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Title: Bessie and Her Friends

Author: Joanna H. Mathews

Release date: September 4, 2014 [EBook #46762]

Language: English

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Bessie's Friends.  
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# BESSIE AND HER FRIENDS.

BY

*JOANNA H. MATHEWS,*

AUTHOR OF "BESSIE AT THE SEASIDE," "BESSIE IN THE  
CITY," &C.

*"Speak not evil one of another."*

*"Bear ye one another's burdens."*

NEW YORK:  
ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,  
530 BROADWAY.

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Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1868, by  
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*MY SISTER BELLA,*

WHOSE LOVING CONSIDERATION

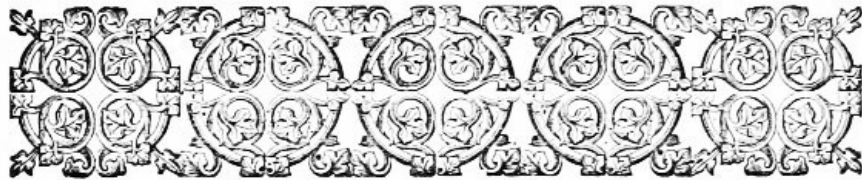
*Has lightened the "burden" of many an otherwise weary hour.*

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*BESSIE AND HER FRIENDS*



*JENNIE'S HOME.*

orher," said little Jennie Richards, "isn't it 'most time for farher to be home?"

"Almost time, Jennie," answered Mrs. Richards, looking up from the face of the baby upon her lap to the clock upon the mantel-piece. A very pale, tiny face it was; so tiny that Sergeant Richards used to say he had to look twice to be sure there was any face there; and that of the mother which bent above it was almost as pale,—sick, anxious, and worn; but it brightened, as she answered Jennie. "It is five minutes before six; he will be here very soon now."

Away ran Jennie to the corner, where stood a cane-seated rocking-chair, and after a good deal of pushing and pulling, succeeded in drawing it up in front of the stove; then to a closet, from which she brought a pair of carpet slippers, which were placed before the chair. [Pg 8]

"I wish I was big enough to reach farher's coat and put it over his chair, like you used to, morher."

"That will come by and by, Jennie."

"But long before I am so big, you'll be quite well, morher."

"I hope so, dear, if God pleases. It's a long, long while to sit here helpless, able to do nothing but tend poor baby, and see my dear little daughter at the work her mother ought to do."

"Oh, morher, just as if I did not like to work! I don't like 'e reason why I have to do it, but it's right nice to work for you and farher. And I wouldn't like to be lazy, so I hope I will always have plenty to do."

"Dear child," said Mrs. Richards, with a sigh, "you're like enough to see that wish granted." [Pg 9]

"'At's good," said Jennie, cheerfully, taking her mother's words in quite a different spirit from that in which they were spoken; "it's so nice to be busy."

And indeed it would appear that this small maiden—small even for her six years—did think so; for as she talked she was trotting about the room, busying herself with arranging half a dozen trifles, which her quick eye spied out, and which, according to her way of thinking, were not just in proper order. First, the hearth, on which no spot or speck was to be seen, must be brushed up anew; next, the corner of the table-cloth was to be twitched into place, and a knife laid more exactly into straight line; then a ball, belonging to one of the younger children, was picked up and put in the toy-basket, with the reminder to little Tommy that father was coming, and the room must be kept in good order. One would have thought it was already as neat as hands could make it. Plain enough it was, certainly, but thoroughly comfortable. The carpet, though somewhat worn, and pieced in more than one place, was well swept and tidy, and the stove and the kettle which sang merrily upon its top were polished till they shone. The table in the centre of the room was ready set for tea, and, though it held no silver or cut glass, the most dainty lady or gentleman in the land need not have hesitated to take a meal from its white cloth and spotless delf ware. The only pieces of furniture which looked as if they had ever cost much were a large mahogany table with carved feet, which stood between the windows, and a bookcase of the same wood at the side of the fireplace; but both of these were old-fashioned, and although they might be worth much to their owners, would have brought little if offered for sale. Not a speck of dust, however, was to be seen upon them or the rest of the furniture, which was of stained pine; while at the side of Mrs. Richards' arm-chair stood the baby's wicker cradle, covered with a gay patchwork spread. And that tiny quilt was the pride and delight of Jennie's heart; for had she not put it all together with her own small fingers? after which, good Mrs. Granby, who lived up-stairs, had quilted and lined it for her. [Pg 10]

On the other side of the mother, sat, in a low chair, a boy about nine years old. His hands were folded helplessly together, and his pale face wore a sad, patient, waiting look, as if something were coming upon him which he knew he must bear without a struggle. One looking closer into his eyes might notice a dull film overspreading them, for Willie Richards was nearly blind, would be quite blind in a few weeks, the doctors said. [Pg 11]

Between Jennie and the baby came three little boys, sturdy, healthy children, always clamoring for bread and butter, and frequent calls for bread and butter were becoming a serious matter in the policeman's household; for provisions were high, and it was not as easy to feed eight mouths as it had been to feed four. This year, too, there had been severe sickness in the family, bringing great expenses with it, and how the wants of the coming winter were to be provided for, Sergeant Richards could hardly tell. [Pg 12]

With the early spring had come scarlet fever. The younger children had gone through it lightly, Jennie escaping altogether; but poor Willie had been nigh to death, and the terrible disease had left its mark in the blindness which was creeping upon him. Then, watching her boy at night, Mrs. Richards had taken cold which had settled in her limbs, and all through the summer months she had lain helpless, unable even to lift her hand. And what a faithful little nurse Jennie had been to her! Then two months ago the baby sister was born, whose coming Jennie had hailed with such delight, but whose short life had so far been all pain and suffering.

The mother was better now, able to sit all day in the cushioned chair, where the strong arms of her husband would place her in the morning. But there she remained a prisoner, unable to move a step or even to stand, though she could so far use her hands as to tend her baby. But Mrs. Richards had not felt quite discouraged until to-day. Now a fresh trouble had come, and she felt as if it were the last drop in the cup already too full. [Pg 13]

The children knew nothing of this, however, and if mother's face was sadder than usual, they thought it was the old racking pain in her bones. The three little boys were at the window, their chubby faces pressed against the glass, peering out into the darkness for the first glimpse of father. His duty had kept him from home all day, and wife and children were more than usually impatient for his coming.

It was a small, two-story, wooden house, standing back from the street, with a courtyard in front, in the corner of which grew an old butternut tree. It bore but few nuts in these latter days, to be sure, but it gave a fine shade in the summer, and the young occupants of the house took great pride and comfort in it. The branches were almost bare now, however, and the wind, which now and then came sighing up the street, would strip off some of the leaves which still remained, and scatter them over the porch or fling them against the window. [Pg 14]

"You couldn't do wi'out me very well; could you, morher?" said Jennie, as she straightened the corner of the rug, "even if good Mrs. Granby does come and do all the washing and hard work."

"Indeed, I could not," answered Mrs. Richards. "My Jennie has been hands and feet to her mother for the last six months."

"And now she's eyes to Willie," said the blind boy.

"And eyes to Willie," repeated his mother, tenderly laying her hand on his head.

"And tongue to Tommy," added Willie, with a smile.

Jennie laughed merrily; but as she was about to answer, the click of the gate was heard, and with shouts of "He's coming!" from Charlie, "Poppy, poppy!" from the younger boy, and a confused jargon from Tommy, which no one but Jennie could understand, the whole three tumbled down from the window and rushed to the door. A moment later it opened, and a tall, straight figure in a policeman's uniform appeared. [Pg 15]

"Halloa, you chaps!" said a cheery voice. "Suppose two or three dozen of you get out of the way and let me shut the door; it won't do to keep a draught on mother."

He contrived to close the door, but as for getting farther with three pair of fat arms clasping his legs, that was quite impossible. The father laughed, threw his cap upon a chair, and catching up first one and then another of his captors, tossed them by turns in the air, gave each a hearty kiss, and set him on his feet again.

"There, gentlemen, now let me get to mother, if you please. Well, Mary, how has it gone to-day? Poorly, eh?" as he saw that in spite of the smile which welcomed him, her cheek was paler and her eye sadder than they had been when he left her in the morning. [Pg 16]

"The pain is no worse, dear,—rather better maybe," she answered; but her lip quivered as she spoke.

"Then that monstrous baby of yours has been worrying you. I am just going to sell her to the first man who will give sixpence for her."

"No, no, no!" rose from a chorus of young voices, with, "She didn't worry scarcely any to-day, farher," from Jennie, as she lifted her face for his kiss.

Willie's turn came next, as rising from his chair with his hand outstretched, he made a step forward and reached his father's side. One eye was quite dark, but through the thick mist which was over the other, he could faintly distinguish the tall, square figure, though, except for the voice and the sounds of welcome, he could not have told if it were his father or a stranger standing there. [Pg 17]

Then began the grand amusement of the evening. Mr. Richards pulled down the covering of the cradle, turned over the pillow, looked under the table, peeped into the sugar-bowl, pepper-pot, and stove, and at last pretended to be much astonished to discover the baby upon its mother's lap, after which the hunt was carried on in search of a place big enough to kiss. This performance was gone through with every night, but never lost its relish, being always considered a capital joke, and was received with shouts of laughter and great clapping of hands.

"Father," said Jennie, when Mr. Richards was seated in the rocking-chair, with a boy on each knee, "we have a great surprise for your supper to-night."

If Jennie did not resemble her father in size, she certainly did in feature. In both there were the same clear, honest gray eyes, the same crisp, short curls, the same ruddy cheeks and full red lips, the same look of kindly good-nature, with something of a spirit of fun and mischief sparkling through it. [Pg 18]

"You have; have you?" he answered. "Well, I suppose you know it takes a deal to surprise a member of police. We see too many queer folks and queer doings to be easy surprised. If you were to tell me you were going to turn a bad, lazy girl, I might be surprised, but I don't know as much short of that would do it."

Jennie shook her head with a very knowing look at her mother, and just then the door opened again and a head was put within.



"Oh, you're home, be you, Sergeant Richards?" said the owner of the head. "All right; your supper will be ready in a jiffy. Come along, Jennie."

With this the head disappeared, and Jennie, obeying orders, followed. In five minutes they both returned, the head this time bringing the rest of the person with it, carrying a tray. Jennie held in her hands a covered dish, which she set upon the edge of the table with an air of great triumph. She was not tall enough to put it in the proper spot before her father's place; but she would by no means suffer him to help her, although he offered to do so. No, it must wait till Mrs. Granby had emptied the tray, and could take it from her hands.

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What the policeman's family would have done at this time without Mrs. Granby would be hard to tell. Although a neighbor, she had been almost a stranger to them till the time of Willie's illness, when she had come in to assist in the nursing. From that day she had been a kind and faithful friend. She was a seamstress, and went out to work by the day; but night and morning she came in to see Mrs. Richards and do what she could to help her, until one evening she had asked Mr. Richards if she might have a talk with him. The policeman said, "Certainly," though he was rather surprised, for Mrs. Granby generally talked without waiting for permission.

"I guess things ain't going just right with you; be they, Sergeant Richards?" she began.

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Richards shook his head sadly. "I suppose if it wasn't right, it wouldn't be, Mrs. Granby; but it's hard to think it with Mary lying there, bound hand and foot, my boy growing blind, and the poor little baby more dead than alive; with me away the best part of the day, and nobody but that green Irish girl to do a hand's turn for them all, unless yourself or some other kind body looks in. Jennie's a wonderful smart child, to be sure; but there's another sore cross, to see her working her young life out, when she ought to be thinking of nothing but her play. And then, how we're going to make both ends meet this year, I don't know."

"So I thought," answered Mrs. Granby; "and it's the same with me about the ends meetin'. Now just supposin' we helped one another along a bit. You see they've raised my rent on me, and I can't afford it no way; besides that, my eyes is givin' out,—won't stand sewin' all day like they used to; so I'm not goin' out by the day no more, but just goin' to take in a bit of work and do it as I can. That Biddy of yours ain't no good,—a dirty thing that's as like as not to sweep with the wrong end of the broom, and to carry the baby with its head down and heels up. She just worries your wife's life out; and every time she goes lumberin' over the floor, Mary is ready to screech with the jar. Now you just send her packin', give me the little room up-stairs rent free for this winter, and the use of your fire for my bits of meals, and I'll do all she does and more too,—washin', scrubbin', cookin', and nussin'. You won't have no wages to pay, and though they mayn't come to much, every little tells; and Mary and the babies will be a sight more comfortable, and you, too, maybe, if I oughtn't to say it. You're just right, too, about Jennie. It goes to my heart to see her begin to put her hand to everything; she's more willin' than she's able. Pity everybody wasn't the same; it would make another sort of a world, I guess. What do you say to it? Will it do?"

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Do! The policeman thought so indeed, and was only too thankful. But it was a one-sided kind of a bargain, he said, all on their side, and Mrs. Granby must take some pay for her services.

This she refused; she was not going to give them all her time, only part of it, and the room rent free was pay enough. But at last she consented to take her meals with them, though somehow she contrived to add more to the rather slender table than she took from it. Now she had a chicken or tender steak for Mrs. Richards, "it was so cheap she couldn't help buying it, and she had a fancy for a bit herself," but it was always a very small bit that satisfied her; now a few cakes for the children, now a pound of extra nice tea or coffee. "Sergeant Richards needed something good and hot when he came in from duty, and he never took nothin' stronger, so he ought to have it."

From the time that she came to them, Mrs. Richards began to improve; there was no longer any need to worry over her disorderly house, neglected children, or the loss of comfort to her husband. The baby ceased its endless wailing, and with Jennie to keep things trim after they had once been put in order, the whole household put on its old air of cosy neatness. Truly she had proved "a friend in need," this cheerful, bustling, kind-hearted little woman.

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"Now you may uncover the dish, farher," said Jennie, as having brought a little stand and placed it at her mother's side, she led Willie to the table.

Mr. Richards did so. "Broiled ham and eggs!" he exclaimed. "Why, the breath is 'most taken out of me! I know where the ham came from well enough, for I bought it myself, but I'd like to know who has been buying fresh eggs at eight cents apiece."

"No, Sergeant Richards, you needn't look at me that way," said Mrs. Granby, holding up the teapot in one hand; "I ain't been doin' no such expenses. I brought them home, to be sure; but they was a present, not to me neither, but to your wife here. Here's another of 'em for her, boiled to a turn too. Fried eggs ain't good for sick folks. 'Twasn't my doin' that you got some with your ham neither; I wanted to keep 'em for her eatin', but she said you was so fond of 'em, and she coaxed me into it. She does set such a heap by you, she thinks nothin' ain't too good for you. Not that I blame her. I often says there ain't a better husband and father to be found than Sergeant Richards, look the city through; and you do deserve the best, that's a fact, if it was gold and diamonds; not that you wouldn't have a better use for them than to eat 'em; diamonds fetches a heap, they tell me, but never havin' had none of my own, I can't rightly tell of my own showin'. Come, eat while it's hot. I'll see to your wife. No, thank you, none for me. I couldn't eat a mouthful if you was to pay me for it. Don't give the little ones none, 'taint good for 'em goin' to

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bed. Jennie might have a bit, she's been stirrin' round so all day, and Willie, too, dear boy." Mrs. Granby's voice always took a tenderer tone when she spoke of Willie. "Well, I'll just tell you how I come by them eggs. This afternoon I took home some work to an old lady, a new customer Mrs. Howard recommended me to. When I was let in, there she stood in the hall, talkin' to a woman what had been sellin' fresh eggs to her. There they was, two or three dozen of 'em, piled up, lookin' so fresh and white and nice, enough to make your mouth water when you looked at 'em and thought what a deal of nourishment was in 'em. So when the lady was through with the woman, says I, 'If you'll excuse the liberty, ma'am, in your house and your presence, I'd just like to take a couple of eggs from this woman before she goes.'

"'Certainly,' says the lady, but the woman says, 'I can't spare no more, there's only a dozen left, and I've promised them to another lady;' and off she goes. Well, me and the old lady settles about the work, and she tells me she'll have more in a month's time, and then she says, 'You was disappointed about the eggs?'

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"'Yes, ma'am,' says I.

"'So, thinkin', I s'pose, 'twasn't for a poor seamstress like me to be so extravagant, she says, 'Eggs are high this season,—eight cents apiece.'

"'I didn't want to be settin' myself up, but I wasn't goin' to have her take no false notions about me, so I says, 'Yes, ma'am, but when a body's sick, and ain't no appetite to eat only what one forces one's self to, I don't think it no sin to spend a bit for a nice nourishin' mouthful.'

"'And she says, very gentle, 'Are you sick?'

"'Not I, ma'am,' says I, 'but a friend of mine. Bad with the rheumatics these six months, and she's a mite of an ailin' baby, and don't fancy nothin' to eat unless it's somethin' delicate and fancy, so I just took a notion I'd get a couple of them eggs for her.'

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"'And she says, 'I see you have a basket there, just let me give you half a dozen of these for your friend.' I never thought of such a thing, and I was took all aback, and I said would she please take it out of the work. I couldn't think of takin' it in the way of charity, and she says, 'If I were ill, and you had any little dainty you thought I might like, would you think it charity to offer it to me?'

"'No, ma'am,' says I; 'but then there's a difference.'

"'I see none in that way,' she said; 'we are all God's children. To one he gives more than to another, but he means that we shall help each other as we find opportunity, and I wish you to take this little gift for your friend as readily as you would offer it to me if I were in like need.' Now wasn't that pretty? A real lady, every inch of her. And with her own hands she laid half a dozen eggs in the basket. She was askin' some more questions about my sick friend, when somebody pulls the door-bell as furious, and when it was opened, there was a servant-gal lookin' as scared as anything, and she tells the old lady her little granddaughter was lost, and couldn't be found nowhere, and was she here, and did they know anything about her? Well, they didn't know nothin', and the old lady said she'd be round right away, and she herself looked scared ready to drop, and I see she hadn't no more thought for me nor my belongin's, nor couldn't be expected to, so I just takes my leave. And when I come home and shows Mary the eggs, nothin' would do but you must have a couple cooked with your ham for supper."

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All the time Mrs. Granby had been telling her story, she was pouring out tea, waiting on Mrs. Richards, spreading bread and butter for the children, and now having talked herself out of breath, she paused. At the last part of the story, the police-sergeant laid down his knife and fork, and looked up at her.

"What is your lady's name?" he asked.

"Mrs. Stanton," answered Mrs. Granby.

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"And who is the child that was lost?"

"I don't know, only a granddaughter; I don't know if it's the same name. Why, have you seen the child?"

"I can't tell if it's the same," answered Richards, "but I've got a story for you to-night. I have been thinking all the afternoon I had a treat for Jennie."

"Is it a duty story, farher?" asked his little daughter.

"Yes, it is a duty story."

"Oh, that's good!"

Whenever her father had a story to tell of anything which had happened to him during his daily duties, Jennie always called it a "duty story," and she was very eager for such anecdotes.





## II.

### *THE POLICE-SERGEANT'S STORY.*



ea was over, the dishes neatly washed and put away by Mrs. Granby and Jennie, the three little boys snugly tucked in their cribs up-stairs, the baby lying quiet in its cradle, and Mrs. Granby seated at the corner of the table with her sewing. Jennie sat upon her father's knee, and Willie in his usual seat at his mother's side, and the policeman began his story.

"It might have been about two o'clock when, as I was at my desk, making out a report, Policeman Neal came in with a lost child in his arms, as pretty a little thing as ever I saw, for all she did look as if she had been having rather a hard time of it,—a gentleman's child and a mother's darling, used to be well cared for, as was easy to be seen by her nice white frock with blue ribbons, and her dainty shoes and stockings. But I think her mother's heart would have ached if she had seen her then. She had lost her hat, and the wind had tossed up her curls, her cheeks were pale and streaked with tears, and her big brown eyes had a pitiful look in them that would have softened a tiger, let alone a man that had half a dozen little ones of his own at home; while every now and then the great heavy sighs came struggling up, as if she had almost cried her heart out.

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"When Neal brought her in, she looked round as if she expected to see some one, and so it seems she did; for he put her on thinking she'd find some of her own folks waiting for her. And when she saw there was no one there, such a disappointed look as came over her face, and her lip shook, and she clasped both little hands over her throat, as if to keep back the sobs from breaking out again. A many lost children I've seen, but never one who touched me like her.

"Well, Neal told where he'd found her, and a good way she'd wandered from her home, as we found afterwards, and how she said her name was Brightfort, which was as near as he'd come to it; for she had a crooked little tongue, though a sweet one. I looked in the directory, but no name like that could I find. Then Neal was going to put her down and go back to his beat, but she clung fast to him and began to cry again. You see, she'd kind of made friends with him, and she didn't fancy being left with strange faces again. So I just took her from him, and coaxed her up a bit, and told her I'd show her the telegraph sending off a message how she was there. I put her on the desk, close to me, while I set the wires to work; and as sure as you live, what did I hear that minute but her saying a bit of a prayer. She didn't mean any one to hear but Him she was speaking to, but I caught every word; for you see my head was bent over near to hers. And I'll never forget it, not if I live to be a hundred, no, nor the way it made me feel. 'Dear Father in heaven,' she said, 'please let my own home father come and find me very soon, 'cause I'm so tired, and I want my own mamma; and don't let those naughty boys hurt my Flossy, but let papa find him too.' I hadn't felt so chirk as I might all day, and it just went to the soft place in my heart; and it gave me a lesson, too, that I sha'n't forget in a hurry."

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Mr. Richards stopped and cleared his throat, and his wife took up the corner of her shawl and wiped her eyes.

"Bless her!" said Mrs. Granby, winking hers very hard.

"Ay, bless her, I say, too," continued the policeman. "It was as pretty a bit of faith and trust as ever I saw; and after it she seemed some comforted, and sat quiet, watching the working of the wires, as if she was quite sure the One she'd looked to would bring her help. Well, I carried her round and showed her all there was to see, which wasn't much, and then I set her to talking, to see if I could find out where she belonged. I saw she'd been confused and worried before Neal brought her in, and I thought like enough she'd forgotten. So, after some coaxing and letting her tell her story in her own way,—how her dog ran away and she ran after him, and so got lost, she suddenly remembered the name and number of the street where she lived. With that she broke down again, and began to cry and sob out, she did want to go home so much.

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"I was just sending out to see if she was right, when up dashes a carriage to the door, and out gets a gentleman on crutches. The moment the little one set eyes on him, she screams out as joyful as you please, 'Oh, it's my soldier, it's my soldier!'

"Talk of an April day! You never saw anything like the way the sunlight broke through the clouds on her face. The moment he was inside the door, she fairly flung herself out of my arms on to his neck; and it was just the prettiest thing in the world to see her joy and love, and how she kissed and hugged him. As for him, he dropped one crutch, and held fast to her, as if for dear life. I knew who he was well enough, for I had seen him before, and found out about him, being in the way of duty. He's an English colonel that lives at the — Hotel; and they tell wonderful stories

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about him,—how brave he is, and what a lot of battles he's fought, and how, with just a handful of soldiers, he defended a hospital full of sick men against a great force of them murdering Sepoys, and brought every man of them safe off. All sorts of fine things are told about him; and I'm bound they're true; for you can tell by the look of him he's a hero of the right sort. I didn't think the less of him, either, that I saw his eyes mighty shiny as he and the baby held fast to each other. She wasn't his child, though, but Mr. Bradford's up in — Street, whom I know all about; and if that crooked little tongue of hers could have said 'R,' which it couldn't, I might have taken her home at once. Well, she was all right then, and he carried her off; but first she walked round and made her manners to every man there as polite as you please, looking the daintiest little lady that ever walked on two feet; and when I put her into the carriage, didn't she thank me for letting her into the station, and being kind to her, as if it was a favor I'd been doing, and not my duty; and as if a man could help it that once looked at her. So she was driven away, and I was sorry to lose sight of her, for I don't know as I ever took so to a child that didn't belong to me."

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"Is that all?" asked Jennie, as her father paused.

"That's all."

"How old was she, farher?"

"Five years old, she said, but she didn't look it. It seemed to me when I first saw her as if she was about your size; but you're bigger than she, though you don't make much show for your six years."

"How funny she can't say 'R' when she's five years old!" said Jennie.

"Yes, almost as funny as that my girl of six can't say 'th,'" laughed the sergeant.

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Jennie smiled, colored, and hung her head.

"And you thought maybe your lost child was Mrs. Stanton's granddaughter; did you?" asked Mrs. Granby.

"Well, I thought it might be. Two children in that way of life ain't likely to be lost the same day in the same neighborhood; and we had no notice of any other but my little friend. You don't know if Mrs. Stanton has any relations of the name of Bradford?"

"No; she's 'most a stranger to me, and the scared girl didn't mention no names, only said little Bessie was missin'."

"That's her then. Little Bradford's name was Bessie; so putting two and two together, I think they're one and the same."

They talked a while longer of little Bessie and her pretty ways and her friend, the colonel; and then Mrs. Granby carried Willie and Jennie off to bed.

"Now, Mary," said Richards, going to his wife's side the moment the children were out of hearing, "I know your poor heart has been aching all day to know what the eye-doctor said; but the boy sticks so close to you, and his ears are so quick, that I couldn't do more than whisper 'yes' when I came in, just to let you know it could be done. I was bringing Willie home when I met Jarvis with a message that I was to go up to the Chief on special business, so, as I hadn't a minute to spare, I just had to hand the poor little man over to Jarvis, who promised to see him safely in your care. Dr. Dawson says, Mary, that he thinks Willie can be cured; but we must wait a while, and he thinks it best that he should not be told until the time comes. The operation cannot be performed till the boy is stronger; and it is best not to attempt it till the blindness is total,—till both eyes are quite dark. Meanwhile, he must be fed upon good nourishing food. If we can do this, he thinks in three months, or perhaps four, the child may be able to bear the operation. After that he says we must still be very careful of him, and see that his strength does not run down; and when the spring opens, we must send him away from town, up among the mountains. And that's what your doctor says of you, too, Mary; that you won't get well of this dreadful rheumatism till you have a change of air; and that next summer I ought to send you where you will have mountain air. Dr. Dawson's charge," Richards went on more slowly, "will be a hundred dollars,—he says to rich folks it would be three hundred, maybe more. But five thousand is easier come at by a good many people than a hundred is by us. So now we know what the doctor can do, we must make out what we can do. I'm free to say I think Willie stands a better chance with Dr. Dawson than he does elsewhere; but I don't see how we are to raise the money. I'd live on bread and water, or worse, lie on the bare boards and work like a slave, to bring our boy's sight back; but I can't see you suffer; and we have the rest of the flock to think of as well as Willie. And I suppose it must bring a deal of expense on us, both before and after the operation; at least, if we follow out the doctor's directions, and he says if we don't, the money and trouble will be worse than thrown away."

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"The first thing I have to do is to see Dr. Schwitz, and find out how much we owe him for attending you and the children, off and on, these six months. I've asked him half a dozen times for his bill, but he always said 'no hurry' and he 'could wait;' and since he was so kind, and other things were so pressing, I've just let it go by."

When he had spoken of the doctor's hope of curing Willie, his wife's pale face had brightened; but as he went on to say what it would cost, her head drooped; and now as he spoke of the other doctor's bill, she covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears and sobs.

"Why, Mary, what is it, dear?"



Bessie's Friends.

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"Oh, Tom! Tom!" she broke forth, "Dr. Schwitz sent his bill this morning. A rough-looking man brought it, and he says the doctor must have it the first of the year, and—and—" She could get no farther. The poor woman! it was no wonder; she was sick and weak, and this unlooked-for trouble had quite broken her down. [Pg 41]

"Now, don't, Mary, don't be so cast down," said her husband. "We'll see our way out of this yet. The Lord hasn't forsaken us."

"I don't know," she answered between her sobs, "it 'most seems like it;" and taking up a book which lay upon the table, she drew from between its leaves a folded paper and handed it to him. He was a strong, sturdy man, this police-sergeant, used to terrible sights, and not easily startled or surprised, as he had told his little daughter; but when he opened the paper and looked at it, all the color left his ruddy cheeks, and he sat gazing at it as if he were stunned. There was a moment's silence; then the baby set up its pitiful little cry. Mrs. Richards lifted it from the cradle. [Pg 42]

"Oh, Tom," she said, "if it would please the Lord to take baby and me, it would be far better for you. I've been only a burden to you these six months past, and I'm likely to be no better for six months to come, for they say I can't get well till the warm weather comes again. You'd be better without us dear, and it's me that's brought this on you."

Then the policeman roused himself.

"That's the hardest word you've spoken to me these ten years we've been married, Mary, woman," he said. "No, I thank the Lord again and again that that trouble hasn't come to me yet. What would I do without you, Mary, dear? How could I bear it to come home and not find you here,—never again to see you smile when I come in; never to hear you say, 'I'm so glad you've come, Tom;' never to get the kiss that puts heart into me after a hard day's work? And the babies,—would you wish them motherless? To be sure, you can't do for them what you once did, but that will all come right yet; and there's the mother's eye to overlook and see that things don't go too far wrong; here's the mother voice and the mother smile for them to turn to. No, no; don't you think you're laid aside for useless yet, dear. As for this wee dolly,"—and the father laid his great hand tenderly on the tiny bundle in its mother's arms,—“why, I think I've come to love her all the more for that she's so feeble and such a care. And what would our Jennie do without the little sister that she has such a pride in and lays so many plans for? Why, it would break her heart to lose her. No, no, Mary, I can bear all things short of that you've spoken of; and do you just pray the Lord that he'll not take you at your word, and never hurt me by saying a thing like that again." [Pg 43]

Trying to cheer his wife, the brave-hearted fellow had almost talked himself into cheerfulness again; and Mrs. Richards looked up through her tears. "And what are we to do, Tom?" she asked. [Pg 44]

"I can't just rightly see my way clear yet," he answered, thoughtfully, rubbing his forehead with his finger; "but one thing is certain, we've got to look all our troubles straight in the face, and to see what we can do. What we *can* do for ourselves we *must*, then trust the Lord for the rest. As I told you, that little soul that was brought up to the station this afternoon gave me a lesson I don't mean to forget in a hurry. There she was, the innocent thing, in the worst trouble I suppose that could come to such a baby,—far from her home and friends, feeling as if she'd lost all she had in the world,—all strange faces about her, and in what was to her a terrible place, and not knowing how she was to get out of it. Well, what does she do, the pretty creature, but just catch herself up in the midst of her grieving and say that bit of a prayer? and then she rested quiet and waited. It gave me a sharp prick, I can tell you, and one that I needed. Says I to myself, 'Tom Richards, you haven't half the faith or the courage of this baby.' There had I been all day fretting myself and quarrelling with the Lord's doings, because he had brought me into a place where I could not see my way out. I had asked for help, too, or thought I had, and yet there I was, faithless and unbelieving, not willing to wait his time and way to bring it to me. But she, baby as she was, knew in whom she had trusted, and could leave herself in his hands after she had once done all she knew how. It's not the first teaching I've had from a little child, Mary, and I don't expect it will be the last; but nothing ever brought me up as straight as that did. Thinks I, the Lord forgive me, and grant me such a share of trust and patience as is given to this his little one; and then I took heart, and I don't think I've lost it again, if I have had a hard blow I did not look for. I own I was a bit stunned at first; but see you, Mary, I am sure this bill is not fair. Dr. Schwitz has overcharged us for certain; and I don't believe it will stand in law."

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"But we can't afford to go to law, Tom, any more than to pay this sum. Four hundred dollars!"

"I would not wonder if Mr. Ray would see me through this," said Richards. "He's a good friend to me. I'll see him, anyhow. I never thought Dr. Schwitz would serve me like this; it's just revenge."

"Have you offended him?" asked Mrs. Richards, in surprise.

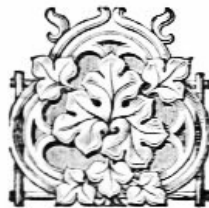
"Yes," answered the policeman. "Yesterday I had to arrest a nephew of his for robbing his employer. Schwitz came to me and begged I'd let him off and pretend he was not to be found, saying he would make it worthwhile to me. I took offence at his trying to bribe me, which was but natural, you will allow, Mary, and spoke up pretty sharp. He swore he'd make me pay for it if I touched the lad; but I never thought he would go this far. And to think I have had the handling of so many rogues, and didn't know one when I saw him!"

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"And Willie?" said the poor mother.

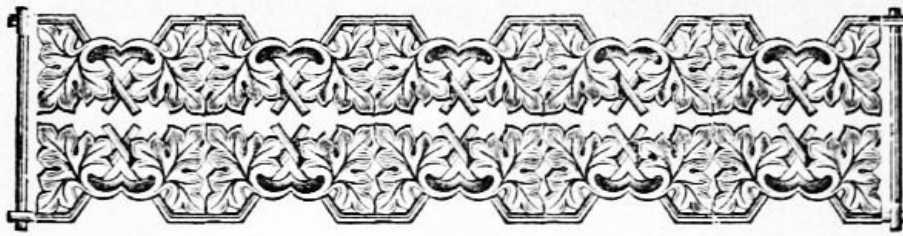
"Ah! that's the worst," answered Richards. "I'm afraid we sha'n't be able to have much done for Willie this next year; for even if Dr. Dawson will wait for his pay, there's all the expense that's to come before and after the operation; and I don't see how we are going to manage it."

Long the good policeman and his wife sat and talked over their troubles; and when kind Mrs. Granby came back, she was told of them, and her advice asked; but three heads were no better than two in making one dollar do the needful work of ten.



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### III.

#### *LITTLE PITCHERS.*



Three young ladies sat talking over their work in the pleasant bow-window of Mrs. Stanton's sitting-room, while at a short distance from them two little curly heads bent over the great picture-book which lay upon the table. The eyes in the curly heads were busy with the pictures, the tongues in the curly heads were silent, save when now and then one whispered, "Shall I turn over?" or "Is not that pretty?" but the ears in the curly heads were wide open to all that was passing in the bow-window; while the three young ladies, thinking that the curly heads were heeding nothing but their own affairs, went on chattering as if those attentive ears were miles away.

"Annie," said Miss Carrie Hall, "I am sorry to hear of the severe affliction likely to befall your sister, Mrs. Bradford." [Pg 49]

"What is that?" asked Annie Stanton, looking up surprised.

"I heard that Mrs. Lawrence, Mr. Bradford's Aunt Patty, was coming to make her a visit."

"Ah, poor Margaret!" said Annie Stanton, but she laughed as she spoke. "It is indeed a trial, but my sister receives it with becoming submission."

"Why does Mrs. Bradford invite her when she always makes herself so disagreeable?" asked Miss Ellis.

"She comes self-invited," replied Annie. "Margaret did not ask her."

"I should think not, considering the circumstances under which they last parted," said Carrie Hall.

"Oh, Margaret has long since forgotten and forgiven all that," said Annie, "and she and Mr. Bradford have several times endeavored to bring about a reconciliation, inviting Aunt Patty to visit them, or sending kind messages and other tokens of good-will. The old lady, however, was not to be appeased, and for the last three or four years has held no intercourse with my brother's family. Now she suddenly writes, saying she intends to make them a visit." [Pg 50]

"I should decline it if I were in the place of Mr. and Mrs. Bradford," said Carrie.

