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STORY OF HOUSEHOLD LABOR AND LOVE ***

HESPER, THE HOME-SPIRIT.

A SIMPLE STORY
OF

HOUSEHOLD LABOR AND LOVE.

BY
ELIZABETH DOTEN.

“CHARITY NEVER FAILETH.”

BOSTON:
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PREFACE.



IN pursuance of one leading idea, has this little work been written:—that of giving to true merit its due. The world is ever ready to celebrate the achievements of its conquering heroes, who, according to the conceptions of mankind, are noble and great, but the patient, persevering heroism of those in humble life, who struggle hard and suffer long, is passed by unnoticed. Many such there are who bear their cross of suffering in silence, and go down to the grave with their hard fought battles and moral victories unhonored and unsung. God and his angels alone take cognizance of such, or it may be, some soul who has known a life experience, sends out a warmly gushing fount of sympathy, to cheer these lone wanderers upon their way. It is not the great and overwhelming sorrows of existence, but the petty, inglorious vexations of daily life, that most severely test the soul's energies. They who can meet such trials with patience and firmness, gradually obtain the mastery, not only over circumstances, but also over themselves and others. It is one of the eternal laws of God that thus it shall be, and sure it is in its fulfilment, as the promise of his word. One thing only is needful for a complete and glorious victory, and that is "the love that never faileth," "that seeketh not its own, but another's good." The working of especial wonders and miracles, the dazzling manifestations of genius, and the great intellectual attainments which cause the world to wonder and admire, belong only to the few, but the power to love is a gift for all, from the highest to the lowest, and the one thing needful is what all may obtain. Mankind, however, are not content with what is so common, but are continually gazing upward for some more glorious manifestation of the Holy Spirit, but not till the "Angels in the House" and "The Home Spirits" are fully known and appreciated, will the celestial beings unveil their lovely countenances and walk with man as of old. When human hearts have learned to live and love aright, then will "the kingdom come." By love alone shall the world become regenerate and redeemed. God speed the day then, when its reign shall be universal and all the nations of the earth shall acknowledge its sway!

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E. D.

Plymouth, December, 1858.

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“Grant me, O God, a high soft star to be
Calm, still, and bright, to trace my way in heaven,
And shed my light o’er life’s tempestuous sea,
While human hearts, like fragile barks are driven
‘Mid rocks and hidden shoals.
A soul ‘mid glorious souls—
A small, pure star within the glittering band
That high above the clouds, undimmed and grand,
In placid beauty rolls,
To herald on the weary to the land
Where all is rest and peace; to guide the way
To Heaven’s unclouded day!”

S. C. E. M.

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HESPER, THE HOME-SPIRIT.



CHAPTER I.

A WELCOME VISITOR.

IT was a cool, clear, autumn evening, and the full harvest-moon was pouring down a flood of mellow light upon the hills and vallies, when the worthy Mr. Byers emerged from the village post-office, and made his way as fast as his age and corpulence would permit, in the direction of "Locust Cottage." This was a small, low, red farmhouse, situated in a green nook of the hills, and at present, owned and occupied solely by an excellent quaker lady, widely known as Aunt Nyna. Mr. Byers was evidently in haste, but his progress though labored, was not rapid. His short, thick legs, did not allow of very extended strides, and he went puffing and blowing at every few steps, like a locomotive. The way was, however, in reality, long, and it was with no small satisfaction, after some fifteen or twenty minutes toilsome walk, that he saw a bright light glimmering through the branches of the locusts, from the cottage windows. Pausing one moment to take breath, before entering the green lane which led directly to the cottage, he drew a letter from his pocket, and scrutinized it closely in the moonlight.

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"That is certainly from over sea," he muttered to himself, "and just the one she wanted. Lord bless her! how glad she will be!"

Returning it to his pocket again with a smile of the greatest satisfaction, he continued on his way. Instead of entering the cottage at once, as might have been expected after such a hasty walk, he lingered a few moments without. Stealing cautiously beneath one of the low front windows, he drew aside the sweet-brier that shaded it, and looked into the room.

Aunt Nyna sat by her cheerful fire, reading from a large, old-fashioned book, which lay open on the stand before her. The house dog dozed in the chimney corner, the tea kettle was singing on the crane, and the little canary was fast asleep with his head beneath his wing. No sound broke the silence save the monotonous tick of the old clock, faithfully numbering the moments, which to one heart at least were full of blessing. Unconscious that any save the All-seeing Eye was upon her, the good lady read on, until the white muslin handkerchief folded so neatly on her bosom was stirred with emotion, and raising her spectacles upon her forehead, she wiped the tears from her eyes.

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"Shedding tears," muttered Mr. Byers. "Right fortunate is it that I'm not there, for it makes a complete simpleton of me to see a woman weep. May be though she is thinking about him, and wonders why he doesn't write. I declare it is a shame to keep her in suspense another moment," and he entered without further delay.

"Good evening, Mrs. Dorothy;" he said with a friendly familiarity.

"Good evening Mr. Byers. I am right glad to see thee, for it is a long time since I beheld the light of thy countenance. Where hast thee been so long?"

"O, all about in spots, and nowhere in particular," replied the old gentleman, as he took his seat in the capacious armchair which was placed for him, and removing his hat wiped the perspiration from his shining crown. "I just thought, Mrs. Dorothy, as it was so pleasant to-night, that I would call over and inquire if you had heard anything from Harry since he left? Let's see—its full three months now, I believe."

