half an hour passed away, and still her mamma did not come.

Was it possible? could she really hope that the note had not been one of complaint of her conduct? [137]

No, that could never be; there was the bell for the children's early dinner. Well, she would go down and act as if nothing had happened. But could she with this uncertainty of how much or how little mamma knew?

But there was mamma's step, and now Mrs. Howard entered the room. One half glance at her face and Gracie's eyes fell. It was enough to show her that her mother knew all.

"Mean old thing!" she said to herself, meaning Miss Ashton. "She's gone and told, and now I s'pose I'll be punished."

"Gracie," said her mother, "I suppose you scarcely need to be told what is in this note which Miss Ashton has sent me."

Gracie stood with head erect, pouting lip, and defiant eyes, idly tossing back and forth the tassel of the window curtain with as much indifference as she could assume.

"Has it come to this, my child," continued Mrs. Howard sorrowfully, "that you have allowed conceit and self-will to gain such a hold upon you, that you could wilfully and deliberately insult your teacher? I have been sure that you would fall into trouble, Gracie, for I knew that such foolish pride must sooner or later have a fall, but I could [138]

not have believed that you would be guilty of this. What did you say to Miss Ashton?"

"I don't care," said Gracie passionately, without directly answering her mother's question. "It was all true, every word of it. She's as hateful as she can be, and unjust and mean;" and Gracie went on, pouring forth a torrent of invective and reproach against Miss Ashton and Nellie Ransom, without paying the slightest heed to her mother's commands to be silent. It was the long pent-up feeling of jealousy and ill-will and pride, that she had been nourishing for months past, and which now burst all bounds and swept every thing before it.

Respect, and even obedience towards her mother, reason, justice, and truth itself were totally lost sight of, as she poured forth accusation after accusation against the offenders, and upheld her own conduct in all she had done and said.

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"And you have said all this to Miss Ashton, perhaps?" said her mother sternly, when the angry child at last came to a pause.

"It is true enough if I did," muttered Gracie again, though her passion was by this time beginning to cool down in a measure. "I'm sure I wish I never went to her hateful old school."

"It is more than probable that Miss Ashton wishes so now; but I shall leave you to think over what you have said to me and to Miss Ashton, and to find out how much of it is true. One thing Miss Ashton desires,—that you do not return to her school till you are ready to acknowledge your fault, and to apologize for your impertinence. And until this is the case, you must remain in your room. Your meals will be sent to you, and I shall not allow your brothers and sisters to have any intercourse with you till you are ready to make such amends as you can. You may send for me when you have any thing to say to me. Oh, Gracie, Gracie!"

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With which words, spoken in a sad, despondent tone, Mrs. Howard went away, closing the door upon her stubborn, rebellious little daughter.

Gracie stood where her mother had left her, not one whit softened or humbled; for now her angry pride began to accuse her mother also of injustice and partiality and unkindness.

"Everybody in the world takes part against me," she said to herself; "but I don't care. Indeed, I won't beg Miss Ashton's pardon, not if I stay here a year. Mamma makes such a fuss about her being so kind and patient and all that. She's paid for teaching me, so it's nothing so wonderfully good. I hope I never will go back to the school where that hateful Nellie is."

Soon the door opened, and the nurse appeared, bearing a tray on which was Gracie's dinner. She set it upon a table, placed a chair, and went away without a word to her.

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"I don't care," said Gracie once more, "no one need talk to me if they don't want to. I'm just as good as they are, and I'd just as lief stay here by myself."

She sat down before the dinner-tray, trying to believe that she would "just as lief eat her dinner alone;" but she found it was not so agreeable after all. She wondered what they were doing downstairs; if the children were chattering as merrily as usual, or if her absence made any difference in the family enjoyment. She had little appetite, as may be supposed, and left the nicely served meal scarcely touched.

But it must not be thought that she had any idea of yielding or acknowledging herself in the wrong. By and by she heard her brothers and sisters coming upstairs, then their voices in the nursery as they prattled to one another; and she knew that they were being made ready for their afternoon airing. Then tiny feet pattered along the hall, and little May's voice sounded through her closed door,—

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"Am oo dood now, Dacie? We'm doin out, Dacie; am oo most dood? Pease don't be naughty dirl, Dacie," and the soft little hand tapped upon the panel as the baby voice pleaded.

"Come away, darling. Gracie may come out when she is good and says she is sorry," said mamma's voice; and Gracie knew that her mother had led the little pet away.

But all this only seemed to harden her. May was such a darling, the sweetest and dearest of all her brothers and sisters, Gracie thought; and, although the sweet, coaxing voice had touched her, she only found in her mother's interference fresh cause of offence.

"Mamma tries to set even May against me, and I s'pose she's been telling all the children what I did," she thought; "but I don't care. I believe they'll grow tired of having me away before I am tired of staying here. There's plenty for me to do. I can read, and I'll work on my mat."

But here it suddenly flashed upon her that she had not brought her mat home with her. Being sent away in disgrace and not returning to the school-room before leaving, she had quite forgotten it, and it still lay there in her desk. And that stain upon it, too, which she had intended to ask her mother to take out if possible. Mamma would not feel like doing it for her now, and she could ask no favors from her. Not unless she repented and—and—apologized to Miss Ashton. And this last she would not do;

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no, never, never.

She heard the children going downstairs, stood at the window and watched them get into the carriage and drive away with mamma, and began to wish that she were there too. And such a lovely afternoon, it was too bad to be shut up here. But still she never blamed herself for her imprisonment; no, mamma, Miss Ashton, Nellie, any one was in the wrong, but not her own wilful, stubborn little self. What was to be the end of this she did not know, but Gracie had no thought of yielding.

She whiled away the afternoon as she best could; but every thing seemed to have lost its zest. Her prettiest story-books had no interest; her dolls were "stupid" and poor company; even her stock of pretty materials for articles for the fair seemed less attractive than usual as she turned them over, and her work "would not go."

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This was the first time in her life that Gracie had ever been punished in such a manner; and apart from the disgrace, which she was determined not to feel, she was a child who was fond of society and did not know how to bear being deprived of it.



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VIII.

"THE SPIDER AND THE FLY."



F Mrs. Howard had perhaps hoped that little May's pleading would have any softening effect on Gracie, she was mistaken. The message she had expected to receive on reaching home did not come to her. Nor did she hear a word from Gracie through the evening until the little girl's bed-time came. Then she sent word that the hour had come, still hoping and believing that the stubborn heart must relent, and that Gracie would feel that she could not go to rest unforgiven and without her mother's good-night kiss. But she was mistaken. Gracie received the message in sullen silence, but obeyed and went to bed without one word of sorrow or repentance.

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It was the same in the morning. Gracie rose and was dressed; her breakfast was brought and eaten in solitude, as her dinner and supper had been yesterday; and still the nurse who waited upon her passed in and out, as it was necessary, and brought no word to comfort the sorrowing heart of her mother.

School-time came, and Gracie knew that the children in her class would believe that her absence was caused by her misconduct of the previous day, as was indeed too true; but this only made her feel more and more proud and obstinate.

The long, weary morning wore away, the solitary dinner was once more over, and again the house seemed so still and lonely, for mamma and the children had gone out again, and the servants were all downstairs.

By and by Gracie heard a light, quick foot running up the stairs and coming towards her own door. The latch was turned and the door softly opened,—Mrs. Howard had not locked her in, for she believed that she could trust Gracie and that she would not disobey so far as to leave the room she had been bidden to keep,—and Hattie's face peeped in.

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Gracie started, partly in astonishment, partly in dismay; for what must she do now? Mamma would not have allowed her to see Hattie, she knew, if she had been at home; and must she send her away? She was so glad to see some one, to be able to speak to some one.

Hattie came in, closed the door behind her, and, running to Gracie, put her arm

about her neck and kissed her, saying with much energy,—

"It's too mean, Gracie! it's the meanest thing I ever knew! It's a great shame!"

There could be no doubt of her sympathy, of her belief that Gracie was in the right, or at least that she was not so very much to blame, and was undeservedly punished. For Hattie was really and truly very fond of Gracie, admired her and considered her very clever; and, although even she had been dismayed by Gracie's outburst yesterday, she was now disposed to treat it lightly, and to say that Gracie had been provoked. There was another reason, too, which induced Hattie to take part against Nellie Ransom, and to wish to put her in the wrong. [148]

"O Hattie!" said Gracie, "how did you come up here? Mamma wouldn't allow it, I know."

Hattie laughed triumphantly.

"I knew that," she said, "for I came to the door a little while ago and the servant said you were up in your room, but he thought you could not see any one to-day, and he said every one else was out. But I said I had a message from school for you, and that you must have it this afternoon. So of course he thought it was from Miss Ashton, as I meant he should, and he let me come up."

"Mamma will be displeased," said Gracie; "you ought not, Hattie. I'm very glad to see you, but I must not let you stay."

"I'll only stay a few minutes," said Hattie, taking the seat which Gracie had not ventured to offer her. "I've something perfectly splendid to tell you." [149]

"Was everybody saying ugly things about me to-day, and talking as if I was as wicked as a murderer?" asked Gracie, more interested in the opinion others might hold of her than in Hattie's promised news.

There had really been very little said on the matter; the offence was too serious and too shocking to Gracie's young companions to make it an agreeable subject of conversation; and, although there had been some wondering as to whether Gracie would ever be allowed to return to the school, but few unkind remarks had been made, and these were more in sorrow than in censure.

And Hattie was too full of her errand and of the fear of being found on forbidden ground to make as good a story of that little as she might have chosen to do at another time.

"Well, no, not much," she answered. "I suppose that old Nellie, hateful thing, was glad enough." [150]

"Did she say so?" questioned Gracie.

"No," said Hattie; "she did not speak about it. Gracie, did Miss Ashton send word to your mother and ask her to punish you?"