"I fear I should do the same," replied Annie, "but Margaret and Mr. Bradford are more forgiving. I am quite sure though that they look upon this visit as a duty to be endured, not a pleasure to be enjoyed, especially as the children are now older, and she will be the more likely to make trouble with them."

"I suppose they have quite forgotten her," said Carrie.

"Harry and Fred may remember her," answered Annie, "but the others were too young to recollect her at this distance of time. Bessie was a baby, Maggie scarcely three years old." [Pg 51]

"Shall you ever forget the day we stopped at your sister's house on our way home from school, and found Mrs. Lawrence and nurse having a battle royal over Maggie?" asked the laughing Carrie.

"No, indeed! Nurse, with Maggie on one arm and Bessie on the other, fairly dancing about the room in her efforts to save the former from Aunt Patty's clutches, both terrified babies screaming at the top of their voices, both old women scolding at the top of theirs; while Fred, the monkey, young as he was, stood by, clapping his hands and setting them at each other as if they had been two cats."

"And your sister," said Carrie, "coming home to be frightened half out of her senses at finding such an uproar in her well-ordered nursery, and poor little Maggie stretching out her arms to her with 'Patty vip me, Patty vip me!'"

"And Margaret quite unable to quell the storm until Brother Henry came in and with a few determined words separated the combatants by sending nurse from the room," continued Annie, with increasing merriment. "Poor mammy! She knew her master's word was not to be disputed, and dared not disobey; but I think she has never quite forgiven him for that, and still looks upon it as hard that when, as she said, she had a chance 'to speak her mind to Mrs. Lawrence,' she was not allowed to do it." [Pg 52]

"But what caused the trouble?" asked Laura Ellis.

"Oh, some trifling mischief of Maggie's, for which auntie undertook to punish her severely. Nurse

interfered, and where the battle would have stopped, had not Henry and Margaret arrived, it is difficult to tell."

"But surely she did not leave your brother's house in anger for such a little thing as that!" said Laura.

"Indeed, she did; at least, she insisted that Maggie should be punished and nurse dismissed. Dear old mammy, who nursed every one of us, from Ruthven down to myself, and whom mother gave to Margaret as a treasure past all price when Harry was born,—poor mammy, who considers herself quite as much one of the family as any Stanton, Duncan, or Bradford among us all,—to talk of dismissing her! But nothing less would satisfy Aunt Patty; and Margaret gently claiming the right to correct her own children and govern her own household as she saw fit, and Henry firmly upholding his wife, Aunt Patty departed that very afternoon in a tremendous passion, and has never entered the house since." [Pg 53]

"Greatly to your sister's relief, I should think," said Laura. "Why, what a very disagreeable inmate she must be, Annie! I am sure I pity Mrs. Bradford and all her family, if they are to undergo another visit from her now."

"Yes," said Annie. "Some sudden freak has taken her, and she has written to say that she will be here next month. You may well pity them. Such another exacting, meddling, ill-tempered old woman it would be difficult to find. She has long since quarrelled with all her relations; indeed, it was quite wonderful to every one how Margaret and her husband bore with her as long as they did. I do not know how the poor children will get on with her. She and Fred will clash before she has been in the house a day, while the little ones will be frightened out of their senses by one look of those cold, stern eyes. Do you remember, Carrie, how, during that last unfortunate visit, Maggie used to run and hide her head in her mother's dress the moment she heard Aunt Patty's step?" [Pg 54]

"Yes, indeed," said Carrie. "I suppose she will be here at Christmas time too. Poor little things! She will destroy half their pleasure."

All this and much more to the same purpose fell upon those attentive ears, filling the hearts of the little listeners with astonishment and dismay. It was long since Maggie's hand had turned a leaf of the scrap-book, long since she or Bessie had given a look or thought to the pictures. There they both sat, motionless, gazing at one another, and drinking in all the foolish talk of those thoughtless young ladies. [Pg 55]

They meant no harm, these gay girls. Not one of them but would have been shocked at the thought that she was poisoning the minds of the dear little children whom they all loved towards the aged relative whom they were bound to reverence and respect. They had not imagined that Maggie and Bessie were attending to their conversation, and they were only amusing themselves; it was but idle talk. Ah, idle talk, idle words, of which each one of us must give account at the last great day!

So they sat and chatted away, not thinking of the mischief they might be doing, until, at a question from Miss Carrie, Annie Stanton dropped her voice as she answered. Still now and then a few words would reach the little ones. "Shocking temper"—"Poor Margaret so uncomfortable"—"Mr Bradford very much displeased"—"patience quite worn out" until Bessie said,— [Pg 56]

"Aunt Annie, if you don't mean us to know what you say, we do hear a little."

Aunt Annie started and colored, then said, hastily "Oh, I had almost forgotten you were there. Would you not like to go down-stairs, pets, and ask old Dinah to bake a little cake for each of you? Run then, and if you heard what we were saying, do not think of it. It is nothing for you to trouble your small heads about. I am afraid we have been rather imprudent," she continued uneasily when her little nieces had left the room. "Margaret is so particular that her children shall hear nothing like gossip or evil speaking, and I think we have been indulging in both. If Maggie and Bessie have been listening to what we were saying, they will not have a very pleasant impression of Mrs. Lawrence. Well, there is no use in fretting about it now. What is said cannot be unsaid; and they will soon find out for themselves what the old lady is." [Pg 57]

Yes, what is said cannot be unsaid. Each little word, as it is spoken, goes forth on its errand of good or evil, and can never be recalled.

Perhaps Aunt Annie would have regretted her thoughtlessness still more if she had seen and heard the little girls as they stood together in the hall. They had no thought of old Dinah and the cakes with this important matter to talk over. Not think of what they heard, indeed! That was a curious thing for Aunt Annie to say. She had been right in believing that Maggie must have forgotten Mrs. Lawrence. Maggie had done so, but now this conversation had brought the whole scene of the quarrel with nurse to her mind. It all came back to her; but in recollection it appeared far worse than the reality. Aunt Patty's loud, angry voice seemed sounding in her ears, uttering the most violent threats, and she thought of the old lady herself almost as if she had been some terrible monster, ready to tear in pieces her own poor frightened little self, clinging about nurse's neck. [Pg 58]

And was it possible that this dreadful old woman was really coming again to their house to make a visit? How could papa and mamma think it best to allow it?

Such mischief had already been done by idle talk!

"Maggie," said Bessie, "do you remember about that Patty woman?"



"Yes," answered Maggie, "I did not remember about her till Aunt Annie and Miss Carrie said that, but I do now; and oh, Bessie, she's *awful!* I wish, I wish mamma would not let her come. She's the shockingest person you ever saw."

"Aunt Annie said mamma did not want her herself; but she let her come because she thought it was right," said Bessie.

"I wonder why mamma thinks it is right when she is so cross and tempered," said Maggie, with a long sigh. "Why, she used to scold even papa and mamma! Oh, I remember her so well now. I wish I didn't; I don't like to think about it;" and Maggie looked very much distressed. [Pg 59]

Bessie was almost as much troubled, but she put her arm about her sister and said, "Never matter, dear Maggie, papa and mamma won't let her do anything to us."

"But suppose papa and mamma both had to go out and leave us, as they did that day she behaved so," said Maggie. "Nursesey has so many to take care of now, and maybe she'd meddle again,—Aunt Annie said she was very meddling too,—and try to punish me when I did not do any blame."

"Jane would help nurse *perfect* us," said Bessie, "and if she couldn't, we'd yun away and hide till papa and mamma came."

"She shouldn't do anything to you, Bessie. I wouldn't let her do that, anyhow," said Maggie, shaking her head, and looking very determined.

"How could you help it if she wanted to, Maggie?"

"I'd say, 'Beware, woman!'" said Maggie, drawing her eyebrows into a frown, and extending her hand with the forefinger raised in a threatening manner. [Pg 60]

"Oh!" said Bessie, "what does that mean?"

"I don't quite know," said Maggie, slowly, "but it frightens people very much."

"It don't frighten me a bit when you say it."

"'Cause you don't have a guilty conscience; but if you had, you'd be, oh, so afraid!"

"How do you know I would?"

"I'll tell you," said Maggie. "Uncle John had a picture paper the other day, and in it was a picture of a woman coming in at the door, and she had her hands up so, and she looked as frightened, as frightened, and a man was standing behind the curtain doing so, and under the picture was 'Beware, woman!' I asked Uncle John what it meant, and he said that was a wicked woman who was going to steal some papers so she could get some money, and when she came in, she heard somebody say, 'Beware, woman,' and she was so frightened she ran away and was never seen again. I asked him to tell me more about it, but he said, 'No, it was a foolish story, not fit for little people.' Then I asked him if foolish stories were only fit for big people, but he just laughed and pinched my cheek. But I coaxed him to tell me why the woman was so frightened when the man did nothing but say those two words, and he said it was because she had a guilty conscience, for wicked people feared what good and innocent people did not mind at all. So if that old Mrs. Patty—I sha'n't call her aunt—don't behave herself to you, Bessie, I'll just try it." [Pg 61]

"Do you think she has a guilty conscience, Maggie?"

"Course she has; how could she help it?"

"And will she yun away and never be seen again?"

"I guess so," said Maggie; "anyhow, I hope she will."

"I wonder why mamma did not tell us she was coming," said Bessie. [Pg 62]

"We'll ask her to-morrow. We can't do it to-night because it will be so late before she comes home from Riverside and we'll be asleep, but we'll do it in the morning. And now, don't let's think about that shocking person any more. We'll go and ask Dinah about the cakes."

But although they resolved to try to forget Aunt Patty for the present, they could not help thinking of her a good deal and talking of her also, for their young hearts had been filled with dread of the old lady and her intended visit.

The reason that Mr. and Mrs. Bradford had not spoken to their children of Mrs. Lawrence's coming was that it was not yet a settled thing; and as there was not much that was pleasant to tell, they did not think it best to speak of her unless it was necessary. It was long since her name had been mentioned in the family, so long that, as Mrs. Bradford had hoped and supposed, all recollection of her had passed from Maggie's mind, until the conversation she had just heard had brought it back. [Pg 63]







## IV.

### *PAPA'S STORY.*



he next morning while they were at breakfast, the postman brought three letters for papa and mamma.

"Margaret," said Mr. Bradford, looking up from one of his, "this is from Aunt Patty to say that she will put off her visit until spring."

Maggie and Bessie both looked up.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Bradford, in a tone as if she were rather more glad than sorry to hear that Aunt Patty was not coming at present. Papa glanced at her with a smile which did not seem as if he were very much disappointed either. Probably the children would not have noticed tone or smile had they not been thinking of what they heard yesterday.

"Holloa!" said Fred, in a voice of dismay, "Aunt Patty is not coming here again; is she? You'll have to look out and mind your P's and Q's, Midget and Bess, if that is the case. We'll all have to for that matter. Whew-ee, can't she scold though! I remember her tongue if it is four years since I heard it."

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"Fred, Fred!" said his father.

"It's true, papa; is it not?"

"If it is," replied his father, "it does not make it proper for you to speak in that way of one so much older than yourself, my boy. Aunt Patty is not coming at present; when she does come, I hope we shall all be ready to receive her kindly and respectfully."

"I see you expect to find it difficult, papa," said the rogue, with a mischievous twinkle of his eye. Before Mr. Bradford had time to answer, Mrs. Bradford, who had been reading her letter, exclaimed joyfully,—

"Dear Elizabeth Rush says she will come to us at New Year, and make us a long visit. I wish she could have come at Christmas, as I begged her to do, but she says she has promised to remain in Baltimore with her sister until after the holidays."

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"Mamma," said Bessie, "do you mean Aunt Bessie is coming to stay with us?"

"Yes, darling. Are you not glad?"

"Indeed, I am, mamma; I do love Aunt Bessie, and the colonel will be glad too."

"That's jolly!" exclaimed Fred; and a chorus of voices about the table told that Aunt Bessie's coming was looked forward to with very different feelings from those which Aunt Patty's excited.

"Mamma," said Maggie suddenly, as they were about leaving the table, "don't you wish you had forty children?"

"Forty!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradford, laughing. "No, that would be rather too large a family, Maggie."

"But, mamma, if you had forty children, the house would be so full there would never be room for Aunt Patty."

The boys laughed, but mamma was grave in a moment.

"Do you remember Aunt Patty, my darling?" she asked, looking rather anxiously at Maggie.

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"Oh, yes, mamma, I remember her ever so well," answered poor Maggie, coloring all over her face and neck, and looking as if the remembrance of Aunt Patty were a great distress.

"I thought you had quite forgotten her, dear," said her mother.

"I had, mamma, but yesterday Aunt Annie and Miss Carrie were talking about her, and then I remembered her, oh! so well, and how fierce she looked and what a loud voice she had, and how she scolded, mamma, and how angry she used to be, and oh! mamma, she's such a dreadful old person, and if you only wouldn't let her come to our house."

"And, mamma," said Bessie, "Aunt Annie said nobody had any peace from the time she came into the house until she went out, and you know we're used to peace, so we can't do without it."

By this time Maggie was crying, and Bessie very near it. Their mamma scarcely knew how to comfort them, for whatever they might have heard from Annie and her friends was probably only too true; and both she and papa had too much reason to fear with Bessie that the usual "peace" of

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their happy household would be sadly disturbed when Aunt Patty should come there again. For though the old lady was not so terrible as the little girls imagined her to be, her unhappy temper always made much trouble wherever she went. All that Mrs. Bradford could do was to tell them that they must be kind and respectful to Mrs. Lawrence, and so give her no cause of offence; and that in no case would she be allowed to punish or harm them. But the thing which gave them the most comfort was that Aunt Patty's visit was not to take place for some months, possibly not at all. Then she talked of Miss Rush, and made pleasant plans for the time when she should be with them, and so tried to take their thoughts from Aunt Patty.

"And Uncle Ruthven is coming home," said Maggie. "Grandmamma had a letter from him last night, and she said he promised to come before the winter was over; and *won't* we all be happy then?" [Pg 69]

Mamma kissed her little daughter's April face, on which the tears were not dry before smiles were dancing in their place, and in happy talk of Uncle Ruthven, Aunt Patty was for the time forgotten.

Uncle Ruthven was mamma's only brother, and a famous hero in the eyes of all the children. None of them save Harry had ever seen him, and he had been such a very little boy when his uncle went away ten years ago, that he could not recollect him. But his letters and the stories of his travels and adventures had always been a great delight to his young nieces and nephews; and now that he talked of coming home, they looked forward to seeing him with almost as much pleasure as if they had known him all their lives. As for the mother and the sisters who had been parted from him for so long, no words could tell how glad they were. A sad rover was Uncle Ruthven; it was easier to say where he had not been than where he had. He had climbed to the tops of high mountains and gone down into mines which lay far below the surface of the earth; had peeped into volcanoes and been shut up among icebergs, at one time had slung his hammock under the trees of a tropical forest, at another had rolled himself in his blankets in the frozen huts of the Esquimaux; had hunted whales, bears, lions, and tigers; had passed through all manner of adventures and dangers by land and by sea; and at last was really coming home, "tired of his wanderings, to settle down beside his dear old mother and spend the rest of his days with her." So he had said in the letter which came last night, and grandmamma had read it over many times, smiled over it, cried over it, and talked of the writer, until, if Maggie and Bessie had doubted the fact before, they must then have been quite convinced that no other children ever possessed such a wonderful uncle as this Uncle Ruthven of theirs. When he would come was not quite certain,—perhaps in two months, perhaps not in three or four, while he might be here by Christmas or even sooner. [Pg 70]

And now came faithful old nurse to hear the good news and to have her share in the general family joy at the return of her first nursling, her beloved "Master Ruthven."

"And will your Aunt Patty be here when he comes, my dear lady?" she asked.

"I think not," said Mrs. Bradford, at which mammy looked well pleased, though she said no more; but Maggie and Bessie understood the look quite well.

Mrs. Bradford had intended by and by to talk to her children of Mrs. Lawrence and to tell them that she was rather odd and different from most of the people to whom they were accustomed, but that they must be patient and bear with her if she was sometimes a little provoking and cross. But now she found that they already knew quite too much, and she was greatly disturbed when she thought that it would be of little use to try and make them feel kindly towards the old lady. But the mischief had spread even farther than she had imagined. [Pg 71]

That afternoon Maggie and Bessie with little Franky were all in their mamma's room, seated side by side upon the floor, amusing themselves with a picture-book. This book belonged to Harry, who had made it himself by taking the cuts from magazines and papers and putting them in a large blank book. It was thought by all the children to be something very fine, and now Maggie sat with it upon her lap while she turned over the leaves, explaining such pictures as she knew, and inventing meanings and stories for those which were new to her.

Presently she came to one which quite puzzled her. On the front of the picture was the figure of a woman with an eagle upon her shoulder, intended to represent America or Liberty; while farther back stood a man with a gun in his hand and a lion at his side, who was meant for John Bull of England. Miss America had her arm raised, and appeared to be scolding Mr. England in the most terrible manner. Maggie could not tell the meaning of it, though she knew that the woman was America, but Franky thought that he understood it very well. Now Master Franky had a good pair of ears, and knew how to make a good use of them. He had, also, some funny ideas of his own, and like many other little children, did not always know when it was best to keep them to himself. He had heard a good deal that morning of some person named Patty, who was said to scold very much; he had also heard of his Uncle Ruthven, and he knew that this famous uncle had hunted lions in far-away Africa. The picture of the angry woman and the lion brought all this to his mind, and now he suddenly exclaimed,— [Pg 72]

"Oh, my, my! Dere's a Patty wis her chitten, and she stolds Uncle 'Utven wis his lion." [Pg 73]

This was too much for Maggie. Pushing the book from her knees, she threw herself back upon the carpet and rolled over, screaming with laughter at the joke of America with her eagle being mistaken for Aunt Patty with a chicken; Bessie joined in, and Franky, thinking he had said something very fine, clapped his hands and stamped his feet upon the floor in great glee. Mrs. Bradford herself could not help smiling, partly at the droll idea, partly at Maggie's amusement; but the next moment she sighed to think how the young minds of her children had been filled [Pg 74]

with fear and dislike of their father's aunt, and how much trouble all this was likely to make.

"Children," said Mr. Bradford, that evening, "who would like to hear a true story?"

Papa found he was not likely to want for listeners, as three or four eager voices answered.

"Wait a moment, dear," he said, as Bessie came to take her usual place upon his knee, and rising, he unlocked a cabinet secretary which stood at the side of the fireplace in his library. This secretary was an object of great interest to all the children, not because it held papa's private papers,—those were trifles of very little account in their eyes,—but because it contained many a relic and treasure, remembrances of bygone days, or which were in themselves odd and curious. To almost all of these belonged some interesting and true story,—things which had happened when papa was a boy, or even farther back than that time,—tales of travel and adventure in other lands, or perhaps of good and great people. So they were pleased to see their father go to his secretary when he had promised "a true story," knowing that they were sure of a treat.

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Mr. Bradford came back with a small, rather worn, red morocco case, and as soon as they were all quietly settled, he opened it. It held a miniature of a very lovely lady. Her bright eyes were so sparkling with fun and mischief that they looked as if they would almost dance out of the picture, and the mouth was so smiling and lifelike that it seemed as if the rosy lips must part the next moment with a joyous, ringing laugh. Her hair was knotted loosely back with a ribbon, from which it fell in just such dark, glossy ringlets as clustered about Maggie's neck and shoulders. It was a very beautiful likeness of a very beautiful woman.

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"Oh, how sweet, how lovely! What a pretty lady!" exclaimed the children, as they looked at it.

"Why, she looks like our Maggie!" said Harry.

"Only don't flatter yourself you are such a beauty as that, Midget," said Fred, mischievously.

"Oh, Fred," said Bessie, "my Maggie is a great deal prettier, and I don't believe that lady was so good as Maggie either."

"She may have been very good," said Harry, "but I don't believe she had half as sweet a temper as our Midge. I'll answer for it that those eyes could flash with something besides fun; could they not, papa?"

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"Was she a relation of yours, papa?" asked Fred.

"Yes," answered Mr. Bradford, "and I am going to tell you a story about her."

"One summer, a good many years ago, two boys were staying on their uncle's farm in the country. Their father and mother were travelling in Europe, and had left them in this uncle's care while they should be absent. It was a pleasant home, and the boys, accustomed to a city life, enjoyed it more than I can tell you. One afternoon, their uncle and aunt went out to visit some friends, giving the boys permission to amuse themselves out of doors as long as they pleased. All the servants about the place, except the old cook, had been allowed to go to a fair which was held in a village two or three miles away, so that the house and farm seemed to be quite deserted. Only one other member of the family was at home, and this was an aunt whom the boys did not love at all, and they were only anxious to keep out of her way."

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"Papa," said Fred, eagerly, "what were the names of these boys and their aunt?"

"Ahem," said Mr. Bradford, with a twinkle in his eye, as he saw Fred's knowing look. "Well, I will call the oldest boy by my own name, Henry, and the youngest we will call Aleck."

"Oh," said Fred, "and the aunt's name was, I suppose—"

"Henrietta," said his father, quickly; "and if you have any remarks to make, Fred, please keep them until my story is done."

"Very well, sir," said Fred, with another roguish look at Harry, and his father went on.

"Henry was a strong, healthy boy, who had never known a day's sickness; but Aleck was a weak, delicate, nervous little fellow, who could bear no excitement nor fatigue. Different as they were, however, the affection between them was very great. Gentle little Aleck looked up to his elder and stronger brother with a love and confidence which were beautiful to see, while the chief purpose of Henry's life at this time was to fulfil the charge which his mother had given him to care for Aleck, and keep him as far as he could from all trouble and harm, looking upon it as a sacred trust.

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"There was a large old barn standing at some distance from the house, used only for the storing of hay; and as they found the sun too warm for play in the open air, Henry proposed they should go there and make some boats which later they might sail in the brook. Aleck was ready enough, and they were soon comfortably settled in the hayloft with their knives and bits of wood. But while they were happily working away, and just as Henry was in the midst of some marvellous story, they heard a voice calling them.

"'Oh, dear,' said little Aleck, 'there's Aunt Henrietta! Now she'll make us go in the house, and she'll give me my supper early and send me to bed, though Aunt Mary said I might sit up and have tea with the rest, even if they came home late. Let us hide, Henry.'

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"No sooner said than done. The knives and chips were whisked out of sight, Aleck hidden beneath the hay. Henry, scrambling into an old corn-bin, covered himself with the corn-husks with which it was half filled, while the voice and its owner came nearer and nearer.

"'You'd better take care; she'll hear you,' said Henry, as he heard Aleck's stifled laughter; and the

next moment, through a crack in the bin, he saw his aunt's head appearing above the stairs. Any stranger might have wondered why the boys were so much afraid of her. She was a tall, handsome lady, not old, though the hair beneath her widow's cap was white as snow. She stood a moment and cast her sharp, bright eyes around the hayloft; then, satisfied that the boys were not there, went down again, saying quite loud enough for them to hear,—

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"If I find them, I shall send Henry to bed early, too; he's always leading dear little Aleck into mischief. Such nonsense in Mary to tell that sick baby he should sit up until she came home!"

"Now it was a great mistake for auntie to say this of Henry. He did many wrong things, but I do not think he ever led his little brother into mischief; on the contrary, his love for Aleck often kept him from harm. So his aunt's words made him very angry, and as soon as he and Aleck had come out of their hiding-places, he said many things he should not have said, setting a bad example to Aleck, who was also displeased at being called 'a sick baby.'

"Let's shut ourselves up in Dan's cubby-hole," said Henry; 'she'll never think of looking for us there, if she comes back.'

"Dan's cubby-hole was a small room shut off from the rest of the hayloft, where one of the farm hands kept his tools; and here the boys went, shutting and bolting the door behind them. They worked away for more than an hour, when Aleck asked his brother if he did not smell smoke.

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"Not I," said Henry; 'that little nose of yours is always smelling something, Aleck.'

"Aleck laughed, but a few moments after declared again that he really did smell smoke and felt it too.

"They are burning stubble in the fields; it is that you notice," said Henry. But presently he sprang up, for the smell became stronger, and he saw a little wreath of smoke curling itself beneath the door. 'There is something wrong,' he said, and hastily drawing the bolt, he opened the door. What a sight he saw! Heavy clouds of smoke were pouring up the stairway from the lower floor of the barn, while forked flames darted through them, showing that a fierce fire was raging below. Henry sprang forward to see if the stairs were burning; but the flames, fanned by the draught that came through the door he had opened, rushed up with greater fury, and drove him back. How could he save Aleck? The fire was plainly at the foot of the stairs, even if they were not already burning, while those stifling clouds of smoke rolled between them and the doors of the haymow, and were now pouring up through every chink and cranny of the floor on which he stood. Not a moment was to be lost. Henry ran back, and closing the door, said to his terrified brother,—

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"Aleck, you must stay here one moment until I bring the ladder. I can let myself down from this little window, but cannot carry you. Stand close to it, dear boy, and do not be frightened.'

"Stretching out from the window, he contrived to reach an old worn-out leader which would scarcely bear his weight, and to slide thence to the ground. Raising the cry of 'Fire!' he ran for the ladder, which should have been in its place on the other side of the barn. It was not there. Frantic with terror, as he saw what headway the fire was making, he rushed from place to place in search of the missing ladder; but all in vain; it could not be found. Meanwhile his cries had brought his aunt and the old cook from the house. Henry ran back beneath the window of the little room where he had left Aleck, and called to him to jump down into his arms, as it was the only chance of safety left. But, alas, there was no answer; the poor little boy had fainted from fright. Back to the door at the foot of the stairs, which were now all in a blaze, through which he was about to rush, when his aunt's hand held him back.

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"Live for your father and mother. *I have none to live for.*'

"With these words, she threw her dress over her head, and dashing up the burning stairs, was the next moment lost to sight. Two minutes later, her voice was heard at the window. In her arms she held the senseless Aleck, and when Henry and the old cook stood beneath, she called to them to catch him in their arms. It was done; Aleck was safe. And then letting herself from the window by her hands, she fell upon the ground beside him scarcely a moment before the flames burst upward through the floor. Aleck was quite unhurt, but his aunt was badly burned on one hand and arm. She insisted, however, upon sitting up and watching him, as he was feverish and ill from fright. Late in the night Henry awoke, and, opening his eyes, saw his aunt kneeling by the side of the bed, and heard her thanking God that he had given her this child's life, beseeching him, oh, so earnestly, that it might be the means of turning his young heart towards her, that there might be some one in the world to love her. Will you wonder if after this Henry felt as if he could never be patient or forbearing enough with this poor unhappy lady?"

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"But what made her so unhappy, papa, and why were the boys so afraid of her?" asked Maggie.

"Well, dear, I must say that it was her violent temper, and her wish to control every one about her, which made her so much feared not only by the boys, but by all who lived with her. But perhaps when I tell you a little more, you will think with me that there was much excuse for her.

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"She was the only daughter and youngest child in a large family of boys. Her mother died when she was a very little baby, so that she was left to grow up without that tenderest and wisest of all care. Her father and brothers loved her dearly; but I am afraid they indulged and spoiled her too much. She had a warm, generous, loving heart, but she was very passionate, and would sometimes give way to the most violent fits of temper. The poor child had no one to tell her how foolish and sinful this was, or to warn her that she was laying up trouble for herself and her friends, for her father would never suffer her to be contradicted or corrected."

"Papa," said Bessie, as her father paused for a moment, "do you mean the story of this passionate child for a lesson to me?" [Pg 87]

"No, darling," said her father; "for I think my Bessie is learning, with God's help, to control her quick temper so well that we may hope it will not give her much trouble when she is older. It is not for you more than for your brothers and sister. But I have a reason for wishing you all to see that it was more the misfortune than the fault of the little Henrietta that she grew up with an ungoverned will and violent temper. Whatever she wanted was given without any thought for the rights or wishes of others; so it was not strange if she soon came to consider that her will was law and that she must have her own way in all things. Perhaps those who had the care of her did not know the harm they were doing; but certain it is, that this poor child was suffered to grow up into a most self-willed woman."

"I am very sorry for her," said Bessie, "'cause she did not have such wise people as mine to tell her what was yight."

"Yes, she was much to be pitied. But you must not think that this little girl was always naughty; it was not so by any means. And in spite of the faults which were never checked, she was generally very bright, engaging, and sweet. As she grew older, she became more reasonable, and as every one around her lived only for her pleasure, and she had all she desired, it was not difficult for her to keep her temper under control. It is easy to be good when one is happy. [Pg 88]

"This picture, which shows you how very lovely she was, was taken for her father about the time of her marriage, and was said to be an excellent likeness. Soon after this, she went to Europe with her husband and father. There she passed several delightful months, travelling from place to place, with these two whom she loved so dearly.

"But now trouble, such as she had never dreamed of, came to this poor girl. They were in Switzerland, and one bright, sunny day, when no one thought of a storm, her husband and father went out in a small boat on the Lake of Geneva. There sometimes arises over this lake a terrible north-east wind, which comes up very suddenly and blows with great violence, causing the waves to rise to a height which would be thought almost impossible by one who had not seen it. For some reason Henrietta had not gone with the two gentlemen, but when she knew it was time for them to be coming in, she went down to the shore to meet them. She soon saw the boat skimming along, and could almost distinguish the faces of the two dear ones for whom she was watching, when this terrible wind came sweeping down over the water. She saw them as they struggled against it, trying with all their strength to reach the shore; but in vain. Wave after wave rolled into the little boat, and before many minutes it sank. Henrietta stood upon the shore, and as she stretched out her helpless hands toward them, saw her husband and father drown. Do you wonder that the sight drove her frantic? That those who stood beside her could scarcely prevent her from throwing herself into those waters which covered all she loved best? Then came a long and terrible illness, during which that dark hair changed to snowy white." [Pg 89]

"Papa," said Bessie, whose tender little heart could not bear to hear of trouble or distress which she could not comfort,—"papa, I don't like this story; it is too mournful." [Pg 90]

"I have almost done with this part of it, dear," said her father, "and I tell it to you that you may know how much need this poor woman had that others should be kind and patient with her, and how much excuse there was for her when all this sorrow and trouble made her irritable and impatient.

"Her brother came for her and took her home, but not one of her friends could make her happy or contented; for this poor lady did not know where to turn for the best of all comfort, and she had no strength of her own to lean upon. So the faults of temper and disposition, which had been passed over when she was young and happy, now grew worse and worse, making her so irritable and cross, so self-willed and determined, that it was almost impossible to live with her. Then for years she was a great sufferer, and besides all this, other troubles came upon her,—the loss of a great part of her fortune through one whom she had trusted, and various other trials. So by degrees she drove one after another of her friends from her, until she seemed to stand quite alone in the world, and to be, as she said, 'without any one to care for her.'" [Pg 91]

"Did not Aleck love her after the fire?" asked Bessie.

"I think he was very grateful to her, dear, but I am afraid he never became very fond of her. He was a gentle, timid little fellow, and though his aunt was never harsh to him, it used to frighten him to see her severity with other people."

"I'd have loved her, even if she was cross," said Maggie, looking again at the picture. "I'd have been so good to her that she couldn't be unkind to me, and if she had scolded me a little, I wouldn't have minded, because I'd have been so sorry for her." [Pg 92]

"Oh, Midget," said Harry, "you would have been frightened out of your wits at her first cross word."

"No, I wouldn't, Harry; and I would try to be patient, even if she scolded me like—like Aunt Patty."

"And what if she was Aunt Patty?" said Fred.

"But then she wasn't, you know."

"But she was," said papa, smiling.

Maggie and Bessie opened their eyes very wide at this astonishing news.

"You said her name was Henrietta, papa," said Maggie.

"Aunt Patty's name is also Henrietta," replied Mr. Bradford, "and when she was young, she was generally called so."

"And Henry was this Henry, our own papa," said Fred, laying his hand on his father's shoulder. [Pg 93]  
"And Aleck was Uncle Alexander, who died so long ago, before any of us were born. I guessed it at the beginning."

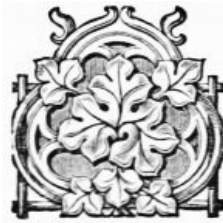
"Well, now," said Mr. Bradford, "if Aunt Patty comes to us by and by, and is not always as gentle as she might be, will my little children remember how much she has had to try her, and how much there is in her which is really good and unselfish?"

The boys promised readily enough, and Bessie said doubtfully that she would try, but when papa turned to Maggie, she looked as shy and frightened as if Aunt Patty herself had asked the question.

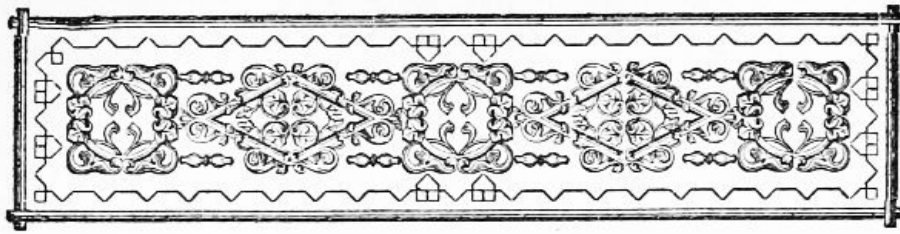
"What is my rosebud afraid of?" said Mr. Bradford.

"Papa," said Maggie, "I'm so sorry for that pretty lady, but I can't be sorry for Aunt Patty,—and oh, papa, I—I—do wish—Aunt Patty wasn't"—and poor Maggie broke down in a desperate fit of crying.

Mr. Bradford feared that his story had been almost in vain so far as his little girls were concerned, and indeed it was so. They could not make the pretty lady in the picture, the poor young wife whose husband and father had been drowned before her very eyes, or the brave, generous woman who had saved little Aleck, one and the same with the dreaded Aunt Patty. The mischief which words had done words could not so easily undo. [Pg 94]







## V.

### *LIGHT THROUGH THE CLOUDS.*



Christmas with all its pleasures had come and gone, enjoyed perhaps as much by the policeman's children as it was by the little Bradfords in their wealthier home. For though the former had not the means of the latter with which to make merry, they had contented spirits and grateful hearts, and these go far to make people happy. Their tall Christmas-tree and beautiful greens were not more splendid in the eyes of Maggie and Bessie than were the scanty wreath and two foot high cedar branch, which a good-natured market-woman had given Mrs. Granby, were in those of little Jennie Richards. To be sure, the apology for a tree was not dressed with glittering balls, rich bonbons, or rows of tapers; its branches bore no expensive toys, rare books, or lovely pictures; but the owner and the little ones for whose delight she dressed it, were quite satisfied, and only pitied those who had no tree at all. Had not good Mrs. Granby made the most extraordinary flowers of red flannel and gilt paper,—flowers whose likeness never grew in gardens or greenhouses of any known land; had she not baked sugar cakes which were intended to represent men and women, pigs, horses, and cows? Were not the branches looped with gay ribbons? Did they not bear rosy-cheeked apples, an orange for each child, some cheap but much prized toys, and, better than all, several useful and greatly needed articles, which had been the gift of Mrs. Bradford? What did it matter if one could scarcely tell the pigs from the men?