"Not one word as yet, Mr. Byers," replied the good lady sorrowfully, "and verily I had no right to expect it before now. I had surely hoped though that thee hadst brought me somewhat. Yet I see I must wait a little longer."

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"Yes, Mrs. Dorothy, *a little longer.*" There was a merry twinkle in the old man's eye as he spoke, and his hand moved nervously in his coat-pocket, but he looked up quickly at the row of crooked-necked squashes hanging along the wall, and at the bright pewter platters

upon the dresser, and composed himself. "I declare, Mrs. Dorothy," he continued, "how snug and comfortable you look here! I like to see a home that *is* a home, though I haven't lived in one for many a year. When my Hannah was alive I knew what true enjoyment was—but," he added, with solemn earnestness—"as the poet says, 'Now she's dead, and that's all over.'"

"Ah me," replied the good lady with a sigh, "what a difference it makes to the whole of life when one we love is taken from us! There's a shadow on everything ever afterwards. I remember when my poor dear husband died I felt—" Here she hesitated, and drew her handkerchief from the black silk bag which lay on the table.

"Mrs. Dorothy," said Mr. Byers, hastily, as he reached for his hat, "are you about to shed tears?"

"Nay, friend, nay," she replied, calmly, and wiping her nose leisurely, she returned the handkerchief to its place. "I was only about to say, that after Mr. Nyna died, I felt that although I would gladly have laid down in the grave with him, that I must live for Harry's sake, and so I lived."

"A very wise conclusion, Mrs. Dorothy, yet one that cannot be successfully carried out under all circumstances."

"Ay, verily, friend; one must needs die at some time. As I was saying, I have lived from that day to this, and I have done all in my power to train up that dear child in the way in which he should go."

"And I have no doubt but what he will 'go it,' Mrs. Dorothy," replied the old gentleman, with the merry twinkle in his eye again. "That is to say, I have no doubt he will continue in the way which you have pointed out to him."

"Verily, I am of that mind myself, Mr. Byers, for he is a good child, and it was no slight trial to part with him." Here her voice became choked.

"He was very helpful to me, and the only company I had." She stretched out her hand again for her handkerchief, and Mr. Byers made a simultaneous movement for his hat. Then, as if by mutual and silent understanding, they both withdrew their hands, and the good lady resumed her knitting.

"I only hope and pray," she continued, "that he may not fall into bad company and evil ways. Verily, it would be much better, Mr. Byers, to hear that he was dead."

"Very much, Mrs. Dorothy."

"But O! to think of such a dreadful thing as hearing of his death!" and there was an obvious tremor in her voice, highly suggestive of tears. She winked and swallowed hard, however, and continued—

"I read my Bible often, Mr. Byers, and—" Here she made a significant pause.

"Yes, yes," said the old gentleman nervously, as he seized the open volume from the stand; "I have no doubt you do. Let's see, where is it, and what is it about?" He drew his time-worn spectacle case from his pocket, and taking out the big, clumsily-bowed glasses, placed them upon his nose.

"It's what the Apostle says about charity, Mr. Byers, and I should think by the way it reads that it was a very good thing."

"Excellent! Excellent, Mrs. Dorothy, when taken in its right sense; for look you, my good woman—" Here Mr. Byers extended his right hand, with the fore finger up, and regarded his auditor over his spectacles with a look of profound wisdom—"it's *love* the apostle means—love of the first quality. A kind of love, Mrs. Dorothy, that won't give up, not break down, nor back out, however much it gets—gets snubbed—excuse the word—or pestered, or imposed upon; but like gutta percha, can be crowded into a very small space, or drawn out to any extent without snapping asunder. It's the very cream of life, Mrs. Dorothy, mingled in with honey and the otto of roses, and we should all be brute beasts without it."

"Yea, verily," responded the good lady, with great earnestness.

"And I can truly say, Mrs. Dorothy, that if these words were all that my Bible contained, I would not part with it for the wealth of the Indies; for is it not a comfort, in this crooked and cross-grained world, to find something that will not fail us? We can't all be Daniels or Isaiahs, or have the wisdom of Solomon or Paul, but the simplest one among us knows how to love. Prophecies shall fail, and knowledge vanish away, but charity *never* faileth. Mrs. Dorothy, I'll thank you for a glass of water." No sooner had the good lady arisen to comply with her visitor's request, than Mr. Byers drew the letter

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from his pocket, slipped it between the leaves of the Bible at his favorite chapter, and closing the volume, laid it upon the table.

"Thank you, Mrs. Dorothy. It is not often that I preach a sermon, but when I do, it is because the spirit moves me, as your people say, and this portion of Scripture in particular, always loosens my tongue and puts words into my mouth, whenever I am reminded of it. I would not like to intrude anything more upon your notice at present, but I do wish, my good woman, that after I am gone, you would look at the preceding chapter, and see what an excellent preface it forms to the Apostle's remarks on charity." Mrs. Dorothy reached immediately for the volume, but Mr. Byers laid his hand upon it.

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"Not now, if you please. The Apostle first goes on at some length to speak of the supernatural powers and miraculous gifts of the times, which caused the whole world to wonder, and exalted those who were thus favored, almost to the rank of gods. Yet, even while confessing that such things were by all means desirable, and to be sought after most diligently, he says, 'Covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet show I unto you *a more excellent way*.' Then he goes on at once to his unequalled discourse on charity—a simple thing in itself, which you, and I, and the smallest child among us can possess if we will, and which shall make us of more worth in the eyes of God and his angels, than all the professors and doctors, and wonder-workers, that the world ever knew. It is beautiful, Mrs. Dorothy! beautiful!" and the enthusiastic old man rubbed his hands together, with an expression of great inward satisfaction, as he rose to depart.