"She wrote to her about it, and I suppose mamma punished me of her own accord," answered Gracie.

"How long is she going to keep you up here?" asked Hattie.

"Till—till—I beg Miss Ashton's pardon," said Gracie, her angry pride rising again at the thought; "and I *never* will do it, no, *never*, not if I stay here a year!"

"But the fair," said Hattie; "you know the fair is in two weeks, and if you don't come out before that you'll miss all the fun."

Now, apart from the interest which all the little girls took in the fair, Gracie had a strong desire, as usual, to play some very prominent part therein. As we know, she had wished to be Queen, and had been vexed because Maggie Bradford had been chosen again; but, although she could not have this coveted honor, she still hoped and intended to make herself very conspicuous there. [151]

It was true that the thought of the fair and all that concerned it had been much in her mind, even during her imprisonment; but it had not occurred to her that her resolution of never, never apologizing to Miss Ashton, "even if she stayed shut up for a whole year," would scarcely agree with her appearance at the festival.

She sat as if confounded at Hattie's words.

"I'd do it if I were you," continued the latter, seeing the effect she had produced. "It's a great shame that you have to, but then you *will* have to, you know; and I'd do it and have it over. If you're going to fret and fuss here about it, you'll feel a great deal worse at last when you come to do it."

Hattie's advice on this subject was certainly good in itself, though she did not put it before Gracie in a right light.

"Miss Ashton is so unjust and so awfully partial to Nellie," pouted Gracie, although her resolution was beginning to waver a little for the first time. [152]

"I know it," said Hattie; "but she can't make other people think Nellie is the smartest child. Every one knows you are, Gracie, even if they won't say so."

"I can learn three lessons while Nellie learns one; but Miss Ashton is always praising her and never praises me," was Gracie's answer.

"I know it," said Hattie again. "Nellie—oh, I can't bear that girl!—sets up to be so wonderfully good, and Miss Ashton always believes whatever she says, and makes such a fuss about her; but you can just *say* you beg Miss Ashton's pardon, and have it over. The rest of the class will have every thing their own way if you don't come out pretty soon and have your word about the fair; and there's your mat, too, you know, Gracie."

"I forgot my mat yesterday when I came away," said Gracie. "I wish you had known it and then you could have brought it to me." [153]

Again Hattie gave a triumphant little laugh, and putting her hand into her pocket drew out the mat,—that is, *a* mat.

Gracie seized it eagerly, gave Hattie a kiss, saying, "Oh, you dear thing! I'm so glad."

Then she looked for the stain, but there was no stain to be seen.

"Where's that ink-spot? Oh, Hattie, did you take it out? There's not a sign of it."

"No," said Hattie, "I did not take it out."

"Why!" exclaimed Gracie, turning the mat over. "Why, it is—it is—it's not mine. It's Nellie's mat!"

"I'm going to tell you," said Hattie. "This morning Miss Ashton handed me your history, which I believe you left in the cloak-room yesterday, and told me to put it in your desk. So when I opened the desk, the first thing I saw was the mat, and I knew you must have forgotten it. Nellie, the mean thing, she had brought her mat to school to-day again, and said she was going to work on it in recess; but when recess came the other children coaxed her to go out in the garden 'cause it was so pleasant, and she went. So while they were all down there, I saw the way to play Miss Nellie a good trick and to help you, dear; and I ran up to the school-room, changed Nellie's mat for yours, put hers back just as she had left it, and she'll never know the difference and think that somehow that ink-spot has come on her mat. And do you know, Gracie, it was the most fortunate thing that Nellie had just worked those two rows more that made her work even with yours; so she never can know. You remember yesterday we could scarcely tell them apart, and now they look almost exactly alike." [154]

"But what then?" said Gracie, almost frightened at the thought of Hattie's probable meaning.

"Why, don't you see?" said Hattie, who told her story as if she thought she had done something very clever and praiseworthy; "you can just finish this mat as if it was your own, and need not bother yourself about the ink-stain." [155]

"But—but—Hattie—this one is Nellie's," said Gracie in a shocked voice.

"What of that? we'll keep the secret, and no one will ever know but us two," said Hattie. "Nellie has the other one, and that's good enough for her. She has no right to expect the most money from your grandmamma. Take a great deal of pains with this, Gracie, and make the work look just like Nellie's."

"But, I can't, I can't," said Gracie. "It seems to me almost like—stealing."

"Stealing!" repeated Hattie. "I'd like to know who has been stealing! I only changed the mats, and you have the best right to the nicest one. I was not going to have Nellie get every thing away from you. She just thinks she's going to make herself the head of the school and beat you in every thing."

Now as I have said, and as you will readily believe, there was more at the bottom of Hattie's desire to thwart Nellie than her wish to see Gracie stand first, although she was really very fond of the latter, and it was this. [156]

It had so happened that Nellie's rather blunt truthfulness and clear-sighted honesty had more than once detected Hattie's want of straightforwardness, and even defeated some object she had in view, and for this Hattie bore her a grudge. She was particularly displeased with her at the present time because of a reprimand from Miss Ashton which she chose to consider she owed to Nellie.

Coming to school rather early one morning, a day or two since, Nellie found Belle Powers and Hattie there before her.

Belle sat upon the lower step of the upper flight of stairs, in a state of utter woe, with the saddest of little faces, and wiping the tears from her eyes. Hattie, grasping the banister with one hand, was swinging herself back and forth, saying, "I wouldn't care if I were you. 'Tis nothing to cry about;" but she looked ashamed and rather caught when she saw Nellie coming up the stairs.

"What is the matter, Belle?" asked Nellie, sitting down beside the school pet and darling, and putting her arm around her neck. [157]

"Fanny Leroy said things about me," sobbed Belle.

"What things?" questioned Nellie with a searching look at Hattie.

"She said I was so bad and spoiled I could hardly ever be good, even when I wanted to," answered Belle piteously; "and she said Miss Ashton had to be excusing me all the time for the naughty things I did in school. And I loved Fanny, and I wouldn't have said such bad things about her; and, oh, dear! I thought she loved me too. She came to Aunt Margaret's when I was there the day before she went away, to say good-bye to Maggie and Bessie and me; and she gave us each a nutmeg to remember her by and to keep for ever an' ever an' ever for a keepsake, and she kissed me ever so many times. And all the time she had been saying bad things about me, and so I'm going to throw away the nutmeg, 'cause I don't want a keepsake of a girl who made b'lieve she liked me when she didn't."

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"I don't believe it," said Nellie with far more energy than was usual with her, and still regarding Hattie with searching looks.

"But Hattie says she did," repeated Belle.

Hattie's *saying* a thing made it by no means sure in Nellie's eyes, and although she was not apt to interfere or meddle where she had no right to do so, she would not let this pass without further questioning. She was fond of the absent Fanny and loved Belle dearly; and believing that both were now wronged, she set herself to right them if possible.

"I don't believe it," she said again.

"Well, you just can believe it," said Hattie resentfully. "Don't I know what Fanny said to me? It's nothing to make such a fuss about, anyhow."

"Belle has very easily hurt feelings," said Nellie; "and besides, it *is* something to make a fuss about. And Fanny hardly ever would say unkind things of other people; the girls used to think she was 'most too particular about it. And, Hattie Leroy, I don't believe she ever said such things about Belle; anyhow, not in that way."

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"She did, too, I tell you," persisted Hattie, secure in Fanny's absence, and determined not to acknowledge that she had misrepresented her innocent words, from the mere love of talking and exaggeration, too; for she had not intended to hurt Belle so much, and was now really sorry to see her so grieved. "She did, too, I tell you. How do you know what Fanny said to me?"

"I don't know what she did say, but I am sure she never said that," repeated Nellie.

Both little girls had raised their voices as they contradicted one another, and as the tones of neither were very amicable by this time, they drew the attention of Miss Ashton.

"What is this, my little girls; what is the trouble?" she asked, coming up the stairs to them; then, seeing Belle's still distressed and tear-stained face she inquired, "Belle, darling, what is wrong?"

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Nellie and Hattie were both rather abashed, especially the latter, who knew herself to be in the wrong; but Belle answered, "Hattie thinks Fanny Leroy said something, and Nellie thinks she didn't. I don't know," she added with a mournful shake of her head, "but somehow somebody must be rather 'deceitful and *despicably* wicked.'" Desperately, Belle meant, and she quoted her words in no spirit of irreverence, but because she thought them suited to the, to her, solemnity of the occasion.

Miss Ashton, too, feared that there was some deceitfulness, or at least exaggeration; and seeing that little Belle was in real trouble she questioned further, and Nellie told her what Hattie had said.

This was not the first time, by any means, that Miss Ashton had known mischief to arise from Hattie's thoughtless way, to call it by no worse name, of repeating things; and she reprov'd her pretty sharply, telling her that such speeches were not at all like her gentle, amiable cousin Fanny, and she could not believe her guilty of them; and even had she said them she, Hattie, had no right to repeat them and make needless sorrow and trouble for Belle. Then she soothed Belle and encouraged her to think that Fanny had not so wronged her; and after school she kept Hattie for a few moments, and spoke to her very seriously but kindly on her idle, foolish habit of telling tales with exaggeration and untruthfulness.

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But Hattie, in repeating this, had said that "Miss Ashton kept her in and gave her an awful scolding just because she had said something that cry-baby Belle did not like, and Nellie went and told her and so put her in a scrape;" nor did she see that it had been her own blame in the first instance. And ever since she had been vexed with Nellie, and this added strength to her wish to have Gracie outstrip Nellie. It was not altogether this, let us do her justice, for she really loved Gracie better than any other child in the school, and was anxious to have her win for her own sake.

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But we must go back to these two little girls as they sat together in Gracie's room.

"Yes, so she does," echoed Gracie; "and I suppose now Miss Ashton will take away my conduct marks, and being away to-day, I'll lose my place in all the classes too. Not that I could not get ahead of her again easily enough," she added contemptuously.