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Perhaps you may like to know how Mrs. Bradford became interested in the policeman's family.

One morning, a day or two before Christmas, Maggie and Bessie were playing baby-house in their own little room, when they heard a knock at mamma's door. Maggie ran to open it. There stood a woman who looked rather poor, but neat and respectable. Maggie was a little startled by the unexpected sight of a strange face, and stood holding the door without speaking.

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"Your ma sent me up here," said the woman. "She is busy below, and she told me to come up and wait for her here."

So Maggie allowed the stranger to pass her, and she took a chair which stood near the door. Maggie saw that she looked very cold, but had not the courage to ask her to come nearer the fire. After a moment, the woman smiled pleasantly. Maggie did not return the smile, though she looked as if she had half a mind to do so; but she did not like to see the woman looking so uncomfortable, and pushing a chair close to the fire, she said, "There."

The woman did not move; perhaps she, too, felt a little shy in a strange place. Maggie was rather vexed that she did not understand her without more words, but summing up all her courage, she said,—

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"I think if you took this seat by the fire, you'd be warmer." The woman thanked her, and took the chair, looking quite pleased.

"Are you the little lady who was lost a couple of months ago?" she asked.

"No," said Maggie, at once interested, "that was our Bessie; but we found her again."

"Oh, yes, I know that. I heard all about her from Policeman Richards, who looked after her when she was up to the station."

"Bessie, Bessie!" called Maggie, "here's a woman that knows your station policeman. Come and look at her."

At this, Bessie came running from the inner room.

"Well," said the woman, laughing heartily, "it is nice to be looked at for the sake of one's friends when one is not much to look at for one's self."

"I think you're pretty much to look at," said Bessie. "I think you have a nice, pleasant face. How is my policeman?"

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"He's well," said the stranger. "And so you call him your policeman; do you? Well, I shall just tell him that; I've a notion it will tickle him a bit."

"He's one of my policemen," said Bessie. "I have three,—one who helps us over the crossing; the one who found me when I came lost; and the one who was so good to me in his station-house."

"And that is my friend, Sergeant Richards. Well, he's a mighty nice fellow."

"Yes, he is," said Bessie, "and I'd like to see him again. Are you his wife, ma'am?"

"Bless you, no!" said the woman; "I am nothing but Mrs. Granby, who lives in his house. Your grandmother, Mrs. Stanton, sent me to your ma, who, she said, had work to give me. His poor wife, she can scarce creep about the room, let alone walking this far. Not but that she's better than she was a spell back, and she'd be spryer yet, I think, but for the trouble that's weighin' on her all the time, and hinders her getting well."

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"Does she have a great deal of trouble?" asked Maggie, who by this time felt quite sociable.

"Doesn't she though!" answered Mrs. Granby. "Trouble enough; and she's awful bad herself with the rheumatics, and a sickly baby, and a blind boy, and debts to pay, and that scandal of a doctor, and no way of laying up much; for the children must be fed and warmed, bless their hearts! and a police-sergeant's pay ain't no great; yes, yes, honey, lots of trouble and no help for it as I see. Not that I tell them so; I just try to keep up their hearts."

"Why don't they tell Jesus about their troubles, and ask him to help them?" asked Bessie, gently.

"So they do," answered Mrs. Granby; "but he hasn't seen best to send them help yet. I suppose he'll just take his own time and his own way to do it; at least, that's what Sergeant Richards says. He'll trust the Lord, and wait on him, he says; but it's sore waiting sometimes. Maybe all this trouble is sent to try his faith, and I can say it don't fail him, so far as I can see. But, honey, I guess you sometimes pray yourself; so to-night, when you go to bed, do you say a bit of a prayer for your friend, Sergeant Richards. I believe a heap in the prayers of the young and innocent; and you just ask the Lord to help him out of this trouble. Maybe he'll hear you; anyway, it won't do no harm; prayer never hurt nobody."

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"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Bessie, as her mother just then entered the room, "what do you think? This very nice woman lives with my station policeman, who was so kind to me, and his name is Yichards, and he has a lame baby and a sick wife and a blind boy, and no doctor to pay, and the children must be fed, and a great deal of trouble, and she don't get well because of it, and he does have trust in the Lord, but he hasn't helped him yet—"

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"And my Bessie's tongue has run away with her ideas," said mamma, laughing. "What is all this about, little one?"

"About Bessie's policeman," said Maggie, almost as eager as her sister. "Let this woman tell you. She knows him very well."

"I beg pardon, ma'am," said Mrs. Granby. "I don't know but it was my tongue ran away with me, and I can't say it's not apt to do so; but when your little daughter was lost, it was my friend, Sergeant Richards, that saw to her when she was up to the station, and he's talked a deal about her, for he was mighty taken with her."

"Bessie told me how kind he was to her," said Mrs. Bradford.

"Yes, ma'am; there isn't a living thing that he wouldn't be kind to, and it does pass me to know what folks like him are so afflicted for. However, it's the Lord's work, and I've no call to question his doings. But the little ladies were just asking me about Sergeant Richards, ma'am, and so I came to tell them what a peck of troubles he was in."

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"What are they, if you are at liberty to speak of them?" asked Mrs. Bradford. "Any one who has been kind to my children has a special claim on me."

So Mrs. Granby told the story, not at all with the idea of asking aid for her friends,—that she knew the good policeman and his wife would not like,—but, as she afterwards told them, because she could not help it. "The dear lady looked so sweet, and spoke so sweet, now and then asking a question, not prying like, but as if she took a real interest, not listening as if it were a duty or because she was ashamed to interrupt. And she wasn't of the kind to tell you there was others worse off than you, or that your troubles might be greater than they were. If there's a thing that aggravates me, it's that," continued Mrs. Granby. "I know I ought to be thankful, and so I mostly am, that I and my friends ain't no worse off than we are, and I know it's no good to be frettin' and worryin' about your trials, and settin' yourself against the Lord's will; but I do say if I fall down and break my arm, there ain't a grain of comfort in hearin' that my next-door neighbor has broken both his. Quite contrary; I think mine pains worse for thinkin' how his must hurt him. And now that I can't do the fine work I used to, it don't make it no easier for me to get my livin' to have it said, as a lady did to me this morning, that it would be far worse if I was blind. So it would, I don't gainsay that, but it don't help my seeing, to have it thrown up to me by people that has the full use of their eyes. Mrs. Bradford aint none of that sort, though, not she; and the children, bless their hearts, stood listenin' with all their ears, and I'd scarce done when the little one broke out with,—

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"Oh, do help them! Mamma, couldn't you help them?"

"But I could see the mother was a bit backward about offerin' help, thinkin', I s'pose, that you and Mary wasn't used to charity, and not knowin' how you'd take it; so she puts it on the plea of its bein' Christmas time."

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And here Mrs. Granby paused, having at last talked herself out of breath.

All this was true. Mrs. Bradford had felt rather delicate about offering assistance to the policeman's family, not knowing but that it might give offence. But when she had arranged with Mrs. Granby about the work, she said,—

"Since your friends are so pressed just now, I suppose they have not been able to make much preparation for Christmas."

"Precious little, ma'am," answered Mrs. Granby; "for Sergeant Richards don't think it right to spend a penny he can help when he's owing others. But we couldn't let the children quite forget it was Christmas, so I'm just goin' to make them a few cakes, and get up some small trifles that will please them. I'd have done more, only this last week, when I hadn't much work, I was fixin' up some of the children's clothes, for Mrs. Richards, poor soul, can't set a stitch with her cramped fingers, and there was a good deal of lettin' out and patchin' to be done."

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"And how are the children off for clothes?" asked Mrs. Bradford.

"Pretty tolerable, the boys, ma'am, for I've just made Willie a suit out of an old uniform of his father's, and the little ones' clothes get handed down from one to another, though they don't look too fine neither. But Jennie, poor child, has taken a start to grow these last few months, and I couldn't fix a thing for her she wore last winter. So she's wearin' her summer calicoes yet, and even them are very short as to the skirts, and squeezed as to the waists, which ain't good for a growin' child."

"No," said Mrs. Bradford, smiling. "I have here a couple of merino dresses of Maggie's, and a warm sack, which she has outgrown. They are too good to give to any one who would not take care of them, and I laid them aside until I should find some one to whom they would be of use. Do you think Mrs. Richards would be hurt if I offered them to her? They will at least save some stitches."

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"Indeed, ma'am," said Mrs. Granby, her eyes dancing, "you needn't be afraid; she'll be only too glad and thankful, and it was only this mornin' she was frettin' about Jennie's dress. She ain't quite as cheery as her husband, poor soul; 'taint to be expected she should be, and she always had a pride in Jennie's looks, but there didn't seem no way to get a new thing for one of the children this winter."

"And here is a cap of Franky's, and some little flannel shirts, which I will roll up in the bundle," said Mrs. Bradford. "They may, also, be of use."

Away rushed Maggie when she heard this to her own room, coming back with a china dog and a small doll, which she thrust into Mrs. Granby's hands, begging her to take them to Jennie, but to be sure not to give them to her before Christmas morning.

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"What shall we do for the blind boy?" asked Bessie. "We want to make him happy."

"Perhaps he would like a book," said mamma.

"But he couldn't see to read it, mamma."

"Oh, I dare say some one would read it to him," said Mrs. Bradford. "Does he not like that?" she asked of Mrs. Granby.

"Yes, ma'am. His mother reads to him mostly all the time when the baby is quiet. It's about all she can do, and it's his greatest pleasure, dear boy, to have her read out the books he and Jennie get at Sunday-school every Sunday."

"Can he go to Sunday-school when he's blind?" asked Maggie.

"Why, yes, honey. Every Sunday mornin' there's a big boy that goes to the same school stops for Willie and Jennie, and totes them with him; and if their father or me can't go to church, he just totes them back after service. And when Willie comes in with his libr'y book and his 'Child's Paper' and Scripture text, he's as rich as a king, and a heap more contented, I guess."

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While Mrs. Granby was talking, Mrs. Bradford was looking over a parcel which contained some new books, and now she gave her one for blind Willie's Christmas gift, saying she hoped things would be ordered so that before another Christmas he would be able to see.

There is no need to tell Mrs. Granby's delight, or the thanks which she poured out. If Mrs. Bradford had given her a most magnificent present for herself, it would not have pleased her half so much as did these trifles for the policeman's children.

That evening, after the little ones were all in bed, Mrs. Granby told Mr. Richards and his wife of all that had happened at Mrs. Bradford's.

Mrs. Richards was by no means too proud to accept the lady's kindness; so pleased was she to think that she should see Jennie warm and neat once more that she had no room in her heart for anything but gratitude.

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Mrs. Granby was just putting away the treasures she had been showing, when there came a rap from the old-fashioned knocker on the front-door.

"Sit you still, Sergeant Richards," she said. "I'm on my feet, and I'll just open the door." Which she did, and saw a tall gentleman standing there, who asked if Mr. Richards was in. "He is, sir," she answered, and then saying to herself, "I hope he's got special business for him that he'll pay him well for," threw open the door of the sitting-room, and asked the gentleman in.

But the police-sergeant had already done the "special business," for which the gentleman came to make return. Mr. Richards knew him by sight, though he had never spoken to him.

"Mr. Bradford, I believe, sir?" he said, coming forward.

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"You know me then?" said the gentleman.

"Yes, sir," answered Richards, placing a chair for his visitor. "You see I know many as don't know me. Can I be of any service to you, sir?"

"I came to have a talk with you, if you are at leisure," said Mr. Bradford. "Perhaps you may think I am taking a liberty, but my wife heard to-day, through your friend, that you were in some trouble with a doctor who has attended your family, and that you have been disappointed in obtaining the services of Mr. Ray, who has gone to Europe. I am a lawyer, you know, and if you do not object to consider me as a friend in his place, perhaps you will let me know what your difficulties are, and I may be able to help you."

The policeman looked gratefully into the frank, noble face before him. "Thank you, sir," he said; "you are very good, and this is not the first time that I have heard of your kindness to those in trouble. It's rather a long story, that of our difficulties, but if it won't tire you, I'll be thankful to tell it."

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He began far back, telling how they had done well, and been very comfortable, having even a little laid by, until about a year since, when Mrs. Richards' father and mother, who lived with them, had died within a month of each other.

"And I couldn't bear, sir," he said, "that the old folks shouldn't have a decent burying. So that used up what we had put by for a rainy day. Maybe I was foolish, but you see they were Mary's people, and we had feeling about it. But sure enough, no sooner was the money gone than the rainy day came, and stormy enough it has been ever since."

He went on, telling how sickness had come, one thing following another; how Dr. Schwitz had promised that his charges should be small, but how he never would give in his bill, the policeman and his wife thinking all the while that it was kindness which kept him from doing so; how it had taken every cent of his salary to pay the other expenses of illness, and keep the family barely warmed and fed; of the disappointment of their hopes for Willie for, at least, some time to come; and finally of the terrible bill which Dr. Schwitz had sent through revenge, the police-sergeant thought, and upon the prompt payment of which he was now insisting.

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"He's hard on me, sir, after all his fair promises," said Richards, as he handed Mr. Bradford the bill; "and you see he has me, for I made no agreement with him, and I don't know as I can rightly say that the law would not allow it to him; so, for that reason, I don't dare to dispute it. But I thought Mr. Ray might be able to make some arrangement with him, and I *can't* pay it all at once, nor this long time yet, that's settled. If he would wait, I might clear it off in a year or two though how then we are to get bread to put into the children's mouths I don't see. And there is the rent to pay, you know. We have tucked the children and Mrs. Granby all into one room, and let out the other two up-stairs; so that's a little help. And Mary was talking of selling that mahogany table and bookcase that are as dear to her as if they were gold, for they were her mother's; but they won't fetch nothing worth speaking of. The English colonel that came after your little daughter, when she was up at the station that day, was so good as to hand me a ten dollar bill, and we laid that by for a beginning; but think what a drop in the bucket that is, and it's precious little that we've added to it. I don't see my way out of this; that's just a fact, sir, and my only hope is that the Lord knows all."

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"You say Dr. Schwitz tried to bribe you by saying he would send in no bill, if you allowed his nephew to escape?" said Mr. Bradford.

"Yes, sir, and I suppose I might use that for a handle against him; but I don't like to, for I can't say but that the man was real kind to me and mine before that. If he presses me too hard, I may have to; but I can't bear to do it."

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"Will you put the matter in my hands, and let me see this Dr. Schwitz?" asked Mr. Bradford.

Richards was only too thankful, and after asking a little more about blind Willie, the gentleman took his leave.

There is no need to tell what he said to Dr. Schwitz, but a few days after he saw the police-sergeant again, and gave him a new bill, which was just half as much as the former one, with the promise that the doctor would wait and allow Richards to pay it by degrees, on condition that it was done within the year. This, by great pinching and saving, the policeman thought he would be able to do. The good gentleman did not tell that it was only by paying part of the sum himself that he had been able to make this arrangement.

"I don't know what claim I have upon you for such kindness, sir," said Richards, "but if you knew what a load you have taken from me, I am sure you would feel repaid."

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"I am repaid, more than repaid," said Mr. Bradford, with a smile; "for I feel that I am only paying a debt."

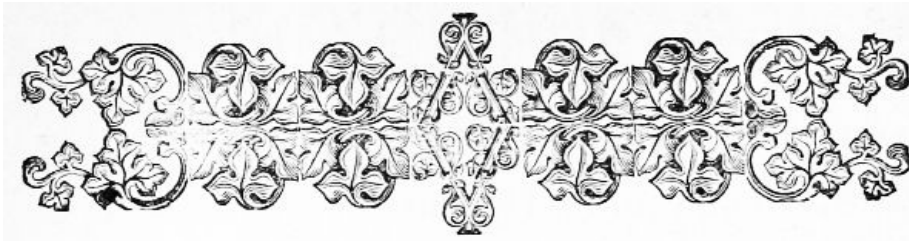
The policeman looked surprised.

"You were very kind to my little girl when she was in trouble," said the gentleman.

"Oh, that, sir? Who could help it? And that was a very tiny seed to bring forth such a harvest as this."

"It was 'bread cast upon the waters,'" said Mr. Bradford, "and to those who give in the Lord's name, he gives again 'good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.'"

But the policeman had not even yet gathered in the whole of his harvest.



## VI.

### *UNCLE RUTHVEN.*



Christmas brought no Uncle Ruthven, but Christmas week brought Miss Elizabeth Rush, the sweet "Aunt Bessie" whom all the children loved so dearly. And it was no wonder they were fond of her, for she was almost as gentle and patient with them as mamma herself; and, like her brother, the colonel, had a most wonderful gift of story-telling, which she was always ready to put in use for them. Maggie and Bessie were more than ever sure that there were never such delightful people as their own, or two such happy children as themselves.

"I think we're the completest family that ever lived," said Maggie, looking around the room with great satisfaction, one evening when Colonel and Mrs. Rush were present. [Pg 118]

"Yes," said Bessie; "I wonder somebody don't write a book about us."

"And call it 'The Happy Family,'" said Fred, mischievously, "after those celebrated bears and dogs and cats and mice who live together in the most peaceable manner so long as they have no teeth and claws, but who immediately fall to and eat one another up as soon as these are allowed to grow."

"If there is a bear among us, it must be yourself, sir," said the colonel, playfully pinching Fred's ear.

"I don't know," said Fred, rubbing the ear; "judging from your claws, I should say you were playing that character, colonel; while I shall have to take that of the unlucky puppy who has fallen into your clutches."

"I am glad you understand yourself so well, any way," returned Colonel Rush, drily.

Fred and the colonel were very fond of joking and sparring in this fashion, but Bessie always looked very sober while it was going on; for she could not bear anything that sounded like disputing, even in play; and perhaps she was about right. [Pg 119]

But all this had put a new idea into that busy little brain of Maggie's. "Bessie," she said, the next morning, "I have a secret to tell you, and you must not tell any one else."

"Not mamma?" asked Bessie.

"No, we'll tell mamma we have a secret, and we'll let her know by and by; but I want her to be very much surprised as well as the rest of the people. Bessie, I'm going to write a book, and you may help me, if you like."

"Oh!" said Bessie. "And what will it be about, Maggie?"

"About ourselves. You put it in my head to do it, Bessie. But then I sha'n't put in our real names, 'cause I don't want people to know it is us. I made up a name last night. I shall call my people the Happys."

"And shall you call the book 'The Happy Family'?" asked Bessie. [Pg 120]

"No; I think we will call it 'The Complete Family,'" said Maggie. "That sounds nicer and more booky; don't you think so?"

"Yes," said Bessie, looking at her sister with great admiration. "And when are you going to begin it?"

"To-day," said Maggie. "I'll ask mamma for some paper, and I'll write some every day till it's done; and then I'll ask papa to take it to the bookmaker; and when the book is made, we'll sell it, and give the money to the poor. I'll tell you what, Bessie, if Policeman Richards' blind boy is not cured by then, we'll give it to him to pay his doctor."

"You dear Maggie!" said Bessie. "Will you yite a piece that I make up about yourself?"

"I don't know," said Maggie; "I'll see what you say. I wouldn't like people to know it was me."

The book was begun that very day, but it had gone little farther than the title and chapter first, before they found they should be obliged to take mamma into the secret at once. There were so many long words which they wished to use, but which they did not know how to spell, that they saw they would have to be running to her all the time. To their great delight, mamma gave Maggie a new copy-book to write in, and they began again. As this was a stormy day, they could not go out, so they were busy a long while over their book. When, at last, Maggie's fingers were tired, and it was put away, it contained this satisfactory beginning:— [Pg 121]

# "THE COMPLETE FAMILY.

"A TALE OF HISTORY.

"CHAPTER I.

"Once upon a time, there lived a family named Happy; only that was not their real name, and you wish you had known them, and they are alive yet, because none of them have died. This was the most interesting and happiest family that ever lived. And God was so very good to them that they ought to have been the best family; but they were not except only the father and mother; and sometimes they were naughty, but 'most always afterwards they repented, so God forgave them.

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"This family were very much acquainted with some very great friends of theirs, and the colonel was very brave, and his leg was cut off; but now he is going to get a new leg, only it is a make believe."

This was all that was done the first day; and that evening a very wonderful and delightful thing occurred, which Maggie thought would make her book more interesting than ever.

There had been quite a family party at dinner, for it was Aunt Bessie's birthday, and the colonel and Mrs. Rush were always considered as belonging to the family now. Besides these, there were grandmamma and Aunt Annie, Grandpapa Duncan, Uncle John, and Aunt Helen, all assembled to do honor to Aunt Bessie.

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Dinner was over, and all, from grandpapa to baby, were gathered in the parlor, when there came a quick, hard pull at the door-bell. Two moments later, the parlor door was thrown open, and there stood a tall, broad figure in a great fur overcoat, which, as well as his long, curly beard, was thickly powdered with snow. At the first glance, he looked, except in size, not unlike the figure which a few weeks since had crowned their Christmas-tree; and in the moment of astonished silence which followed, Franky, throwing back his head and clapping his hands, shouted, "Santy Caus, Santy Caus!"

But it was no Santa Claus, and in spite of the muffling furs and the heavy beard, in spite of all the changes which ten long years of absence had made, the mother's heart, and the mother's eye knew her son, and rising from her seat with a low cry of joy, Mrs. Stanton stretched her hands towards the stranger, exclaiming, "My boy! Ruthven, my boy!" and the next moment she was sobbing in his arms. Then his sisters were clinging about him, and afterwards followed such a kissing and hand-shaking!

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It was an evening of great joy and excitement, and although it was long past the usual time when Maggie and Bessie went to bed, they could not go to sleep. At another time nurse would have ordered them to shut their eyes and not speak another word; but to-night she seemed to think it quite right and natural that they should be so very wide awake, and not only gave them an extra amount of petting and kissing, but told them stories of Uncle Ruthven's pranks when he was a boy, and of his wonderful sayings and doings, till mamma, coming up and finding this going on, was half inclined to find fault with the old woman herself. Nurse had quite forgotten that, in those days, she told Uncle Ruthven, as she now told Fred, that he was "the plague of her life," and that he "worried her heart out." Perhaps she did not really mean it with the one more than with the other.



Bessie's Friends.

"And to think of him," she said, wiping the tears of joy from her eyes,— "to think of him asking for his old mammy 'most before he had done with his greetings to the gentlefolks! And him putting his arm about me and giving me a kiss as hearty as he used when he was a boy; and him been all over the world seein' all sorts of sights and doin's. The Lord bless him! He's got just the same noble, loving heart, if he has got all that hair about his face." [Pg 125]

Uncle Ruthven's tremendous beard was a subject of great astonishment to all the children. Fred saucily asked him if he had come home to set up an upholsterer's shop, knowing he could himself furnish plenty of stuffing for mattresses and sofas. To which his uncle replied that when he did have his beard cut, it should be to furnish a rope to bind Fred's hands and feet with.

Maggie was very eager to write down the account of Uncle Ruthven's home-coming in her history of "The Complete Family," and as mamma's time was more taken up than usual just now, she could not run to her so often for help in her spelling. So the next two days a few mistakes went down, and the story ran after this fashion:— [Pg 126]

"The Happys had a very happy thing happen to them witch delited them very much. They had a travelling uncle who came home to them at last; but he staid away ten years and did not come home even to see his mother, and I think he ort to don't you? But now he is come and has brought so many trunks and boxes with such lots and lots of things and kurositys in them that he is 'most like a Norz' Ark only better, and his gret coat and cap are made of the bears' skins he shot and he tells us about the tigers and lions and I don't like it and Fred and Harry do and Bessie don't too. And he is so nice and he brought presents for every boddy and nurse a shawl that she's going to keep in her will till she dies for Harry's wife, and he has not any and says he won't because Uncle Ruthven has no wife. That is all to-day my fingers are krampd." [Pg 127]

Strange to say, Maggie was at home with the new uncle much sooner than Bessie. Little Bessie was not quite sure that she altogether approved of Uncle Ruthven, or that it was quite proper for this stranger to come walking into the house and up-stairs at all hours of the day, kissing mamma, teasing nurse, and playing and joking with the children, just as if he had been at home there all his life. Neither would she romp with him as the other children did, looking gravely on from some quiet corner at their merry frolics, as if she half-disapproved of it all. So Uncle Ruthven nicknamed her the "Princess," and always called her "your highness" and "your grace," at which Bessie did not know whether to be pleased or displeased. She even looked half-doubtfully at the wonderful stories he told, though she never lost a chance of hearing one. Uncle Ruthven was very fond of children, though he was not much accustomed to them, and he greatly enjoyed having them with him, telling Mrs. Bradford that he did not know which he liked best,— Bessie with her dainty, quiet, ladylike little ways, or Maggie with her half-shy, half-roguish manner, and love of fun and mischief. Maggie and all the boys were half wild about him, and as [Pg 128]

for baby, if she could have spoken, she would have said that never was there such an uncle for jumping and tossing. The moment she heard his voice, her hands and feet began to dance, and took no rest till he had her in his arms; while mamma sometimes feared the soft little head and the ceiling might come to too close an acquaintance.

"Princess," said Mr. Stanton, one evening, when he had been home about a fortnight, catching up Bessie, as she ran past him, and seating her upon the table, "what is that name your highness calls me?"

"I don't call you anything but Uncle Yuthven," answered Bessie, gravely.

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"That is it," said her uncle. "What becomes of all your r's? Say Ruthven."

"Er—er—er—Yuthven," said Bessie, trying very hard at the r.

Mr. Stanton shook his head and laughed.

"I can talk plainer than I used to," said Bessie. "I used to call Aunt Bessie's name very crooked, but I don't now."

"What did you use to call it?"

"I used to say *Libasus*; but now I can say it plain, *Lisabus*."

"A vast improvement, certainly," said Mr. Stanton, "but you can't manage the R's yet, hey? Well, they will come one of these days, I suppose."

"They'd better," said Fred, who was hanging over his uncle's shoulder, "or it will be a nice thing when she is a young lady for her to go turning all her R's into Y's. People will call her crooked-tongued Miss Bradford."

"You don't make a very pleasant prospect for me to be in," said Bessie, looking from brother to uncle with grave displeasure, "and if a little boy like you, Fred, says that to me when I am a big lady, I shall say, 'My dear, you are very impertinent.'"

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"And quite right, too," said Uncle Ruthven. "If all the little boys do not treat you with proper respect, Princess, just bring them to me, and I will teach them good manners."

Bessie made no answer, for she felt rather angry, and, fearing she might say something naughty, she wisely held her tongue; and slipping from her uncle's hold, she slid to his knee, and from that to the floor, running away to Aunt Bessie for refuge.

After the children had gone to bed, Uncle Ruthven went up to Mrs. Bradford's room, that he might have a quiet talk with this his favorite sister. Mrs. Bradford was rocking her baby to sleep, which business was rather a serious one, for not the least talking or moving about could go on in the room but this very young lady must have a share in it. The long lashes were just drooping upon the round, dimpled cheek when Uncle Ruthven's step was heard.

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"Ah-oo-oo," said the little wide-awake, starting up with a crow of welcome to the playfellow she liked so well.

Mamma laid the little head down again, and held up a warning finger to Uncle Ruthven, who stole softly to a corner, where he was out of Miss Baby's sight and hearing, to wait till she should be fairly off to dreamland. This brought him near the door of Maggie's and Bessie's room, where, without intending it, he heard them talking. Not hearing his voice, they thought he had gone away again, and presently Maggie said in a low tone, that she might not rouse baby, "Bessie, have you objections to Uncle Ruthven?"

"Yes," answered Bessie, slowly,— "yes, Maggie, I think I have. I try not to, but I'm 'fraid I do have a little objections to him."

"But why?" asked Maggie. "I think he is lovely."

"I don't know," said Bessie. "But, Maggie, don't you think he makes pretty intimate?"

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"Why, yes," said Maggie; "but then he's our uncle, you know. I guess he has a right if he has a mind to."

"But he makes more intimate than Uncle John, and we've known him ever so long, and Uncle Yuthven only a little while. Why, Maggie, he kisses mamma!"

"Well, he is her own brother," said Maggie, "and Uncle John is only her step-brother,—no, that's not it—her brother-of-law—that's it."

"What does that mean, Maggie?"

"It means when somebody goes and marries your sister. If somebody married me, he'd be your brother-of-law."

"He sha'n't!" said Bessie, quite excited. "He's a horrid old thing, and he sha'n't do it!"

"Who sha'n't do what?" asked Maggie, rather puzzled.

"That person, that brother-of-law; he sha'n't marry you; you are my own Maggie."

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"Well, he needn't if you don't want him to," said Maggie, quite as well contented to settle it one way as the other. "And you needn't feel so bad, and sit up in bed about it, Bessie, 'cause you'll take cold, and mamma forbid it."

"So she did," said Bessie, lying down again with a sigh. "Maggie, I'm 'fraid I'm naughty to-night. I forgot what mamma told me, and I was naughty to Uncle Yuthven."



"What did you say?"

"I didn't *say* anything, but I felt very passionate, and I thought naughty things,—how I'd like to give him a good slap when he teased me, and, Maggie, for a moment I 'most thought I wished he did not come home. I am going to tell him I'm sorry, the next time he comes."

"I wouldn't," said Maggie, who was never as ready as Bessie to acknowledge that she had been wrong; "not if I didn't do or say anything." [Pg 134]

"I would," said Bessie. "It is naughty to feel so; and you know there's no 'scuse for me to be passionate like there was for Aunt Patty, 'cause my people are so very wise, and teach me better. And it grieves Jesus when we feel naughty, and he saw my naughty heart to-night."

"Then ask him to forgive you," said Maggie.

"So I did; but I think he'll know I want to be better if I ask Uncle Yuthven too."

"Well," said Maggie, "maybe he will. But, Bessie, why do you speak about yourself as if you are like Aunt Patty. You're not a bit like her."

"But I might be, if I wasn't teached better," said Bessie, "and if Jesus didn't help me. Poor Aunt Patty! Papa said she was to be pitied."

"I sha'n't pity her, I know," said Maggie.

"But, Maggie, mamma said we ought to try and feel kind to her, and to be patient and good to her when she came here, 'cause she's getting very old, and there's nobody to love her, or take care of her. I am 'fraid of her, but I am sorry for her." [Pg 135]

"If she has nobody to take care of her, let her go to the Orphan Asylum," said Maggie. "I just hope papa will send her there, 'cause we don't want to be bothered with her."

"And don't you feel a bit sorry for her, Maggie?"

"No, not a bit; and I'm not going to, either. She is quite a disgrace to herself, and so she'd better stay at her house up in the mountains."

Maggie, in her turn, was growing quite excited, as she always did when she talked or thought of Aunt Patty. It was some time since the children had done either, for Christmas, Aunt Bessie, and Uncle Ruthven had given them so much else to think about, that they had almost forgotten there was such a person.

And now mamma, who had laid baby in her cradle, coming in to stop the talking, was sorry to hear her little girls speaking on the old, disagreeable subject. She told them they must be still, and go to sleep. The first command was obeyed at once, but Maggie did not find the second quite so easy; and she lay awake for some time imagining all kinds of possible and impossible quarrels with Aunt Patty, and inventing a chapter about her for "The Complete Family." [Pg 136]

While little Maggie was thinking thus of Aunt Patty, the old lady, in her far-away home, was wondering how she might best contrive to gain the hearts of her young nieces and nephews, for she was not the same woman she had been four years ago. During the last few months a new knowledge and a new life had come to her, making her wish to live in peace and love with every one. But she did not know how to set about this; for the poor lady had grown old in the indulgence of a bad temper, a proud spirit, and a habit of desiring to rule all about her; and now it was not easy to change all this. She had humbled herself at the feet of her Lord and Saviour, but it was hard work to do it before her fellow-men. She could not quite resolve to say to those whom she had grieved and offended by her violence and self-will, "I have done wrong, but now I see my sin, and wish, with God's help, to lead a new life." [Pg 137]

Still, she longed for the love and friendship she had once cast from her, and her lonely heart craved for some care and affection. She well knew that Mr. and Mrs. Bradford would be only too ready to forgive and forget all that was disagreeable in the past, and she also felt that they would do nothing to prejudice the minds of their children against her. She thought she would go to them, and try to be gentle and loving, and so perhaps she should win back their hearts, and gain those of their little ones. But old habit and the old pride were still strong within her, and so, when she wrote to Mr. Bradford to say she was coming to make them a visit, she gave no sign that she was sorry for the past, and would like to make amends. [Pg 138]

But shortly before the time she had fixed for the visit, something happened which caused her to change her purpose, and she chose to say nothing of her reasons for this, only sending word that she could not come before spring, perhaps not then. Now, again she had altered her plans, and this time she chose to take them all by surprise, and to go to Mr. Bradford's without warning.

"Margaret," said Mr. Stanton softly, as his sister came from the bedside of her little girls, and they went to the other side of the room, "what a sensitive conscience your darling little Bessie has! It seems I vexed her to-night, though I had no thought of doing so. I saw she was displeased, but the feeling seemed to pass in a moment. Now I find that she is so penitent for indulging in even a wrong feeling that she cannot rest satisfied without asking pardon, not only of her heavenly Father, but also of me." And he told Mrs. Bradford of all he had heard the children say, with some amusement, as he repeated the conversation about himself. [Pg 139]

"Yes," said Mrs. Bradford, "my dear little Bessie's quick temper gives her some trouble. I am often touched to see her silent struggles with herself when something tries it, how she forces back each angry word and look, and faithfully asks for the help which she knows will never fail her. But with that tender conscience, and her simple trust in Him who has redeemed her, I

believe all the strength she needs will be granted. God only knows how thankful I am that he has thus early led my precious child to see the sin and evil of a passionate and unchecked temper, and so spared her and hers the misery which I have seen it cause to others."

Uncle Ruthven came in the next morning, and, as usual, "making intimate," ran up to mamma's room. She was not there; but Maggie and Bessie were, busy over "The Complete Family." But Maggie did not look at all as if she belonged to the Happys just then. She had composed, what she thought, a very interesting chapter about Aunt Patty, and commenced it in this way: "There came to the Happys a very great aflekshun." But when she had written this last word, she had her doubts about the spelling, and carried the book to mamma to see if it were right. Mamma inquired what the affliction was, and finding, as she supposed, that it was Aunt Patty, she told Maggie she did not wish her to write about her. Maggie was very much disappointed, and even pouted a little, and she had not quite recovered when her uncle came in. In his hand he carried a little basket of flowers, which the children supposed was for mamma, and which he stood upon the table. Bessie loved flowers dearly, and in a moment she was hanging over them, and enjoying their sweetness.

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Uncle Ruthven asked what they were about, and to Bessie's surprise, Maggie took him at once into the secret, telling him all about "The Complete Family" and her present trouble. Uncle Ruthven quite agreed with mamma that it was not wisest and best to write anything unkind of Aunt Patty, and told Maggie of some very pleasant things she might relate, so that presently she was smiling and good-natured again.

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Then Mr. Stanton took Bessie up in his arms. "Bessie," he said, "did I vex you a little last night?"

Bessie colored all over, but looking her uncle steadily in the eyes, answered, "Yes, sir; and I am sorry I felt so naughty."