"I must go now," he continued, glancing at the clock, "for it is about eight, and I have several more calls to make. Doubtless you will hear from Harry before long, so don't be discouraged. Meanwhile, read your Bible and trust in the Lord, and above all things, don't forget to look this very night at the chapter which I mentioned. You will find something there worth thinking about, and excellent to sleep upon."

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"Yea, verily, I will, friend," replied the good lady, "and I thank thee much, also, for thy pleasant discourse, although my disappointment at not hearing from Harry has somewhat troubled and confused me."

"And what would you have done, Mrs. Dorothy, if, upon my entrance, I had taken a big letter at once from my pocket, directed in Harry's own hand, with a foreign post-mark upon it?"

"Done, Mr. Byers! I should have shed tears of gratitude and joy over it."

"Very likely; and this is exactly the reason why I should not like to be such a messenger. Good night, Mrs. Dorothy." After the door closed behind him, Mr. Byers did not proceed directly on his way. Once more he stopped beneath the window, and looked through the overshadowing vines into the room. He saw the good lady re-seat herself by the stand, open the sacred volume, and then heard her quick, joyful exclamation of surprise. It was quite enough for him. Smiling; and rubbing his hands with heartfelt satisfaction, he bent his steps down the lane, in search of some other place and opportunity for the exercise of his active benevolence and ready sympathies.

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CHAPTER II.

THE "LITTLE WIFE."

"COME hither, Bose," said Aunt Nyna, shortly after the departure of Mr. Byers, "I am minded to talk with thee."

The faithful old house dog, who lay dozing in the chimney corner, opened his eyes sleepily and drew a long breath. He rose up, and shaking his rough coat, came and sat down beside his mistress—rested his fore paws upon her knees, and gazed up into her face with a knowing, expectant look.

"I am mindful that thou art but a poor, dumb beast, without a soul," continued the good lady, "yet nevertheless, as I have no other friend in my loneliness, I would fain speak with thee. Dost thee remember Master Harry, Bose? and dost thee know, too, that here I have a letter from him—the first since he left us three months ago? Look at it, poor creature! It is brim-full of hope and affection, and there are even words of kindly remembrance for thee, which would make thy old heart leap for joy, could they be spoken in his own cheery tone."

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She held the closely written sheet before the face of her faithful companion, but he only winked at it with an unconcerned look, as any dog might be expected to do. Suddenly, however, he started up, wagging his tail, scented the letter keenly, and rubbed his head against it, with a quick, low cry.

"Lord bless his dear old heart," exclaimed the good lady, with a gush of tears. "He knows all about it. What wonderful gifts the good Lord has bestowed upon his dumb creatures! and she glanced up reverently, with clasped hands, in silent acknowledgment of the wisdom and goodness of the Creator. Again and again did she read over this welcome missive from the only remaining one of the little band which had once gathered around her. Then she placed it once more as a sacred keep-sake between the lids of the Bible, and folding her hands meekly, leaned back in her chair. Her face was turned towards the window, where she could see the clear moonlight falling upon the hills and corn-fields—the locust trees and vines which grew by the cottage waving in the wind, and far out beyond, the village church, with the little grave-yard about it, and the white stones gleaming in the moonlight. Then the faces of her loved and lost, whose mortal remains lay buried there, seemed to look kindly down upon her with the faces of angels, and as they faded away she sank into a deep and quiet slumber. As she sat thus, the door was gently opened, and a young girl entered—a fair, round-faced girl, with rosy cheeks and bright eyes. She wore a checked handkerchief tied over her head—a little brown sack—a short striped dress—blue stockings fitting very closely to her legs, and stout leather shoes. Bose raised his head quickly, but upon seeing who it was, he got up and wagged his tail as if she were an old acquaintance."

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"Good evening, aunty," said the girl in a cheerful tone.

"Bless me!" exclaimed the good lady, starting up—"Why Hesper! is it thou? Verily, I was almost, if not quite asleep. Come to the fire dear child and warm thee. I hope thou hast brought thy work, and will sit with me awhile."

"No, aunty," she replied, as she knelt down by the fire and rubbed her little ruddy hands together, "I have come to you in trouble, and must fly away home again as soon as possible."

"Trouble, Hesper?" repeated the good lady with a look of concern, "what is it?"

"Why, you see, aunty, just before dark, as father was at work in the mill, a large bar of iron fell upon his foot, and crushed it badly. He was so faint he could not stand, and Capt. Clark brought him home in his wagon."

"Dear! dear! that is a great pity! And didn't thou send for the doctor, Hesper?"

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"No; mother wished to, and so did I, but father would not listen to us. He said doctors always charged so much that it was like giving them the bread out of the children's mouths. Poor Mose has been hard at work all day, and now he must take father's place to-night."

"To-night! what for?"

"Why, yes; you know that Mose works days and father nights. Mose was just about leaving, when father hurt him, and as Mr. Brown, the overseer, said that he must have a man in his place, Mose was obliged to stay."

"Poor Mose! it is really too bad," said Aunt Nyna, sorrowfully. "He begins to stoop and look almost as old as his father. He has altogether too much hard labor for one so young. How old is he, Hesper?"