"But she can't have the best mat now," said Hattie.

"I don't see how I *could* do that," said Gracie. "It is her's, you know, Hattie, and I can't, really I can't."

"But you'll have to now," said Hattie. "You know Nellie has found the ink-spot on the other mat by this time, and there's no way to give her this one back."

Yes, there was one way, but that did not enter Hattie's thoughts.

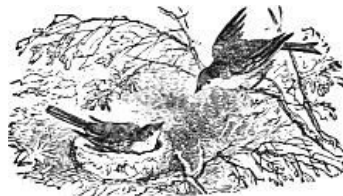
"I couldn't," said Gracie again, shrinking at the idea of doing what she knew to be so dishonest and deceitful. "I must have my own mat, Hattie; but I do wish this was mine and the other Nellie's." [163]

"But we can't put it back now, and I took it for you," said Hattie complainingly. "Gracie, you must keep it now. I shall get into an awful scrape if you don't; and it's real mean of you."

It would take too long to tell you of all the arguments and persuasions Hattie used. How she pleaded and reproached; how she insisted that there was no way of undoing what she had done; how she excited and increased Gracie's jealous pride and desire to outdo Nellie; and this last she found by far the most effectual argument.

And—Gracie yielded. Persuading herself that she had the best right to receive the highest premium because her own grandmamma had offered it; putting from her the thought of the only way in which justice could now be done to Nellie, on the plea that Hattie would be disgraced, and she would be "too mean" to bring this upon her; rousing up all her own naughty and envious feelings against innocent Nellie, she gave way at last and fell before temptation. Fell into the very sin, or even worse, from which she felt herself so very secure,—deceit and theft, for it was no less. [164]

"Now I'll go, dear," said Hattie, jumping up as soon as Gracie had yielded, perhaps afraid that she might repent and insist that she could not keep the mat, "and no one but us two will ever know the secret. And, Gracie, make up your mind to ask Miss Ashton's pardon, so you won't lose all the fun."



IX.

A GUILTY CONSCIENCE.

IF Gracie had been an unhappy and miserable child before, what was she now with all this load upon her conscience? For even pride and self-conceit could not attempt to justify such a deed. Jealousy had a good deal to say; and she tried to listen to that, and to believe also that she was not really to blame: she had been forced into it; she could not betray Hattie, who had done this from love to her. But she was more wretched than it would be easy to tell; and she was beginning to feel such a contempt for her chosen friend that this also was a sore spot in her heart. Day by day she was learning that there was nothing true or honorable or upright about Hattie. She hardly even seemed to think it much harm to tell a falsehood, or appeared ashamed when she was found out; and for some days she had had a growing feeling that it was not pleasant to have a friend with the character of a "story-teller," which Hattie now bore among her school-fellows. And Gracie; was she not just as bad, perhaps even worse? For Gracie had been taught all the value and beauty of truth, and had never till now wilfully fallen away from it; but she knew that the worth of that jewel was not much considered in Hattie's home, and so it had lost its preciousness in her eyes. [166]

Miss Ashton, too, knew this; and so she was less severe with Hattie than she might

have been with another child who had a better example and more encouragement to do right in this particular.

Lily, in her plain speaking, would probably have called Mr. and Mrs. Leroy by the same uncomplimentary name she had given to Mr. Raymond; for the same foolish system of management was carried on in their family. Probably they would have been much shocked to hear it said that they taught the lesson of deceit; but was it to be expected that Hattie could have much regard for the truth when she heard herself and her brothers and sisters threatened with punishments, which were not, perhaps, when they were frightened by tales of bears, wolves, and old black men, and such things which had no existence?

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"Willie, your mamma said she would send you to bed if you went there," was said to little Willie Leroy one day.

"Oh, I'm not afraid," answered Willie, contemptuously. "Mamma never does what she says;" and off he ran to the forbidden spot, his words proving quite true, although his mamma heard that he had disobeyed her so deliberately.

"Is your mother going to make you something for the fair?" Hattie was asked by one of her schoolmates.

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"She says so; but I don't know if she will," was the answer.

Hattie's was not the simple faith of "Mamma says so," so sweet in little children. Mamma might or might not do as she had said she would, according to the convenience of the moment.

So it was no marvel that Hattie thought it no great harm to escape punishment or gain some fancied good by stretching the truth, or even telling a deliberate falsehood; or that, having a great love of talking, a story should outgrow its true dimensions in her hands; or that she did not see what was honest and upright as well as some children.

But with Gracie Howard it was very different.

Truth, and truth before all things, was the motto in her home, the lesson which from her babyhood had been taught to her by precept and by example; and the conscience which, in Hattie, was so easily put to sleep, would not let her rest. In vain did jealousy and ambition try to reconcile her to the act of dishonesty and meanness into which she had allowed herself to be drawn; in vain did she argue with herself that "it was all Hattie's fault;" she could not betray Hattie when she had done this just for her; or "there was no way of putting the mat back now; she could not help herself." Gracie sinned with her eyes open, and her conscience all alive to the wickedness of which she was guilty.

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But her stubborn pride was beginning to give way in one point; for she had no mind to "lose the fun of the fair," as Hattie said,—though even the fair had lost some of its attraction with this weight upon her conscience,—and she resolved to send for her mother, and tell her she would ask Miss Ashton's pardon.

So when the long, weary afternoon had worn away, and Mrs. Howard came home, Gracie rang the bell, and sent a message begging her mother to come to her.

Mamma came thankfully; but one look at her little daughter's face was enough to convince her that she was in no softened mood, in no gentle and humbled spirit. It was with a sullen and still half-defiant manner that Gracie offered to do what was required of her; and her mother saw that it was fear of farther punishment, and not real sorrow and repentance, which moved her.

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"I suppose I ought not to have spoken so, mamma," she answered, when her mother asked her if she did not see how very naughty she had been; "but Miss Ashton is so unjust, and Nellie provokes me so."

"How is Miss Ashton unjust?" asked Mrs. Howard.

Gracie fidgeted and pouted, knowing that her mother would not be willing to accept the charges she was ready to bring.

"She's always praising Nellie for every thing she does, mamma; and in these days she never gives me one word of praise, even when every one has to see that I do the best. And—and—I b'lieve she tries to make me miss, so Nellie can go above me in the classes."

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"Gracie," said her mother, "you know that that last accusation is untrue. As for the first, if Miss Ashton is sparing of her praise, my daughter, it is because she knows it is hurtful to you. Nellie is a timid child, trying to do her best, but with little confidence in her own powers; and praise, while it encourages and helps her to persevere, does not make her vain or conceited. But Miss Ashton sees that that which is needful for Nellie is hurtful to you; for it only increases your foolish vanity and self-esteem, and it is for your own good that she gives you a smaller share. You have, unhappily, so good an opinion of yourself, Gracie, that praise not only makes you disagreeable, but disposes you to take less trouble to improve yourself. Let me

hear no more of Miss Ashton's injustice. When you deserve it, or it does not hurt you, Miss Ashton is as ready to give praise to you as she is to another. You say you are willing to ask her pardon for your impertinence; but I fear that you do not really see your fault."

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"Are you not going to let me come out, then, mamma?"

"Yes, since you promise to do as I say; but I fear you are in no proper spirit, Gracie, and that you will fall into further trouble unless you become more submissive and modest."

"Hattie was here this afternoon, mamma," said Gracie, as she followed her mother from the room.

"So I understood," said Mrs. Howard, who had been waiting for the confession, having been informed of the circumstance by the servant.

"I left my mat in school yesterday," said Gracie, "and she thought I would want it, and came to bring it back."

She spoke in a low tone and with downcast eyes; for Gracie was so unused to deceit that she could not carry it out boldly, as a more practised child might have done.

Something in her manner struck her mother, who turned and looked at her.

"Did Hattie bring you any message from Miss Ashton?" she asked.

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"No, mamma: she only came about the mat; and she begged me to ask Miss Ashton's pardon," answered Gracie with the same hesitation.

But her mother only thought that the averted face and drooping look were due to the shame which she felt at meeting the rest of the family after her late punishment and disgrace.

"I told Hattie you would not wish her to stay with me, mamma; but she would not go right away, but I would not let her stay very long."

"I am glad you were so honest, dear," said Mrs Howard.

Honest! Gracie knew how little she deserved such a character, and her mother's praise made her feel more guilty than ever.

She was received with open arms by the other children; for Gracie was the eldest of the flock, and, in spite of her self-conceit, she was a kind little sister, and the younger ones quite shared her own opinion, thinking no child so good and wise as their Gracie. And they had missed her very much; so now they all treated her as if she had been ill or absent, and made much of her.

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But for once Gracie could not enjoy this, and it only seemed to make her feel more ashamed and guilty. What would mamma say, what would all say if they only knew?

Mrs. Howard had told Gracie that she might either go to school early in the morning and make her apology to Miss Ashton before the other scholars came, or she might write to her this evening, and send the note to her teacher.

Gracie had chosen to do the last; but when the younger children had gone to bed, and she tried to write the note, she found she could not bring her mind to it. Her conscience was so troubled, and her thoughts so full of her guilty secret, that the words she needed would not come to her; and as her mother saw her sitting with her elbows upon the table, biting the end of her pencil or scrawling idly over her blotter and seeming to make no progress at all, she believed, and with reason, that Gracie was not truly repentant for what she had done, and had only promised to beg Miss Ashton's pardon in order that she might be released from the imprisonment of which she had tired. Gracie was not usually at a loss for ideas or words where she had any thing to write.

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"I can't do it," she said pettishly at last, pushing paper and pencil from her. "I s'pose I'll have to go to Miss Ashton in the morning, and I b'lieve I'll go to bed now. Good-night, mamma."