"Nay," said Uncle Ruthven, smiling, "if I teased you, although I did not intend it, I am the one to beg pardon."

"But I was pretty mad, uncle, and I felt as if I wanted to be naughty. I think I ought to be sorry."

"As you please then, darling; we will forgive one another. And now would you like this little peace-offering from Uncle Ruthven?" and he took up the basket of flowers.

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"Is that for me?" asked Bessie, her eyes sparkling.

"Yes. I thought perhaps I had hurt your feelings last night, and so I brought it to you that you might see I was sorry."

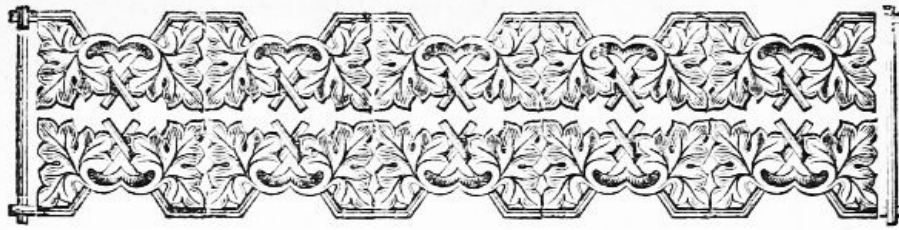
"But I could believe you without that."

Bessie felt reproached that she had told Maggie she had "objections to Uncle Ruthven," and now she felt as if they had all flown away.

"Perhaps you could," said Uncle Ruthven, smiling as he kissed her; "but the flowers are your own to do with as you please. And now you must remember that I am not much accustomed to little girls, and do not always know what they like and what they do not like; so you must take pity on the poor traveller, if he makes a mistake now and then, and believe he always wishes to please you and make you love him as far as he knows how."

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## VII.

### *AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.*



Uncle Ruthven had brought home with him two servants, the elder of whom was a Swede, and did not interest the children much, being, as Maggie said, such a "very broken Englishman" that they could scarcely understand him. But the other was a little Persian boy about twelve years old, whom a sad, or rather a happy accident, had thrown into Mr. Stanton's hands. Riding one day through the streets of a Persian town, as he turned a corner, this boy ran beneath his horse's feet, was thrown down and badly hurt. Mr. Stanton took him up and had him kindly cared for, and finding that the boy was an orphan, with no one to love him, he went often to see him, and soon became much interested in the grateful, affectionate little fellow; while Hafed learned to love dearly the only face which looked kindly upon him. When the time came for Mr. Stanton to go away, Hafed's grief was terrible to see, and he clung so to this new friend, that the gentleman could not find it in his heart to leave him. It was not difficult to persuade those who had the care of him to give him up; they were only too glad to be rid of the charge. So, at some trouble to himself, Mr. Stanton had brought him away. But if he needed payment, he found it in Hafed's happy face and tireless devotion to himself. He was less of a servant than a pet; but his master did not mean him to grow up in idleness and ignorance, and as soon as he knew a little English, he was to go to school to learn to read and write; but at present he was allowed time to become accustomed to his new home.

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The children thought him a great curiosity, partly because of his foreign dress, and that he had come from such a far-off country; partly because he could speak only half a dozen English words.

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Hafed took a great fancy to the little girls, and was never happier than when his master took him to Mr. Bradford's house, and left him to play with them for a while. Maggie and Bessie liked him also, and they immediately set about teaching him English. As yet, he knew only four or five words, one of which was "Missy," by which name he called every one who wore skirts, not excepting Franky, who considered it a great insult. Maggie was very eager to have him learn new words, and was constantly showing him something and repeating the name over and over till he could say it. But though he took great pains, and was an apt scholar, he did not learn fast enough to satisfy Maggie.

"Hafed," she said to him one day, holding up her doll, "say 'doll.'"

"*Dole*," repeated Hafed, in his soft, musical tones.

"Doll," said Maggie, not at all satisfied with his pronunciation, and speaking in a louder voice, as if Hafed could understand the better for that.

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"Dole," said Hafed again, with a contented smile.

"D-o-o-ll," shrieked Maggie, in the ear of her patient pupil, with no better success on his part.

Miss Rush was sitting by, and she called Maggie to her. "Maggie, dear," she said, "you must not be impatient with Hafed. I am sure he tries his best; but you must remember it is hard work for that little foreign tongue of his to twist itself to our English words. He will learn to pronounce them in time."

"But, Aunt Bessie," said Maggie, "mamma said it was always best to learn to do a thing well at first, and then one will not have to break one's self of bad habits."

"And so it is, dear; but then we cannot always do that at once. When mamma teaches you French, you cannot always pronounce the words as she does; can you?"

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"No; ma'am; but those are hard French words, and we are trying to teach Hafed English, and that is so easy."

"Easy to you, dear, who are accustomed to it, but not to him. It is even harder for him to frame the English words than it is for you to repeat the French; and you should be gentle and patient with him, as mamma is with you."

The little Persian felt the cold very much, and delighted to hang about the fires and registers. He had a way of going down on his knees before the fire, and holding up both hands with the palms towards the blaze. The first time nurse saw him do this, she was quite shocked.

"The poor little heathen," she said. "Well, I've often heard of them fire-worshippers, but I never expected to see one, at least, in this house. I shall just make so bold as to tell Mr. Ruthven he ought to teach him better."

But Hafed was no fire-worshipper, for he had been taught better, and thanks to his kind master, did not bow down to that or any other false god. It was only his delight in the roaring blaze which had brought him down in front of it, not, as nurse thought, the wish to pray to it.

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"Let's teach him about Jesus," said Bessie to her sister. "First, we'll teach him to say it, and then he'll want to know who he is."

So kneeling down beside the little stranger, she took his hand in hers, and pointing upwards said, "Jesus."

The boy's face lighted up immediately, and to Bessie's great delight, he repeated Jesus in a tone so clear and distinct as to show it was no new word to him. He had a pretty way when he wished to say he loved a person, of touching his fingers to his lips, laying them on his own heart, and then on that of the one for whom he wished to express his affection. Now, at the sound of the name, which he, as well as Bessie, had learned to love, he tried, by a change in the pretty sign, to express his meaning. Touching first Bessie's lips and then her heart with the tips of his fingers, he softly blew upon them, as if he wished to waft to heaven the love he could not utter in words, saying, "Missy—Jesus?"

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Bessie understood him. She knew he wished to ask if she loved Jesus, and with a sunny face, she answered him with a nod, asking, in her turn, "Do you, Hafed,—do you love Jesus?"

The boy went through the same sign with his own heart and lips, saying, "Hafed—Jesus," and Bessie turned joyfully to her sister.

"He knows him, Maggie. We won't have to teach him; he knows our Jesus, and he loves him too. Oh, I'm so glad!"

"Now the Good Shepherd, that has called ye to be his lambs, bless you both," said old nurse, with the tears starting to her eyes. "That's as cheering a sight as I want to see; and there was me a misjudging of my boy. I might have known him better than to think he'd let one as belonged to him go on in darkness and heathendom."

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Nurse always called Mr. Stanton her "boy" when she was particularly pleased with him.

From this time Hafed was almost as great a favorite with nurse as he was with the children, and seeing how gentle and thoughtful he was, she would even sometimes leave them for a few moments in his care.

One morning mamma and Aunt Bessie were out, and Jane, who was sick, had gone to bed. Hafed was in the nursery playing with the children, when the chamber-maid came in to ask nurse to go to Jane. Nurse hesitated at first about leaving her charge, but they all said they would be good, and Hafed should take care of them. Nurse knew that this was a safe promise from Maggie and Bessie, but she feared that, with every intention of being good, mischievous Franky would have himself or the others in trouble if she stayed away five minutes.

"See here," she said, "I'll put ye all into the crib, and there ye may play omnibus till I come back. That will keep ye out of harm's way, Franky, my man, for if there's a chance for you to get into mischief, ye'll find it."

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This was a great treat, for playing in the cribs and beds was not allowed without special permission, and Franky, being provided with a pair of reins, and a chair turned upside down for a horse, took his post as driver, in great glee; while the three little girls were packed in as passengers, Maggie holding the baby. Hafed was rather too large for the crib, so he remained outside, though he, too, enjoyed the fun, even if he did not quite understand all it meant. Then, having with many pointings and shakings of her head made Hafed understand that he was not to go near the fire or windows, or to let the children fall out of the crib, mammy departed.

They were all playing and singing as happy as birds, when the nursery-door opened, and a stranger stood before them. In a moment every voice was mute, and all five children looked at her in utter astonishment. She was an old lady, with hair as white as snow, tall and handsome; but there was something about her which made every one of the little ones feel rather shy. They gazed at her in silence while she looked from one to another of them, and then about the room, as if those grave, stern eyes were taking notice of the smallest thing there.

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"Well!" exclaimed the old lady, after a moment's pause, "this is a pretty thing!"

By this time Bessie's politeness had gained the better of her astonishment, and scrambling to her feet, she stood upright in the crib. As the stranger's eyes were fixed upon Hafed as she spoke, the little girl supposed the "pretty thing" meant the dress of the young Persian, which the children thought very elegant; and she answered, "Yes, ma'am, but he is not to wear it much longer, 'cause the boys yun after him in the street, so Uncle Yuthven is having some English clothes made for him."

"Where is your mother?" asked the old lady, without other notice of Bessie's speech.

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"Gone out with Aunt Bessie, ma'am."

"And is there nobody left to take care of you?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am," answered Bessie. "Maggie and I are taking care of the children, and Hafed is taking care of us."

"Humph!" said the old lady, as if she did not think this at all a proper arrangement. "I shall give Margaret a piece of my mind about this."

Bessie now opened her eyes very wide. "Papa don't allow it," she said, gravely.

"Don't allow what?" asked the stranger, rather sharply.

"Don't allow mamma to be scolded."

"And who said I was going to scold her?"

"You said you were going to give her a piece of your mind, and pieces of mind mean scoldings, and we never have mamma scolded, 'cause she never deserves it."

"Oh!" said the old lady, with a half-smile, "then she is better than most people."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Bessie, innocently, "she is better than anybody, and so is papa."

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"Just as well *you* should think so," said the lady, now smiling outright. "And you are Maggie—no—Bessie, I suppose."

"Yes, ma'am. I am Bessie, and this is Maggie, and this is baby, and this is Franky, and this is Hafed," said the child, pointing in turn to each of her playmates.

"And is there no one but this little mountebank to look after you?" asked the old lady. "Where is your nurse?"

"She is coming back in a few minutes," answered Bessie. "And Hafed is not a—a—that thing you called him, ma'am. He is only a little Persian whom Uncle Yuthven brought from far away over the sea, and he's a very good boy. He does not know a great many of our words, but he tries to learn them, and he knows about our Jesus, and tries to be a good little boy."

Dear Bessie wished to say all she could in praise of Hafed, whom she thought the old lady looked at with displeasure. Perhaps Hafed thought so, also, for he seemed very much as if he would like to hide away from her gaze. Meanwhile Maggie sat perfectly silent. When the old lady had first spoken, she started violently, and, clasping her arms tightly about the baby, looked more and more frightened each instant; while baby, who was not usually shy, nestled her little head timidly against her sister's shoulder, and stared at the stranger with eyes of grave infant wonder.

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"And so you are Maggie," said the lady, coming closer to the crib.

Poor Maggie gave a kind of gasp by way of answer.

"Do you not know me, Maggie?" asked the old lady, in a voice which she intended to be coaxing.

To Bessie's dismay, Maggie burst into one of those sudden and violent fits of crying, to which she would sometimes give way when much frightened or distressed.

"Why, why!" said the stranger, as the baby, startled by Maggie's sobs, and the way in which she clutched her, raised her voice also in a loud cry. "Why, why! what is all this about? Do you not know your Aunt Patty?"

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Aunt Patty! Was it possible? At this astounding and alarming news, Bessie plumped down again in the bed beside Maggie, amazed at herself for having dared to speak so boldly to that terrible person. And yet she had not seemed so terrible, nor had she felt much afraid of her till she found out who she was.

But now Mrs. Lawrence was losing patience. Certainly she had not had a very pleasant reception. Coming cold and tired from a long journey, she had found her host and hostess out, and no one but the servants to receive her. This was her own fault, of course, since she had not told Mr. and Mrs. Bradford to expect her; but that did not make it the less annoying to her. It is not always the easier to bear a thing because we ourselves are to blame for it.

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However, she had made up her mind not to be vexed about it, and at once went to the nursery to make acquaintance with the children. But the greeting she received was not of a kind to please any one, least of all a person of Aunt Patty's temper. And there was worse still to come.

"What is the meaning of all this?" asked Mrs. Lawrence, in an angry tone. "Here, Maggie, give me that child, and stop crying at once."

As she spoke, she tried to take the baby, but poor Maggie, now in utter despair, shrieked aloud for nurse, and held her little sister closer than before. Aunt Patty was determined, however, and much stronger than Maggie, and in another minute the baby was screaming in her arms.

"Oh, Maggie, why don't somebody come?" cried Bessie. "Oh, do say those words to her?"

Maggie had quite forgotten how she had intended to alarm Aunt Patty if she interfered with them; but when Bessie spoke, it came to her mind, and the sight of her baby sister in the old lady's arms was too much for her. Springing upon her feet, she raised her arm after the manner of the woman in the picture, and gasped out, "Beware, woman!"

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For a moment Aunt Patty took no notice of her, being occupied with trying to soothe the baby.

"Beware, woman!" cried Maggie, in a louder tone, and stamping her foot.

Mrs. Lawrence turned and looked at her.

"Beware, woman!" shrieked Maggie, and Bessie, thinking it time for her to come to her sister's aid, joined in the cry, "Beware, woman!" while Franky, always ready to take part in any disturbance, struck at Aunt Patty with his whip, and shouted, "'Ware, woman!" and Hafed, knowing nothing but that this old lady had alarmed and distressed his young charge, and that it was his duty to protect them, raised his voice in a whoop of defiance, and snatching up the hearth-brush, brandished it in a threatening manner as he danced wildly about her. Nor was this all, for Flossy, who had also been taken into the crib as a passenger, commenced a furious

barking, adding greatly to the uproar.



Bessie's Friends.

It would be difficult to say which was the greatest, Aunt Patty's astonishment or her anger; and there is no knowing what she would have done or said, for at this moment the door opened, and Uncle Ruthven appeared. [Pg 159]

For a moment he stood perfectly motionless with surprise. It was indeed a curious scene upon which he looked. In the centre of the room stood an old lady who was a stranger to him, holding in her arms the screaming baby; while around her danced his own little servant-boy, looking as if he might be one of the wild dervishes of his own country; and in the crib stood his young nieces and Franky, all shouting, "Beware, woman!" over and over again.

But Aunt Patty had not the least idea of "running away, never to be seen again," and if her conscience were "guilty," it certainly did not seem to be at all alarmed by anything Maggie or Bessie could do. [Pg 160]

Nevertheless, Mr. Stanton's appearance was a great relief to her. Baby ceased her loud cries, and stretched out her dimpled arms to her uncle, with a beseeching whimper; Hafed paused in his antics, and stood like a statue at sight of his master; and the three other children all turned to him with exclamations of "Oh, Uncle Ruthven; we're so glad!" and "Please don't leave us," from Maggie and Bessie; and "Make dat Patty be off wiz herself," from Franky.

Mr. Stanton recovered himself in a moment, and bowing politely to Mrs. Lawrence, said, with a smile sparkling in his eye, "I fear you are in some trouble, madam; can I help you?"

"Help me?" repeated the old lady; "I fear you will want help yourself. Why, it must need half a dozen keepers to hold these little Bedlamites in any kind of order." [Pg 161]

"They are usually orderly enough," answered Mr. Stanton as he took baby from Aunt Patty, who was only too glad to give her up; "but I do not understand this. What is the matter, Maggie, and where is nurse?"

But Maggie only answered by a new burst of sobs, and Bessie spoke for her. "She's Aunt Patty, Uncle Yuthven; she says she is."

"Well," said Uncle Ruthven, more puzzled than ever, for he knew little of Mrs. Lawrence, save that she was Mr. Bradford's aunt, "and do you welcome her with such an uproar as this? Tell me where nurse is, Bessie."

As he spoke, nurse herself came in, answering his question with, "Here I am, sir, and—"

Nurse, in her turn, was so astonished by the unexpected sight of Aunt Patty that she stood quite

still, gazing at her old enemy. But, as she afterwards said, she presently "recollected her manners," and dropping a stiff courtesy to Mrs. Lawrence, she took the baby from Mr. Stanton, and in a few words explained the cause of her ten minutes' absence. The tearful faces of her nurslings, and that of Aunt Patty, flushed and angry, gave nurse a pretty good guess how things had been going while she had been away, but she saw fit to ask no questions.

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"My lady is out, ma'am," she said, with a grim sort of politeness to Mrs. Lawrence, "and I think she was not looking for you just now, or she would have been at home."

Then Mr. Stanton introduced himself, and asking Mrs. Lawrence if she would let him play the part of host till his sister came home, he offered the old lady his arm, and led her away.

Poor Aunt Patty! she scarcely knew what to do. The old angry, jealous temper and the new spirit which had lately come to dwell in her heart were doing hard battle, each striving for the victory. She thought, and not without reason, that her nephew's little children must have been taught to fear and dislike her, when they could receive her in such a manner; and the evil spirit said, "Go, do not remain in a house where you have been treated so. Leave it, and never come back to it. You have been insulted! do not bear it! Tell these people what you think of their unkindness, and never see them again." But the better angel, the spirit of the meek and lowly Master, of whom she was striving to learn, said, "No, stay, and try to overcome evil with good. This is all your own fault, the consequence of your own ungoverned and violent temper. Your very name has become a name of fear to these innocent children; but you must bear it, and let them find they have no longer cause to dread you. And do not be too proud to let their parents see that you are sorry for the past, and wish it to be forgotten. If this is hard, and not what you would have expected, remember how much they have borne from you in former days; how patient and gentle and forbearing they were."

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Then, as her anger cooled down, she began to think how very unlikely it was that Mr. or Mrs. Bradford had said or done anything which could cause their children to act in the way Maggie and Bessie had done that morning. This was probably the work of others who remembered how perverse and trying she had been during her last visit. And Aunt Patty was forced to acknowledge to herself that it was no more than she deserved, or might have looked for.

[Pg 164]

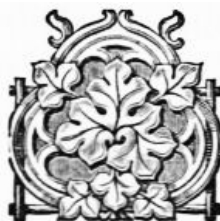
And so, trying to reason herself into better humor, as she thought the matter over, she began to see its droll side (for Aunt Patty had a quick sense of fun) and to find some amusement mingling with her vexation at the singular conduct of the children.

Meanwhile, Mr. Stanton, who saw that the poor lady had been greatly annoyed, and who wondered much at all the commotion he had seen in the nursery, though, like nurse, he thought it wisest to ask no questions, was doing his best to make her forget it; and so well did he succeed, that presently Mrs. Lawrence found herself, she scarcely knew how, laughing heartily with him as she related the story of Maggie's strange attack upon her. Mr. Stanton understood it no better than she did, perhaps not so well; but he was very much amused; and as he thought these young nieces and nephews of his were very wonderful little beings, he told Aunt Patty many of their droll sayings and doings, making himself so agreeable and entertaining, that by the time his sister came in, the old lady had almost forgotten that she had cause to be offended, and was not only quite ready to meet Mrs. Bradford in a pleasant manner, but actually went so far as to apologize for taking them all by surprise.

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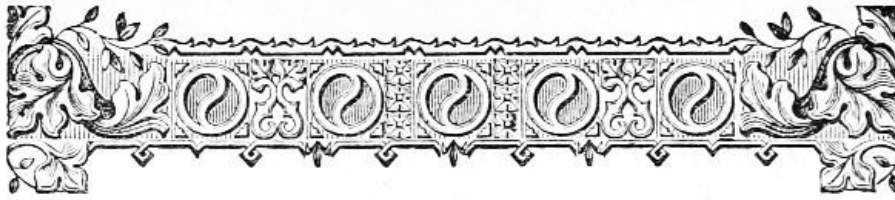
This was a great deal to come from Aunt Patty. She would not have spoken so four years ago; but Mrs. Bradford was not more surprised by this than she was at the difference in look and manner which now showed itself in the old lady. Surely, some great change must have come to her; and her friends, seeing how much more patient and gentle she was than in former days, could not but think it was the one blessed change which must come to the hearts of those who seek for love and peace by the true way.

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## VIII.

### *FRANKY.*



ut although such a great and delightful alteration had taken place in Mrs. Lawrence, and although Mrs. Bradford and Miss Rush did all they could to make the children feel kindly towards her, it was some days before things went at all smoothly between the old lady and the little ones, and Annie Stanton, seeing the consequence of her thoughtlessness, had more than once reason to regret it, and to take to herself a lesson to refrain from evil speaking.

Maggie and Bessie, it is true, were too old and too well behaved to speak their fear and their dislike openly, by word or action, but it was plainly to be seen in their looks and manners. Poor Aunt Patty! She heard the sweet, childish voices prattling about the house, ringing out so freely and joyfully in peals of merry laughter, or singing to simple music the pretty hymns and songs their dear mother and Mrs. Rush had taught them; but the moment she appeared, sweet song, innocent talk, and gay laugh were hushed; the little ones were either silent, or whispered to one another in subdued, timid tones. Little feet would come pattering, or skipping along the hall, a small, curly head peep within the door, and then vanish at sight of her, while a whisper of "She's there; let's run," told the cause of its sudden disappearance. She saw them clinging around their other friends and relations with loving confidence, climbing upon their knees, clasping their necks, pressing sweet kisses on their cheeks and lips, asking freely for all the interest, sympathy, and affection they needed. Father and mother, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, Colonel and Mrs. Rush, the very servants, who had been long in the house, all came in for a share of childish love and trust. But for her they had nothing but shy, downcast looks, timid, half-whispered answers; they shrank from the touch of her hand, ran from her presence. Yes, poor Aunt Patty! the punishment was a severe one, and, apart from the pain it gave her, it was hard for a proud spirit such as hers to bear. But she said nothing, did not even complain to Mrs. Bradford of the reception she had met with from Maggie and Bessie, and it was only by Uncle Ruthven's account and the confession of the little girls that their mamma knew what had occurred.

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On the morning after Mrs. Lawrence's arrival, Maggie, as usual, brought the "Complete Family" to her mother to have the spelling corrected, and Mrs. Bradford found written, "'Beware, woman!' is not a bit of use. It don't frighten people a bit; not even guilty conshuns, and Uncle John just teased me I know. It is real mean."

Mamma asked the meaning of this, and, in a very aggrieved manner, Maggie told her of Uncle John's explanation of the picture, and how she thought she would try the experiment on Aunt Patty when she had insisted on taking the baby.

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"But it was all of no purpose, mamma," said Maggie, in a very injured tone; "she did not care at all, but just stood there, looking madder and madder."

Mamma could scarcely wonder that Aunt Patty had looked "madder and madder," and she told Maggie that she thought her aunt wished to be kind and good since she had not uttered one word of complaint at the rude reception she had met with. But the little girl did not see it with her mother's eyes, and could not be persuaded to think less hardly of Aunt Patty.

But that rogue, Franky, was not afraid to show his feelings. He was a bold little monkey, full of life and spirits, and always in mischief; and now he seemed to have set himself purposely to defy and brave Mrs. Lawrence, acting as if he wished to see how far he could go without meeting punishment at her hands. This sad behavior of Franky's was particularly unfortunate, because the old lady had taken a special love for the little boy, fancying he looked like the dear father who so many years ago had been drowned beneath the blue waters of the Swiss lake.

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A day or two after Aunt Patty came, she, with Mrs. Bradford and Miss Rush, was in the parlor with three or four morning visitors. Franky had just learned to open the nursery door for himself, and this piece of knowledge he made the most of, watching his chance and slipping out the moment nurse's eye was turned from him. Finding one of these opportunities for which he was so eager, he ran out and went softly down-stairs, fearing to hear nurse calling him back. But nurse did not miss him at first, and he reached the parlor in triumph. Here the door stood partly open, and putting in his head, he looked around the room. No one noticed the roguish little face, with its mischievous, dancing eyes, for all the ladies were listening to Aunt Patty, as she told them some very interesting anecdote.

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Suddenly there came from the door, in clear, childish tones, "Ladies, ladies, does Patty stold oo? Oo better wun away, she stolds very dreadful."

After which Master Franky ran away himself as fast as his feet could carry him, laughing and



chuckling as he mounted the stairs, as if he had done something very fine.

Mrs. Lawrence went straight on with her story, not pausing for an instant, though that she heard quite as plainly as any one else was to be seen by the flush of color on her cheek, and the uplifting of the already upright head.

As for poor Mrs. Bradford, it was very mortifying for her; but what was to be done? Nothing, just nothing, as far as Aunt Patty was concerned. It was not a thing for which pardon could well be asked or an apology made, and Mrs. Bradford thought the best way was to pass it over in silence. She talked very seriously to Franky, but it seemed impossible to make the little boy understand that he had done wrong; and, although nothing quite as bad as this occurred again for several days, he still seemed determined to make war upon Aunt Patty whenever he could find a chance of doing so. And yet, strange to say, this unruly young gentleman was the first one of the children to make friends with his old auntie; and it came about in this way:—

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Aunt Bessie had brought as her Christmas gift to Franky a tiny pair of embroidered slippers, which were, as her namesake said, "perferly cunning," and in which the little boy took great pride. Nurse, also, thought a great deal of these slippers, and was very choice of them, allowing Franky to wear them only while she was dressing or undressing him. But one day when she brought him in from his walk, she found his feet very cold, and taking off his walking-shoes, she put on the slippers, and planted him in front of the fire, telling him to "toast his toes." No sooner did the little toes begin to feel at all comfortable than Franky looked around for some way of putting them to what he considered their proper use; namely, trotting about. That tempting nursery-door stood ajar, nurse's eyes were turned another way, and in half a minute he was off again. Mammy missed him very soon, and sent Jane to look for him. She met him coming upstairs, and brought him back to the nursery with a look in his eye which nurse knew meant that he had been in mischief. And was it possible? He was in his stocking feet! The precious slippers were missing. In vain did the old woman question him; he would give her no answer, only looking at her with roguishness dancing in every dimple on his chubby face; and in vain did Jane search the halls and staircase. So at last nurse took him to his mother, and very unwilling he was to go, knowing right well that he had been naughty, and that now he would be obliged to confess it.

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"Where are your slippers, Franky?" asked Mrs. Bradford, when nurse had told her story.

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Franky hung his head and put his finger into his mouth, then lifted his face coaxingly to his mother for a kiss.

"Mamma cannot kiss you till you are a good boy," said Mrs. Bradford, and repeated her question, "Where are your slippers?"

"In Patty's pottet," said Franky, seeing that his mother would have an answer, and thinking he had best have it out.

"And how came they in Aunt Patty's pocket?"

"She put dem dere hersef," answered the child.

"Did she take them off your feet, Franky?"

"No, mamma," answered Franky, liking these questions still less than he had done the others.

"How did they come off then?"

"Me trow dem at Patty," said Franky.

At last, after much more questioning and some whimpering from the child, he was brought to confess that he had gone to the library, where he found Aunt Patty. Defying her as usual, and trying how far he could go, without punishment, he had called her "bad old sing," and many other naughty names; but finding this did not bring the expected scolding, he had pulled off first one and then the other of his slippers and thrown them at the old lady. These Mrs. Lawrence had picked up and put in her pocket, still without speaking. Little Franky could not tell how sorrow and anger were both struggling in her heart beneath that grave silence.

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When Mrs. Bradford had found out all Franky could or would tell, she told him he was a very naughty little boy, and since he had behaved so badly to Aunt Patty, he must go at once and ask her pardon. This Franky had no mind to do. He liked very well to brave Aunt Patty from a safe distance; but he did not care to trust himself within reach of the punishment he knew he so justly deserved. Besides, he was in a naughty, obstinate mood, and would not obey his mother as readily as usual. But mamma was determined, as it was right she should be, and after rather a hard battle with her little son, she carried him down-stairs, still sobbing, but subdued and penitent, to beg Aunt Patty's forgiveness.

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"Me sorry, me do so any more," said Franky, meaning he would do so no more.

To his surprise, and also somewhat to his mother's, the old lady caught him in her arms, and covered his face with kisses, while a tear or two shone in her eye.

"Don't ky; me dood now," lisped Franky, forgetting all his fear, and putting up his hand to wipe away her tears; and from this minute Aunt Patty and Franky were the best of friends. Indeed, so indulgent did she become to him, that papa and mamma were quite afraid he would be spoiled; for the little gentleman, finding out his power, lorded it over her pretty well. Mrs. Bradford, coming in unexpectedly one day, actually found the old lady on her hands and knees, in a corner, playing the part of a horse eating hay from a manger; while Franky, clothes-brush in hand, was, much to his own satisfaction, pretending to rub her down, making the hissing noise used by coachmen when they curry a horse, and positively refusing to allow his patient playfellow to rise.

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But Maggie and Bessie could not be persuaded to be at all friendly or sociable with Aunt Patty. True, after their first dread of her wore off, and they found she was by no means so terrible as they had imagined, they no longer scampered off at the least sound of her voice or glimpse of her skirts, as they had done at first; and Bessie even found courage to speak to her now and then, always looking however, as if she thought she was running a great risk, and could not tell what would be the consequence of such boldness. For after all they had heard, our little girls found it impossible to believe that such a great change had taken place in Aunt Patty, and were always watching for some outbreak of temper.

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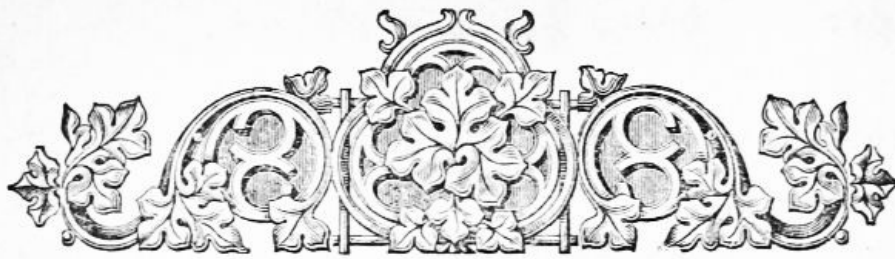
Unhappily there was one thing which stood much in Aunt Patty's way, not only with the children, but perhaps with some grown people also, and that was her old way of meddling and finding fault with things which did not concern her. This she did, almost without knowing it; for so it is, where we have long indulged in a habit, it becomes, as it were, a part of ourselves, and the older we grow, the harder it is to rid ourselves of it. And there are few things which sooner rouse the evil passions and dislike of others than this trick of fault-finding where we have no right or need to do so, or of meddling with that which does not concern us. So Mrs. Lawrence, without intending it, was constantly fretting and aggravating those around her while Maggie and Bessie, who thought that all their mamma did or said was quite perfect, were amazed and indignant when they heard her rules and wishes questioned and found fault with, and sometimes even set aside by Aunt Patty, if she thought another way better.

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## IX.

### "*BEAR YE ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS.*"



ne Sunday when Mrs. Lawrence had been with them about two weeks, Maggie and Bessie, on going as usual to their class at Mrs. Rush's, found that they two were to make up her whole class that morning; for Gracie Howard was sick, and Lily Norris gone on a visit to her grandfather who lived in the country. Mrs. Rush was not very sorry to have her favorite scholars by themselves, for she wished to give them a little lesson which it was not necessary that the others should hear. And Maggie gave her the opportunity for which she wished by asking Colonel Rush for the story of Benito.

"For," said the little girl, "if we were away and Lily and Gracie here, and you told them a new story, we should be very disappointed not to hear it; so Bessie and I made agreement to ask for an old one, and we like Benito better than any." [Pg 182]

"Very well; it shall be as you say," replied the colonel, who, provided his pets were satisfied, was so himself, and after the children had gone, he said to his wife, "Certainly there are few things in which our sweet little Maggie does not act up to the Golden Rule, of which she is so fond. She does not repeat it in a parrot-like way, as many do, but she understands what it means, and practises it too, with her whole heart."

So when the lessons were over, the colonel told the story of Benito, which never seemed to lose its freshness with these little listeners. When he came to the part where Benito helped the old dame with her burden, Mrs. Rush said, "Children, what do you think that burden was?"

"We don't know," said Bessie. "What?"

"Neither do I *know*," answered Mrs. Rush. "I was only thinking what it *might* be. Perhaps it was pain and sickness; perhaps the loss of friends; perhaps some old, troublesome sin, sorely repented of, long struggled with, but which still returned again and again, to weary and almost discourage her as she toiled along in the road which led to the Father's house. Perhaps it was all of them; but what ever it was, Benito did not pause to ask; he only thought of his Lord's command, 'Bear ye one another's burdens;' and so put his hand to the load, and eased the old dame's pain and weariness. Was it not so?" she asked of her husband. [Pg 183]

"I think so," he answered.

"But a little child could not help grown persons to bear their sins, or to cure them," said Bessie; "they must go to Jesus for that."

"Yes, we must go to Jesus; but the very love and help and pity we have from him teach us to show all we can to our fellow-creatures, whether they are young or old. One of the good men whom Jesus left on earth to do his work and preach his word tells us that Christ was 'touched with the feeling of our infirmities, because he was in all points tempted like as we are.' This means that, good and pure and holy as he was, yet he allowed himself to suffer all the trials and struggles and temptations which can come to poor, weak man, so that he might know just what we feel as we pass through them, and just what help we need. Yet, sorely tempted as he was, he never fell into sin, but returned to his Father's heaven pure and stainless as he left it. Since then Christ feels for all the pains and struggles through which we go for his sake, since he can make allowance for all our weakness and failures; and as he is so ready to give us help in our temptations, so much the more ought we who are not only tempted, but too apt, in spite of our best efforts, to fall into sin, to show to others all the kindness and sympathy we may at any time need for ourselves. So may we try to copy our Saviour, 'bearing one another's burdens,' even as he has borne ours, by giving love and pity and sympathy where we can give nothing else. Benito was a very young child, scarcely able to walk on the narrow road without the help of some older and wiser hand, and his weak shoulders could not carry any part of the old dame's load; but he put his baby hands beneath it, and gave her loving smiles and gentle words, and these brought her help and comfort, so that she went on her way, strengthened for the rest of the journey. And, as we know, Benito met his reward as he came to the gates of his Father's house. So much may the youngest do for the oldest; and I think *we* know of an old dame whose 'burden' our little pilgrims, Maggie and Bessie, might help to bear, if they would." [Pg 184]

"I just believe you mean Aunt Patty!" exclaimed Bessie, in such a tone as showed she was not very well pleased with the idea.

"And," said Maggie, with just the least little pout, "I don't believe she is a dame pilgrim, and I [Pg 186]

don't believe she is in the narrow path, not a bit!"

"There I think you are mistaken, Maggie, for, so far as we can judge, there is reason to think Aunt Patty is walking in the safe and narrow road which leads to the Father's house; and, since she has not been brought to it by paths quite so easy and pleasant as some of us have known, there is all the more reason that we happier travellers should give her a helping hand. It may be very little that we can give; a word, a look, a smile, a kind offer to go for some little trifle that is needed, will often cheer and gladden a heart that is heavy with its secret burden. And if we now and then get a knock, or even a rather hard scratch from those corners of our neighbor's load, which are made up of little faults and odd tempers, we must try not to mind it, but think only of how tired those poor, weary shoulders must be of the weight they carry."