"He was seventeen last month."

"Only seventeen! poor soul! and he does as much work as any man, without fretting or finding fault either."

"No; he never says one complaining word, and is just as ready to lend me a helping hand about the house, when he comes home, as if he had done nothing at all. I wish he *did* talk more, for sometimes, when father complains and finds so much fault, and all the time Mose is so good and patient, I long to throw my arms about his neck and tell him how much I love him. But then we children are not used to doing such things, and I am afraid he would think me a very silly girl. So I do what is next best—I knit stockings for him, mend his old jacket as well as I can, and have his supper all nice and hot for him when he comes home."

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"Heaven help thee, Hesper!" piously ejaculated the old lady, "thou hast many trials, but thou may'st be sure while trying so hard to do well, that God will bless thee."

"He does bless me, aunty, for I have a thousand things to make me happy. But I mustn't stop to talk with you any longer. I only ran over to see if you could spare me a few of your green wormwood leaves to bruise into a salve for father's foot, as mother says if he won't have a doctor, that is the best thing which can be done for him."

"Well, I suppose it is," said Aunt Nyna, "Though I verily fear he will repent it sorely if he does not have proper care in the first place." She took down her old shawl from the peg in the corner, and wrapping it about her, they went out into the little garden in the rear of the cottage. The moon shone so brightly they could easily find the bed of herbs, in the centre of which grew the great wormwood root.

"I had almost forgotten to tell thee, Hesper," said Aunt Nyna, as they were gathering the leaves, "that I have had a letter from Harry."

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"From Harry!" exclaimed the girl, in a tone of joyful surprise. She let go of the plant at once, and sitting down flat upon the ground, looked up to the good lady with an expression of eager expectation.

"Yea, darling! a letter from Harry, this very night; and he said—well he said so much that I scarce know what first to tell thee."

"Was he well and happy, aunty? and does he remember us all, and mean to come back so soon as he is able?"

"Yes; all that and more: but very particularly he says—'Tell my little wife,' just as he always called you Hesper—that I don't like the looks of the Chinese ladies at all, and that I think more of her every day I live. That I shall work hard to earn all the money I can, and when I come back shall take her—if she is willing—to be my little wife in reality."

Hesper laughed merrily—"that is just like Harry," she said. "But, aunty," she added in a graver tone, "father said, a short time ago, that he didn't like it at all that Harry should call me his little wife. He said it was only putting foolish notions into children's heads, which would get there soon enough without any assistance. Mother told him that she didn't see any particular harm in it, and I never shall forget how he looked, or what his words were when he answered." "'Susan,' said he, 'perhaps *you* think so, for every woman who has made a fool of herself, is perfectly willing that another should do so. Now-a-days, the boys and girls are brought up to think, that to get married is all they live for, and that if they can cheat one another into it, they are remarkably fortunate; but when a few years have passed by, and the cares of the world are fairly upon them, they will wish they were in their graves, with all that belong to them.' Mother looked very sad when he said this, and I saw her slyly wipe the tears from her eyes. It made me feel so sorrowful that I didn't know what to do, and so, when there was a good chance, I stole up into my chamber, and kneeling down I prayed with all my heart, that I might die before I was old enough to marry, or if I could

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live, that I might be kept from doing anything so wrong and foolish."

"Nay, my child," said the good woman, with much earnestness, "that is not right. I am sorry to say that thy father always looks on the dark side of life, but verily, there is a bright one also. It may be that he is right in thinking that the young people have very foolish notions about such things, now-a-days, but that is mostly the fault of their elders. Every sensible father and mother should tell their children, so soon as they are old enough to understand, of the great duties that life has in store for them—that they are growing up to be men and women—it may be, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and therefore they should keep their bodies pure, sound and healthy, and store their minds with useful knowledge, so they may be able to act faithfully and wisely in whatsoever situation they may be placed. Then there would not be so many mistaken marriages as there are now, and those who do marry, would be far happier. Yea, Hesper, I am not afraid to say to thee, young as thou art, that it is a solemn thing to become a wife, and God grant thou may'st never take that step, without thinking well about it in the first place."

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"No, aunty," replied Hesper, with a serious countenance and a decided shake of her head, "I never shall marry. I am sorry Harry ever called me his little wife, and you must write to him not to do so any longer, for I never shall be *his* wife or any one's? I only want to be a good woman, and stay at home and take care of father and mother."

"Well, child, thou hast indeed a thoughtful head, but thee knows little as yet of the world, and the experiences of life. I only pray that thy heart may ever keep in its child-like purity, and be preserved from the blight and mildew of misplaced affection."

Thus they went on talking, as they slowly gathered the leaves, without thinking how fast time flew, until they had obtained a sufficient quantity.

"Dear me, aunty," exclaimed Hesper, as she rose up to depart, "I am afraid I have quite spoiled one of your beautiful herbs, for I have trampled directly over it, and should not have thought it anything more than grass, had it not been for its strong and pleasant fragrance."

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"O, there is no harm done," said Aunt Nyna, "it is only my camomile root, which is not easily hurt, for, like a good Christian, the more it is trampled upon, the greater is the fragrance and the better it grows."

"Why, what a good-natured thing!" said Hesper, laughing. "I must carry some of the leaves home with me to put under my pillow. Then I may dream of it, and perhaps grow just like it."