And Gracie went to her room, wishing to escape from her own thoughts, and bring this miserable day to a close as soon as possible.

But the next morning it was no better; and now it seemed harder to go to Miss Ashton and speak than it would be to write. But it was too late now: she had no time to compose a note, "make it up" as she would have said, and to copy it before school, and she must abide by her choice of the previous night.

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She started early for school, according to her mother's desire, with many charges from her to remember how grievously she had offended Miss Ashton, and to put away pride and self-conceit and make her apology in a proper spirit.

Had there not been that guilty secret fretting at Gracie's heart, she might have been induced to be more submissive; but, as it was, she felt so unhappy that it only increased her reluctance to make amends to Miss Ashton and acknowledge how wrong she had been.

She asked for her teacher at once when she reached the house, anxious to "have it

over;" and, when the young lady appeared, blurted out, "I beg your pardon, Miss Ashton."

Miss Ashton sat down, and, taking Gracie's half-reluctant hand, drew her kindly towards her.

"It is freely granted, my dear," she said. "And are you truly sorry, Gracie?"

Gracie fidgeted and wriggled uneasily; but we who know what she had done can readily believe that it was more pride than a strict love of the truth which led her to say to herself that she was "not sorry," and "she could not tell a story by saying so." [177]

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, and I won't do so again," she repeated, seeing that Miss Ashton waited for her answer.

Miss Ashton did not wish to force her to say that which she did not feel, and she saw that it was of no use to argue with her in her present stubborn mood; but she talked quietly and kindly to her, setting before her the folly and the wrong of the self-love and vanity which were ruling her conduct, and day by day spoiling all that was good and fair in her character.

"See what trouble they have brought you into now, Gracie," she said; "and unless you check them in time, my child, they will lead you deeper into sin. I scarcely know you for the same little girl who first came to me, so much have these faults grown upon you; and they are fast destroying all the affection and confidence of your school-fellows. Why, Gracie, I have heard one little girl say that 'Gracie thought so much of herself that it sometimes made her forget to be very true.'" [178]

Gracie started. Was this the character her self-love was earning for her? she who desired to stand so high in all points with the world.

Ah! but it was for the praise of man, and not for the honor and glory of God that Gracie strove to outshine all others; and she walked by her own strength, and the poor, weak prop must fail her and would lay her low.

"Forget to be very true!"

How far she had done this, even Miss Ashton did not dream; but it seemed to Gracie that she had chosen her words to give her the deepest thrust, and she bowed her head in shame and fear.

But Miss Ashton, knowing nothing of what was passing in that guilty young heart, was glad to see this, and believed that her words were at last making some impression on Gracie, and that she was taking her counsel and reproof in a different spirit from that in which she generally received them. [179]

Strange to say, in all the miserable and remorseful thoughts which had made her wretched since yesterday afternoon, it had not once entered her mind how she was to face Nellie when the poor child should make known the misfortune which had befallen her.

One by one the children came in, and how awkward Gracie felt in meeting them may readily be imagined by any one who has suffered from some similar and well-merited disgrace. Still she tried, as she whispered to Hattie she should do, to "behave as if nothing had happened;" and when little Belle, after looking at her wistfully for a moment as if undecided how to act, came up and kissed her, saying, "I'm glad to see you, Gracie," she answered rather ungraciously, "I'm sure it's not so very long since you saw me," and sent the dear little girl away feeling very much rebuffed. [180]

And yet she really felt Belle's innocent friendliness, and her sweet attempt to make her welcome and at her ease; but pride would not let her show it.

Nellie was one of the last to arrive, and her troubled and woe-begone face startled Gracie and smote her to the heart.

"Such a dreadful thing has happened to me," said Nellie, when she was questioned by the other children; and the tears started to her eyes afresh as she spoke.

"What is it? What is it?" asked a number of eager voices.

"I don't know how it can have happened," said Nellie, hardly able to speak for the sobs she vainly tried to keep back. "I have been so, so careful; but there is an ugly spot like ink or something on my mat. I can't think how it ever came there, for I put it in my desk very carefully when school began yesterday, and did not take it out till I got home, and I did not know there was any ink near it. But when I unrolled it last evening the stain was there, and mamma thinks it is ink, and she cannot get it out. And I've taken such pains to keep the mat clean and nice." [181]

And here poor Nellie's voice broke down entirely, while Gracie, feeling as if her self-command, too, must give way, opened her desk and put her head therein, with a horrible choking feeling in her throat.

"We'll all tell Mrs. Howard it came somehow through not any fault of yours," said Lily. "Never mind, Nellie, yours is the best mat, anyhow; we all know it;" and Lily cast a defiant and provoking glance at Gracie, which was quite lost upon the latter.

Lily had suggested on the day before, that when Gracie came back to school they

should "all behave just as if nothing had happened," just what Gracie intended to do; but generous Lily had said it in quite a different spirit from that in which Gracie proposed it to herself.

But Gracie's rebuff to Belle, and the seeming indifference with which she treated Nellie's misfortune, roused Lily's indignation once more; for she thought, as did many of the other children, that Gracie did not feel sorry for Nellie's trouble, since it gave her the greater chance of having her own work pronounced the best.

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"Yes, we will tell Mrs. Howard," said Dora Johnson: "yours was really the best mat of all, though Gracie's was almost as nice; and we will tell her something happened to it that you could not help, and perhaps she will not mind it."

"Perhaps a vase standing on it would cover the spot," said Laura Middleton.

Nellie shook her head.

"No," she said, "that would not make it any better. Mrs. Howard said that the best and neatest mat must take the highest premium, and mine is not the neatest now. I wouldn't feel comfortable to do any thing that was not quite fair, even if you all said I might."

"That was not quite fair!"

More and more ashamed, and feeling how far behind Nellie left her in honesty and fairness, Gracie still sat fumbling in her desk, looking for nothing.

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"Well," said Dora, "we'll speak to Mrs. Howard about it, and see what she says: won't we, Gracie?"

Gracie muttered something which might mean either yes or no.

"Augh!" said Lily, "what do you talk to that proudy about it for? She don't care a bit. I b'lieve she's just glad and wouldn't help Nellie if she could."

Gracie made no answer: she was too miserable for words or to think of answering Lily's taunts, and she would have given up all thought of having any thing to do with the fair to have had Nellie's mat safely in her possession once more. Oh, if she had never yielded to temptation or to Hattie's persuasions!

"How you do act!" whispered Hattie to Gracie. "If you don't take care they will suspect something."

"I can't help it," returned Gracie in the same tone: "it is such an awful story that we have told."

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"It is not a story," said Hattie; "we've neither of us said one word about the mat."

This was a new view of the matter; but it brought no comfort to Gracie's conscience. She knew that the acted deceit was as bad as the spoken one, perhaps in this case even worse.

She felt as if she could not bear this any longer, as if she must tell, must confess what she had done; and yet—how? How could she lower herself so in the eyes of her schoolmates? she who had always held herself so high, been so scornful over the least meanness, equivocation, or approach to falsehood!

A more wretched little girl than Gracie was that morning it would have been hard to find; but her teacher and schoolmates thought her want of spirit arose from the recollection of her late naughtiness and the feeling of shame, and took as little notice of it as possible.

And Lily, repenting of her resentment when she saw how dull and miserable Gracie seemed, threw her arms about her neck as they were leaving school, and said, "Please forgive me my provokingness this morning, Gracie. I ought to be ashamed, and I am."

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But Gracie could not return, scarcely suffer, the caress, and dared not trust herself to speak, as she thought how furious Lily's indignation would be if she but knew the truth.



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X.

A GAME OF CHARACTERS.



AT home or at school, studying, working or playing—for the latter she had little heart now—Gracie could not shake off the weight that was upon her mind and spirits. Even her work for the fair had lost its interest; and as for the mat, Nellie's mat, she could not bear the sight of it. She went to sleep at night thinking of it, and trying to contrive some way out of her difficulty, though she would not listen to the voice of her conscience which whispered that there was but one way; and she woke in the morning with the feeling that something dreadful had happened. Appetite and spirits failed; she grew fretful and irritable, and her mother imagined that she must be ill, though Gracie resolutely persisted that there was nothing the matter with her, and that she felt quite well.

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"Gracie," said Mrs. Howard one morning after three or four days had passed, "it appears to me that you are not doing much on your mat. How is that?"

"I don't care," answered Gracie, fretfully. "I don't believe I'll finish it. I'm tired of the old thing."

"That will not do, my child," said her mother. "You have undertaken to do this for your grandmamma and for the fair, and I cannot have you stop it now without some good reason. Bring the mat to me."

Gracie went for the mat very unwillingly, though she dared not refuse nor even show her reluctance.

"It really does you credit," said Mrs. Howard, taking it from her hands: "it is so smooth and even, and you have kept it so neat. But you must be more industrious, dear, if you are to have it finished in time. And see, Gracie," she continued, looking at it more closely, "these last few lines look not *quite* as nicely as the rest. There is a difference in the work, and you will have to take more pains than you have done

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here. It looks almost as if another person had worked it. You have not let any one help you with it, have you?"

"No, mamma," replied Gracie in a low tone and with a frightened feeling. Was there really such a difference between her work and Nellie's that it was so easily detected?

It had not occurred either to her or to Hattie, perhaps they did not know, that the work of two different hands seldom or never matches well upon embroidery in worsted, and that it is almost sure to be perceived. She was dismayed at the thought that her mother had noticed this, and now every stitch that she took seemed to make the difference more plain, take what pains she might.

She began to feel angry and indignant at Hattie for leading her into this sin, shutting her eyes to the fact that, if she had not allowed proud and jealous thoughts to creep into her heart, temptation would not have had so much influence over her. [189]

She no longer took any pleasure in the society of her little friend, and shrank from her in a way that Hattie perceived, and by which she was hurt; for she was disposed in her own mind to throw all the blame upon Hattie, forgetting that she was really the most to blame, since she had been better taught, and saw more clearly the difference between right and wrong.