"But, Mrs. Rush," said Maggie, "Aunt Patty's corners scratch very hard, and hurt very much."

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"But the corners are not half as sharp as they were once; are they, dear?" asked Mrs. Rush, smiling.

"Well," said Maggie, slowly, as if she were considering, "maybe her temper corner is not so sharp as it used to be, but her meddling corner is very bad,—yes, very bad indeed; and it scratches like everything. Why, you don't know how she meddles, and what things she says, even when she is not a bit mad. She is all the time telling mamma how she had better manage; just as if mamma did not know a great deal better than she does about her own children and her own house, and about everything! And she dismanages Franky herself very much; and she said dear Aunt Bessie deserved to have such a bad sore throat 'cause she would go out riding with Uncle Ruthven, when she told her it was too cold; and she said the colonel"—

"There, there, that will do," said Mrs. Rush, gently. "Do not let us think of what Aunt Patty does to vex us, but see if we do not sometimes grieve her a little."

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"Oh! she don't think you do anything," said Maggie; "she says you are a very lovely young woman."

"Well," said the colonel, laughing, "neither you nor I shall quarrel with her for that; shall we? There is one good mark for Aunt Patty; let us see how many more we can find."

"She was very good to Patrick when he hurt his hand so the other day," said Bessie. "She washed it, and put a yag on it, and made it feel a great deal better."

"And she likes Uncle Ruthven very much," said Maggie.

"That is right," said Mrs. Rush, "think of all the good you can. When we think kindly of a person, we soon begin to act kindly towards them, and I am quite sure that a little love and kindness from you would do much to lighten Aunt Patty's burden. And if the sharp corners fret and worry you a little, remember that perhaps it is only the weight of the rest of the burden which presses these into sight, and then you will not feel them half as much. Will you try if you can be like Benito, and so receive the blessing of Him who says the cup of cold water given in his name shall meet its reward?"

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"We'll try," said Maggie, "but I don't think we'll succeed."

"And if at first you don't succeed, what then?"

"Then try, try, try again," said Maggie, cheerfully, for she was already trying to think what she might do to make Aunt Patty's burden more easy; "but—"

"But what, dear?"

"I hope she won't shed tears of joy upon my bosom," said Maggie, growing grave again at the thought of such a possibility; "I wouldn't quite like *that*."

"And what does Bessie say?" asked the colonel.

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"I was thinking how precious it is," said the little girl, turning upon the colonel's face those serious brown eyes which had been gazing so thoughtfully into the fire.

"How precious what is, my darling?"

"To think Jesus knows how our temptations feel, 'cause he felt them himself, and so knows just how to help us and be sorry for us."

Colonel Rush had his answer to both questions.

That same Sunday evening, the children were all with their father and mother in the library. Mrs. Lawrence sat in an arm-chair by the parlor fire, alone, or nearly so, for Miss Rush and Mr. Stanton in the window at the farther side of the room were not much company to any one but themselves.

Certainly the poor old lady felt lonely enough, as, with her clasped hands lying upon her lap, her chin sunk upon her breast, and her eyes fixed upon the fire, she thought of the long, long ago, when she, too, was young, bright, and happy; when those around lived only for her happiness.

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Ah! how different it all was now! They were all gone,—the youth, the love, the happiness; gone, also, were the wasted years which she might have spent in the service of the Master whom she had sought so late; gone all the opportunities which he had given her of gaining the love and friendship of her fellow-creatures. And now how little she could do, old and feeble and helpless as she was. And what hard work it was to struggle with the evil tempers and passions to which she had so long given way; how difficult, when some trifle vexed her, to keep back the sharp and angry word, to put down the wish to bend everything to her own will, to learn of Him who was

meek and lowly in heart!

And there was no one to know, no one to sympathize, no one to give her a helping hand in this weary, up-hill work, to guess how heavily the burden of past and present sin bore upon the poor, aching shoulders. In her longing for the human love and sympathy she had once cast from her, and which she could not now bring herself to ask, the poor old lady almost forgot that there was one Eye to see the struggles made for Jesus' sake, one Hand outstretched to save and to help, one Voice to whisper, "Be of good courage." [Pg 192]

True, Mr. and Mrs. Bradford were always kind and thoughtful, and all treated her with due respect and consideration; but that was not all she wanted. If the children would but love and trust her. There would be such comfort in that; but in spite of all her efforts, they were still shy and shrinking,—all, save that little tyrant, Franky. Even fearless Fred was quiet and almost dumb in her presence.

So Aunt Patty sat, and sadly thought, unconscious of the wistful pair of eyes which watched her from the other room, until by and by a gentle footstep came stealing round her chair, a soft little hand timidly slipped itself into her own, and she turned to see Bessie's sweet face looking at her, half in pity, half in wonder. [Pg 193]

"Well, dear," she asked, after a moment's surprised silence, "What is it?"

Truly, Bessie scarcely knew herself what it was. She had been watching Aunt Patty as she sat looking so sad and lonely, and thinking of Mrs. Rush's lesson of the morning, till her tender little heart could bear it no longer, and she had come to the old lady's side, not thinking of anything particular she would do or say, but just with the wish to put a loving hand to the burden.

"Do you want anything, Bessie?" asked Mrs. Lawrence again.

"No, ma'am, but"—Bessie did not quite like to speak of Aunt Patty's troubles, so she said, "I have a little burden, too, Aunt Patty."

Aunt Patty half smiled to herself as she looked into the earnest, wistful eyes. She, this innocent little one, the darling and pet of all around her, what burden could she have to bear? She did not know the meaning of the word. Then came a vexed, suspicious thought. [Pg 194]

"Who told you that I had any burden to bear, child?" she asked, sharply.

"Every one has; haven't they?" said Bessie, rather frightened; then, strong in her loving, holy purpose, she went on. "Everybody has some burden; don't they, Aunt Patty? If our Father makes them very happy, still they have their faults, like I do. And if he don't make them very happy, the faults are a great deal harder to bear; are they not?"

"And what burden have you, dearie?" asked the old lady, quite softened.

"My tempers," said the child, gravely. "I used to be in passions very often, Aunt Patty, till Jesus helped me so much, and very often now I have passions in myself when some one makes me offended; but if I ask Him quite quick to help me, he always does. But it is pretty hard sometimes, and I think that is my burden. Maybe it's only a little one, though, and I oughtn't to speak about it." [Pg 195]

Aunt Patty was surprised, no less at the child's innocent freedom in speaking to her than at what she said, for she had never suspected that gentle little Bessie had a passionate temper. She looked at her for a moment, and then said, "Then thank God every day of your life, Bessie, that he has saved you from the misery of growing up with a self-willed, ungoverned temper. Thank him that his grace has been sufficient to help you to battle with it while you are young, that age and long habit have not strengthened it till it seems like a giant you cannot overcome. You will never know what misery it becomes then, with what force the tempter comes again and again; *no one* knows, *no one* knows!"

Perhaps Mrs. Lawrence was talking more to herself than to Bessie; but the child understood her, and answered her.

"Jesus knows," she said, softly, and with that tender, lingering tone with which she always spoke the Saviour's name.

"Jesus knows," repeated the old lady, almost as if the thought came to her for the first time. [Pg 196]

"Yes, Jesus knows," said Bessie, putting up her small fingers with a little caressing touch to Aunt Patty's cheek; "and is it not sweet and precious, Aunt Patty, to think he had temptations too, and so can know just how hard we have to try not to grieve him? Mrs. Rush told us about it to-day, and I love to think about it all the time. And she told us how he helped every one to bear their burdens; and now we ought to help each other too, 'cause that was what he wanted us to do. But if sometimes we cannot help each other, 'cause we don't know about their burdens, Jesus can always help us, 'cause he always knows; don't he?"

"Bessie, come and sing," called mamma from the other room, and away ran the little comforter to join her voice with the others in the Sabbath evening hymn.

Yes, she had brought comfort to the worn and weary heart; she had put her hand to Aunt Patty's burden and eased the aching pain. [Pg 197]

"Jesus knows." Again and again the words came back to her, bringing peace and rest and strength for all days to come. She had heard it often before; she knew it well. "Jesus knows;" but the precious words had never come home to her before as they did when they were spoken by the sweet, trustful, childish voice,—"Jesus knows."

There is no need to tell that they were friendly after this, these two pilgrims on the heavenward way,—the old woman and the little child, she who had begun to tread in her Master's footsteps so early in life's bright morning, and she who had not sought to follow him until the eleventh hour, when her day was almost ended. For they were both clinging to one faith, both looking to one hope, and the hand of the younger had drawn the feet of the elder to a firmer and surer foothold upon the Rock of Ages, on which both were resting.

And how was it with our Maggie?

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It was far harder work for her to be sociable with Aunt Patty than it was for Bessie; for besides her fear of the old lady, there was her natural shyness to be struggled with. As for speaking to her, unless it was to give a timid "yes" or "no" when spoken to, that was, at first, by no means possible; but remembering that Mrs. Rush had said that a look or a smile might show good-will or kindness, she took to looking and smiling with all her might. She would plant herself at a short distance from Aunt Patty, and stare at the old lady till she looked up and noticed her, when she would put on the broadest of smiles, and immediately run away, frightened at her own boldness.

Mrs. Lawrence was at first displeased, thinking Maggie meant this for impertinence or mockery; but Mrs. Bradford, having once or twice caught Maggie at this extraordinary performance, asked what it meant, and was told by her little daughter that she was only "trying to bear Aunt Patty's burden."

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Then followed an account of what Mrs. Rush had taught the children on Sunday.

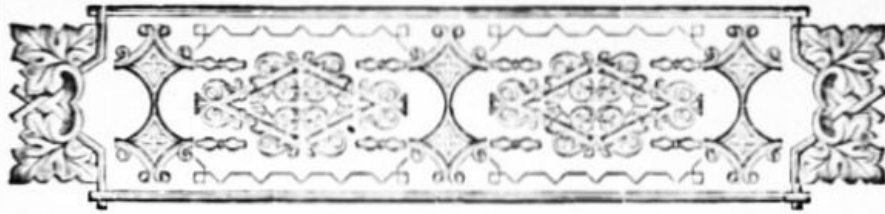
"But, indeed, indeed, mamma," said poor Maggie, piteously, "I don't think I can do any better. I do feel so frightened when she looks at me, and she don't look as if she liked me to smile at her, and this morning she said, 'What are you about, child?' *so* crossly!"

Mamma praised and encouraged her, and afterwards explained to Aunt Patty that Maggie only meant to be friendly, but that her bashfulness and her friendliness were sadly in each other's way. So Mrs. Lawrence was no longer displeased, but like the rest of Maggie's friends, rather amused, when she saw her desperate efforts to be sociable; and after a time even Maggie's shyness wore away. Before this came about, however, she and Bessie had made a discovery or two which amazed them very much.

Surely, it might be said of each of these little ones, "She hath done what she could."

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## X.

### *TWO SURPRISES.*



Some time after this Aunt Patty bought a magnificent toy menagerie, not for a present to any of her young nieces and nephews, but to keep as an attraction to her own room when she wished for their company.

Even Maggie could not hold out against such delightful toys, and after some coaxing from Bessie, and a good deal of peeping through the crack of the door at these wonderful animals, she ventured into Aunt Patty's room.

The two little girls, with Franky, were there one morning while mamma and Aunt Patty sat at their work. The animals had been put through a great number of performances, after which it was found necessary to put the menagerie in thorough order. For this purpose the wild beasts were all taken from their cages, and tied with chains of mamma's bright-colored worsteds to the legs of the chairs and tables, while the cages were rubbed and dusted; after which they were to be escorted home again. This proved a very troublesome business, for the animals, as was quite natural, preferred the fields, which were represented by the green spots in the carpet, to the cages, where they were so closely shut up, and did not wish to be carried back. At least, so Maggie said when mamma asked the cause of all the growling and roaring which was going on.

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"You see, mamma," she said, "they want to run away to their own forests, and they tried to devour their keepers, till some very kind giants, that's Bessie and Franky and me, came to help the keepers."

But now Flossy, who had been lying quietly on the rug, watching his chance for a bit of mischief, thought he had better help the giants, and rushing at an elephant with which Franky was having a great deal of trouble, tossed it over with his nose, and sent it whirling against the side of the room, where it lay with a broken leg and trunk. Alas, for the poor elephant! It was the first one of the toys that had been broken, and great was the mourning over its sad condition, while Flossy was sent into the corner in disgrace. Of course, it was not possible for the elephant to walk home; he must ride.

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"Patty," said Franky, "do down-'tairs and det my water-tart; it's in de lib'ry."

"Franky, Franky!" said mamma, "is that the way to speak to Aunt Patty?"

"Please," said Franky.

"Aunt Patty has a bone in her foot," said Mrs. Lawrence.

Franky put his head on one side, and looking quizzically at the old lady, said, "Oo went down-'tairs for oo bastet wis a bone in oo foot, so oo tan do for my tart wis a bone in oo foot."

Maggie and Bessie knew that this was saucy, and expected that Aunt Patty would be angry; but, to their surprise, she laughed, and would even have gone for the cart if mamma had not begged her not to.

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"Franky," said mamma, as the little girls, seeing Aunt Patty was not displeased, began to chuckle over their brother's cute speech, "you must not ask Aunt Patty to run about for you. It is not pretty for little boys to do so."

"But me want my tart to wide dis poor efelant," said Franky, coaxingly.

Bessie said she would go for the cart, and ran away down-stairs. She went through the parlor, and reaching the library-door, which stood ajar, pushed it open. Aunt Bessie and Uncle Ruthven were there; and what did she see? Was it possible?

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

At this the two culprits turned, and seeing Bessie's shocked and astonished face, Uncle Ruthven laughed outright, his own hearty, ringing laugh. "Come here, princess," he said.

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But Bessie was off, the cart quite forgotten. Through the hall and up the stairs, as fast as the little feet could patter, never pausing till she reached mamma's room, where she buried her face in one of the sofa cushions; and there her mother found her some moments later.

"Why, Bessie, my darling, what is it?" asked mamma. "What has happened to you?"

Bessie raised her flushed and troubled face, but she was not crying, as her mother had supposed, though she looked quite ready to do so.

"Oh, mamma!" she said, as Mrs. Bradford sat down and lifted her up on her lap.

"What has troubled you, dearest?"

"Oh, mamma, such a shocking thing! I don't know how to tell you."

"Have you been in any mischief, dear? If you have, do not be afraid to tell your own mamma."

"Oh! it was not me, mamma, but it was a dreadful, dreadful mischief."

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"Well, darling, if any of the others have been in mischief, of which I should know, I do not think you will speak of it unless it is necessary!"

"But you ought to know it, mamma, so you can see about it; it was so very improper. But it was not any of us children; it was big people—it was—it was—Uncle Yuthven and Aunt Bessie; and I'm afraid they won't tell you themselves."

"Well," said Mrs. Bradford, trying to keep a grave face, as she imagined she began to see into the cause of the trouble. She need not have tried to hide her smiles. Her little daughter buried her face on her bosom, as she whispered the, to her, shocking secret, and never once looked up at her mother.

"Mamma,—he—he—*kissed* her!—he did—and she never scolded him, not a bit."

Still the disturbed little face was hidden, and mamma waited a moment till she could compose her own, and steady her voice.

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"My darling," she said, "I have a pleasant secret to tell you. You love dear Aunt Bessie very much; do you not?"

"Yes, mamma, dearly, dearly; and, mamma, she's very much mine,—is she not?—'cause I'm her namesake; and Uncle Yuthven ought not to do it. He had no yight. Mamma, don't you think papa had better ask him to go back to Africa for a little while?"

Bessie's voice was rather angry now. Mamma had once or twice lately seen signs of a little jealous feeling toward Uncle Ruthven. She, Bessie the younger, thought it very strange that Bessie the elder should go out walking or driving so often with Uncle Ruthven, or that they should have so many long talks together. Uncle Ruthven took up quite too much of Aunt Bessie's time, according to little Bessie's thinking. She had borne it pretty well, however, until now; but that Uncle Ruthven should "make so intimate" as to kiss Aunt Bessie, was the last drop in the cup, and she was displeased as well as distressed.

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"And if papa had the power," said Mrs. Bradford, "would my Bessie wish Uncle Ruthven sent away again, and so grieve dear grandmamma, who is so glad to have him at home once more, to say nothing of his other friends? I hope my dear little daughter is not giving way to that ugly, hateful feeling, jealousy."

"Oh! I hope not, mamma," said Bessie. "I would not like to be so naughty. And if you think it's being jealous not to like Uncle Yuthven to—to do that, I'll try not to mind it so much;" and here a great sob escaped her, and a tear or two dropped on mamma's hand.

Mrs. Bradford thought it best to make haste and tell her the secret.

"My darling," she said, "you know, though you are so fond of dear Aunt Bessie, she is not related to you,—not really your aunt."

"Yes'm, but then I love her just as much as if she was my very, very own. I have to love her for so many yeasons; 'cause she is her own self and I can't help it, and 'cause I'm her namesake, and 'cause she's my dear soldier's own sister. Mamma, don't you think that is plenty of yeasons to be fond of her for?"

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"Yes, dear, but you must be willing to have others fond of her too. And do you not think it would be very pleasant to have her for your own aunt, and to keep her always with us for our very own?"

"Oh, yes, mamma! but then that could not be; could it?"

"Well, yes," said Mrs. Bradford; "if Uncle Ruthven marries her, she will really be your aunt, and then she will live at grandmamma's, where you may see her almost every day, and feel she is quite one of the family."

"And is he going to, mamma?" asked Bessie, raising her head, and with the utmost surprise and pleasure breaking over her face; "is Uncle Yuthven going to marry her, and make her our true aunt?"

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"Yes, I believe so," answered her mother; "it was all settled a few days ago. We did not mean to tell you just yet, but now I thought it better. But, Bessie, if you send poor Uncle Ruthven away to Africa again, I fear you will lose Aunt Bessie too, for she will go with him."

"I was naughty to say that, dear mamma," said Bessie, her whole face in a glow of delight, "and I am so sorry I felt cross to Uncle Yuthven just when he was doing us such a great, great favor. Oh, he was so very kind to think of it! He has been trying to give us pleasure ever since he came home, and now he has done the very best thing of all. He knew just what we would like; did he not, mamma?"

Mamma laughed. "I rather think he knew we would all be pleased, Bessie."

"I must thank him very much indeed,—must I not, mamma?—and tell him how very obliging I think he is."

"You may thank him just as much as you please, dear," said mamma, merrily. "Here comes

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Maggie to see what has become of us. She must hear this delightful secret too."

So Maggie was told, and went capering round the room in frantic delight at the news, inventing, as usual, so many plans and pleasures that might fit in with this new arrangement, that Bessie was better satisfied than ever, and even forgave Uncle Ruthven the kiss.

And here was a second joy at hand; for in came a message from Mrs. Rush, asking that the little girls might come over to the hotel and spend the rest of the day with her and the colonel. They were always ready enough for this, and in a short time they were dressed and on their way with Starr, the colonel's man, who had come for them.

Starr was a soldier, straight, stiff, and very grave and respectful in his manner; and now, as he walked along, leading a little girl in each hand, they wondered to see how very smiling he looked.

"Starr," said Bessie, peeping up in his face, "have you some good news?"

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"I've no bad news, miss," said Starr, with a broader smile than before.

"You look so very pleased," said Bessie; to which Starr only replied, "It's likely, miss," and became silent again.

When they reached the long crossing, who should be standing on the corner but Sergeant Richards. Bessie saw him at once, and went directly up to him.

"How do you do, Mr. Station Policeman?" she said, politely, and holding out her morsel of a hand to him. "This is my Maggie."

"Well, now, but I'm glad to see you, and your Maggie too," said the police-sergeant. "And how have you been this long time?"

"Pretty well," answered Bessie. "How are your blind boy and your lame wife and your sick baby, and all your troubles?"

"Why, the wife is able to move round a little," said Richards, "and the baby is mending a bit too."

"And Willie?" asked Bessie.

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A shadow came over the policeman's honest face. "Willie is drooping," he said, with a sigh. "I think it's the loss of the sight of his mother's face and of the blessed sunlight that's ailing him. His eyes are quite blind now,—no more light to them than if he was in a pitch-dark cell."

"But I thought the doctor could cure him when his eyes were all blind," said Bessie.

"Not just now, dear. Next year, maybe, if all goes well. That's the best we can hope for, I believe. But here I am standing and talking to you, when I've business on hand that can't be put off." So saying, he shook hands again with Bessie and walked rapidly away.

"I s'pose he means he can't afford to pay the doctor now," said Bessie, as she and Maggie went on again with Starr. "Mrs. Granby said they were pretty poor, and she was 'fraid they couldn't do it this year. It's so long for Willie to wait. I wonder if papa wouldn't pay the doctor."

"There's the mistress watching for the little ladies," said Starr, and, looking up, the children saw Mrs. Rush standing at the window of her room and nodding to them. In two minutes more they were at the door, which she opened for them with even a brighter face than usual; and, after kissing them, stood aside to let them see the colonel, who was coming forward to meet them.

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Yes, there he came, and—no wonder Mrs. Rush looked bright and happy, no wonder Starr was smiling—without his crutches; moving slowly, to be sure, and leaning on a cane, but walking on two feet!

If Colonel Rush imagined he was about to give his little friends a pleasant surprise, he found he was not mistaken.

"Oh!" exclaimed Bessie, but it was in a very different tone from that in which she had uttered it once before that day.

Maggie gave a little shriek of delight which would almost have startled any one who had not known Maggie's ways, or seen her sparkling face.

"Oh! goody! goody! goody!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands and hopping about in a kind of ecstasy. "How lovely! how splendid! how—how—superfluous!" Maggie had been trying to find the longest "grown-up" word she could think of, and as she had that morning heard her father say that something was "altogether superfluous," she now used the word without a proper idea of its meaning.

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But the colonel was quite content to take the word as she meant it, and thanked her for her joyous sympathy. He knew that Bessie felt none the less because she was more quiet. She walked round and round him, looking at him as if she could not believe it, and then going up to him, took his hand in both hers, and laid her smooth, soft cheek upon it in a pretty, tender way which said more than words.

"Do let's see you walk a little more," said Maggie. "It's so nice; it's just like a fairy tale, when a good fairy comes and mends all the people that have been chopped to pieces, and makes them just as good as ever; only this is true and that is not."

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"Who put it on?" asked Bessie, meaning the new leg.

"Starr put it on," answered the colonel.

"And did you make it, too, Starr?" asked Bessie.

"No, indeed, miss;" said Starr, who still stood at the door with his hat in his hand, and his head on one side, looking at his master much as a proud nurse might look at her baby who was trying its first steps,—no, indeed, miss; that was beyond me."

"Starr would have given me one of his own, if he could have done so, I believe," said the colonel, smiling.

"So would I," said Maggie, "if mine would have fitted. I think I could do very well with one foot; I hop a good deal, any way. See, I could do this way;" and she began hopping round the table again.

"And you run and skip a good deal," said Mrs. Rush, "and how could you do all that on one foot?" [Pg 216]

Maggie considered a moment. "But I am very attached to the colonel," she said, "and I think I could give up one foot if it would be of use to him."

"I believe you would, my generous little girl," said the colonel; and Mrs. Rush stooped and kissed Maggie very affectionately.

"Will that new foot walk in the street?" asked Maggie.

"Yes, it will walk anywhere when I'm accustomed to it. But I am a little awkward just yet, and must practise some before I venture on it in the street."

It seemed almost too good to be true, that the colonel should be sitting there with two feet, which certainly looked quite as well as papa's or Uncle Ruthven's, or those of any other gentleman; and it was long before his affectionate little friends tired of looking at him and expressing their pleasure.

"We have some very good news for you," said Bessie; "mamma said we might tell you." [Pg 217]

"Let us have it then," said the colonel; and the grand secret about Uncle Ruthven and Aunt Bessie was told.

"I just believe you knew it before," said Maggie, who thought Colonel and Mrs. Rush did not seem as much surprised as was to be expected.

"I am afraid we did, Maggie," said the colonel, smiling; "but we are none the less pleased to hear Bessie tell of it."

"But if Uncle Yuthven did it for a favor to us, why did he not tell us first?" said Bessie, rather puzzled.

"Well," said the colonel, with a little twinkle in his eye, "it is just possible that your Uncle Ruthven took some other people into consideration,—myself and Marion, for instance. Can you not imagine that he thought it would be very pleasant for us to be related to you?"

"Will you be our relations when Uncle Yuthven marries Aunt Bessie?" asked Bessie.

"I think we shall have to put in some claim of that sort," said the colonel. "Aunt Bessie is my sister, and if she becomes your own aunt, I think my wife and I must also consider ourselves as belonging to the family. What should you say to Uncle Horace and Aunt May?"—May was the colonel's pet name for his wife. [Pg 218]

It was not likely that either of our little girls would find fault with this arrangement; and now it was impossible to say too much in praise of Uncle Ruthven and his very kind plan.

The children spent a most delightful day. Mrs. Rush had ordered an early dinner for them; after which the carriage came, and all four—the colonel and his wife and Maggie and Bessie—went for a drive in the Central Park. It was a lovely afternoon, the air so soft and sweet with that strange, delicious scent in it which tells of the coming spring, and here and there, in some sunny nooks, the children were delighted to see little patches of green grass. Sparrows and chickadees, and other birds which make their home with us during the winter, were hopping merrily over the leafless branches, and twittering ceaselessly to one another, as if they were telling of the happy time near at hand, when the warm south winds would blow, and the trees and bushes be covered with their beautiful green summer dress. Presently Starr, turning round from his seat on the box beside the coachman, pointed out a robin, the first robin; and then Maggie's quick eyes discovered a second. Yes, there were a pair of them, perking up their heads and tails, with a saucy, jaunty air, which seemed to say, "Look at me; here I am to tell you spring is coming. Are you not glad to see me?" [Pg 219]

And as the carriage drove slowly by, that the children might watch the birds, one of them threw back his head and broke into the sweetest, merriest song, which told the same pleasant story.

Yes, spring was in the air, and the birdies knew it, though earth as yet showed but few signs of it. [Pg 220]

"He sings just as if he was so glad he couldn't help it," said Maggie, "and I feel just like him."

When they drove back to the city, the children were rather surprised to find they were taken again to the hotel instead of going home at once; but Mrs. Rush said, that as the weather was so mild and pleasant, mamma had promised they might stay till after dark. This was a suitable ending to such a very happy day, especially as it was arranged for them to take their supper while their friends dined. Mrs. Rush thought nothing too much trouble which could give pleasure to these two dear little girls.

They were listening to one of the colonel's delightful stories when Mr. Stanton and Miss Rush came in, with the double purpose of paying a short visit to the colonel and his wife and of taking home their young visitors.

Scarcely were they seated when Bessie walked up to Mr. Stanton with "Uncle Er-er-er-Yuthven,"—Bessie was trying very hard for the R's in these days, especially when she spoke to her uncle,—"we do thank you so very much. We think you are the most obliging gentleman we ever saw."

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"Really," said Uncle Ruthven, gravely, "this is very pleasant to hear. May I ask who are the 'we' who have such a very high opinion of me?"

"Why, mamma and the colonel and Mrs. Yush and Maggie and I; and I s'pose all the fam'ly who know what a very great favor you are going to do for us."

"And what is this wonderful favor?" asked Mr. Stanton.

"To marry Aunt Bessie, so she will be quite our very own," answered the little girl. "And then you see that makes my soldier and Mrs. Yush our own too. They are Uncle Horace and Aunt May now, for the colonel said we might as well begin at once. We are all very, very pleased, Uncle Yuthven, and Maggie and I think you are the kindest uncle that ever lived."

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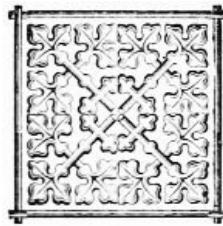
"I am glad you have found that out at last," said Uncle Ruthven. "Here I have been living for your happiness ever since I came home, and if I had made this last sacrifice without your finding out that I am the best and most generous uncle in the world, it would have been terrible indeed."

"I don't believe you think it is a sacrifice," said Maggie. "I guess you like it 'most as well as Bessie and I do."

"*Does* he, Aunt Bessie?" asked little Bessie, in a tone as if this could not be; at which Uncle Ruthven's gravity gave way, and the older people all laughed heartily, though the children could not see why.

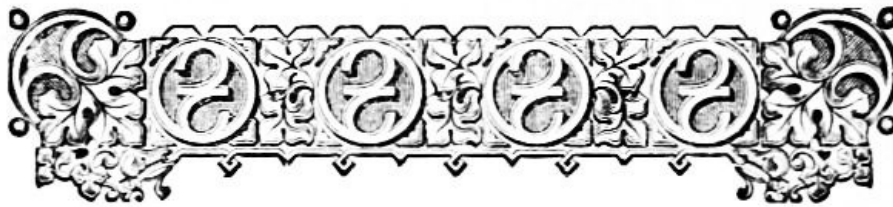
If Bessie had known how to express her feelings, she would have said that it was Uncle Ruthven's manner when he was joking which caused her to "have objections" to him. When Uncle John was joking, he had such a merry face that it was quite easy to see what he meant; but Uncle Ruthven always kept such a sober face and tone that it was hard to tell whether he were in earnest or no. And now, when he caught her up in his arms, and stood her upon the mantel-piece, she felt as if she still only half approved of him; but it was not in her heart to find fault with him just now, and she readily put up her lips for the kiss which she knew he would claim before he let her go.

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## XI.

### *BLIND WILLIE.*



aggie and Bessie," said Mrs. Bradford, one day soon after this, "I am going to send Jane over with some work to Mrs. Granby. Would you like to go with her and see the policeman's children?"

Bessie answered "Yes," readily enough, but though Maggie would have liked the long walk on this lovely day, she was rather doubtful of the pleasure of calling on those who were entire strangers to her. But after some little coaxing from Bessie, who said she would not go without her, she was at last persuaded, and they set out with Jane, taking Flossy with them.

The children had their hooples, which they trundled merrily before them and Flossy went capering joyously along, sometimes running ahead, for a short distance, and then rushing back to his little mistresses, and if any rough boys made their appearance, keeping very close at their side till all danger was past. For since Flossy was stolen, he had been very careful as to the company he kept, and looked with a very suspicious eye upon any one who wore a ragged coat, which was not very just of Flossy, since a ragged coat may cover as true and honest a heart as ever beat; but as the poor puppy knew no better, and had received some hard treatment at the hands of those whose miserable garments covered hard and cruel hearts, he must be excused for thinking that the one was a sign of the other.

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Flossy had turned out quite as pretty a little dog as he had promised to be. His coat was long, soft, and silky, and beautifully marked in brown and white; his drooping ears hung gracefully on each side of his head, while his great black eyes were so knowing and affectionate that it was hard to believe no soul looked out of them. It was no wonder that almost every child they passed turned to take a second look, and to wish that they, too, had such a pretty merry pet. Flossy was in great favor that day on account of a droll trick which he had played, much to the amusement of the children. Harry and Fred were very anxious to teach him all manner of things, such as standing on his head, pretending to be dead, and so forth; but Maggie and Bessie declared he was too young to be taught anything except "to be good and polite," and would not have him teased. Beside, he had funny tricks and ways of his own which they thought much better than those, and was as full of play and mischief as a petted doggie could be.

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Harry had a weak ankle, which in his boyish frolics he was constantly hurting, and now, having given it a slight sprain, he was laid up on the sofa. On the day before this, his dinner had been sent to him, but as it did not exactly suit him, he called Flossy, and writing on a piece of paper what he desired, gave it to the dog, and told him to take it to mamma. He was half doubtful if the creature would understand; but Flossy ran directly to the dining-room with the paper in his mouth, and gave it to Mrs. Bradford. As a reward for doing his errand so well, she gave him a piece of cake, although it was against her rules that he should be fed from the table.

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On this day, Harry had been able to come down-stairs; and while the children were at their dinner, Flossy was heard whining at the door. Patrick opened it, and in he ran with a crumpled piece of paper, on which Franky had been scribbling, in his mouth, and going to Mrs. Bradford held it up to her, wagging his tail with an air which said quite plainly, "Here is your paper, now give me my cake."

"Poor little doggie! He did not know why one piece of paper was not as good as another, and Mrs. Bradford could not refuse him, while all the children were quite delighted with his wisdom, and could not make enough of him for the remainder of the day."

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Maggie and Bessie were rather surprised at the appearance of the policeman's house. It was so different from those which stood around it, or from any which they were accustomed to see in the city; but it looked very pleasant to them with its green shutters, old-fashioned porch, and the little courtyard and great butternut tree in front. The small plot of grass behind the white palings was quite green now, and some of the buds on the hardier bushes were beginning to unfold their young leaves. Altogether it looked very nice and homelike, none the less so that Jennie Richards and her three younger brothers were playing around, and digging up the fresh moist earth, with the fancy that they were making a garden. But their digging was forgotten when they saw Jane with her little charge.

"Does Mrs. Granby live here?" asked Jane, unlatching the gate.

"Yes, ma'am," answered Jennie. "Will you please to walk in?" and opening the doors, Jennie showed the visitors into the sitting-room.

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Mrs. Richards sat sewing, with Willie, as usual, beside her, rocking ceaselessly back and forth in his little chair; while good Mrs. Granby, who had been seated close by the window, and had seen Jane and the children come in, was bustling about, placing chairs for them.

On Willie's knee was a Maltese kitten purring away contentedly; but the moment she caught sight of Flossy, she sprang from her resting-place, and, scampering into a corner, put up her back, and began spitting and hissing in a very impolite manner. If Miss Pussy had been civil, Flossy would probably have taken no notice of her; but when she drew attention upon herself by this very rude behavior, he began to bark and jump about her, more with a love of teasing than with any idea of hurting her. It was quite a moment or two before these enemies could be quieted, and then it was only done by Maggie catching up Flossy in her arms, and Mrs. Granby thrusting the kitten into a bureau drawer with a cuff on its ear.

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The commotion being over, with the exception of an occasional spit from the drawer, as if kitty were still conscious of the presence of her foe, Bessie walked up to Mrs. Richards, and politely holding out her hand, said, "We came to see you and your fam'ly, ma'am, and we're sorry to make such a 'sturbance."

"Well," said Mrs. Richards, smiling at what she afterwards called Bessie's old-fashioned ways,—"well, I think it was the kitten was to blame for the disturbance, not you, nor your pretty dog there; and I'm sure we're all glad to see you, dear. Are you the little girl that was lost and taken up to the station?"

"Yes, I am," said Bessie; "but I was not taken up 'cause I was naughty, but 'cause I could not find my way home. Is my policeman pretty well?"

"He's very well, thank you, dear; but he'll be mighty sorry to hear you've been here, and he not home to see you."

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"Mother," said Willie, "what a sweet voice that little girl has! Will she let me touch her?"

"Would you, dear?" asked Mrs. Richards; "you see it's the only way he has now of finding what anybody is like."