As they passed along through the garden, aunt Nyna gathered some fine, ripe peaches, and gave them to Hesper for her mother. "How is thy mother to-night?" she asked.

"O, she doesn't seem to get any better, and sometimes I think," continued the girl sorrowfully, "that she never will."

"Aye, well, it isn't best to be discouraged," said aunt Nyna, cheerfully, though at the same time she felt that the poor girl had great reason to be so.

The fact was, that Hesper's mother had been ill for a long time, and during the last six months, had been confined entirely to her bed. Hesper was only fifteen years of age, and quite small at that, but being the only daughter in a large and poor family, she had been obliged to think and care for others early. Until the past year she had attended school, and learned very fast, but now, the sickness of her mother made it necessary for her to remain at home. Her loving heart and cheerful disposition made her as quick to learn in one place as another, and she soon became quite an accomplished little house-keeper. All the neighbors wondered at her readiness and ability, and her aunt Betsey, who was very particular and hard to please, declared that Hesper would make a real nice woman, if she lived long enough.

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"I sometimes think," said Hesper, "that mother might get better if she didn't worry so much about poor little Johnny; but she lies there in bed, and watches him as he eats his bread and milk in the chimney corner, or sits with his playthings on the floor, and she sighs often, as she says—'Poor child! what would become of you if I should be taken away!' O, it makes my heart ache, and I feel as though I should cry."

"It is sad, very sad," said aunt Nyna.

"Mother says," continued Hesper, "that for many years she kept thinking he would come out bright at last, but there's no use hoping for that any longer. Although he is ten years old now, yet he cannot speak a single word, and is just as much pleased with his little playthings, as when he was an infant. Poor Johnny," she added, thoughtfully, "he is a simple child, but I know he loves me, and if mother should die, I would sooner beg from door to door, than see him suffer."

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As they were talking together, they passed out through the garden gate, and continued down the lane, till they came to the bridge over the brook. Here with many a word of affection and encouragement, they parted. Aunt Nyna returned to her cottage, and Hesper scampered up the winding road by the old wind-mill, in the direction of her home.

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CHAPTER III.

HESPER AND HER FATHER.

MR. GREYSON, the father of Hesper, sat in his high-backed chair, looking pale and very much distressed. His foot rested upon a pillow in the chair before him, and he groaned as if in great pain. The fire had gone out on the hearth, and the only light in the room was from a tall candle which flickered and flared, making great dancing shadows on the wall, and gleaming fitfully across the face of the sick woman who lay upon the bed. Simple Johnny, the poor child of whom we have spoken, sat in the chimney corner, sobbing and crying as though his heart would break.

"Hush, hush!" said his father impatiently; but the poor child vainly strove to suppress his grief. It was but for a moment, and then it burst forth afresh. One could not wonder much, however, when the cause was known. The little porringer of bread and milk which Hesper had given him just before she went out, by an unlucky slip was overturned upon the hearth, and Fido—a little black dog, with drooping ears and white feet—was lapping it up in greedy haste. This was indeed a serious misfortune. The supper of the children usually consisted of bread and milk, and as it was portioned out in equal shares, therefore what was lost could not be easily replaced. His supper, moreover, was one of the great events in this poor child's daily experience. His porringer of bread and milk, his wooden horse and tin soldiers, with now and then a run in the fields to gather flowers, made up his whole round of enjoyment. The loss of a richly freighted ship could not have more seriously affected a prosperous merchant, than did that overturned porringer of bread and milk to this poor, simple child.

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"Do hush, Johnny dear!" said his mother in a gentle tone, when she saw how much it worried her husband. But the child could not be pacified.

"Strange!" said his father impatiently, "that he couldn't have been taught to mind better. If he had been constantly under *my* eye for ten years, it would have been different." His wife sighed heavily as she sank down again upon her pillow, but made no reply. Just then, in came Hesper, all out of breath with running.

"Well," said her father, "I hope you have stayed long enough. I wonder if you ever think of anybody but yourself when you are away."

Hesper did not reply. Her father did not like to be answered when he was impatient, and he was uncommonly so to-night.

"I have a nice parcel of leaves," she said pleasantly, as she unrolled her apron and displayed them.

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"Well, well," he replied, "put them down, and stop that child's crying as soon as possible, or send him to bed."

To Johnny, his father's last words, which he perfectly understood, were a most unwelcome sound, and he cried louder than ever.

"Poor fellow!" said Hesper, as she discovered the cause of his grief—"no wonder he cries. He has lost nearly all of his supper. How luckily things do happen sometimes," she thought to herself. "Here I have been so busy that I had quite forgotten my own supper; now Johnny shall share it, and right welcome." She poured the greater part of the milk out of her own bowl into the porringer, and as she gave it into his hand the glad smile which lit up the troubled countenance of the poor child, and shone through his tears, was worth more to her than victuals and drink. The next thing she did was to kindle a fire and prepare the salve. When it was ready she spread it upon a nice linen cloth, and laid it on the hearth, while she unbound her father's foot, for it had been bathed and wrapped up nicely, before. Her little sympathising heart was full of compassion for him the moment she beheld it. No wonder he groaned and was so impatient!

"May be," thought Hesper, "I should make a much more noisy complaint if it were myself." She handled it very carefully, but her father worried and fretted so, that her hands trembled violently, and she was afraid that she was hurting far more than helping him.

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"There," said he, when she had finished, "I'm glad you are done. I don't believe it will do one bit of good."