As for Nellie, poor, innocent, injured Nellie, Gracie felt as if she could not bear the sight of her; and when she saw in what a gentle, patient spirit she took her great misfortune,—for so all the children considered it,—she grew more and more ashamed and lowered in her own sight. Pride and self-esteem could not now blind her to the fact that Nellie was better, far better, than herself.

Meanwhile the change in Gracie was exciting the wonder of all, the pity of some, of her young friends and schoolmates. Only Hattie held the clew to it; and she was surprised that such "a trifle," as she considered it, should have such an effect upon Gracie and make her so unhappy. [190]

But Gracie was not a really bad or deceitful child, although she had suffered herself to be led so far astray. She was not naturally more unkind or selfish than most of us who have not the love and fear of God before us; indeed she was what children call "generous" in giving or sharing what she had, and she was always glad to do a helpful or obliging act for another. But she had always trusted to her own strength, and believed she could not fall, and now she was learning that her high thoughts of herself, and her carelessness of what she considered little faults, had made her an easy prey to temptation and the indulgence of a foolish pride and jealousy had led her into this great sin into which she had not imagined she could fall. But although she saw this now, she was not truly repentant; for she would not take the only right and true way to make amends; and spent her time wishing vain wishes, and trying to contrive some way out of her difficulty without bringing disgrace upon herself or losing her character for honor and truthfulness among her young companions. It troubled Gracie far less to think how she already stood in the eyes of God, than it did to imagine how she might appear in the sight of her earthly friends if this thing were known. [191]

There was a small children's party at Mrs. Bradford's. Gracie did not care to go; indeed she would much rather not have done so: but her mother had accepted for her, and she had no good excuse for staying away.

She was more restless and miserable than usual that afternoon: she set up her opinion against that of all the rest, found fault with her playmates in every game that was begun, was more than usually sure that she knew every thing and could do better than any one else, and, not having her wits and thoughts about her, miserably failed in all the plays in which she meant to shine. [192]

"What shall we play now?" asked Bessie at length, when they had all tired of some romping game.

"Let's take a little rest, and play 'Characters,'" said Gracie, who was very good in this, having no match among her present playmates save Maggie.

"Well," said Maggie, willing to please her if possible, although she saw some objections to the game just now; "we'll play it; but it is rather hard for the younger ones, so we must take easy characters. Who'll go out?"

"I will," said Lily; "but mind you do take an easy one. Somebody we know very well, not any history or jography character. I don't want to bother my head about lesson people when I'm playing."

"Very well," said Maggie; and Lily went out, singing loudly in the hall that she might "be sure and not hear."

"Let's take Cromwell," said Gracie, always anxious, no matter what her frame of mind, to display her knowledge. [193]

"No," said Maggie, "that's too hard for Lily; and she wants us to take some one we know."

"I should think any goose might know about Cromwell," said Gracie.

"We did not know about him till a few weeks ago," said Dora Johnson. "We've only just had him in our history, and I don't b'lieve Lily knows much about him."

"Then take Lafayette," said Gracie.

"Lily means some of the people we have in our own lives," said Bessie. "Make haste: she'll be tired."

This was seconded by Lily's voice calling from without, "Why don't you make haste? I should think you were choosing a hundred people."

"Let's take Flossey," said Belle, looking at the dog, who had jumped upon a chair beside Maggie, where he sat with a wise and sedate air as if he were listening to all that passed, and ready to take his share in the game. [194]

This was agreed upon by all but Gracie, who declared that it was "ridiculous to choose a dog," and she had "a great mind not to play the game in such an absurd way."

Lily was called in and proceeded to ask her questions.

"Male or female?" was the first, beginning at Dora.

"Male," answered Dora.

"Black or white?" asked Lily.

"Neither," said Belle, who was next in turn, "least he's not black at all; but he's some white."

Lily looked rather puzzled at this.

"And what color besides is he?"

"Brown," answered Bessie.

"A brown and white man," said Lily. "Oh! I know. It's old black Peter."

"No, no, no," echoed around the circle.

"Not one scrap of Peter is white," said Mamie Stone. "He's the blackest old man I ever saw."

"Part of his eyes are white and his teeth too," said Lily, who was generally pretty sure of her ground when she stated a fact. "Where does he live?" [195]

"In this country," said Nellie.

"In this city?"

"Yes," answered Maggie.

"Is he good or bad?"

"Good, most generally," answered Mabel; "only sometimes pretty mischievous."

"Oh," said Lily, light beginning to break upon her. "Can he talk?"

"He tan't talt, but he tan bart pretty well," said Frankie, to whom the question fell.

"Oh! oh! that's too plain," cried one and another laughing; and Maggie, thinking Frankie did not understand the game well enough to be allowed to go out, gave a hint to Lily, but not wishing to hurt her little brother's feelings took refuge in the French language, and said:—

"Ne *guessez pas* a lui."

Frankie, however, was too sharp for her; there was not much that escaped him, and he exclaimed in a very aggrieved tone that it was "not fair," and that Lily should guess at him. [196]

So Lily said "Flossey" was the character; and, amid much laughter, the young gentleman betook himself to the hall with a pompous air, telling the little girls to make haste.

"Let's take himself," said Bessie, which being agreed upon, Frankie was called back almost before he was well out of the room.

"Is he blat or white?" he asked, following Lily's example, and beginning as she had done at Dora.

"He's white," said Dora laughing; and, in obedience to a suggestion from Maggie to help him out, she added,— "white, with brown eyes and red cheeks and brown hair."

"Flossey," cried Frankie triumphantly.

"No, no; not Flossey again," said the children.

"Does he have four feets?" asked the little boy.

"No, only two," said Belle.

"Does he live in the stable?" asked Frankie.

"No, he lives in this house," said Bessie. [197]

"Blackie," said Frankie, who was unable to give up the idea that since it was not Flossey it must be the little pony owned by his sisters.

"Does he eat hay?" was his next question.

"No," answered Nellie, "he eats fruit and meat and bread and milk, and, oh! how he does love sugar and candy!"

"Me," cried Frankie, feeling that this description exactly suited himself.

The character having been guessed at Nellie she now went out, and Maggie, willing to put Gracie in a good humor if possible, asked her who they should take this time.

"Mary, Queen of Scots," answered Gracie promptly.

It was not altogether probable that the younger children knew much of this unfortunate lady, but Gracie's choice was acceded to and Nellie called.

"Male or female?" was of course the first question.

"Female," answered Dora.

"Old or young?"

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"Um—m—m, pretty old," said Belle; "at least she was grown up."

"Is she alive now?"

"No," answered Bessie.

"Where did she live?"

"Well," said Lily, "she lived in a good many places. But not in this country. Generally in France or Scotland."

"Oh," said Nellie to whom this answer gave an inkling of the truth; but she passed on to the next.

"Was she good or bad, Maggie?"

"Some think her quite celestial and some think her quite infernal," answered Maggie with grand emphasis; "but on the whole I think she was not either, only rather middling like the most of us."

Nellie felt more confident than ever; but not caring to risk one of her three guesses as yet, she passed on. The questions she put to Mabel and Frankie were simple and very easily answered; then came Gracie's turn.

"What was she celebrated for?"

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"For cruelty and persecuting people," answered Gracie confidently; and Nellie's idea was at once put to flight by the reply.

"That's a mistake," said Dora. "You are thinking of another character, Gracie."

"I'm not, either," said Gracie. "Don't I know history better than any of you?"

"You don't know *that*, anyway," said Maggie. "Gracie, you *are* wrong. *She* was not the character you are thinking of, and was not celebrated for that."

"But she *was*," persisted Gracie.

"Nellie," said Maggie, "you need not guess by what Gracie has told you, for she is not right."

"I'll put my question another way," said Nellie. "Can I ask Gracie once again?"

All agreed and Nellie asked,—

"Was she celebrated for her beauty and her misfortunes?"

"I shan't tell you," said Gracie snappishly. "If I do, I shan't be believed, but they'll all go and contradict me. I suppose I know what I know; and any of you might be proud if you knew as much history as I do and had kept the head of the class so long."

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Gracie had for a moment forgotten how disgracefully she had lost her place at the head of the history class, but the silence that followed her ill-tempered speech brought it back to her and increased her vexation.

"You all think you know so much," she said, throwing herself back sullenly in her chair.

Bessie had begged Lily to bear with Gracie and not to aggravate her as she seemed so miserable and out of spirits, and Lily had been very forbearing; at least, so she thought. But now her small stock of patience was quite exhausted and she exclaimed vehemently:—

"Gracie, we try to stand you; we do try with all our might and main; but you use up every bit of standing there is in me!"

This did not mend matters in Gracie's present state of mind, but led to a pretty severe quarrel between her and Lily which the others vainly tried to heal, Lily being rather provoking, and Gracie obstinately sullen and ill-tempered.

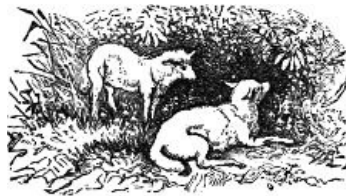
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It ended in a violent burst of tears from the latter, and a declaration that she would

go home at once. But this was impossible, since it was now evening; and the children's supper-time being near at hand, Mrs. Bradford could not just then spare a servant to go home with Gracie.

No soothing or coaxing proved of any avail, nor did Lily's repentance; for she was sorry now that she had been provoking, and would readily have kissed and made up if Gracie could have been persuaded to do so.

Gracie said that she would not stay where Lily was, and went sulkily upstairs to the room where Maggie and Bessie slept.



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XI.

CONFESSION.



RACIE expected and wished to be left to herself till it was time to go home; at least she thought she did, and she had quite made up her mind that if any one came and begged her to go down to supper she would steadily refuse.