"Oh! he may touch me as much as he likes," said Bessie, and coming close to the blind boy, she put her hand in his, and waited patiently while he passed his fingers up her arm and shoulder, then over her curls, cheek, and chin; for Willie Richards was already gaining that quick sense of touch which God gives to the blind.

The mother's heart was full as she watched the two children, and saw the tender, pitying gaze Bessie bent upon her boy.

"Poor Willie!" said the little girl, putting her arm about his neck, "I am so sorry for you. But perhaps our Father will let you see again some day."

"I don't know," said Willie, sadly; "they used to say I would be better when the spring came, but the spring is here now, and it is no lighter. Oh, it is so very, very dark!"

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Bessie's lip quivered, and the tears gathered in her eyes as she raised them to Mrs. Richards. But Mrs. Richards turned away her head. She sometimes thought that Willie had guessed that the doctor had had hopes of curing them in the spring, but she had not the courage to ask him. Nor could she and his father bear to excite hopes which might again be disappointed, by telling him to wait with patience till next year.

But Bessie did not know what made Mrs. Richards silent, and wondering that she did not speak, she felt as if she must herself say something to comfort him.

"But maybe next spring you will see, Willie," she said.

"Maybe so," said Willie, piteously, "but it is so long to wait."

Bessie was silent for a moment, not quite knowing what to say; then she spoke again. "Wouldn't you like to come out and feel the spring, Willie? It is nice out to-day and the wind is so pleasant and warm."

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"No," answered Willie, almost impatiently, "I only want to stay here with mother. I know it feels nice out; but the children come and say, '*See* the sky, how blue it is!' and '*Look* at this flower,' when I can't see them, and it makes me feel so bad, so bad. I know the grass is green and the sky is blue, and the crocuses and violets are coming out just as they used to when I could see, but I don't want them to tell me of it all the time; and they forget, and it makes me feel worse. But I wouldn't mind the rest so much if I could only see mother's face just a little while every day, then I would be good and patient all the time. Oh! if I only could see her, just a moment!"

"Don't, don't, sonny," said his mother, laying her hand lovingly on his head.

It was the ceaseless burden of his plaintive song,— "If I only could see mother's face! If I only could see mother's face!"

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"And maybe you will some day, Willie," said Bessie; "so try to think about that, and how she loves you just the same even if you don't see her. And don't you like to know the blue sky is there, and that Jesus is behind it, looking at you and feeling sorry for you? None of us can see Jesus, but we know he sees us and loves us all the same; don't we? Couldn't you feel a little that way about your mother, Willie?"

"I'll try," said Willie, with the old patient smile coming back again.

Poor Willie! It was not usual for him to be impatient or fretful. But he had been sadly tried that

day in the way he had spoken of, and the longing for his lost sight was almost too great to be borne. But now Mrs. Granby, suspecting something of what was going on on that side of the room, came bustling up to Willie and Bessie, bringing Maggie with her. Maggie had been making acquaintance with Jennie while Bessie was talking with the blind boy.

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"Willie," said Mrs. Granby, "here's just the prettiest little dog that ever lived, and he is as tame and gentle as can be. If Miss Maggie don't object, maybe he'd lie a bit on your knee, and let you feel his nice long ears and silken hair."

"Yes, take him," said Maggie, putting her dog into Willie's arms.

Flossy was not usually very willing to go to strangers; but now, perhaps, his doggy instinct told him that this poor boy had need of pity and kindness. However that was, he lay quietly in Willie's clasp, and looking wistfully into his sightless eyes, licked his hands and face.

Maggie and Bessie were delighted, and began to tell Willie of Flossy's cunning ways. The other children gathered about to listen and admire too, and presently Willie laughed outright as they told of his cute trick with the crumpled paper.

And now, whether Miss Kitty saw through the crack of the drawer that her young master was fondling a new pet, or whether she only guessed at it, or whether she thought it hard that fun should be going on in which she had no share, cannot be told; but just then there came from her prison-place such a hissing and sputtering and scratching that every one of the children set up a shout of laughter. Not since his blindness came upon him had his mother heard Willie's voice sound so gleeful, and now in her heart she blessed the dear little girl who she felt had done him good. Then as the children begged for her, kitty was released; but as she still showed much ill-temper, Mrs. Granby was obliged to put her in the other room.

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Soon after this our little girls, with their nurse, took leave, having presented Willie with a new book, and his mother with some useful things mamma had sent, and giving Willie and Jennie an invitation to come and see them.

They did not go back as joyfully as they had come. Somehow, in spite of the good laugh they had had, the thought of blind Willie made them feel sad, and giving Jane their hoops to carry, they walked quietly by her side, hand in hand.

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Bessie was half heart-broken as she told her mamma of the blind boy's longing to see his mother's face, and neither she nor Maggie quite recovered their usual spirits for the remainder of the day. Mamma was almost sorry she had allowed them to go.

"And what makes my princess so sad this evening?" asked Uncle Ruthven, lifting Bessie upon his knee.

"Don't you think you'd be very sad, sir, if you were blind?"

"Doubtless I should, dear. I think, of all my senses, my sight is the one I prize most, and for which I am most thankful. But you are not going to lose your sight; are you, Bessie?"

"No," said Bessie; "but Willie Richards has lost his. He is quite, quite blind, uncle, and can't see his mother's face; and they can't let the doctor cure him, 'cause they are too poor. Maggie and I wished to help them very much, and we wanted to ask them to take all the glove-money we have,—that is what mamma lets us have to do charity with,—but mamma says it would not be much help, and she thinks we had better keep it to buy some little thing Willie may need. And we are very grieved for him."

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"Poor little princess!" said Mr. Stanton. "And why did you not come to me for help? What is the good of having an old uncle with plenty of money in his pockets, if you do not make him 'do charity' for you? Let me see. How comes on the history of the 'Complete Family,' Maggie?"

"Oh! it's 'most finished," said Maggie. "At least, that book is; but we are going to have another volume. Mamma likes us to write it. She says it is good practice, and will make it easy for us to write compositions by and by."

"Very sensible of mamma," said Mr. Stanton. "But I think you said you wished to sell it when it was finished, so that you might help the poor."

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"Yes, sir."

"Well, you know I am going away to-morrow morning,—going to take Aunt Bessie to Baltimore to see her sister. We shall be gone about a week. If your book is finished when we come home, I shall see if I cannot find a purchaser for it. And you might use the money for the blind boy if you like."

Just at this moment nurse put her head in at the door with "Come along, my honeys. Your mamma is waiting up-stairs for you, and it's your bed-time."

"In one instant, mammy," said Mr. Stanton. "Is it a bargain, little ones? If I find a man to buy your book, will you have it ready, and trust it to me, when I come back?"

The children were willing enough to agree to this; and Maggie only wished that it was not bed-time, so that she might finish the book that very night. Uncle Ruthven said they would talk more about it when he returned, and bade them "Good-night."

[Pg 240]

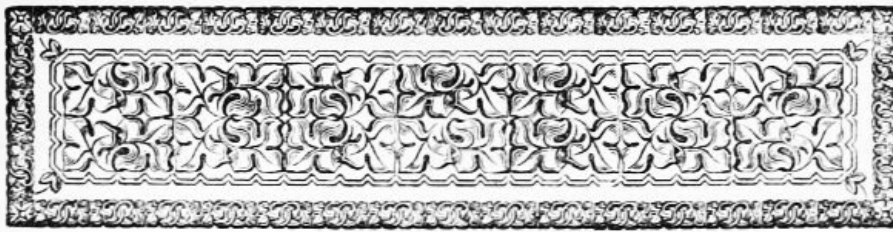
"My darlings," said mamma, when they went up-stairs, "I do not want you to distress yourselves about blind Willie. When the time comes for the doctor to perform the operation on his eyes, I think the means will be found to pay him. But you are not to say anything about it at present. I only tell you because I do not like to see you unhappy."

"Are you or papa going to do it, mamma?" asked Bessie.

"We shall see," said Mrs. Bradford, with a smile.

"Perhaps we can help you a little," said Maggie, joyfully; and she told her mother of her uncle's proposal about the book.

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## XII.

### *MAGGIE'S BOOK.*



Uncle Ruthven and Aunt Bessie went away the next morning, and were gone nearly a week, and very much did the children miss them, especially as the week proved one of storm and rain, and they were shut up in the house.

During all this stormy weather Aunt Patty seemed very anxious to go out, watching for the first glimpse of sunshine. But none came, and at last, one morning when there was a fine, drizzling rain, she came down dressed for a walk. Mrs. Bradford was much astonished, for Mrs. Lawrence was subject to rheumatism, and it was very imprudent for her to go out in the damp. In vain did Mrs. Bradford offer to send a servant on any errand she might wish to have done. Aunt Patty would not listen to it for a moment, nor would she allow a carriage to be sent for, nor tell where she was going. [Pg 242]

She stayed a long time, and when the boys ran home from school in the midst of a hard shower, they were surprised to meet her just getting out of a carriage which had drawn up around the corner. Aunt Patty did not seem at all pleased to see them, and in answer to their astonished inquiries, "Why, Aunt Patty! where have you been?" and "Why don't you let the carriage leave you at the house?" answered, sharply, "When I was young, old people could mind their own affairs without help from school-boys."

"Not without help from school-girls, when *she* was around, I guess," whispered Fred to his brother, as they fell behind, and let the old lady march on.

Nor was she more satisfactory when she reached home, and seemed only desirous to avoid Mrs. Bradford's kind inquiries and anxiety lest she should have taken cold. This was rather strange, for it was not Aunt Patty's way to be mysterious, and she was generally quite ready to let her actions be seen by the whole world. But certainly no one would have guessed from her manner that she had that morning been about her Master's work. [Pg 243]

Uncle Ruthven and Aunt Bessie came home that afternoon, and found no reason to doubt their welcome.

"We're very glad to see you, Uncle Er-er Ruthven," said Bessie, bringing out the *R* quite clearly.

"Hallo!" said her uncle, "so you have come to it at last; have you? You have been learning to talk English while I was away. Pretty well for my princess! What reward shall I give you for that Ruthven?"

"I don't want a reward," said the little princess, gayly. "I tried to learn it 'cause I thought you wanted me to; and you are so kind to us I wanted to please you. Besides, I am growing pretty old, and I ought to learn to talk plain. Why, Uncle Ruthven, I'll be six years old when I have a birthday in May, and the other day we saw a little girl,—she was blind Willie's sister,—and she couldn't say *th*, though she is 'most seven; and I thought it sounded pretty foolish; and then I thought maybe it sounded just as foolish for me not to say *r*, so I tried and tried, and Maggie helped me." [Pg 244]

"Uncle Ruthven," said Maggie, coming to his side, and putting her arm about his neck, she whispered in his ear, "did you ever find a man to buy my book?"

"To be sure," said Mr. Stanton, "a first-rate fellow, who promised to take it at once. He would like to know how much you want for it?"

"I don't know," said Maggie; "how much can he afford?"

"Ah! you answer my question by another. Well, he is pretty well off, that fellow, and I think he will give you sufficient to help along that blind friend of yours a little. We will not talk of that just now, however, but when you go up-stairs, I will come up and see you, and we will settle it all then." [Pg 245]

"Here is a prize," said Mr. Stanton, coming into the parlor some hours later, when the children had all gone; and he held up Maggie's history of the "Complete Family."

"What is that?" asked Colonel Rush, who with his wife had come to welcome his sister.

Mr. Stanton told the story of the book.

"But how came it into your hands?" asked Mr. Bradford.

"Oh, Maggie and I struck a bargain to-night," said Mr. Stanton, laughing, "and the book is mine to do as I please with."

"Oh, Ruthven, Ruthven!" said his sister, coming in as he spoke, and passing her hand



affectionately through his thick, curly locks, "you have made two happy hearts to-night. Nor will the stream of joy you have set flowing stop with my little ones. That poor blind child and his parents—"

"There, there, that will do," said Mr. Stanton, playfully putting his hand on Mrs. Bradford's lips. "Sit down here, Margaret. I shall give you all some passages from Maggie's book. If I am not mistaken, it will be a rich treat." [Pg 246]

Poor little Maggie! She did not dream, as she lay happy and contented on her pillow, how merry they were all making over her "Complete Family," as Uncle Ruthven read aloud from it such passages as these.

"The Happy father and mother brought up their children in the way they should go, but sometimes the children went out of it, which was not the blame of their kind parents, for they knew better, and they ought to be ashamed of themselves, and it is a great blessing for children to have parents.

"The colonel had a new leg, not a skin one, but a man made it, but you would not know it, it looks so real, and he can walk with it and need not take his crutches, and the souls of M. and B. Happy were very glad because this was a great rejoicing, and it is not a blessing to be lame, but to have two legs is, and when people have a great many blessings, they ought to 'praise God from whom all blessings flow;' but they don't always, which is very wicked." [Pg 247]

"This very Complete Family grew completer and completer, for the travelling uncle married Aunt Bessie, I mean he is going to marry her, so she will be our own aunt and not just a make b'lieve, and all the family are very glad and are very much obliged to him for being so kind, but I don't think he is a great sacrifice.

"M. and B. Happy went to see the policeman's children. Blind Willie was sorrowful and can't see his mother, or anything, which is no consequence, if he could see his mother's face, for if M. Happy and B. Happy could not see dear mamma's face they would cry all the time. I mean M. would, but Bessie is better than me so maybe she would not, and Willie is very patient, and the cat was very abominable, and if Flossy did so, Bessie and I would be disgraced of him. She humped up her back and was cross, so Mrs. Granby put her in the drawer, but she put a paw out of the crack and spit and scratched and did 'most everything. Oh! such a bad cat!!!!!! Jennie she cannot say th, and afterwards I laughed about it, but Bessie said I ought not, because she cannot say r and that was 'most the same. And she is going to try and say Uncle Ruthven's name quite plain and hard, he is so very good to us, and he promised to find a man to buy this book, and we hope the man will give five dollars to be a great help for blind Willie's doctor. I suppose he will ask everybody in the cars if they want to buy a book to print, that somebody of his wrote, but he is not going to tell our name because I asked him not to." [Pg 248]

The book ended in this way:—

"These are not all the acts of the Complete Family, but there will be another book with some more. Adieu. And if you don't know French, that means good-by. The end of the book!"

"Pretty well for seven years old, I think," said Mr. Bradford. "Mamma, did you lend a helping hand?" [Pg 249]

"Only to correct the spelling," said Mrs. Bradford; "the composition and ideas are entirely Maggie's own, with a little help from Bessie. I have not interfered save once or twice when she has chosen some subject I did not think it best she should write on. Both she and Bessie have taken so much pleasure in it that I think it would have been a real trial to part with the book except for some such object as they have gained."

"And what is that?" asked Colonel Rush.

"The sum Dr. Dawson asks for the cure of Willie Richards," answered Mrs. Bradford, "which sum this dear brother of mine is allowing to pass through the hands of these babies of mine, as their gift to the blind child."

"Aunt Patty," said Bessie at the breakfast-table the next morning,— "Aunt Patty, did you hear what Uncle Ruthven did for us?"

"Yes, I heard," said the old lady, shortly. [Pg 250]

"And don't you feel very happy with us?" asked the little darling, who was anxious that every one should rejoice with herself and Maggie; but she spoke more timidly than she had done at first, and something of her old fear of Aunt Patty seemed to come over her.

"I do not think it at all proper that children should be allowed to have such large sums of money," said Mrs. Lawrence, speaking not to Bessie, but to Mrs. Bradford. "I thought your brother a more sensible man, Margaret. Such an ill-judged thing!"

Mrs. Bradford was vexed, as she saw the bright face of her little daughter become overcast, still she tried to speak pleasantly. Something had evidently gone wrong with Aunt Patty.

"I do not think you will find Ruthven wanting in sense or judgment, Aunt Patty," she said, gently. "And the sum you speak of is for a settled purpose. It only passes through my children's hands, and is not theirs to waste or spend as they may please." [Pg 251]

"And if it was, we would rather give it to blind Willie, mamma," said Bessie, in a grieved and half-angry voice.

"I am sure of it, my darling," said mamma, with a nod and smile which brought comfort to the

disappointed little heart. Ah, the dear mamma! they were all sure of sympathy from her whether in joy or sorrow. Aunt Patty's want of it had been particularly hard on Bessie, for the dear child saw the old lady did not look half pleased that morning, and she had spoken as much from a wish to cheer her as for her own sake and Maggie's.

"It is all wrong, decidedly wrong!" continued Mrs. Lawrence. "In my young days things were very different. Children were not then allowed to take the lead in every way, and to think they could do it as well or better than their elders. The proper thing for you to do, Margaret, is to put by that money till your children are older and better able to judge what they are doing."

"I think they understand that now, Aunt Patty," said Mrs. Bradford, quietly, but firmly; "and if they should not, I suppose you will allow that their parents are able to judge for them. Henry and I understand all the merits of the present case." [Pg 252]

Aunt Patty was not to be convinced, and she talked for some time, growing more and more vexed as she saw her words had no effect. Mr. and Mrs. Bradford were silent, for they knew it was of no use to argue with the old lady when she was in one of these moods; but they wished that the meal was at an end, and the children were out of hearing.

And there sat Miss Rush, too, wondering and indignant, and only kept from replying to Aunt Patty by Mrs. Bradford's beseeching look. But at last Mr. Bradford's patience was at an end, and in a firm, decided manner, he requested the old lady to say nothing more on the subject, but to leave it to be settled by his wife and himself.

If there was any person in the world of whom Mrs. Lawrence stood in awe, it was her nephew; and she knew when he spoke in that tone, he meant to be obeyed. Therefore, she was silent, but sat through the remainder of breakfast with a dark and angry face. [Pg 253]

"Papa," said Maggie, as her father rose from the table, "do you think there is the least, least hope that it will clear to-day?"

"Well, I see some signs of it, dear; but these April days are very uncertain. Of one thing be sure, if the weather be at all fit, I will come home and take you where you want to go."

"Are you tired of being shut up in the house so long, dear Midget?" asked Aunt Bessie, putting her arm about Maggie, and drawing her to her side.

"Yes, pretty tired, Aunt Bessie; but that is not the reason why Bessie and I wish so very much to have it clear. Papa told us, if the weather was pleasant, he would take us to the policeman's, and let us give the money ourselves. But he says, if it keeps on raining, he thinks it would be better to send it, because it is not kind to keep them waiting when they feel so badly about Willie, and this will make them so glad. I suppose it is not very kind, but we want very much to take it, and see Mrs. Richards how pleased she will be." [Pg 254]

"We will hope for the best," said Mr. Bradford, cheerfully; "and I think it may turn out a pleasant day. But my little daughters must not be too much disappointed if the rain keeps on. And now that I may be ready for clear skies and dry pavements, I must go down town at once."

No sooner had the door closed after Mr. Bradford than Aunt Patty broke forth again. "Margaret," she said, severely, "it is not possible that you mean to add to your folly by letting your children go to that low place, after such weather as we have had! You don't know what you may expose them to, especially that delicate child, whom you can never expect to be strong while you are so shamefully careless of her;" and she looked at Bessie, who felt very angry. [Pg 255]

"That will be as their father thinks best," answered Mrs. Bradford, quietly. "He will not take them unless the weather is suitable; and the policeman's house is neat and comfortable, and in a decent neighborhood. The children will come to no harm there."

"And it is certainly going to clear," said Harry. "See there, mamma, how it is brightening overhead."

"It will not clear for some hours at least," persisted the old lady; "and then the ground will be extremely damp after this week of rain, especially among those narrow streets. Do be persuaded, Margaret, and say, at least, that the children must wait till to-morrow."

"Bessie shall not go unless it is quite safe for her," answered Mrs. Bradford, "and she will not ask it unless mamma thinks it best; will you, my darling?"

Bessie only replied with a smile, and a very feeble smile at that; and her mother saw by the crimson spot in each cheek, and the little hand pressed tightly upon her lips, how hard the dear child was struggling with herself. It was so. Bessie was hurt at what she thought Aunt Patty's unkindness in trying to deprive her of the pleasure on which she counted, and she had hard work to keep down the rising passion. [Pg 256]

Aunt Patty argued, persisted, and persuaded; but she could gain from Mrs. Bradford nothing more than she had said before, and at last she left the room in high displeasure.

"Mamma," said Harry, indignantly, "what do you stand it for? How dare she talk so to you? Your folly, indeed! I wish papa had been here!"

"I wish you'd let me hush her up," said Fred. "It's rather hard for a fellow to stand by and have his mother spoken to that way. Now is she not a meddling, aggravating old coon, Aunt Bessie? No, you need not shake your head in that grave, reproving way. I know you think so; and you, too, you dear, patient little mamma;" and here Fred gave his mother such a squeeze and kiss as would have made any one else cry out for mercy. [Pg 257]

"I sha'n't try to bear Aunt Patty's burden this day, I know," said Maggie. "She is *too* mean not to want blind Willie cured, and it is not any of hers to talk about, either. Her corners are awful to-day! Just trying to make mamma say Bessie couldn't go to the policeman's house!"

Bessie said nothing, but her mamma saw she was trying to keep down her angry feelings.

"I suppose she is tired of the 'new leaf' she pretended to have turned over, and don't mean to play good girl any more," said Fred.

"She has been worrying papa too," said Harry. "There is never any knowing what she'll be at. There was a grove which used to belong to her father, and which had been sold by one of her brothers after he died. It was a favorite place with our great-grandfather, and Aunt Patty wanted it back very much, but she never could persuade the man who had bought it to give it up. A few years ago he died, and his son offered to sell it to her. She could not afford it then, for she had lost a great deal of property, and the mean chap asked a very large sum for it because he knew she wanted it so much. But she was determined to have it, and for several years she has been putting by little by little till she should have enough. She told Fred and me all about it, one evening when papa and mamma were out, and we felt so sorry for her when she told how her father had loved the place, and how she could die contented if she only had it back once more after all these years, that we asked papa if he could not help her. Papa said he would willingly do so, but she would not be pleased if he offered, though she had so set her heart on it that she was denying herself everything she could possibly do without; for she is not well off now, and is too proud to let her friends help her. Well, it seems she had enough laid by at last,—a thousand dollars,—and she asked papa to settle it all for her. He wrote to the man, and had a lot of fuss and bother with him; but it was all fixed at last, and the papers drawn up, when what does she do a week ago, but tell papa she had changed her mind, and should not buy the grove at present."

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"Harry, my boy," said Mrs. Bradford, "this is all so, but how do you happen to know so much about it?"

"Why, she talked to me several times about it, mamma. She was quite chipper with Fred and me now and then, when no grown people were around, and used to tell us stories of things which happened at the old homestead by the hour. The other day when you were out, and Mag and Bess had gone to the policeman's, she told me it was all settled that she was to have the grove; and she seemed so happy over it. But only two days after, when I said something about it, she took me up quite short, and told me that affair was all over, and no more to be said. I didn't dare to ask any more questions of her, but I thought it no harm to ask papa, and he told me he knew no more than I did, for Aunt Patty would give him no reason. He was dreadfully annoyed by it, I could see, although he did not say much; he never does, you know, when he is vexed."

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"Quite true," said his mother; "and let him be an example to the rest of us. We have all forgotten ourselves a little in the vexations of the morning. You have been saying that which was better left unsaid, and your mother has done wrong in listening to you."

"No, indeed, you have not," said Fred, again clutching his mother violently about the neck; "you never do wrong, you dear, precious mamma, and I'll stand up for you against all the cross old Aunt Pattys in creation."

"My dear boy," gasped his mother, "if you could leave my head on, it would be a greater convenience than fighting on my account with Aunt Patty. And your mother must be very much on her guard, Fred, if a thing is to be judged right by you because she does it. But, dearest children, did we not all determine not to allow ourselves to be irritated and vexed by such things as have taken place this morning? This is almost the first trial of the kind we have had. Let us be patient and forgiving, and try to think no more of it."

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But it was in vain that Mrs. Bradford coaxed and persuaded, and even reproved. Her children obeyed, and were silent when she forbade any more to be said on the subject; but she could not do away with the impression which Aunt Patty's ill-temper and interference had made.

Poor Aunt Patty! She had practised a great piece of self-denial, had given up a long-cherished hope, that she might have the means of doing a very kind action; but she did not choose to have it known by her friends. And having made up her mind to this, and given up so much to bring it about, it did seem hard that her arrangements should be interfered with, as they seemed likely to be by this new plan which had come to her ears the night before.

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But now as she stood alone in her own room, taking herself to task for the ill-temper she had just shown, she felt that it would be still harder for the children; she could not allow them to be disappointed if it were still possible to prevent it; that would be too cruel now that she saw so plainly how much they had set their hearts upon this thing. At first it had seemed to her, as she said, much better that they should put by the money until they were older, but now she saw it was the desire to carry out her own will which had led her to think this. But Aunt Patty was learning to give up her own will, slowly and with difficulty it might be, with many a struggle, many a failure, as had been shown this morning; but still, thanks to the whispers of the better spirit by whose teachings she had lately been led, she was taking to heart the lesson so hard to learn because so late begun.

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And now how was she to undo what she had done, so that Maggie and Bessie might still keep this matter in their own hands? For Aunt Patty, hearing the little ones talk so much of the blind boy and his parents, had become quite interested in the policeman's family. She did not know them, it was true, had never seen one of them, but the children's sympathy had awakened hers, and she felt a wish to do something to help them; but to do this to much purpose was not very easy for

Mrs. Lawrence. She was not rich, and what she gave to others she must take from her own comforts and pleasures. What a good thing it would be to pay Dr. Dawson and free the policeman from debt! What happiness this would bring to those poor people! What pleasure it would give little Maggie and Bessie! But how could she do it? She had not the means at present, unless, indeed, she put off the purchase of the grove for a year or two, and took part of the sum she had so carefully laid by for that purpose, and if she did so, she might never have back the grove. She was very old, had not probably many years to live, and she might pass away before the wished-for prize was her own. And these people were nothing to her; why should she make such a sacrifice for them?

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So thought Aunt Patty, and then said to herself, if she had but a short time upon earth, was there not more reason that she should spend it in doing all she could for her Master's service, in helping those of his children on whom he had laid pain and sorrows? She had been wishing that she might be able to prove her love and gratitude for the great mercy that had been shown to her, that she might yet redeem the wasted years, the misspent life which lay behind her, and now when the Lord had given her the opportunity for which she had been longing, should she turn her back upon it, should she shut her ear to the cry of the needy, because to answer it would cost a sacrifice of her own wishes? Should she bear the burdens of others only when they did not weigh heavily on herself?

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And so the old lady had gone to Dr. Dawson and paid him the sum he asked for curing Willie's eyes. What more she had done will be shown hereafter. If the children had known this, perhaps they could have guessed why she would not buy the grove after all papa's trouble. There were several reasons why Mrs. Lawrence had chosen to keep all this a secret; partly from a really honest desire not to parade her generosity in the eyes of men, partly because she thought that Mr. Bradford might oppose it, and fearing the strength of her own resolution, she did not care to have it shaken by any persuasions to the contrary, and partly because she had always rather prided herself on carrying out her own plans without help or advice from others. This fear that she might be tempted to change her purpose had also made Aunt Patty so anxious to bring it to an end at once, and had taken her out in the rain on the day before this. And now it seemed that her trouble so far as regarded Dr. Dawson was all thrown away. But the question was, how should she get the money back from the doctor without betraying herself to him or some of the family? for this Aunt Patty was quite determined not to do. It was not a pleasant task to ask him to return the money she had once given, and that without offering any reason save that she had changed her mind. Every limb was aching with the cold taken from her exposure of yesterday, and now if she was to be in time, she must go out again in the damp. True, it was not raining now, but there was another heavy cloud coming up in the south; she should surely be caught in a fresh shower. If she could have persuaded Mrs. Bradford to keep the children at home until the next day, she could go to Dr. Dawson that afternoon if the weather were clear, and so escape another wetting. For the doctor had told her he did not think he could see the policeman before the evening of that day.

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But Margaret was "obstinate," said the old lady, forgetting that she herself was a little obstinate in keeping all this a secret. So there was nothing for it but to go at once.

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Poor old lady! Perhaps it was not to be wondered at that, as she moved about the room, making ready to go out, she should again feel irritable and out of humor. She was in much pain. The plans which had cost her so much, and which she had thought would give such satisfaction, were all disarranged. She was vexed at being misjudged by those from whom she had so carefully concealed what she had done, for she saw plainly enough that they all thought her opposition of the morning was owing to the spirit of contradiction she had so often shown. She was vexed at herself, vexed with Mrs. Bradford, vexed even with the little ones whom she could not allow to be disappointed, and just for the moment she could not make up her mind to be reasonable and look at things in their right light.

Nor were her troubles yet at an end. As she left the room, she met Mrs. Bradford, who, seeing that she was going out again, once more tried to dissuade her from such imprudence, but all to no purpose. Aunt Patty was very determined and rather short, and went on her way down-stairs.

[Pg 268]

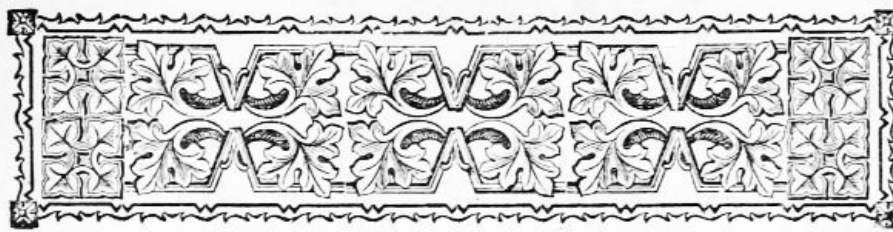
As Mrs. Bradford entered her nursery, mammy, who had heard all that had passed, said, with the freedom of an old and privileged servant,—

"Eh, my dear, but she's contrary. She's just hunting up a fit of rheumatics, that you may have the trouble of nursing her through it."

Mrs. Lawrence heard the old woman's improper speech, but did not hear Mrs. Bradford's gently spoken reproof, and we may be sure the first did not help to restore her good-humor.



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### XIII.

#### *DISAPPOINTMENT.*



Bessie's high spirits had all flown away. The scene with Aunt Patty, and the fear that the weather would not allow Maggie and herself to carry Uncle Ruthven's gift to blind Willie, on which pleasure, in spite of her father's warning, she had quite set her mind, were enough to sadden that sensitive little heart. More than this, she was very much hurt at what Aunt Patty had said of her mother. *She*, that dear, precious mamma, always so tender and devoted, so careful of her by night and day, to be so spoken of! No one else had ever dared to speak so to mamma in her hearing, and she did not feel as if she could forgive it. Poor little soul! she was very indignant, but she kept down her anger, and all she had allowed herself to say had been, "She would not like to be blind herself a whole year; but she has not a bit of *sympathy*." At which long word mamma could not help smiling; but as she looked at the grieved face, she felt as if she could scarcely keep her own patience. [Pg 270]

"Come here, Bessie," said Miss Rush, who was sitting by the window, "I have something to show you; see there," as Bessie climbed upon her lap. "A few moments since I saw a break in the clouds, and a bit of blue sky peeping out. I did not call you right away, lest you should be disappointed again; but the blue is spreading and spreading, so I think we may hope for a fine day, after all. And see, there is the sun struggling through. Ah, I think you will have your walk with papa."

Yes, there came the sun shining quite brightly now, and the pools of water on the sidewalk began to dance in his beams as if they were saying, "How do you do, Mr. Sun? We are glad to see you after a week's absence, even though you do mean to make us disappear beneath your warm rays." [Pg 271]

Bessie watched for a few moments, and then ran to find Maggie, who had gone up-stairs with mamma for a new story-book which Aunt Bessie had promised to read for them.

"Maggie, Maggie!" she called from the foot of the stairs, "come and see how the blue sky is coming out and how the sun is shining;" and as she spoke, Maggie ran along the upper hall, and came down, saying, dolefully,—

"Oh, Bessie! I saw it up-stairs, and I went to the window to look, and there's a great cloud coming over the sun. There, see! he's all gone now. I just believe it is going to rain again."

It was too true, and as the little girls ran to the front-door, and Maggie drew aside the lace which covered the large panes of glass in the upper part, so that they might peep out, they saw that the blue sky had disappeared, and a moment later, down splashed the heavy drops of rain.

Bessie felt a great choking in her throat, and Maggie said, impatiently, "It is *never* going to clear up; I know it. It just rains this way to provoke poor children who want to go out." [Pg 272]

"Maggie, darling, who sends the rain?" came in Aunt Bessie's gentle tone through the open parlor-door, and at the same moment a stern voice behind the children said,—

"You are very naughty, child. Do you remember that God hears you when you say such wicked words?"

Both children turned with a start to see Mrs. Lawrence in hat and cloak, and with an enormous umbrella in her hand.

"No," she said, severely, as poor frightened Maggie shrank before the glance of her eye, "you will not go out to-day, nor do you deserve it."

Then Bessie's anger broke forth. "You are bad, you're cruel!" she said, stamping her foot, and with her face crimson with passion. "You want poor Willie to be blind all his life. You don't want him to be well, even when our Father—" [Pg 273]

What more she would have said will never be known, save by Him who reads all hearts; for as these last two words passed her lips, she checked herself, and rushing to Aunt Bessie, who had gone to the parlor-door at the sound of Mrs. Lawrence's voice, buried her face in the folds of her dress.

"Our Father!" Was she his little child now when in her fury and passion she had forgotten that his holy eye rested upon her, when she was grieving and offending him? Such was the thought that had stopped her, even as she poured forth those angry words. For one moment she stood with her face hidden, sending up a silent, hurried prayer to the Great Helper, then turning to Aunt Patty, she said, with a touching meekness,—

"Please forgive me, Aunt Patty. I didn't try hard enough that time; but I'll try not to do so again. The wicked passion came so quick;" and then she hid her face once more against Miss Rush.

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Yes, the passion had come quickly, but it had been quickly conquered, and as Aunt Patty looked at her, these words came to her mind: "Greater is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city;" and she stood humbled before this little child. Turning away without a word, she opened the front-door and passed out, while Miss Rush led the children back to the parlor.

Aunt Bessie's own eyes glistened as she lifted the sobbing child upon her lap, while Maggie stood beside her, holding Bessie's hand in one of her own, and with her pocket-handkerchief wiping the tears that streamed from her little sister's eyes.

"Oh, it has been such a bad day, and we thought it was going to be such a nice one, didn't we?" said Bessie. "We were so very glad when we woke up this morning, and we have had such very *misable* times all day, and now I was so naughty. And I did ask for help to be good, too, this morning. Aunt Bessie, why didn't it come?"

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"I think it did come, darling," said Aunt Bessie. "If it had not, you could not have conquered yourself as you did the moment you remembered you were displeasing your heavenly Father. If you forgot for a moment, and your temper overcame you, I think he knew how you had struggled with it this morning, and so pitied and forgave, sending the grace and strength you needed as soon as you saw your own want of it."

"It's all Aunt Patty's fault, anyhow," said Maggie. "She provoked us, hateful old thing! I know I ought not to say that about the rain, Aunt Bessie, 'cause it's God's rain, and he can send it if he chooses; but it was not her business to meddle about, and I am a great deal more sorry for your speaking so kind than for all the scolding. I just wish—I wish—"

"I would not wish any bad wishes for Aunt Patty, dear," said Miss Rush. "That will not help any of us to feel better."