Hesper was quite disheartened, but she said nothing. She moved

the little pine table up to the fire, placed the candle upon it, and sat down to her work. She was making a shirt, of stout, coarse cloth, for Mose. It was the first time she had ever attempted to make one, and she was doing it now by her mother's direction. It was nearly finished, and her fingers flew very fast, for she thought that when her aunt Betsey came in next morning—as no doubt she would—she would show it to her, and tell her she had made it all herself. She was not afraid to do so, for she knew that she had taken pains enough to please even aunt Betsey.

Mr. Greyson sat very still, with his head laid back in his chair, and his eyes almost closed. Hesper supposed he was asleep, but he was not. He was watching her and thinking very earnestly about her. So much had his mind been occupied by work and family cares of late, that he had scarce bestowed a thought upon her. Now, when he saw how small she was, and then remembered how much she did every day, he wondered that it was possible. Then, too, she looked so cheerful and good-natured, with her hair parted so smoothly on her forehead, and her face bent down to her work, all glowing with pleasant thoughts. His heart was drawn towards her, and he began to be sorry for the impatient words he had spoken. Then he observed, also, her little, short, faded frock, and he wondered how long she had worn, and where she had obtained it. Certainly he had not bought her a dress for more than a year, and where she had obtained that one was a mystery. He did not know that she had often sat up late at night to patch and mend it, and that when, at last, the waist and sleeves had given out entirely, she was obliged to put on her little brown sack and wear it constantly, to cover all deficiencies. His own trials had seemed so great that he had little sympathy to spare for his children. This poor girl, therefore, had been obliged to bear her own little cross of self-denial in silence, while the saddening influences of her father's gloomy disposition, cast a continual shadow across her sunshine.

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She had not the slightest idea at present, however, that he was observing her; for while her fingers flew so swiftly, her mind was busy with plans for the future. At precisely half-past nine the shirt was completed, and as she held it up, she viewed it with the greatest satisfaction. Had it been the most exquisite piece of embroidery, it could not have afforded her a more heartfelt pleasure. She folded it up neatly, and then turned her attention to Johnny. The happy little fellow had eaten every drop of his bread and milk, and then fallen asleep. His head rested wearily against the wall, and just then there was such a beautiful and peaceful expression to his countenance, that Hesper felt unwilling to disturb him.

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"May be," she thought, "he is dreaming of the angels, and what a pity it will be for me to bring him back from their blessed company." She lightly raised the golden ringlets from his round, fair cheeks, and regarded him with a look of intense interest. To this thoughtful girl there had always been an unfathomable mystery in the silence which brooded over the soul of her unfortunate brother. She felt, without understanding, that there was something, away down in the depths of his being, quietly waiting its own due time for utterance, and until that time came, he must remain a simple, inexperienced child. At times, a strange feeling of wonder and religious awe would come over her, as she regarded him, for an almost angelic expression would sweep across his countenance, and in his large, blue eyes, there would be such a deep and tender light, that it almost made her weep. She looked upon him as something holy, and in return, the child attached himself to her with an affection which knew no change or diminution. To-night he had sat up unusually late for him, and now his slumber was so deep and quiet, that she found it very difficult to arouse him. He did not resist her, however, as she raised him up tenderly and undressed him; for he was so heavy with sleep he could scarce stand, and really did not know when Hesper tucked up his bed and gave him a good-night kiss. The poor girl herself was very tired, but she had one more duty to perform, which to her was always pleasant. She drew up the little table, and taking a book from the drawer, seated herself upon the side of her mother's bed.

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"Read quite low," said her mother, "so as not to disturb your father." They both thought he was asleep, but he heard every word they said. Hesper read on very slowly and thoughtfully, till she came to the words, "Charity never faileth." Aunt Nyna had spoken to her of this particular chapter while they were together in the garden,

and therefore she had selected it.

"Mother," she said, as she laid down the book, "I think love *does* fail, sometimes, for I have tried very hard to love and please father, but he never likes anything that I do." Her mother sighed deeply, and the tears came into her eyes, as she looked up in the face of the good child.

"It don't mean *that*, Hesper. Love often fails in what it attempts. But it *does* mean, that under all difficulties or discouragements, true love never fails or grows weary, but remains the same forever and ever. It is just like God himself."

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"Then," said Hesper, as she glanced towards her father, "I will not mind it much if he doesn't love me, for it will make me very happy if in one little thing I can be like God."

"Your father wasn't always so, Hesper," said her mother, as the tears streamed down her pale cheeks. She turned her face over into her pillow, and while Hesper was finishing the chapter, she thought of the first years of their wedded life. Then her husband was strong and healthy, and they had a little cottage of their own, with hollyhocks blooming by the door, and roses at the window. Next came long years of suffering and sorrow, when both were broken down in health and spirits, and they had not bread enough to fill the little hungry mouths that cried out for it. No wonder he became gloomy and sad, and said at times that his children would be better off in their graves. It was no uncommon thing. Thousands of poor men had felt just so before him. Only the brave heart of a Christian can bear poverty cheerfully.

Hesper had finished reading some time, and sat waiting for her mother to speak, but as she did not, she supposed she was asleep. "Good night, mother," she whispered, for it was a comfort to the tender-hearted child to speak the words, even though they were not heard. Her mother raised her head.

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"Good night," she replied, and putting her arms about Hesper's neck, she kissed her.