She stood there with all manner of unhappy and wretched feelings, wishing vain and fruitless wishes, as she had so often done since she had fallen into this sin,—that she had never allowed Hattie to tempt her into doing what she knew to be wrong; that grandmamma had never made this plan or offered to put a price on the different pieces of work; that she had never gone to the school, or that Nellie had never belonged to it; but still she did not think of wishing that she had not thought so much of herself or been so very anxious above all things to be first.

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Poor Gracie! Only those can tell how unhappy she was who have themselves so fallen and so suffered. There was no way out of her trouble but by confessing all the truth, and she could not bring herself to that.

She had not closed the door when she came in, and presently she heard a gentle foot-fall, then Bessie's soft voice, saying, "Are you in here, Gracie?"

There was no light in the room save the faint glimmer of moonlight which came through the window, and as Gracie stood in the shade, Bessie did not at first see her.

"Yes, I'm here, but I don't want any supper, and I'm not coming down till I go home," answered Gracie, not as ungraciously as she had intended to speak, for somehow she could not be disagreeable to dear Bessie.

"Supper is not quite ready yet, and you shall have some up here if you had very much rather not come down," said Bessie with a coaxing tone in her voice; "but you'd better come down, Gracie. They're all very sorry for you and don't think you meant to be cross, 'cause Nellie said she was sure something troubled you for a good many days, or you did not feel well, and that often made people impatient, so we ought not to be mad at you."

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Gracie made no answer, but presently Bessie heard a low sob.

"Gracie, dear," she said, coming closer to her little friend and putting her arms about her neck, "something does trouble you, doesn't it? Couldn't you tell me what it is, and let me see if I could comfort you? Sometimes it makes people feel better to tell their troubles and have some one feel sorry for them."

The caressing touch, the tender manner, the earnest, pleading voice were too much for Gracie, and, throwing herself down on a chair, she buried her face in her arms and sobbed bitterly.

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Bessie let her cry for a moment, for the wise little woman knew that tears often do

one good for a while, and contented herself with giving soft touches to Gracie's hair and neck to let her know she was still beside her and ready to give her her sympathy.

At last Gracie raised her head and said brokenly, "Oh, Bessie, I am so bad! I am so wicked!"

"I don't think being rather—rather—well, rather cross, is so very *wicked*," said Bessie, hesitating to give a hard name to Gracie's ill-temper, "and if you are sorry now and will come downstairs, we'll all be very glad to see you."

"Oh, it isn't that," sobbed Gracie. "Bessie, if you knew what I've done, you'd hate me. I know you would."

"No, I wouldn't," said Bessie. "I'd never hate you, Gracie. I'd only be sorry for you and try to help you."

"You can't help me. No one can help me," said Gracie, in a fresh paroxysm of distress. [206]

"Can't your mamma? Mammams generally can," said Bessie.

"No, not even mamma," answered Gracie. "Oh, Bessie, I do feel as if it would be a kind of relief to tell you; but you'd hate me, you couldn't help it; and so would every one else."

"Every one else need not know it because you tell me," said Bessie. "Tell Jesus, and ask Him to help you, Gracie."

"Even He can't," said Gracie; "at least—at least—not unless I tell other people who ought to know it."

"Do you mean He would want you to tell it?"

"Yes, I s'pose so," almost whispered Gracie.

Bessie considered a moment. That Gracie was full of a vain, foolish pride and self-conceit, she knew; also that she was not the Gracie of a year or two since; but that she would wrong any one she never dreamed, and she could not imagine any cause for this great distress. [207]

"Gracie," she said, "I think by what you say that you must have done something to me. I can't think what it can be; but I promise not to be angry. I will be friends with you all the same."

"It was not you; no, it was not you; but, Bessie, it was such a dreadful thing and so mean that you never can bear me after you know it. You are so very true yourself."

"Have you told a story?" asked Bessie in a troubled voice.

"Not told a story, but I acted one," sobbed Gracie. "O Bessie! sit down here and let me tell you. I can't keep it in any longer. Maybe you'll tell me what to do; but I know what you'll say, and I can't do that."

Bessie did as she was requested, and, in as few whispered words as possible, Gracie poured her wretched story into her ears.

Bessie sprang to her feet, and her arms which she had clasped about Gracie's neck fell away from it. It was as the latter had feared; this was so much worse than any thing Bessie had expected, she was herself so truthful and upright, that her whole soul was filled with horror and dismay. No wonder that Gracie was distressed. This was indeed dreadful. [208]

"I knew it, I knew it," said Gracie, burying her face again. "I knew you never could bear me again. It seemed as if I couldn't help telling you, Bessie; but you never, never will speak to me again. I wish—I wish—oh, I almost wish I was an orphan and had no one to care for me, so I could wish I was dead, only I'm too bad to go to God."

Sympathy and pity were regaining their place in Bessie's heart in spite of her horror and indignation at what Gracie had done, and once more she sat down beside her and tried to soothe and comfort.

She succeeded in part at least. Gracie's sobs grew less violent, and she let Bessie persuade her to raise her head. Then they sat side by side, Bessie holding her hand. [209]

"What would you do, Bessie?" asked Gracie. "I know I ought to tell, but I don't see how I can. It will be such a disgrace, and all the girls will have to know, and I've made such a fuss about myself, and always thought I never could do any thing that was very bad. And now this."

And now this!

Yes, after all her boasting, after all her self-confidence, her belief that she could not and would not fall into greater sin through her own conceit and vanity.

Bessie knew all this; knew how confident Gracie had been in her own strength; knew what a bitter shame and mortification it must be to have this known; knew that it must be long before she could regain the trust and respect of her schoolmates after this thing should once be told. During the last few months Gracie had lost much of the liking and affection of her little friends; but not one among them would have [210]

believed her capable of deliberate deceit or of that which was not strictly honest.

Ah! it was a great and terrible fall. Bessie felt this as well as Gracie.

But she knew also that there was but one thing for Gracie to do; but one way in which she could have any peace or comfort once more.

Bessie was not the child for Gracie to put confidence in, if she expected advice that was not plain and straightforward.

"What *shall* I do, Bessie?" she repeated.

"I think you'll have to tell, dear," said the pitying little voice beside her.

Gracie actually shrank in a kind of terror at the thought; and yet she had known that this was what Bessie would say.

"Oh! I can't, I can't; I never can," she moaned.

"But, Gracie, dear," said the little monitress, "I don't think you will ever feel happy and comfortable again till you do; and Jesus is displeased with you all the time till you do it. If you told about it and tried to make it up to Nellie, then He would be pleased with you again. And then you could have comfort in that even if people were rather cross to you about it. And, Gracie, Maggie and I will not be offended with you. I know Maggie will not; and we'll coax the other girls not to tease you or be unkind to you about it."

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"Don't you think it was so very wicked in me then?" asked Gracie. "O Bessie! you are such a good child, I don't believe you ever have wicked thoughts. You don't know how hard it is sometimes not to do wrong when you want to do it very much,—when a very, very great temptation comes, like this."

"Yes," said Bessie, "I think I do, Gracie. And you are very much mistaken when you say I never have naughty thoughts. I have them very often, and the only way I can make them go is, to ask Jesus to help me, and to keep asking Him till they do go, and the temptation too. Perhaps, when you had the temptation to do this you did not remember to ask."

"No, I did not," said Gracie. "But, Bessie, it never seemed to me that I *could* do a thing that was not quite true and honest. And I suppose it has come because I thought too much of myself and wanted too much to have my work the best. It was not that I cared about the money, for you know that was for Jessie and her grandfather; but I wanted every one to say mine was the best; and it made me so mad that any one should say Nellie's was better than mine. If I had not cared so very much, Hattie would not have persuaded me, for I *did* know it was horribly mean. You never had a temptation like this, Bessie."

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"I don't know," said Bessie slowly. "I think I once had one something like it. Don't you remember, Gracie, that time you lost your prize composition and we found it in the drawer of the hall-table?"

"Yes," answered Gracie, "and how cross I was about it, and how hateful to you and Maggie."

"Well," said Bessie, "I had a very hard temptation that time. I found the composition first, and I wanted to leave it there and not tell any one, 'cause I wanted Maggie to have the prize so much; and at first it did not seem so very wrong to me, and I tried to think I *ought* not to tell, because then my own Maggie could have the prize; but I did not feel sure about it, so I asked Jesus to let me see what I ought to do, and then I saw it quite plain, and knew I must take the composition to you. But it was a dreadful temptation, Gracie."

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"Yes," said Gracie with a sigh, feeling deeply the difference between herself and her dear little playmate who had so bravely resisted temptation. For she knew how very anxious Bessie had been that Maggie should gain the prize.

"But you did not *do* the thing you were tempted to do," she said. "What would you do if you had, Bessie?"

"I should go right away and tell my mamma; and perhaps she could find some way to help me out of it," said Bessie. "Anyway, she ought to know, and she will tell you what you ought to do."

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"Oh, it will make mamma feel dreadfully," said Gracie. "She was always telling me I would fall into trouble some day because I thought too much of myself; but, oh, dear! she never could have believed I would do this. Wouldn't you feel awfully, Bessie, if you had done it?"

Yes, indeed. Bessie felt that she should; it almost seemed to her that she should die if she had such a weight on her mind and conscience, and she felt for Gracie most deeply.

But still she knew that Gracie would never feel right again till she had made confession, and she once more urged it upon her; confession to God and man; and at last Gracie promised.

Promised with many tears and sobs; but that promise once given, she became in

haste to have it over and to go home to her mamma at once.

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"Ask your mamma to let me go home as soon as she can, Bessie," she pleaded. "Tell her I do not feel well, for I do not really. My head aches and I feel all shaky, as if I could not hold still; and I don't want to see any one down stairs again or to have any supper."