"I don't know about that," said Maggie, gravely shaking her head. "I think I'd feel more comfortable in my mind if I wished something about her. I think I'll have to do it, Aunt Bessie."

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"Then wish only that she were a little more amiable, or did not speak quite so sharply," said Miss Rush, smiling at Maggie's earnestness.

"Oh, pooh! that's no good," said Maggie. "She never will learn to behave herself. I'll tell you, I just wish she was a Lot's wife."

"Lot's wife?" said Miss Rush.

"I mean Lot's wife after she 'came a pillar of salt, and then maybe she'd be all soaked away in this pouring rain, and no more left of her to come back again and bother us."

There was never any telling where Maggie's ideas would carry her, and at the thought of the droll fate she had imagined for Aunt Patty, Miss Rush fairly laughed outright, and even Bessie smiled, after which she said she would go up-stairs and talk a little to her mother, which always did her good when she was in trouble.

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This shower proved the last of the rain for that day, and by twelve o'clock the clouds had all rolled away and the pavements were drying rapidly, giving fresh hope to Maggie and Bessie that they would be able to go over to the policeman's house; but before that Aunt Patty had returned. She was very silent, almost sad, and the many troubled looks she cast towards the little girls made Mrs. Bradford think that she was sorry for her unkindness of the morning.

This was so, but there was more than that to trouble the old lady, for her errand to Dr. Dawson had been fruitless. When she reached his house, he was out, but she sat down to wait for him. He soon came in and without waiting for her to speak, told her that, having an hour to spare, he had just been up to the police-station to give Richards the good news.

So it was too late after all, for now that the policeman knew of her gift, Mrs. Lawrence could not make up her mind to ask it back. Then the doctor asked her if she had any further business with him, to which she answered "No," and walked away, leaving him to think what a very odd old lady she was, and to say indignantly that he believed "she had not trusted him, and had come to see that he kept faith with her."

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"Bradford," said Mr. Stanton, as he stood in his brother-in-law's office that morning, "those dear little girls of yours have put me to shame with their lively, earnest desire to do good to others. Here have I been leading this lazy, useless life ever since I came home, looking only to my own comfort and happiness; and in my want of thought for others scarcely deserving the overflowing share of both which has fallen to me. Your little ones have given me a lesson in their innocent wish to extend to others the benefits which God has heaped upon them; now cannot you help me to put it into practice? I am still so much of a stranger in my own city that I should scarcely know where to begin the task of carrying help to those who need it; but you were always a hand to know the claims and deserts of the poor. I have, thank God, the means and the time; can you show me where I can best spend them?"

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"Doubtless, my dear fellow," answered Mr. Bradford. "I think you are rather hard upon yourself; but I can show you where both time and money can be laid out with a certainty of doing good and bringing happiness to those who deserve them. Just now—But how far do your benevolent intentions go?"

"Tell me the necessities of your *protégée* or *protégées*," said Mr. Stanton, smiling, "and I will tell you how far I am inclined to satisfy them. I had not thought much about it, having just been

roused to a sense that it was time I was doing somewhat for the welfare of those who are not as well off as myself."

"I was about to say," continued Mr. Bradford, "that at present I know of no more worthy case than that of the father of the blind boy in whom my children are so much interested. If an honest, God-fearing heart, a trusting, cheerful, yet submissive spirit, can give him a claim upon our help and sympathy, he certainly possesses it. I have watched him and talked to him during the last few months with considerable interest, and I honestly believe his troubles have not arisen through any fault of his own, but through the dealings of Providence. He has been sorely tried, poor fellow, and I should like to see him set right once more with the world, free from the pressure of debt, and able to save his earnings for the comfort of his family. I had intended to undertake the payment of Dr. Dawson for the treatment of Willie's eyes, but since you have done this, I shall hand to Richards the sum I had intended for that purpose. Whatever you may choose to add to this, will be so much towards relieving him from his debt to this Schwitz."

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"And how much is that?" asked Mr. Stanton.

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Mr. Bradford named the sum, and after hearing all the circumstances, Mr. Stanton drew a check for the amount needed to pay the rest of the debt to Dr. Schwitz, and gave it to his brother-in-law, asking him to hand it to the policeman with his own gift.

"You had better come with us this afternoon, and see for yourself," said Mr. Bradford. "It is going to be fine, and I have promised those dear little things that they shall carry their prize to the blind boy's home. I believe we are likely to find Richards there about three o'clock, and I should like you to know him."

So Mr. Stanton was persuaded; and as Maggie and Bessie were watching eagerly from the window for the first glimpse of papa, they saw him coming up the street with Uncle Ruthven.

When they were ready to go, those three precious notes, the price of Willie's sight, were brought by Maggie to her father, with many prayers that he would take the best of care of them. She was not satisfied till she had seen them in his pocket-book, where she herself squeezed them into the smallest possible corner, next thrusting the pocket-book into the very depths of his pockets, and ramming in his handkerchief on top of that, "to be sure to keep it all safe."

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But there was a sore disappointment in store for these poor children. As they were leaving the house, and before Mr. Bradford had closed the door behind them, who should appear at the foot of the steps but Sergeant Richards himself, with his broad, honest face in a glow of happiness and content.

"Ah! Richards, how are you?" said Mr. Bradford.

"At your service, sir," answered the policeman, politely touching his cap. "I just came round to say a word to you, but I see you are going out. I sha'n't detain you two moments, though, if you could spare me that."

"Willingly," said Mr. Bradford. "We were on our way to your house, but our errand will keep;" and he led the way back to the parlor, followed by the whole party.

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Mrs. Bradford and Miss Rush were there also, just ready to go out; while Aunt Patty sat in the library, where every word that passed in the front room must reach her ears.

"No, I'll not sit down, thank you, sir," said the policeman, "and I'll not keep you long. You have been so kind to me, and taken such an interest in all my difficulties, that I felt as if I must come right up and tell you of the good fortune, or, I should say, the kind Providence, which has fallen to me. I have been furnished with the means to pay my debt to Dr. Schwitz; and more, thank God! more than this, Dr. Dawson has received the amount of his charge for the operation on Willie's eyes. I shall be able to hold up my head once more, and that with the chance of my boy having his sight again."

"And how has this come about?" asked Mr. Bradford.

"I cannot say, sir. Some unknown friend has done it all; but who, I know no more than yourself, perhaps not so much;" and the policeman looked searchingly into Mr. Bradford's face.

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"And I know absolutely nothing," said the gentleman, smiling. "I see, Richards, you thought I had some hand in it, and expected to find me out; but I assure you, it is not my doing. These little girls of mine had, through the kindness of their uncle, hoped to place in your hands the sum needed for Dr. Dawson, and it was for this purpose that we were on our way to your house; but you say some one has been beforehand with us."

"That's so, sir," said Richards; "but none the less am I most grateful to you and the little ladies and this kind gentleman for your generous intentions. I am sure I don't know what I have done that the Lord should raise me up such friends. But it is most strange as to who could have done this, sir, and about that old lady."

"What old lady?" asked Mr. Bradford.

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"Why, sir, she who either has done this or has been sent by some one else. If I don't keep you too long, I should just like to tell you what I know."

"Not at all," said Mr. Bradford. "Let us have the story."

"Yesterday morning," said the policeman, "Mrs. Granby was sitting by the window, when she saw an old lady going to 'most all the houses, and seeming to be asking her way or inquiring for some one. So Mrs. Granby puts out her head and asks if she was looking for any one. 'I want Mrs.

Richards, the policeman's wife,' says the old lady. Mrs. Granby told her that was the place and opens the door for her. Well, she walked in, but a stranger she was, to be sure; neither my wife nor Mrs. Granby ever set eyes on her before, and they did not know what to make of her. All sorts of questions she asked, and in a way Mary did not like at all, never telling who she was or what she came for. Well, after a while she went away, but never letting on what she had come for, and Mrs. Granby and Mary set it down that it was only for spying and meddling. But last night when I took up the Bible to read a chapter before we went to bed, out drops a sealed packet with my name printed on it. I opened it, and there, will you believe it, sir, were two one hundred dollar bills, and around them a slip of paper with the words, printed, too, 'Pay your debts.' No more, no less. You may know if we were astonished, and as for my wife, she was even a bit frightened. After talking it over, we were sure it could have been no one but the old lady that had put it there. But who was she, and how did she know so much of my affairs? Mrs. Granby said she remembered to have seen her fussing with the leaves of the Bible, sort of careless like, as it lay upon the table, and she must have slipped it in then. But whether it was her own gift, or whether she was sent by some one else, who does not care to be seen in the matter, I don't know. The women will have it that it was the last, and that she did not like her errand, and so eased her mind by a bit of fault-finding and meddling, and I must say it looks like it."

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"And you have no possible clew to who this person was, Richards?" asked Mr. Bradford.

"None, sir. I might track her easy, I suppose, but since she didn't seem to wish it to be known who she was or where she came from, I wouldn't feel it was showing my gratitude for the obligations she's laid me under, and you see by the printing she don't wish to be tracked even by her handwriting. Nor was this all. Early this morning, round comes Dr. Dawson to the station, asking for me; and he told me that an old lady had been to his house yesterday, and after asking a lot of questions, had paid him a hundred and fifty dollars for undertaking the operation on Willie's eyes, and took a receipted bill from him. By all accounts, she must be the same person who was at my place yesterday, and if ever a man was as mad as a hornet, he's the one. When he asked if he might take the liberty of inquiring what interest she had in my family, she asked if it was necessary to Willie's cure that he should know that; and when he said, 'No, of course not,' she said it *was* a great liberty, and as good as told him to mind his own affairs. He quite agrees with my wife and Mrs. Granby that she was only a messenger from some unknown friend, and that she was not pleased with the business she had in hand. The doctor is very much occupied just now, and told her he could not well see me before this evening; but he found he could make time to run over and tell me this morning, and kindly did so. So, you see, sir, I do not rightly know what to do, joyful and grateful as I feel; and I thought I would just run over and tell you the story at once, and ask if you thought I might safely use this money without fear of getting into any difficulty. You see it's such a strange and mysterious way of doing things that I won't say but I would think it odd myself if I heard another person had come by such a sum in such a way."

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"I see no possible objection to your using the money," said Mr. Bradford. "It certainly has been intended for you, however singular the way in which it has been conveyed to you, or however disagreeable the manner of the messenger. It has probably been the work of some eccentric, but kind-hearted person who does not choose to have his good deeds known."

"I can't say but I would feel better to know whom it came from, Mr. Bradford, grateful from my very soul as I am. I shouldn't have been too proud to take such a favor from one who I knew was a friend to me, with the hope, maybe, of one day making it up, but it's not so comfortable to have it done in this secret sort of way, and as if it were something to be ashamed of."

"Do not look at it in that way, Richards, but believe that your friend has only acted thus from a wish that his left hand should not know what his right hand has done. Look at it as a gift from the Lord, and use it with an easy heart and a clear conscience, as I am sure your benefactor intended."

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"Well, may God bless and prosper him, whoever he is," said the policeman. "I only wish he knew what a load is lifted from my heart. And thank you too, sir, for your advice and for all your interest in me."

While the policeman had been telling his story, Maggie and Bessie had stood listening eagerly to him. At first they looked pleased as well as interested, but when it was made plain to them that some stranger had done the very thing on which they had set their hearts, a look of blank dismay and disappointment overspread their faces. By the time he had finished, Bessie, with her head pressed against her mother's shoulder, was choking back the tears, and Maggie, with crimson cheeks and wide-open eyes, was standing, the very picture of indignation.

"Papa," she exclaimed, as Mr. Richards said the last words, "does he really mean that woman went and paid that money for blind Willie to be cured?"

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"Yes, my darling," said her father, with a feeling of real pity for the disappointment of his two little daughters, "but I think—"

"It's too bad," said Maggie, without waiting for her father to finish his sentence; "it's as mean, as mean as—Oh! I never heard of anything so mean; the horrid old thing! something ought to be done to her. I know she just did it to make a disappointment to Bessie and me. Oh, dear! It's too bad!" She finished with a burst of tears.

"My dear little girl," said her father, "I know this is a great disappointment to you; but you must not let it make you unreasonable. This person is probably an entire stranger to you; and any way, she could know nothing of your purpose."



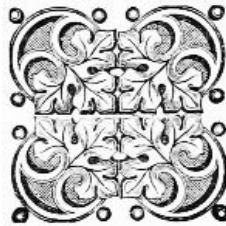
"You will find plenty of uses for the money," said Uncle Ruthven, catching Bessie up in his arms. [Pg 292]  
"Put it away till you find another blind boy, or lame girl, or some old sick body, who would be glad of a little help. Papa will find you ways enough to spend it."

"But," said Bessie, mournfully, as she wiped her eyes, "we wanted to use it for Willie, and we thought so much about it, and we were so glad when we thought how pleased he would be! Oh! we are very much *trialed*; are we not, Maggie?"

"Now the Lord love you for your thought of my boy," said the policeman, "and I'm sure I wish, for your sake, that the old lady had stopped short of Dr. Dawson's door, keeping her money for some other folks that had need of it, and leaving it to you two dear little ones to do this kind turn for my child. But Willie will think just as much, as I do, of your meaning to do it, as if you'd done it out and out; and if you'll allow it, madam,"—here he turned to Mrs. Bradford, "I'd like to bring him over, that he may say so."

Mrs. Bradford said she would be very glad to see Willie, and asked Mr. Richards to bring him and Jennie over the next day, and let them spend an hour or two with the children. This she did, thinking it would be a pleasure to her little girls to see the blind boy and his sister, and wishing to do all she could to console them for their disappointment. [Pg 293]

The policeman promised to do this, and then, once more thanking Mr. Bradford and his family for all their kindness, he went away.





## XIV.

### *AUNT PATTY.*



ut Maggie and Bessie, especially the former, were quite determined not to be consoled. They thought such a terrible disappointment deserved to be sorrowed over for some time to come, and sat with tearful faces and a very mournful manner, quite unable to do anything but grieve.

"I hope I shall have strength to bear it, but I don't know," said Maggie, with her pocket-handkerchief to her eyes.

Mamma told her that the way to bear a trial was not to sit fretting over it and thinking how bad it was, but to look at its bright side, and see what good we or others might gain from it.

"But *this* has no bright side; has it, mamma?" asked Bessie.

"I think so," replied her mother. "This unknown friend has done much more for the policeman and his family than you could have done, and she has not only given the money for Dr. Dawson, but has, also, paid the debt to Dr. Schwitz; while your uncle is kind enough to allow you to keep your money for some one else who may need it." [Pg 295]

"But, mamma," said Maggie, with her eyes still covered, "Uncle Ruthven was going to pay the debt himself; papa told us so. So it would have been just as good for the policeman."

"I declare," said Mr. Stanton, "I had quite forgotten that I was disappointed too! Well, well;" and he leaned his head on his hand, and put on a very doleful air. "Bradford," he continued, in the most mournful tones, "since we are not to go over to the policeman's this afternoon, I had thought we might have some other little frolic; but of course, none of us are in spirits for the visit to the menagerie I had intended to propose."

At this, Maggie's handkerchief came down, and Bessie raised her head from her mother's shoulder. [Pg 296]

"I do not know but I might go, if I could make up a pleasant, happy party to take with me," said Mr. Stanton. "You could not think of it, I suppose, Maggie?"

"I don't know," said Maggie, half unwilling to be so soon comforted, and yet too much pleased at the thought of this unexpected treat to be able to refuse it. "Perhaps I might. I think maybe it would do me good to see the animals." But she still sat with the air of a little martyr, hoping that Uncle Ruthven would press her very much, so that she might not seem to yield too easily.

"I thought perhaps it might bring *me* a little comfort to see the monkeys eat peanuts, and then make faces at me, while they pelted me with the shells," said Mr. Stanton, in the same despairing tone.

At this Bessie broke into a little low laugh, and the dimples showed themselves at the corners of Maggie's mouth, though she pursed up her lips, and drew down her eyebrows in her determination not to smile. But it was all useless, and in two moments more Uncle Ruthven had them both as merry as crickets over this new pleasure. Mamma and Aunt Bessie were coaxed to give up their shopping and go with them, and the three boys, Harry, Fred, and Franky, being added to the party, they all set off in good spirits. [Pg 297]

The blind boy and the terrible disappointment were not forgotten, but the children had made up their minds to take mamma's advice,—bear it bravely, and look on the bright side.

Aunt Patty saw them go, and was glad to be left to herself, although her own thoughts were not very pleasant company. She had done a kind and generous action in an ungracious way, causing those whom she had benefited to feel that they would rather have received the favor from another hand, bringing a real trial upon these dear children, and vexation and regret to herself. She could not look upon her work or its consequences with any satisfaction. What though she had done a good deed, she had not done it quite in the right spirit, and so it seemed it had not brought a blessing. Self-will and temper had been suffered to overcome her once more. Bessie had shamed her by the self-control which she, an old woman, had not shown, and she had been outdone by both these little ones in patience and submission. The policeman's family would have been quite as well off as they were now, and she might still have had the long-desired grove, the object of so many thoughts and wishes, had she never taken up the matter, or had she even allowed her intentions to be known. She had really had an honest desire to keep her generous self-sacrifice a secret, that it should not be published abroad to all the world; but there was, also, an obstinate little corner in her heart which made her determine to keep it from her nephew, lest he should oppose it. "For I want none of his advice or interference," she said, to herself; it being generally the case that those who deal most largely in those articles themselves are the most unwilling to receive them from others. [Pg 298]

So the poor old lady sadly thought, taking shame and repentance to herself for all the peevishness and ill-temper of the last two days, seeing where she had acted wrongly and unwisely, and making new resolutions for the future. Ah, the old besetting sin, strengthened by long habit and indulgence, what a tyrant it had become, and how hard she had to struggle with it, how often was she overcome! Yes, well might little Bessie be thankful that wise and tender teachers had taught her to control that passionate temper, which later might have proved such a misery to herself and her friends. Then came back to her the dear child's trusting words, "Jesus knows," bringing with them a comforting sense of his near love and presence, and a feeling that his help and forgiveness were still open to her, though she had again so sadly given way. Oh, that she had little Bessie's simple faith! that this feeling of the Saviour's nearness, this constant looking to him for help and guidance, which were shown by this little one, were hers also! She bethought herself of a hymn, which she had heard Mrs. Bradford teaching to her children during the last week, and which they had all sung together on Sunday evening. She could not recollect the exact words, but it seemed to her that it was the very thing she needed now. She searched for it through all the hymn-books and tune-books on which she could lay her hands, but in vain; and, as was Aunt Patty's way, the more she could not find it, the more she seemed to want it. Should she ask the children for it when they came home? To do so, would be the same as confessing that she had done wrong, and that was the hardest thing in the world for the proud old lady to do. But yes, she would do it! Nay, more, she would no longer be outdone by a little child in generosity and humility. She would tell the children that she was sorry for her unkindness of the morning.

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It did Aunt Patty no harm, but a great deal of good, that long afternoon's musing in the silent house, where no patter of children's feet, nor any sound of young voices was heard; for baby had gone to her grandmamma, so that even her soft coo and joyous crow were missing for some hours.

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Meanwhile the children were enjoying themselves amazingly; for a visit to the menagerie with Uncle Ruthven, who knew so much of the wild beasts and their habits, and who told of them in such an interesting way, was no common treat. The day had been as April-like within as without, clouds and sunshine by turns, ending at last in settled brightness; and no one who had seen the happy faces of our Maggie and Bessie would have thought that they could have worn such woeful looks but a few hours since.

After reaching home, they were passing through the upper hall on their way down to the parlor, where they had left papa and Uncle Ruthven, when Aunt Patty's door opened, and she called them. They stood still and hesitated.

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"Come in," said Mrs. Lawrence again, in a gentle tone; "Aunt Patty wants to speak to you."

Maggie and Bessie obeyed, but slowly and unwillingly, as the old lady grieved to see, the former with drooping head and downcast eyes, while Bessie peeped shyly up at her aunt from under her eyelashes.

"Aunt Patty was cross, and vexed you this morning," said Mrs. Lawrence; "but she is sorry now. Come, kiss her and be friends."

In a moment Bessie's rosebud of a mouth was put up for the desired kiss, but Maggie still held back. It was not that she was unforgiving, but this meekness from Aunt Patty was something so new, and so contrary to all the ideas she had formed of her, that she did not know how to believe in it, or to understand it.

"Kiss her," whispered Bessie; "it is not 'bearing her burden' if you don't."

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So Maggie's face was lifted also, and as her aunt bent down and kissed her, she was astonished to see how gentle and kind, although sad, she looked. The "corners" were all out of sight just now, and Maggie even began to feel sorry that she had wished Aunt Patty to be "a pillar of salt which might be soaked away in the rain."

Mrs. Lawrence asked them if they had enjoyed themselves, and put a question or two about the menagerie in a pleasant, gentle tone, which showed that her ill-temper was all gone. Then there was a moment's silence, the children wishing, yet not exactly knowing how, to run away; at the end of which, Mrs. Lawrence said, in rather an embarrassed voice, as if she were half ashamed of what she was doing, "Bessie, where did you find that little hymn, 'Listen, oh, listen, our Father all holy'?"

"Oh, it is in our dear little 'Chapel Gems,'" said the child. "Is it not pretty, Aunt Patty? Mamma found it, and I asked her to teach it to us, 'cause it was so sweet to say when any of us had been naughty. When we sing it, I think it's just like a little prayer in music."

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"Can you find the book for me?" asked the old lady.

"Mamma lent it to Mrs. Rush. She wanted to have the music, so we might have it for one of our Sunday-school hymns. I'll ask mamma to let you have it as soon as Aunt May sends it back."

"It is of no consequence," said Mrs. Lawrence, in a tone in which Bessie fancied there was some disappointment. "Do not let me keep you if you want to go."

Both children turned toward the door, but before they reached it, Bessie lingered, also detaining Maggie, who held her hand.

"Aunt Patty," she said, sweetly, "I think it is of consequence if you want it. And—and—I know 'Our Father all holy.' If you would like, I can say it to you."

"Come, then, darling," answered the old lady, and standing at her knee with Aunt Patty's hand

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resting on her curls, Bessie repeated, slowly and correctly, this beautiful hymn:—

"Listen, oh, listen, our Father all holy!  
Humble and sorrowful, owning my sin,  
Hear me confess, in my penitence lowly,  
How in my weakness temptation came in.

"Pity me now, for, my Father, no sorrow  
Ever can be like the pain that I know;  
When I remember that all through to-morrow,  
Missing the light of thy love, I may go.

"For thy forgiveness, the gift I am seeking,  
Nothing, oh, nothing, I offer to thee!  
Thou to my sinful and sad spirit speaking,  
Giving forgiveness, giv'st all things to me.

"Keep me, my Father, oh, keep me from falling!  
I had not sinned, had I felt thou wert nigh;  
Speak, when the voice of the tempter is calling  
So that temptation before thee may fly.

"Thoughts of my sin much more humble shall make me,  
For thy forgiveness I'll love thee the more;  
So keep me humble until thou shall take me  
Where sin and sorrow forever are o'er."<sup>[A]</sup>

"I had not sinned, had I felt thou wert nigh," she said again, after she was through with the last line. "I wish we could always remember our Father is nigh; don't you, Aunt Patty? We know it, but sometimes we forget it a little, and then the naughtiness comes, and so we grieve him. But is not that a sweet hymn to say when we are sorry for our sin, and want him to help and forgive us again? I felt it was yesterday when I had been angry and spoken so naughtily to you." [Pg 306]

"Oh, child, child!" was all the answer Mrs. Lawrence gave. Her heart had been softened before, now it was quite melted, and putting her arm about Bessie, she drew her to her and kissed her on both cheeks; while Maggie stood by wondering as she heard the tremor of Aunt Patty's voice and saw something very like a tear in her eye.

"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, Thou hast perfected praise," murmured the old lady to herself, when the door had closed behind the children. "Lord, make me even like unto this little child, granting me such faith, such grace, such patience, such an earnest desire to do thy will, to live only to thy glory." [Pg 307]

Yes, such were the lessons learned even by an old woman like Aunt Patty from this little lamb of Jesus, this little follower of her blessed Lord and Master. "Even a child is known by his doings."

"Who is for a summer among the mountains?" asked Mr. Bradford as the family sat around the table after dinner.

"I am, and I, and I!" came from a chorus of young voices, for from papa's look it was plainly to be seen that the question was addressed to the children, and that the grown people had had their say before. Even baby, who was learning to imitate everything, made a sound which might be interpreted into an "I," but one little voice was silent.

"And has my Bessie nothing to say?" asked papa.

"Is the sea at the mountains, papa?" said Bessie, answering his question by another.

"No, dear," said her father, smiling, "but among the mountains to which we think of going, there is a very beautiful lake, on the border of which stands the house in which we shall stay." [Pg 308]

"I am very fond of the sea, papa," answered Bessie, "and I think I would prefer to go to Quam Beach again,—I mean if the others liked it too."

"I do not doubt we should all enjoy ourselves at Quam," said Mr. Bradford, "for we spent a very pleasant summer there last year. But grandmamma does not think the sea-side good for Aunt Annie's throat, and wishes to take her up among the mountains. The colonel's doctor has also advised him to go there, so we shall not have the same delightful party we had last summer if we go to Quam. About four miles from the old homestead, and higher up in the Chalecoo Mountains, is this very lovely lake set deep among the rocks and woods. Here lives a man named Porter,—you remember him, Aunt Patty?"

"Certainly," answered Mrs. Lawrence, "he has been adding to and refitting his house, with the intention of taking boarders, I believe. Do you think of going there?" [Pg 309]

"Yes. I remember even in former days it was an airy, comfortable old place, and with the improvements which I hear Porter has made, I think it will just suit our party. What do you say, Bessie? Would you not like to go there with all the dear friends, rather than to Quam without them?"

"Oh, yes," said Bessie; "I like my people better than I do the sea; but then I do wish there was just a little bit of sea there, papa."

Papa smiled at Bessie's regret for the grand old ocean, which she loved so dearly; but as he told her of the many new pleasures she might find among the mountains, she began to think they might prove almost as delightful as those of the last summer at Quam Beach.

So the plan was talked over with pleasure by all. Papa and Uncle Ruthven were to start the next morning to go up to the lake, see the house, and, if it suited, to make all the necessary arrangements. The party was a large one to be accommodated,—grandmamma and Aunt Annie, Uncle Ruthven and Aunt Bessie, Colonel and Mrs. Rush, and Mr. and Mrs. Bradford with all their family; and as soon as it was found to be doubtful if this could be done, all the children, even Bessie, were in a flutter of anxiety lest they should be disappointed. This was of no use, however, for the matter could not be decided till papa and Uncle Ruthven returned.

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"I have a little private business with Maggie and Bessie," said papa, as they rose from the table. "Young ladies, may I request the honor of your company in my room for a few moments?"

Wondering what could be coming now, but sure from papa's face that it was something very pleasant, the little girls went skipping and dancing before him to the library, where, sitting down, papa lifted Bessie to his knee, and Maggie upon the arm of the chair, holding her there with his arm about her waist.

When they were all settled, Mr. Bradford said, "Uncle Ruthven and I have a plan which we thought might please you, but if you do not like it, you are to say so."

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"Papa," said Maggie, "if it's any plan about that money, I think we'll have to consider it a little first. You see it seems to us as if it was very much Willie's money, and we will have to be a little accustomed to think it must do good to some one else."

This was said with a very grave, businesslike air, which sat rather drolly upon our merry, careless Maggie, and her father smiled.

"I shall tell you," he said, "and then you may have the next two days, till Uncle Ruthven and I come back, to consider it. Dr. Dawson thinks it necessary for Willie Richards to have change of air as soon as he is able to travel. Of course his mother must go with him, to take care of him; and, indeed, it is needful for the poor woman herself to have mountain air. I have thought that we might find some quiet farmhouse at or near Chalecoo, where Willie and his mother could go for two or three months at a small cost; but I do not believe it is possible for the policeman to afford even this, without very great discomfort and even suffering to himself and his family. Now, how would you like to use the money Uncle Ruthven gave you to pay the board of Willie and his mother, and so still spend it for his good and comfort? As I said, you may take two days to think over this plan, and if it does not suit you, you can say so."

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Ah! this was quite unnecessary, as papa probably knew. *This* needed no consideration. Why, it was almost as good as paying Dr. Dawson,—rather better, Maggie thought.

But Bessie could not quite agree to this last. "I am very satisfied, papa," she said, "but then it would have been so nice to think our money helped to make blind Willie see his mother's face."

"Maggie, have you forgiven that old woman yet?" asked Fred, when his father and little sisters had joined the rest of the family in the other room.

"Oh, yes!" said Maggie. "I think she is lovely! She has made things a great deal better for us, though she did not know it, and blind Willie is to go to the country. But you are not to talk about it, Fred, for he is not to be told till it is all fixed, and papa has found the place; and we are to pay the board, and I'm so sorry I said bad things about her, even if she was only the messenger, and some one sent her."

[Pg 313]

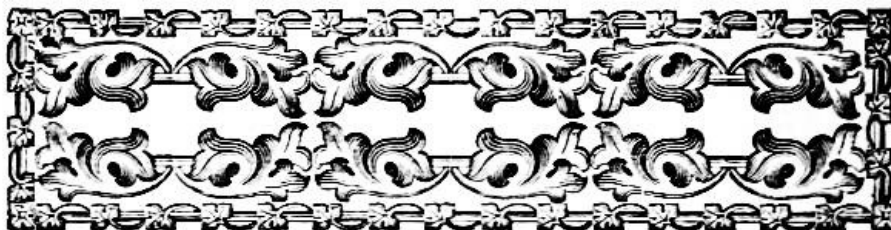
"Hallo!" said Fred, "anything more?"

"I am so full of gladness, I don't know what to do with it," said Maggie, who very often found herself in this state; "but I am so very tired I can't hop much to-night."



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## XV.

### *WILLIE'S VISIT.*



here," said Mrs. Granby, holding Willie Richards at arm's length from her, and gazing at him with pride and admiration,—“there, I'd like to see the fellow, be he man, woman, or child, that will dare to say my boy is not fit to stand beside any gentleman's son in the land.”

Certainly Mrs. Granby had no need to be ashamed of the object of her affectionate care. His shoes, though well worn and patched, had been blacked and polished till they looked quite respectable; the suit made from his father's old uniform was still neat and whole, for Willie's present quiet life was a great saving to his clothes, if that were any comfort; his white collar was turned back and neatly tied with a black ribbon, and Mrs. Granby had just combed back the straight locks from his pale, fair forehead in a jaunty fashion which she thought highly becoming to him. There was a look of hope and peace on his delicate face which and not been there for many a long day, for last night his father had told him that the doctor had an almost sure hope of restoring his sight, if he were good and patient, and that the operation was to take place the next week. The news had put fresh heart and life into the poor boy, and now, as Mrs. Granby said this, he laughed aloud, and throwing both arms about her neck, and pressing his cheek to hers, said,—

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“Thank you, dear Auntie Granby. I know I am nice when you fix me up. Pretty soon I shall see how nice you make me look.”

“Come now, Jennie, bring along that mop of yours,” said Mrs. Granby, brandishing a comb at Jennie, and, half laughing, half shrinking, the little girl submitted to put her head into Mrs. Granby's hands. But, as had been the case very often before, it was soon given up as a hopeless task. Jennie's short, crisp curls defied both comb and brush, and would twist themselves into close, round rings, lying one over another after their own will and fashion.

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“I don't care,” said Jennie, when Mrs. Granby pretended to be very angry at the rebellious hair,—“I don't care if it won't be smoothed; it is just like father's, mother says so; and anything like him is good enough for me.”

“Well, I won't say no to that,” said Mrs. Granby, putting down the brush and throwing Jennie's dress over her head. “The more you're like him in all ways, the better you'll be, Jennie Richards, you mind that.”

“I do mind it,” said Jennie. “I know he's the best father ever lived. Isn't he, Willie?”

“S'pose that's what all young ones says of their fathers and mothers,” answered Mrs. Granby, “even s'posin' the fathers and mothers ain't much to boast of. But you're nearer the truth, Jennie, than some of them, and it's all right and nat'ral that every child should think its own folks the best. There's little Miss Bradfords, what you're goin' up to see, they'd be ready to say the same about their pa.”

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“And good reason, too,” chimed in Mrs. Richards. “He's as true and noble a gentleman as ever walked, and a good friend to us.”

“That's so,” answered Mrs. Granby, “I'll not gainsay you there neither. And that's come all along of your man just speaking a kind word or two to that stray lamb of his. And if I'd a mind to contradick you, which I haint, there's Sergeant Richards himself to back your words. The bairns is 'most ready, sergeant; and me and Mary was just sayin' how strange it seemed that such a friend as Mr. Bradford was raised up for you just along of a bit of pettin' you give that lost child. It's as the gentleman says,—'bread cast upon the waters;' but who'd ha' thought to see it come back the way it does? It beats all how things do come around.”

“Under God's guidance,” said the policeman, softly. “The Lord's ways are past finding out.”

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“I'll agree to that too,” answered Mrs. Granby, “bein' in an accommodatin' humor this afternoon. There, now, Jennie, you're ready. Mind your manners now, and behave pretty, and don't let Willie go to falling down them long stairs at Mrs. Bradford's. There, kiss your mother, both of you, and go away with your father. I s'pose he ain't got no time to spare. I'll go over after them in an hour or so, Sergeant Richards.”

Here Tommy began very eagerly with his confused jargon which no one pretended to understand but Jennie.

“What does he say, Jennie?” asked the father.

"He says, 'Nice little girl, come some more. Bring her doggie,'" said Jennie; then turning to her mother, she asked, "Mother, do you b'lieve you can understand Tommy till I come back?"

"I'll try," said her mother, smiling; "if I cannot, Tommy and I must be patient. Run now, father is waiting." [Pg 319]

Mrs. Granby followed them to the door, and even to the gate, where she stood and watched them till they were out of sight, for, as she told Mrs. Richards, "it did her a heap of good to see the poor things goin' off for a bit of a holiday."

The policeman and his children kept steadily on till they reached the park near which Mr. Bradford lived, where they turned in.

"How nice it is!" said Willie as the fresh, sweet air blew across his face, bringing the scent of the new grass and budding trees. "It seems a little like the country here. Don't you wish we lived in the country, father?"

"I would like it, Willie, more for your sake than for anything else, and I wish from my heart I could send you and mother off to the country this summer, my boy. But you see it can't be managed. But I guess somehow father will contrive to send you now and then up to Central Park, or for a sail down the bay or up the river. And you and Jennie can come over here every day and play about awhile, and that will put a bit of strength in you, if you can't get out into the country." [Pg 320]

"And then I shall see; sha'n't I, father? I hear the birds. Are they hopping about like they used to, over the trees, so tame and nice?"

"Yes," answered his father, "and here we are by the water, where's a whole heap of 'em come down for a drink." In his new hope, Willie took a fresh interest in all about him.

"Oh, I hear 'em!" said Willie, eagerly, "and soon I'll see 'em. Will it be next week, father?" and he clasped tightly the hand he held.