Mr. Greyson turned away his face quickly, for he was heart-stricken at what he had heard, and he could not bear to see their mutual love. The next moment Hesper passed him on her way to her chamber, and he longed to call her back and speak kindly, but something, he knew not what, restrained him.

It was not till the poor girl sank down upon her pillow, that she was conscious of being very weary. Her head ached with thinking, and her limbs with long continued action; but it was a sweet consolation to know that she had done all her duty. The moon shone in at the little window near the foot of her bed, and as she looked out, she could see the top of "Cottage Hill" covered with neat white houses and finely cultivated gardens. Beyond this was the "Rolling Mill," where her father and Mose worked. The noise of the machinery could be heard at a great distance, and day and night the red flames were pouring constantly from the tops of the tall chimnies. As Hesper was watching this, a thought came to her suddenly. "Why!" she exclaimed, as she started to her feet in an instant—"Poor Mose hasn't had a morsel of supper!" In a few moments she was dressed and went softly down stairs. Her father still sat in his great chair with his eyes closed, but even then he was not asleep. She stole very gently into the pantry, and wrapped up some broad slices of bread and meat which were left from her father's supper. Then she warmed some tea and poured into it the last drop of milk from her own bowl, of which, as yet, she had not tasted. When all was ready she wrapped her mother's great shawl about her, and carefully unbolted the door.

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"Hesper," said her father, "where are you going?"

She was very sorry he had heard her, for she feared he would not allow her to go out so late at night.

"Only to carry Mose some supper, if you please, sir," she said very meekly. "Poor Mose! I am afraid he will faint before morning, if he does not have some."

"That is right; you are a good girl, Hesper," he said in a pleasant tone.

O, how those few, gently spoken words made her heart throb, and with what joyful tears in her eyes did she spring from the doorstep! Never had she known him to speak so kindly before, and her whole affectionate nature was drawn towards him in a moment.

MOSE.

HESPER was quite at a loss what to do, when she came to the great door of the Rolling Mill. The dress of the workmen—the red light shining on their faces—the dazzling brightness from the furnaces, and the deep, gloomy blackness of the more remote parts of the building, all appeared so wild and strange, that she dared not enter. Every few moments the doors of the furnaces would be raised, and a large, glowing mass of red hot iron taken out, which was drawn quickly between rollers of various sizes. Great showers of sparks flew in all directions, and the voices of the workmen had a strange, unnatural sound as they shouted to one another amid the roar and din of the ponderous machinery. Hesper quite despaired of ever finding Mose amid all this confusion, and she longed to see some one of whom she could inquire.

“What’s that, over in the corner yonder?” said one of the workmen to another, pointing towards Hesper.

“Well,” said his companion, after a moment’s pause, “I am not quite certain, but if it wasn’t so late, I should take it to be a little girl.”

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“Some stray child, I suppose,” said the first—“I’ll go speak to her.”

“Do you wish for anything, my little maid?” he asked kindly.

“Please, sir,” said Hesper, curtsying, “can you tell me where my brother, Moses Greyson is?”

“I will see,” he replied, and he went to Mr. Brown, the overseer.

“Follow me, my little lady,” said Mr. Brown, “and I will point him out to you. The poor fellow was pretty well tired, and I told him he had better rest awhile.”

They went out of the mill, and passed along the borders of the stream, by which the machinery was turned.

“There he is, yonder,” said Mr. Brown, and as Hesper looked in the direction in which he pointed, she saw Mose sitting upon a log near the mill-dam. She thanked Mr. Brown as he left her, and then stole up softly behind her brother. He had an old coat thrown over his shoulders—his elbows rested upon his knees, and his face was covered with his hands.

“Poor fellow,” thought Hesper, “how tired and hungry he must be!” She gathered up her great shawl, and then clasped her arm closely about his neck.

“What are you thinking about, Mose?” she said cheerfully, as she laid her warm cheek against his.

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“Why Hesper!” he exclaimed, in perfect astonishment, “in the name of all that is wonderful how came you here.”

“To bring you some supper, Mose,” she replied, as she displayed her little tin pail, and roll of bread and meat.

“That is just like you,” said Mose. “You are the most thoughtful girl in the world.” There was such a choking sensation in his throat, he could not say another word. If he hadn’t been a great boy he would have cried outright. A few moments before, he was feeling perfectly wretched for he thought that everybody in the world had forgotten him. But even then, that dear, good girl, was trudging all alone over the hills, to bring him some supper, and now was sitting upon the log beside him, with her sweet little face close to his. “Who wouldn’t love such a sister,” he thought, and he longed to say so, but just then he dared not trust his voice to speak.

“Do eat it now,” said Hesper, “and drink the tea while it is hot, it will do you so much good.”

He did not wait for a second invitation, but ate and drank with a good relish, for he was faint with hunger.

“There,” he said, as he swallowed the last morsel, “that has done my very heart good, and I cannot tell you how much better I feel than I did ten minutes ago. I am glad you came just as you did, Hesper, for I was thinking that if I should jump into the stream here, all my troubles would soon be over, and I should rest forever.”

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“O Mose! Mose! what a dreadful thing!” exclaimed Hesper.

“Well,” he said, laughing, “I didn’t really mean to. I was only thinking about it. But I don’t feel so now. I want to talk to you,

Hesper, now that I have the chance—I long to lay open my whole heart to you, but I am afraid you will think me very selfish if I do.”