Bessie was about to leave her to do as she was asked, when Mrs. Bradford came in.

"Gracie and Bessie," she said, "are you here? You were so long in coming that I feared something was wrong. Will you not come down and have some supper, Gracie?"

Gracie did not speak, but held fast to Bessie's hand.

"Mamma," said the little girl, "Gracie does not feel well, and she would like to go home as soon as you could send her. She's quite trembling, mamma. I feel her."

Mrs. Bradford took Gracie's hand in hers and found that it was indeed cold and trembling, while her temples were hot and throbbing; for over-excitement and worry had made her really ill, and the lady saw that she was more fit for bed than for the supper-room.

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She told Gracie she should go home immediately, and putting on her hat led her down stairs, and calling Mr. Bradford, begged him to take the poor little girl home and explain matters to her mamma.

Gracie clung to Bessie for a good-night kiss, whispering, "I will do it, Bessie; no matter what comes after, I will do it."

Mr. Bradford took her home,—it was not far from his house,—talking cheerfully by the way and trying to keep her amused; but, though Gracie felt he was kind, she hardly knew what he was saying, her mind was so taken up with the thought of the dreadful secret she had to confess.

Mrs. Howard was startled, as was only natural, to see her little girl coming home so much before she had expected her; and Mr. Bradford's assurance that he did not think there was much wrong with Gracie, and that she would be well after a good night's sleep, did not quiet her fears, especially when she looked in Gracie's face.

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She quickly undressed her and put her to bed; but, longing as Gracie was to have her confession over, she could not tell it while the nurse was in the room; and it was not until she was safely in bed, and the woman sent to prepare some medicine, that she gave vent to the tears she had managed to keep back before her.

"There, there, my darling," said her mother soothingly. "You will be better soon. Do not be frightened; this is only a little nervousness."

"O mamma, mamma!" cried poor Gracie; "you ought not to be so kind to me. You don't know how bad, how very bad I am."

"Is there any thing especially wrong just now, Gracie?" asked her mother gently.

"Yes, mamma; oh, yes. I have—I have—put your head closer, mamma, and let me whisper;" and then, with her face hidden against her mother's shoulder, came the confession, made with many bitter tears and sobs.

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Mrs. Howard was greatly shocked; she could hardly speak when she heard all.

"Shall you ever be able to forgive me, mamma?" sobbed Gracie. "I know, I know you think me perfectly dreadful, but if you could try me just this once, and see if I ever do such a thing again. Indeed, I don't think I could. I know I am not too good to do it, as I thought I was before; but I have felt so dreadfully ever since I did it, I don't think I could ever punish myself so again."

"I can believe that you have been very unhappy, my child," said her mother; "indeed I have seen it, though I did not know the cause. But you have need to ask a higher forgiveness than mine."

"I will, mamma," said Gracie; "but—but—I suppose Nellie and the other children must be told?"

"I fear so, Gracie," said her mother. "Nellie must be righted and have her own mat again, and I do not see how we are to avoid having the rest of the children hear this terrible thing also. I must see Miss Ashton in the morning and talk it over with her, and we will arrange what is best to be done. But now you must try to be quiet and go to sleep. You are over-excited and will be really ill, so I can allow you to talk no more. But before you sleep, my child, make your peace with your Father in heaven, and ask Him to help you to bear the punishment you have brought upon yourself by your naughty pride and ambition."

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Gracie obeyed her mother as well as she was able; and, truly repentant, we may hope, at last fell into a troubled sleep.



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XII.

THE FAIR.



HE next day was Saturday, when there was no school, so that Mrs. Howard was able to see Miss Ashton and tell her the sad story, quite early in the morning.

Miss Ashton was much grieved and surprised; for, as she told Mrs. Howard, although she had known that Gracie's high thoughts of herself and belief that she was wiser and better than any of her companions often led her into exaggeration, yet she could not have believed her capable of any thing that was really mean and dishonorable.

She was distressed, too, at the thought of the exposure and mortification which must follow; for it seemed necessary, for Nellie's sake, that not only Grandmamma Howard, but the whole school should know the truth. She and Mrs. Howard talked it all over for some time, but neither of the two ladies saw any way to avoid this disgrace for Gracie. They would willingly have spared her the punishment, if possible, for she had already suffered severely, and she seemed so truly humble and repentant that her mother did not believe there was much fear she would again fall into this sin.

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Mrs. Howard had thought last night that perhaps she ought to deprive Gracie of any share in the fair; but that must make her disgrace very well known, and now she hoped that there was no need of further punishment to make her see and feel her great fault.

And now Grandmamma Howard must be seen and told the sad story. Mrs. Howard knew that she would be much distressed that her kind plan should turn out so badly. Neither Gracie's mamma nor Miss Ashton had quite approved of that plan; especially on Gracie's account, but they could not well say so and cross the good old lady.

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It was as they had feared. Grandmamma was very much grieved and disturbed to know that what she had intended to be a help and a kindness, had only proved a source of trouble, and an encouragement to Gracie's besetting sin.

There yet remained to Mrs. Howard the still more painful task of telling Nellie how she had been wronged. She would have thought it right to make Gracie do this herself, had it not been that the child was really ill that morning, and in no state for further excitement; and it was not just to Nellie to put off the confession any longer.

Nellie was filled with amazement. Much as she had wondered over the unfortunate spot upon the mat she supposed to be hers, she had never dreamed of a thing like this, nor had she the least suspicion of the truth. Indeed, how should she?

She was a quiet child, with a more wise and thoughtful little head than those who did not know her well would have given her credit for; but words did not come to her very readily, and, after the first surprise was over, she only said to Mrs. Howard, with the tears in her eyes,—

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"Please tell Gracie I am not angry with her, and hope she will be friends with me once more. Let's try not to think about it any more than we can help; will you, Mrs. Howard?"

Generous, forgiving Nellie! How ashamed Gracie felt when her mother told her this, and she contrasted Nellie's conduct with her own.

She lay upon her little bed that afternoon, feeling wretched both in mind and body,

though it was a relief to remember that she had confessed all to mamma, and that she had set her face toward the right way once more, when Mrs. Howard came in bringing Nellie with her.

Poor Gracie gave a low sob, and covered her face with her hands in utter shame and distress, feeling as if she could not bear to have Nellie look at her.

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But in a moment Nellie was beside her, saying,—

"Don't, Gracie; please don't. You needn't feel so very badly about it now. I don't care much, and we'll make it all up."

"Oh, Nellie, Nellie! I don't deserve you to be so kind to me," sobbed Gracie. "I was so hateful to you and so jealous, and it seemed as if I could not bear to have you go before me in any thing. I know I've been just too hateful to you."

"Well, never mind now," said Nellie.

Mrs. Howard had gone out and left the two children together.

"I can't help minding," said Gracie; "and, only think, Nellie, all the other girls in the school will have to know, and it will shame me almost to death. I hope, I hope mamma will never make me go back to school, and I mean to stay away from the fair, any way."

"That is what I came to see you about," said Nellie. "The girls need not know, Gracie. You see my—your—the mat with the ink-spot on it is nearly finished now, so I have done about as much work on one as on the other. And I don't care so very much about having mine called the best, for the money will do Jessie and her grandfather just as much good, no matter who earns it. So if each of us finishes the one she has now, it will be all the same, and the rest of the children need never know it. I am sure, Gracie, I should feel just as you do, and never want to come back to school again or see any of our class if I had done this, and I know just how badly you must feel. So I thought about it, and it seemed to me it would come right again if we just went on with the work as if this had not been found out; I mean if you had not told. I'd rather no one would know it but just those who know now. Don't you think we could arrange it so, Gracie? Your mother gave me leave to tell you this, and says she would be very glad for you if it can be done, and she thinks Miss Ashton will be willing."

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To hear the earnest, wistful voice one might have supposed that generous, great-hearted Nellie was pleading for some great boon for herself.

But she could not tell all that Gracie felt. No, indeed; she did not know what coals of fire she was heaping on her head; how perfectly humbled and remorseful she felt as she remembered all the hard thoughts she had cherished toward her; the unkind words and unjust actions of which she had been guilty; all forgotten now, it seemed, by Nellie, who was only anxious to make the path of repentance as easy as possible to her, and to avoid all unnecessary shame and exposure to the one who had so greatly injured her.

With many sobs and broken words she told Nellie all that was in her heart, beseeching her forgiveness, and thanking her over and over for her consideration and sweet thoughtfulness; not that she put it in just such words, but in those that were very simple and very touching to Nellie.

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So peace was made between them,—a peace that was sure to be lasting and true where there was such sincere repentance on one side, such good will and hearty forgiveness on the other.

Grandmamma Howard was only too glad on Gracie's account to accept Nellie's generous proposal.

Miss Ashton also agreed that the matter should go no further, and so it was arranged, and further disgrace to Gracie avoided, although the weight of shame and remorse was not readily lifted from her heart, and she felt as if her schoolmates must know her secret and that she dared scarcely look them in the face.

They all wondered at the new humility and modesty which she now began to show; but the change was an agreeable one, and drew forth no unkind remarks.

A prettier sight than Miss Ashton's garden and piazza on that lovely June afternoon when the long-talked-of fair took place, would have been hard to find. Kind friends had decked the spot tastefully; flowers were everywhere in abundance; the tables conveniently and becomingly arranged; and the display of articles upon them was not only tempting, but such as had been manufactured by the children did them wonderful credit. Flags, ribbons, wreaths, and festoons, all joined to make the scene gay; and in and out, among and below them flitted the white-robed "little sunbeams," who lent the fairest life and brightness to the scene.

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"Sunbeams" they all were that day, indeed. No cloud appeared to darken their happiness, no ill-temper, jealousy, or desire to outvie one another was heard or seen. Even Gracie and Hattie, who were each rather oppressed with the sense of past naughtiness, and the feeling of what the others would say and think if they knew all,

could not but be bright and gay amid this pleasant companionship.