"I don't know about next week, sonny. I believe your eyes have to be bandaged for a while, lest the light would be too bright for them, while they're still weak, but you will have patience for that; won't you, Willie?"

Willie promised, for it seemed to him that he could have patience and courage for anything now. [Pg 321]

"Oh!" said Jennie, as they reached Mr. Bradford's house, and went up the steps, "don't I wish I lived in a house like this!"

"Don't be wishing that," said her father. "You'll see a good many things here such as you never saw before, but you mustn't go to wishing for them or fretting after the same. We've too much to be thankful for, my lassie, to be hankering for things which are not likely ever to be ours."

"'Tis no harm to wish for them; is it, father?" asked Jennie, as they waited for the door to be opened.

"It's not best even to wish for what's beyond our reach," said her father, "lest we should get to covet our neighbors' goods, or to be discontented with our own lot; and certainly we have no call to do that."

Richards asked for Mrs. Bradford, and she presently came down, bringing Maggie and Bessie with her. Jennie felt a little strange and frightened at first when her father left her. Making acquaintance with Maggie and Bessie in her own home was a different thing from coming to visit them in their large, handsome house, and they scarcely seemed to her like the same little girls. But when Maggie took her up-stairs, and showed her the baby-house and dolls, she forgot everything else, and looked at them, quite lost in admiration. [Pg 322]

Willie was not asked to look at anything. The little sisters had thought of what he had said the day they went to see him, and agreed that Bessie was to take care of him while Maggie entertained Jennie. He asked after Flossy, and the dog was called, and behaved quite as well as he had done when he saw Willie before, lying quiet in his arms as long as the blind boy chose to hold him, and putting his cold nose against his face in an affectionate way which delighted Willie highly.

There was no difficulty in amusing Jennie, who had eyes for all that was to be seen, and who thought she could never be tired of handling and looking at such beautiful toys and books. But perhaps the children would hardly have known how to entertain Willie for any length of time, if a new pleasure had not accidentally been furnished for him. [Pg 323]

Maggie and Bessie had just taken him and his sister into the nursery to visit the baby, the canary bird, and other wonders there, when there came sweet sounds from below. Willie instantly turned to the door and stood listening.

"Who's making that music?" he asked presently in a whisper, as if he were afraid to lose a note.

"Mamma and Aunt Bessie," said Maggie.

"Would you and Jennie like to go down to the parlor and hear it?" asked Bessie.

Willie said "Yes," very eagerly, but Jennie did not care to go where the grown ladies were, and said she would rather stay up-stairs if Maggie did not mind.

Maggie consented, and Bessie went off, leading the blind boy by the hand. It was both amusing and touching to see the watch she kept over this child who was twice her own size, guiding his steps with a motherly sort of care, looking up at him with wistful pity and tenderness, and speaking to him in a soft, coaxing voice such as one would use to an infant. [Pg 324]

They were going down-stairs when they met Aunt Patty coming up. She passed them at the landing, then suddenly turning, said, in the short, quick way to which Bessie was by this time somewhat accustomed, "Children! Bessie! This is very dangerous! You should not be leading that poor boy down-stairs. Where are your nurses, that they do not see after you? Take care, take care! Look where you are going now! Carefully, carefully!"

Now if Aunt Patty had considered the matter, she would have known she was taking the very way to bring about the thing she dreaded. Willie had been going on fearlessly, listening to his gentle little guide; but at the sound of the lady's voice he started, and as she kept repeating her cautions, he grew nervous and uneasy; while Bessie, instead of watching his steps and taking heed to her own, kept glancing up at her aunt with an uncomfortable sense of being watched by those sharp eyes.

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However, they both reached the lower hall in safety, where Bessie led her charge to the parlor-door. "Mamma," she said, "Willie likes music very much. I suppose you would just as lief he would listen to you and Aunt Bessie."

"Certainly," said mamma. "Bring him in."

But before they went in, Willie paused and turned to Bessie.

"Who was that on the stairs?" he asked in a whisper.

"Oh! that was only Aunt Patty," answered the little girl. "You need not be afraid of her. She don't mean to be so cross as she is; but she is old, and had a great deal of trouble, and not very wise people to teach her better when she was little. So she can't help it sometimes."

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"No," said Willie, slowly, as if he were trying to recollect something, "I am not afraid; but then I thought I had heard that voice before."

"Oh, I guess not," said Bessie; and then she took him in and seated him in her own little arm-chair, close to the piano.

No one who had noticed the way in which the blind boy listened to the music, or seen the look of perfect enjoyment on his pale, patient face, could have doubted his love for the sweet sounds. While Mrs. Bradford and Miss Rush played or sang, he sat motionless, not moving a finger, hardly seeming to breathe, lest he should lose one note.

"So you are very fond of music; are you, Willie?" said Mrs. Bradford, when at length they paused.

"Yes, ma'am, very," said he, modestly; "but I never heard music like that before. It seems 'most as if it was alive."

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"So it does," said Bessie, while the ladies smiled at the boy's innocent admiration.

"I think there's a many nice things in this house," continued Willie, who, in his very helplessness and unconsciousness of the many new objects which surrounded him, was more at his ease than his sister.

"And mamma is the nicest of all," said Bessie. "You can't think how precious she is, Willie!"

Mrs. Bradford laughed as she put back her little daughter's curls, and kissed her forehead.

"I guess she must be, when she is your mother," said Willie. "You must all be very kind and good people here; and I wish, oh, I wish it was you and your sister who gave the money for Dr. Dawson. But never mind; I thank you and love you all the same as if you had done it, only I would like to think it all came through you. And father says"—

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Here Willie started, and turned his sightless eyes towards the open door, through which was again heard Mrs. Lawrence's voice, as she gave directions to Patrick respecting a parcel she was about to send home.

"What is the matter, Willie?" asked Mrs. Bradford.

"Nothing, ma'am," answered the child, as a flush came into his pale cheeks, and rising from his chair, he stood with his head bent forward, listening intently, till the sound of Aunt Patty's voice ceased, and the opening and closing of the front-door showed that she had gone out, when he sat down again with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Does anything trouble you?" asked Mrs. Bradford.

"No, ma'am; but—but—I *know* I've heard it before."

"Heard what?"

"That voice, ma'am; Miss Bessie said it was her aunt's."

"But you couldn't have heard it, you know, Willie," said Bessie, "'cause you never came to this house before, and Aunt Patty never went to yours."

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These last words brought it all back to the blind boy. He knew now. "But she *did*," he said, eagerly,—"*she* did come to our house. That's the one; that's the voice that scolded mother and Auntie Granby and Jennie, and that put the money into the Bible when we didn't know it!"

Mrs. Bradford and Miss Rush looked at one another with quick, surprised glances; but Bessie said, "Oh! you must be mistaken, Willie. It's quite *um*possible. Aunt Patty does not know you or your house, and she never went there. Besides, she does not"—"Does not like you to have the money," she was about to say, when she thought that this would be neither kind nor polite, and checked herself.



But Willie was quite as positive as she was, and with a little shake of his head, he said, "Ever since I was blind, I always knew a voice when I heard it once. I wish Jennie or Mrs. Granby had seen her, they could tell you; but I know that's the voice. It was *you* sent her, after all, ma'am; was it not?" and he turned his face toward Mrs. Bradford.

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"No, Willie, I did not send her," answered the lady, with another look at Miss Rush, "nor did any one in this house."

But in spite of this, and all Bessie's persuasions and assurances that the thing was quite impossible, Willie was not to be convinced that the voice he had twice heard was not that of the old lady who had left the money in the Bible; and he did not cease regretting that Jennie had not seen her.

But to have Jennie or Mrs. Granby see her was just what Mrs. Lawrence did not choose, and to avoid this, she had gone out, not being able to shut herself up in her own room, which was undergoing a sweeping and dusting. She had not been afraid of the sightless eyes of the little boy when she met him on the stairs, never thinking that he might recognize her voice; but she had taken good care not to meet those of Jennie, so quick and bright, and which she felt would be sure to know her in an instant. But secure as Aunt Patty thought herself, when she was once out of the house, that treacherous voice of hers had betrayed her, not only to Willie's sensitive ears, but to that very pair of eyes which she thought she had escaped. For, as the loud tones had reached Maggie and Jennie at their play, the latter had dropped the toy she held, and exclaimed, in a manner as startled as Willie's, "There's that woman!"

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"What woman?" asked Maggie.

"The old woman who brought the money to our house. I know it is her."

"Oh, no, it is not," said Maggie; "that's Aunt Patty, and she's an old lady, not an old woman, and she wouldn't do it if she could. She is real mean, Jennie, and I think that person who took you the money was real good and kind, even if we did feel a little bad about it at first. Aunt Patty would never do it, I know. Bessie and I try to like her, and just as we begin to do it a little scrap, she goes and does something that makes us mad again, so it's no use to try."

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"But she does talk just like the lady who came to our house," persisted Jennie.

"You can see her if you have a mind to," said Maggie, "and then you'll know it is not her. Come and look over the balusters, but don't let her see you, or else she'll say, 'What are you staring at, child?'"

They both ran to the head of the stairs, where Jennie peeped over the balusters.

"It *is* her!" she whispered to Maggie. "I am just as sure, as sure. She is all dressed up nice to-day, and the other day she had on an old water-proof cloak, and a great big umbrella, and she didn't look so nice. But she's the very same."

"Let's go down and tell mamma, and see what she says," said Maggie, as the front-door closed after Aunt Patty.

Away they both rushed to the parlor; but when Jennie saw the ladies, she was rather abashed and hung back a little, while Maggie broke forth with, "Mamma, I have the greatest piece of astonishment to tell you, you ever heard. Jennie says she is quite sure Aunt Patty is the woman who put the money in the Bible and paid Dr. Dawson. But, mamma, it can't be; can it? Aunt Patty is quite too dog-in-the-mangery; is she not?"

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"Maggie, dear," said her mother, "that is not a proper way for you to speak of your aunt, nor do I think it is just as you say. What do you mean by that?"

"Why, mamma, you know the dog in the manger could not eat the hay himself, and would not let the oxen eat it; and Aunt Patty would not buy the grove, or tell papa what was the reason; so was she not like the dog in the manger?"

"Not at all," said Mrs. Bradford, smiling at Maggie's reasoning. "The two cases are not at all alike. As you say, the dog would not let the hungry oxen eat the hay he could not use himself, but because Aunt Patty did not choose to buy the grove, we have no right to suppose she would not make, or has not made some other good use of her money, and if she chooses to keep that a secret, she has a right to do so. No, I do not think we can call her like the dog in the manger, Maggie."

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"But do you believe she gave up the grove for that, mamma? She would not be so good and generous; would she?"

"Yes, dear, I think she would. Aunt Patty is a very generous-hearted woman, although her way of doing things may be very different from that of some other people. Mind, I did not say that she *did* do this, but Willie and Jennie both seem to be quite positive that she is the old lady who was at their house, and I think it is not at all unlikely."

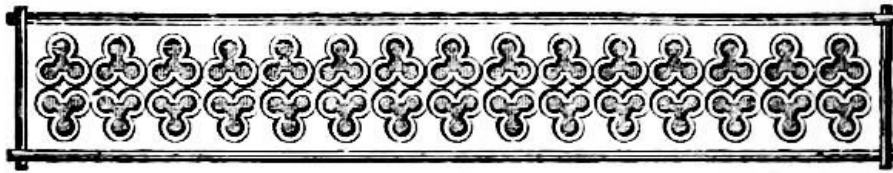
"And shall you ask her, mamma?"

"No. If it was Aunt Patty who has been so kind, she has shown very plainly that she did not wish to be questioned, and I shall say nothing, nor must you. We will not talk about it any more now. We will wind up the musical box, and let Willie see if he likes it as well as the piano."

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Very soon after this, Mrs. Granby came for Willie and Jennie, and no sooner were they outside of the door than they told of the wonderful discovery they had made. Mrs. Granby said she was not at all astonished, "one might have been sure such a good turn came out of *that* house, somehow."





## XVI.

### *WILLIE'S RECOVERY.*



Willie seemed amazingly cheered up and amused by his visit, and told eagerly of all he had heard and noticed, with a gay ring in his voice which delighted his mother. It was not so with Jennie, although she had come home with her hands full of toys and picture-books, the gifts of the kind little girls she had been to see. She seemed dull, and her mother thought she was tired of play and the excitement of seeing so much that was new and strange to her. But Mrs. Richards soon found it was worse than

this.

"I don't see why I can't keep this frock on," said Jennie, fretfully, as Mrs. Granby began to unfasten her dress, which was kept for Sundays and holidays. [Pg 337]

"Surely, you don't want to go knocking round here, playing and working in your best frock!" said Mrs. Granby. "What would it look like?"

"The other one is torn," answered Jennie, pouting, and twisting herself out of Mrs. Granby's hold.

"Didn't I mend it as nice as a new pin?" said Mrs. Granby, showing a patch nicely put in during Jennie's absence.

"It's all faded and ugly," grumbled Jennie. "I don't see why I can't be dressed as nice as other folks."

"That means you want to be dressed like little Miss Bradfords," answered Mrs. Granby. "And the reason why you ain't is because your folks can't afford it, my dearie. Don't you think your mother and me would like to see you rigged out like them, if we had the way to do it? To be sure we would. But you see we can't do more than keep you clean and whole; so there's no use wishin'." [Pg 338]

Jennie said no more, but submitted to have the old dress put on; but the pleasant look did not come back to her face.

Anything like sulkiness or ill-temper from Jennie was so unusual that the other children listened in surprise; but her mother saw very plainly what was the matter, and hoping it would wear off, thought it best to take no notice of it at present.

The dress fastened, Jennie went slowly and unwillingly about her task of putting away her own and her brother's clothes; not doing so in her usual neat and orderly manner but folding them carelessly and tumbling them into the drawers in a very heedless fashion. Mrs. Granby saw this, but she, too, let it pass, thinking she would put things to rights when Jennie was in bed.

Pretty soon Tommy came to Mrs. Granby with some long story told in the curious jargon of which she could not understand one word.

"What does he say, Jennie?" she asked. [Pg 339]

"I don't know," answered Jennie, crossly. "I sha'n't be troubled to talk for him all the time. He is big enough to talk for himself, and he just may do it."

"Jennie, Jennie," said her mother, in a grieved tone.

Jennie began to cry.

"Come here," said Mrs. Richards, thinking a little soothing would be better than fault-finding. "The baby is asleep; come and fix the cradle so I can put her in it."

The cradle was Jennie's especial charge, and she never suffered any one else to arrange it; but now she pulled the clothes and pillows about as if they had done something to offend her.

"Our baby is just as good as Mrs. Bradford's," she muttered, as her mother laid the infant in the cradle.

"I guess we think she is the nicest baby going," said Mrs. Richards, cheerfully; "and it's likely Mrs. Bradford thinks the same of hers."

"I don't see why Mrs. Bradford's baby has to have a better cradle than ours," muttered Jennie. [Pg 340]  
"Hers is all white muslin and pink, fixed up so pretty, and ours is old and shabby."

"And I don't believe Mrs. Bradford's baby has a quilt made for her by her own little sister," answered the mother.

"And it has such pretty frocks, all work and tucks and nice ribbons," said Jennie, determined not to be coaxed out of her envy and ill-humor, "and our baby has to do with just a plain old slip with not a bit of trimming. 'Taint fair; it's real mean!"

"Jennie, Jennie," said her mother again, "I am sorry I let you go, if it was only to come home

envious and jealous after the pretty things you've seen."

"But haven't we just as good a right to have them as anybody else?" sobbed Jennie, with her head in her mother's lap.

"Not since the Lord has not seen fit to give them to us," answered Mrs. Richards. "We haven't a right to anything. All he gives us is of his goodness; nor have we a *right* to fret because he has made other folks better off than us. All the good things and riches are his to do with as he sees best; and if one has a larger portion than another, he has his own reasons for it, which is not for us to quarrel with. And of all others, I wouldn't have you envious of Mrs. Bradford's family that have done so much for us."

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"Yes," put in Mrs. Granby, with her cheery voice; "them's the ones that ought to be rich that don't spend all their money on themselves, that makes it do for the comfort of others that's not as well off, and for the glory of Him that gives it. Now, if it had been you or me, Jennie, that had so much given to us, maybe we'd have been selfish and stingy like; so the Lord saw it wasn't best for us."

"I don't think anything could have made you selfish or stingy, Janet Granby," said Mrs. Richards, looking gratefully at her friend. "It is a small share of this world's goods that has fallen to you, but your neighbors get the best of what does come to you."

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"Then there's some other reason why it wouldn't be good for me," said Mrs. Granby; "I'm safe in believin' that, and it ain't goin' to do for us to be frettin' and pinin' after what we haven't got, when the Almighty has just been heapin' so much on us. And talkin' of that, Jennie, you wipe your eyes, honey, and come along to the kitchen with me; there's a basket Mrs. Bradford gave me to unpack. She said it had some few things for Willie, to strengthen him up a bit before his eyes were done. And don't let the father come in and find you in the dumps; that would never do. So cheer up and come along till we see what we can find."

Jennie raised her head, wiped her eyes, and followed Mrs. Granby, who, good, trusting soul, soon talked her into good-humor and content again.

Meanwhile, Maggie and Bessie were very full of the wonderful discovery of the afternoon, and could scarcely be satisfied without asking Aunt Patty if it could really be she who had been to the policeman's house and carried the money to pay his debts; also, paid Dr. Dawson for the operation on Willie's eyes. But as mamma had forbidden this, and told them that they were not to speak of it to others, they were obliged to be content with talking of it between themselves. If it were actually Aunt Patty who had done this, they should look upon her with very new feelings. They had heard from others that she could do very generous and noble actions; but it was one thing to hear of them, as if they were some half-forgotten story of the past, and another to see them done before their very eyes. Aunt Patty was not rich. What she gave to others, she must deny to herself, and they knew this must have cost her a great deal. She had given up the grove, on which she had set her heart, that she might be able to help the family in whom they were so interested,—people of whom she knew nothing but what she had heard from them. If she had really been so generous, so self-sacrificing, they thought they could forgive almost any amount of crossness and meddling.

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"For, after all, they're only the corners," said Maggie, "and maybe when she tried to bear the policeman's burden, and felt bad about the grove, that made her burden heavier, and so squeezed out her corners a little more, and they scratched her neighbors, who ought not to mind if that was the reason. But I do wish we could really know; don't you, Bessie?"

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Putting all things together, there did not seem much reason to doubt it. The policeman's children were positive that Mrs. Lawrence was the very lady who had been to their house, and Aunt Patty had been out on two successive days at such hours as answered to the time when the mysterious old lady had visited first them, and then Dr. Dawson.

Papa and Uncle Ruthven came home on the evening of the next day, having made arrangements that satisfied every one for the summer among the mountains. Porter's house, with its addition and new conveniences, was just the place for the party, and would even afford two or three extra rooms, in case their friends from Riverside wished to join them. The children were delighted as their father spoke of the wide, roomy old hall, where they might play on a rainy day, of the spacious, comfortable rooms and long piazza; as he told how beautiful the lake looked even in this early spring weather, and of the grand old rocks and thick woods which would soon be covered with their green summer dress. Still Bessie gave a little sigh after her beloved sea. The old homestead and Aunt Patty's cottage were about four miles from the lake, just a pleasant afternoon's drive; and at the homestead itself, where lived Mr. Bradford's cousin, the two gentlemen had passed the night. Cousin Alexander had been very glad to hear that his relations were coming to pass the summer at Chalecoo Lake, and his four boys promised themselves all manner of pleasure in showing their city cousins the wonders of the neighborhood.

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"It all looks just as it used to when I was a boy," said Mr. Bradford. "There is no change in the place, only in the people." He said it with a half-sigh, but the children did not notice it as they pleased themselves with the thought of going over the old place where papa had lived when he was a boy.

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"I went to the spot where the old barn was burned down, Aunt Patty," he said. "No signs of the ruins are to be seen, as you know; but as I stood there, the whole scene came back to me as freshly as if it had happened yesterday;" and he extended his hand to Aunt Patty as he spoke.

The old lady laid her own within his, and the grasp he gave it told her that years and change had not done away with the grateful memory of her long past services. She was pleased and touched,

and being in such a mood, did not hesitate to express the pleasure she, too, felt at the thought of having them all near her for some months. [Pg 347]

About half-way between the homestead and the Lake House, Mr. Bradford and Mr. Stanton had found board for Mrs. Richards and her boy. It was at the house of an old farmer who well remembered Mr. Bradford, and who said he was pleased to do anything to oblige him, though the gentlemen thought that the old man was quite as well satisfied with the idea of the eight dollars a week he had promised in payment. And this was to come from Maggie's and Bessie's store, which had been carefully left in mamma's hand till such time as it should be needed. All this was most satisfactory to our little girls; and when it should be known that the operation on Willie's eyes had been successful, they were to go to Mrs. Richards and tell her what had been done for her boy's farther good.

Mrs. Bradford told her husband that night of all that had taken place during his absence, and he quite agreed with her that it was without doubt Aunt Patty herself who had been the policeman's benefactor. [Pg 348]

"I am not at all surprised," he said, "though I own that this did not occur to me, even when Richards described the old lady. It is just like Aunt Patty to do a thing in this way; and her very secrecy and her unwillingness to confess why she would not have the grove, or what she intended to do with the money, convinced me that she was sacrificing herself for the good of some other person or persons."

Then Mr. Bradford told his wife that Aunt Patty meant to go home in about ten days, and should Willie's sight be restored before she went, he hoped to be able to persuade her to confess that she had had a share in bringing about this great happiness. He was very anxious that his children should be quite certain of this, as he thought it would go far to destroy their old prejudice, and to cause kind feelings and respect to take the place of their former fear and dislike.

Mrs. Bradford said that good had been done already by the thought that it was probably Aunt Patty who had been so generous, and that the little ones were now quite as ready to believe all that was kind and pleasant of the old lady as they had been to believe all that was bad but two days since. She told how they had come to her that morning, Maggie saying, "Mamma, Bessie and I wish to give Aunt Patty something to show we have more approval of her than we used to have; so I am going to make a needle-book and Bessie a pin-cushion, and put them in her work-basket without saying anything about them." [Pg 349]

They had been very busy all the morning contriving and putting together their little gifts without any help from older people, and when they were finished, had placed them in Aunt Patty's basket, hanging around in order to enjoy her surprise and pleasure when she should find them there.

But the poor little things were disappointed, they could scarcely tell why. If it had been mamma or Aunt Bessie who had received their presents, there would have been a great time when they were discovered. There would have been exclamations of admiration and delight and much wondering as to who could have placed them there,—"some good fairy perhaps who knew that these were the very things that were wanted," and such speeches, all of which Maggie and Bessie would have enjoyed highly, and at last it would be asked if they could possibly have made them, and then would have come thanks and kisses. [Pg 350]

But nothing of this kind came from Aunt Patty. She could not enter into other people's feelings so easily as those who had been unselfish and thoughtful for others all their lives; and though she was much gratified by these little tokens from the children, she did not show half the pleasure she felt; perhaps she really did not know how. True she thanked them, and said she should keep the needle-book and pin-cushion as long as she lived; but she expressed no surprise, and did not praise the work with which they had taken so much pains. [Pg 351]

"What is this trash in my basket?" she said, when she discovered them. "Children, here are some of your baby-rags."

"Aunt Patty," said Mrs. Bradford, quickly, "they are intended for you; the children have been at work over them all the morning."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Lawrence, changing her tone. "I did not understand. I am sure I thank you very much, my dears; and when you come to see me this summer, I shall show you how to do far better than this. I have a quantity of scraps and trimmings of all kinds, of which you can make very pretty things."

This was intended to be kind; but the promise for the future did not make up for the disappointment of the present; and the children turned from her with a feeling that their pains had been almost thrown away.

"Mamma," Bessie had said afterwards, "do you think Aunt Patty was very grateful for our presents?"

"Yes, dear, I think she was," said mamma, "and I think she meant to show it in her own way." [Pg 352]

"But, mamma, do you think that was a nice way? You would not have said that to any one, and I felt as if I wanted to cry a little."

Mamma had seen that her darlings were both hurt, and she felt very sorry for them, but she thought it best to make light of it, so said, cheerfully, "I am quite sure Aunt Patty was gratified, pussy, and that whenever she looks at your presents, she will think with pleasure of the kind little hands that made them."

"When I am big, and some one gives me something I have pleasure in, I'll try to show the pleasure in a nice way," said Maggie.

"Then you must not forget to do it while you are young," said mamma. "Let this show you how necessary it is to learn pleasant habits of speaking and acting while you are young."

"Yes," said Maggie, with a long sigh, "and Aunt Patty ought to be excused. I suppose, since she was not brought up in the way she should go when she was young, she ought to be expected to depart from it when she is old. We must just make the best of it when she don't know any better, and take example of her."

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"Yes," said mamma, rather amused at the way in which Maggie had put into words the very thought that was in her own mind; "let us make the best of everything, and be always ready to believe the best of those about us."

All this Mrs. Bradford told to her husband, and agreed with him that it was better not to endeavor to find out anything more till the trial on Willie's eyes was over.

Maggie's new volume of "The Complete Family" was begun the next day in these words: "Once there was a man who lived in his home in the mountains, and who always listened very modestly to everything that was said to him, so his wife used to say a great deal to him. And one day she said, 'My dear, Mr. and Mrs. Happy, with all their family, and a great lot of their best friends, are coming to live with us this summer, and they are used to having a very nice time, so we must do all we can to make them comfortable, or maybe they will say, "Pooh, this is not a nice place at all. Let us go to the sea again. These are very horrid people!"' And the man said, 'By all means, my dear; and we will give them all they want, and let them look at the mountains just as much as they choose. But I do not think they will say unkind words even if you are a little disagreeable, but will make the best of you, and think you can't help it.' Which was quite true, for M. Happy and B. Happy had a good lesson the man did not know about, and had made a mistake; and sometimes when people seem dreadfully hateful, they are very nice,—I mean very good,—so it's not of great consequence if they are not so nice as some people, and they ought not to be judged, for maybe they have a burden. And M. Happy made two mistakes; one about Mrs. Jones, and the other about that other one mamma don't want me to write about. So this book will be about how they went to the mountains and had a lovely time. I guess we will."

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Rather more than a week had gone by. Willie Richards lay on his bed in a darkened room, languid and weak, his eyes bandaged, his face paler than ever, but still cheerful and patient. It was five days since the operation had been performed, but Willie had not yet seen the light, nor was it certain that he would ever do so, though the doctor hoped and believed that all had gone well. They had given the boy chloroform at the time, and then bound his eyes before he had recovered his senses. But on this day the bandage was to be taken off for the first, and then they should know. His mother sat beside him holding his thin, worn hand in hers.

"Willie," she said, "the doctor is to be here presently, and he will take the bandage from your eyes."

"And will I see then, mother?"

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"If God pleases, dear. But, Willie, if he does not see fit to give you back your sight, could you bear it, and try to think that it is his will, and he knows best?"

Willie drew a long, heavy breath, and was silent a moment, grasping his mother's fingers till the pressure almost pained her; then he said, low, and with a quiver in his voice, "I would try, mother; but it would be 'most too hard after all. If it could be just for a little while, just so I could see your dear face for a few moments, then I would try to say, "Thy will be done.'"

"However it is, we must say that, my boy; but, please the Lord, we shall yet praise him for his great goodness in giving you back your poor, dear eyes."

As she spoke, the door opened, and her husband put his head in.

"Here's the doctor, Mary," he said, with a voice that shook, in spite of his efforts to keep it steady; and then he came in, followed by the doctor and Mrs. Granby.

The latter, by the doctor's orders, opened the window so as to let in a little softened light, and after a few cheerful words the doctor unfastened the bandage, and uncovered the long sightless eyes. Willie was resting in his mother's arms with his head back against her shoulder, and she knew that he had turned it so that her face might be the first object his eyes rested on.

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It was done; and, with a little glad cry, the boy threw up his arms about his mother's neck.

"What is it, Willie?" asked his father, scarcely daring to trust his voice to speak.

"I saw it! I saw it!" said the boy.

"Saw what, sonny?" asked his father, wishing to be sure that the child could really distinguish objects.

"I saw mother's face, her dear, dear face; and I see you, too, father. Oh, God is so good! I will be such a good boy all my life. Oh, will I never have to fret to see mother's face again?"

"Ahem!" said the doctor, turning to a table and beginning to measure some drops into a glass, while Mrs. Granby stood crying for joy at the other end of the room. "If you're not to, you must keep more quiet than this, my boy; it will not do for you to grow excited. Here, take this."

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"Who's that?" asked Willie, as the strange face met his gaze.

"Ho, ho!" said the doctor. "Are you going to lose your ears now you have found your eyes? I thought you knew all our voices, my fine fellow."

"Oh, yes," said Willie, "I know now; it's the doctor. Doctor, was I just as patient as you wanted me to be?"

"First-rate," answered the doctor; "but you must have a little more patience yet. I'll leave the bandage off, but we will not have quite so much light just now, Mrs. Granby."

Willie begged for one look at Auntie Granby, and then Jennie was called, that he might have a peep at her, after which he was content to take the medicine and lie down, still holding his mother's hand, and now and then putting up his fingers with a wistful smile to touch the dearly loved face he could still see bending over him in the dim light.

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That evening the policeman went up to Mr. Bradford's. He was asked to walk into the parlor, where sat Mr. Bradford and Aunt Patty, while old nurse was just taking Maggie and Bessie off to bed.

"Oh, here is our policeman!" said Bessie; and she ran up to him, holding out her hand. "How is your Willie?"

"That's just what I came to tell you, dear. I made bold to step up and let you know about Willie, sir," he said, turning to Mr. Bradford.

"And what is the news?" asked the gentleman.

"The best, sir. The Lord has crowned all his mercies to us by giving us back our boy's sight."

"And has Willie seen his mother's face?" asked Bessie, eagerly.

"Yes, that he has. He took care that should be the first thing his eyes opened on; and it just seems as if he could not get his full of looking at it. He always was a mother boy, my Willie, but more than ever so since his blindness."

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"How is he?" asked Mr. Bradford.

"Doing nicely, sir. Rather weakish yet; but when he can bear the light, and get out into the fresh air, it will do him good; and I hope he'll come round after a spell, now that his mind is at ease, and he's had a sight of that he'd set his heart on, even if we can't just follow out the doctor's orders."

Bessie felt as if she could keep her secret no longer. "May I, papa,—may I?" she asked.

Papa understood her, and nodded assent.

"But you *can* follow the doctor's orders," said she, turning again to the policeman, "and Willie can have all the fresh air he needs,—fresh mountain air, he and his mother. And Maggie and I are to pay it out of the money that Uncle Ruthven gave us for the eye doctor whom the"—here Bessie looked half doubtfully towards Aunt Patty—"the old lady paid. And now, you see, it's a great deal nicer, 'cause if she hadn't, then, maybe, Willie couldn't go to the country."

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Bessie talked so fast that Richards did not understand at first, and her father had to explain. The man was quite overcome.

"It's too much, sir, it's too much," he said, in a husky voice, twisting his cap round and round in his hands. "It was the last thing was wanting, and I feel as if I had nothing to say. There ain't no words to tell what I feel. I can only say may the Lord bless you and yours, and grant you all your desires in such measure as he has done to me."

Mr. Bradford then told what arrangements had been made, in order to give Richards time to recover himself. The policeman thought all these delightful, and said he knew his wife and boy would feel that they could never be thankful and happy enough.

"And to think that all this has come out of that little one being brought up to the station that day, sir; it's past belief almost," he said.

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"So good has been brought out of evil," said Mr. Bradford.

As soon as the policeman had gone, Maggie and Bessie ran up-stairs to tell their mother the good news, leaving papa and Aunt Patty alone together. Mr. Bradford then turned to the old lady, and laying his hand gently on her shoulder, said,—

"Aunt Patty, you have laid up your treasure where moth and rust do not corrupt; but surely it is bearing interest on earth."

"How? Why? What do you mean, Henry?" said Mrs. Lawrence, with a little start.

"Come, confess, Aunt Patty," he said; "acknowledge that it is to you this good fellow who has just left us owes his freedom from debt, his child's eyesight, his release from cares which were almost too much even for his hopeful spirit; acknowledge that you have generously sacrificed a long-cherished desire, given up the fruits of much saving and self-denial, to make those happy in whom you could have had no interest save as creatures and children of one common Father. We all know it. The policeman's children recognized you, and told my little ones. Why will you not openly share with us the pleasure we must all feel at the blind boy's restoration to sight? Did you not see dear Bessie's wistful look at you as she bade you good-night? These little ones cannot understand why there should be any reason to hide such kindness as you have shown to these people, or why you should refuse to show an interest you really feel. It is true that we are told not to let our left hand, know that which is done by our right hand; but are we not also commanded

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so to let our light shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven? And can we do so, or truly show our love to him, if we hide the services rendered for his sake behind a mask of coldness and reserve? My dear aunt, for his sake, for your own, for the sake of the affection and confidence which I wish my children to feel for you, and which I believe you wish to gain, let me satisfy them that it was really you who did this thing."

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The old lady hesitated for a moment longer, and then she broke down in a burst of humility and penitence such as Mr. Bradford had never expected to see from her. She told him how she had heard them all talking of the policeman and his troubles, and how much she had wished that she was able to help him; how she had thought that the desire to have the grove was only a fancy, right in itself perhaps, but not to be indulged if she could better spend the money for the good of others; and how, without taking much time to consider the matter, she had decided to give it up. Then she had half regretted it, but would not confess to herself or others that she did so, and so, feeling irritable and not at ease with herself, had been impatient and angry at the least thing which seemed to oppose her plans. The children, she said, had shamed her by their greater patience and submission under the disappointment she had so unintentionally brought upon them, and now she felt that the ill-temper she had shown had brought reproach on the Master whom she really wished to serve, and destroyed the little influence she had been able to gain with the children.

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Mr. Bradford told her he thought she was mistaken here, and if the children could only be quite certain that it was she who had proved such a good friend to the policeman's family, they would forget all else in their pleasure at her kindness and sympathy.

So Mrs. Lawrence told him to do as he thought best; and she found it was as he said; for when Maggie and Bessie came down in the morning, full of joy at the happiness which had come to Willie and his parents, they ran at once to Aunt Patty, and Bessie, putting her little arms about her neck, whispered,—

"Dear Aunt Patty, we're so much obliged to you about Willie, and if we had only known it was you, we wouldn't have felt so bad about it. Now we only feel glad, and don't you feel glad, too, when you know how happy they all are?"

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Then Maggie sidled up, and slipping her hand into Aunt Patty's, said,—

"Aunt Patty, please to forgive me for saying naughty things about you when I didn't know you was the queer old lady."

Aunt Patty was quite ready to exchange forgiveness; and for the two remaining days of her stay, it seemed as if her little nieces could not do enough to show how pleased and grateful they were; and when she left them, they could tell her with truth how glad they were that they were to see her soon again in her own home.

And if you are not tired of Maggie and Bessie, you may some time learn how they spent their summer among the mountains.

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#### FOOTNOTES:

[A] "Chapel Gems."

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