Gracie had told Hattie that she had confessed her sin to her mother, and the latter knew that some share of blame must have fallen to her; so, although she did not look upon it in as serious a light as Gracie did, she had an uncomfortable and conscious feeling. Miss Ashton had talked to her more seriously than she had ever done before, and had also informed her parents of what had taken place, telling them that she did not wish to disgrace Hattie, and so, as it was near the close of school, she would not ask them to remove her now; but that she could not take her back in the fall. Hattie's utter disregard of truth had already brought too much trouble into her little flock for her to risk any further mischief from that source.

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Hattie's parents had been much mortified and displeased, and the child herself had been severely punished; but I doubt if the punishment had been altogether just; for how was the child who saw equivocation and deceit used at home as a means of family government when convenience demanded it, to learn the value of the jewel thus sullied, or to judge of the line where it was believed that falsehood must stop and truth and uprightness begin?

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As for generous Nellie, she seemed to have no recollection of what had passed, unless it was in the new and caressing tenderness of her manner toward Gracie; not a patronizing manner, but one full of encouragement and helpfulness.

The other children wondered not only at Gracie's new gentleness and modesty, but also at the sudden intimacy which seemed to have sprung up between these two.

"Maybe," said Lily privately, "it is because Gracie is learning to think better of herself"—which was just the opposite from what Lily meant—"and Nellie's trying to help her."

"Yes," said Maggie; "perhaps Gracie is learning it is 'never too late to mend,' which would make her much more agreeable, and other people would think more of her. I do think she is improved."

Maggie had yielded not alone to the persuasions of Miss Ashton, but also to an earnest appeal from Gracie, and accepted once more the title of Queen. And very well she became it, standing in front of her throne—which she could not be persuaded to occupy—within the pretty bower into which one end of the piazza had been turned, according to her ideas. Bessie, Belle, and Lily were her "maids of honor," and helped her to sell the bouquets and baskets of flowers with which she was bountifully supplied; and they drove a thriving trade; for so many sweet smiles, bright looks, and winning words went with the flowers that the stock within the "Queen's Bower" was much in demand. She had her band of music too, for half a dozen canary-birds hung within and around the bower, and, excited by the laughter and chatter about them, seemed to try which could sing the loudest and sweetest.

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Jessie's parrot was on exhibition, lent by his present owner for the occasion, down in the old summer-house at the end of the garden, where Jessie herself took the ten cents admission fee, and made him display all his accomplishments.

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And the Doll! She must have a capital letter to do justice to her perfections. Of all the dolls that ever were seen or heard or thought of, that doll surely took the lead. It would be of no use for me to describe her or her toilet, for if you should ever see her, you would surely tell me that I had not told one half.

It was nearly the hour at which the fair was "to begin," and the children were all gathered about the table on which she was displayed, when there came a ring at the front door-bell.

Away fluttered every little saleswoman to her appointed stand, hoping that this might be the first customer.

And so it proved; for it was no less a person than old Mrs. Howard, who had purposely timed her arrival so that she might be there before any other person.

"Well, my dears," she said, looking round upon the smiling young faces about her, "this is a pretty sight. And, industrious as I know you have been, and kind as your friends have been, I should hardly have thought it possible that you should have made such a fine show on your tables. But you know I have some especial business with you, and I have come early that we may have it over before the rush begins."

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This was very encouraging. Mrs. Howard thought it probable they would have "a rush" of customers, and who should know better than she?

"You remember I offered six prizes for different articles to be worked for me," continued the old lady, "but there are only four finished, as you know. My little grand-daughter, Gracie, felt that she had not displayed a proper spirit about them, and she decided not to finish hers for the fair, but to leave it and complete it for me afterwards."

This had been Gracie's own proposal to her mother and grandmother, and they had allowed her to have her own way, thinking that this willingness to put herself behind the others, and to give up even the show of strife with Nellie, told of a spirit of true repentance, as indeed it did. When the other children had asked with much surprise

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where her mat was, she had answered quietly that she could not finish it. This had not proved any loss to the fair, because the time she would have devoted to the mat had been given to other articles.

"Here, then," continued Mrs. Howard, "are two toilet sets and two mats for me to judge between. Of the latter, the one Nellie Ransom brings is certainly the best in point of work; but it has unfortunately received a bad ink-stain. Now those of us who know Nellie are very sure that this has not come through any neglect or carelessness of her own, and since she did not do it herself it seems hard that she should suffer for it. I should be quite willing to overlook it, for this is really the best piece of work among the four; but I cannot do so unless the others are willing. Those among you who think Nellie ought not to be a loser by this misfortune, raise your hands."

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Instantly every little hand was raised, and if one were before another it was Gracie's.

"Very well; that is satisfactory," said Mrs. Howard. "Nellie, my dear, here are ten dollars for your mat, the first money taken in for your fair. The second sum, I think, must go to Maggie's toilet set—ah! yes, Maggie's and Bessie's, I should have said," as she saw the look which Maggie turned upon her sister, as if wishing that she should have her full share of credit—"the third to Dora's mat, and the fourth to Hattie's toilet set. You are all satisfied, I trust, with this arrangement."

There was a murmur of assent, and this part of the business was settled.

"And now," said Mrs. Howard, "I want to say that I think I made a mistake in offering these rates of prices, and so exciting you to outvie one another. I meant to give you a motive for trying to improve yourselves, but I believe it was not a good principle to set you thus one against the other, and I know that it has led to some hard feeling and unkindness. But that, I trust, is now all healed, and I shall take care not to put such temptation in your way again."

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The children all thought they knew what Mrs. Howard meant, and with true courteousness they all avoided looking at Gracie.

But this was as much as was ever known by any of them, save the two or three who had been in the secret, of Gracie's temptation and fall. That she had been jealous and unkind to Nellie, they had all seen; that she had gone further and been led into deceit and meanness, they never heard. Hattie, for her own sake, held her peace for once; and penitent Gracie had not to face the scorn and wonder of all her schoolmates.

After this Mrs. Howard went about from table to table, purchasing not only one article, but generally two or three, from each little saleswoman; but she said she would not remove them till the fair was over, so that they might still add to the appearance of their tables. They were all marked SOLD in enormous, staring letters, that there might be no possibility of mistake.

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And now, customer after customer began to flock in, and among the earlier arrivals came Mr. Powers, who was immediately seized upon by Belle, and led to the table where the baby doll lay in her glory.

Now it had been announced that whoever offered the highest price for this famous infant was to have her, and it was not to be told till the close of the fair who had done this. The names of would-be purchasers, with the amount each offered, were written down by Miss Annie Stanton, who still held the doll in charge, lest too eager little hands should mar her beauties.

"Please offer a whole lot, papa; I do want her so," said Belle. "Isn't she lovely? Did you ever see such a doll?"

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Mr. Powers expressed all the admiration he thought needful, which did not nearly satisfy Belle, who was only half consoled by what she thought a want of proper interest by Maggie's whispered assurance that men "never did appreciate dolls, and it was quite useless to expect it of them. It did not seem to be born in them."

However, Mr. Powers put down his name and the sum he would give, which last remained for the present a secret between him and Miss Annie Stanton.

Mamie Stone was as eager about the doll as Belle, and her mamma was called upon also to offer a high price for the treasure.

But my "Sunbeam" would lengthen itself far beyond its sister rays if I should tell you all that took place at the fair. Enough to say that it was a great success, and that a sum was taken in that was more than sufficient to purchase Jessie's parrot back and to provide a comfortable home for herself and her grandfather for at least a year to come. That is, with what the little girl might hope to make herself by the further sale of her wares.

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Evening came, bringing with it the great interest of the day, the announcement of the munificent purchaser of the doll, and every little heart beat high with hope that it might be some friend of her own, who would bestow the coveted prize upon her.

It proved to be Grandmamma Howard.

Belle stood in an agony of expectation, squeezing her father's hand and scarcely breathing in the hush that came before the name was spoken; and when she heard

"Mrs. Howard," a rush of color dyed her face, and a look of blank disappointment overspread it. She looked up and caught her father's gaze fixed anxiously upon her. She dashed her little hand across her eyes to scatter the tears that would well up, and, forcing a smile, said with a trembling lip, "Never mind, papa, you meant me to have it, so it was just as good of you."

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Her father stooped and kissed her, rejoicing in her sweetness and determined good temper. A little more than a year since, a tempest of tears and sobs would have broken from his over-indulged child; but now she had learned to control herself and to be contented and pleasant even when things did not go quite her own way. She was all smiles and brightness again in a few minutes, nearly consoled for her disappointment by her papa's caress and his few whispered words of blessing.

All believed that Gracie or one of her little sisters would be presented with the doll by her grandmother; and great, therefore, was the amazement of the circle of young friends when the next day it was rumored, then made certain, that Mrs. Howard had sent it to Nellie Ransom.

Every child wondered "why," and so did more than one grown person; for the Howards and the Ransoms were not, as Maggie said, "very intimate, and it was rather surprising Mrs. Howard should think of giving such a present to Nellie. But she seems to have taken a great fancy to her, and Nellie quite deserves it," she added.

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"I wonder if she gave it to her because of the mat," said Mamie Stone.

"I think it was because she is such a serious child," said Lily. "I find old people like *seriousity*, and Nellie has a great deal of it."

So they judged, these little ones. Nellie, gentle, unobtrusive "little sunbeam" that she was, went on her quiet way, shedding light and warmth in many an unsuspected nook and corner, and bringing now and then some hidden seed to blossom in beauty and fragrance.

Only one of her schoolmates ever suspected that it was her thoughtful care for Gracie's character and feelings, her sweet forgiving spirit which led her to forget past injuries, which had won for her the gift of the much coveted doll, and given her a high place in the love and admiration of the few who knew all the story.

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