“No, no Mose,” said Hesper, “I can never think that of you, for when I have seen *you* so good and patient, it has given *me* greater courage to persevere. You seem nearer to me, Mose, than any of the others, because you and I have a great many hard things to bear. But aunt Nyna tells me that if we are patient, we shall be all the stronger and better for it when we grow older, and I believe it, for she has met with a great many sorrows in life, and yet there is no one more cheerful.”

“Well,” said Mose proudly, “if a little girl like you has so much courage, I am sure I ought to, but when I see the advantages that other boys possess I can’t help longing for something better. I want to *know* more—I want to see more of the world, and I want to earn money enough to make us all comfortable, for it is killing me to drudge along so day after day, merely to get food and clothing, and not have one moment for thought or enjoyment. Hesper, it is too hard, though I never said so before.”

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“I wish I knew what you *could* do,” said Hesper, sorrowfully. He drew an old book from his pocket. It looked very much worn and tumbled. The covers were loose, and the leaves soiled and torn down at the corners. It was the old Geography he had formerly studied in school.

“Look here,” he continued, “every moment of my leisure time I have spent over this old book, until I can repeat almost the whole of it. Now, Hesper, if I could only go to sea, I could do all I wish. I long to be away on the broad ocean, where I can grow strong and healthy. I think of it all day and dream of it at night. Sometimes, when I have done work, I have gone away by myself far along the beach, where the waves came rolling in from the open sea. There I have seen the great merchant ships pass by with their sails all set, and their flags streaming in the breeze. I have watched them till they have been lost, quite lost in the distance, and then, as I have thought of the different ports to which they were bound, of the wonderful cities and strange people they visited, I have indulged in so many useless longings, that sometimes I have wept like a child. O, Hesper! if it were only possible!” Hesper was astonished, for she had never heard Mose say so much before. But he had quite taken her heart into his own, and now she felt there was nothing in the world so desirable as that Mose should go to sea. She did not once think of the sad loss it would be to the family, or of her own loneliness. It was enough that he *wanted* to go, and she felt that he *must*.

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“I believe it *is* possible,” she said with the utmost confidence, though she was sure she couldn’t tell why. Mose shook his head sorrowfully—“I don’t see how, said he—father is not strong as he used to be—mother is sick, and Fred and Charlie are too young to do anything useful. I feel that I *must* stay at home, though I should die at my post. Besides, there is no one to help me.”

Hesper was silent, but her heart was full of sympathy. She glanced down at the foam-covered stream as it fell over the dam and dashed boldly over every obstacle. Then she raised her eyes to the cloudless heavens, where the stars were shining brightly and the full moon looked kindly down upon her.

“*God* will help us,” she said earnestly. Mose looked steadily in her face, and then as he, too, glanced upward, the same feeling of hopefulness and child-like confidence in the fatherly care of God came over him.

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“Yes, God will help us,” he responded, “and we will trust in Him.”

That was enough—their hearts were at rest. Had they been older, the doubts and skepticism which often come with riper years, might have intervened to dim the brightness of their cheerful faith; but as it was, their child-like hearts leaned with unwavering confidence upon this great staff of hope, in the full assurance that it would not fail them.

“Good night,” whispered Hesper, as she held up her cheek for a parting kiss.

“Good night,” replied Mose, as he gave it, and the next moment she was gone.

THE GREYSONS AND GRIMSBYS.

THE Greysons lived in a long, low, double house, situated near the seashore, with nothing around it to render it attractive or agreeable. The other part was occupied by a family named Grimsby. The father was in California, and the mother went out washing. She was exceedingly sensitive on this point, however, and was so much afraid the neighbors would think less of her on account of it, that she never missed an opportunity of telling them they were no better than herself—that every cent she had, she earned honestly, and that was what everybody couldn't say. Some were foolish enough to reply, but they usually suffered for it, as Mrs. Grimsby's tongue was the terror of the whole neighborhood. She was quite sure, she said, that the time would come when she should be able to look down on those who despised her now, and make them feel it an honor to have their children associate with hers.

Juliana, the oldest of the family, was a great, slovenly girl—idle and disagreeable. Her long, black hair, of which she had a great profusion, was always in a heap, her dress torn and dirty, her stockings out at the heels, and to finish her appearance, she wore a pair of her mother's shoes which were much too large for her. It was very easy to tell at what time Juliana arose in the morning, for the great shoes could be heard clattering down the stairs and shuffling through the entry. Then too, the quarrelling was louder, the baby cried oftener, and Mrs. Grimsby scolded at the top of her voice.

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There were also two boys in this family, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, who were a little older than Fred and Charlie Greyson. Their mother said they would prove themselves worthy of their name, for two such boys couldn't be found anywhere, and in this last particular the neighbors perfectly agreed with her. As there was no public school within several miles, Hesper's two brothers were obliged to remain at home, and as might have been expected of two little fellows, six and eight years of age, having nothing particular to do, they were very restless and uneasy. Their father had no time to attend to them, their mother was sick, and Hesper was always so busy that it was quite impossible for her either to amuse or instruct them. Accordingly they spent the greater part of their time in the back-yard where they kept a pair of beautiful white rabbits, which they had named Billy and Bunny. There was also a pigstye on their side of the yard, and in it a pig, so small and black that the children called him Coaly, and made quite a pet of him. Coaly was a knowing pig, and even Mose and Hesper liked occasionally to make him a visit.

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The opposite side of the yard belonged to the Grimsbys. George kept ducks and Benny had a goat. There was but little grass for the poor creature to subsist upon, for the yard was small, and at all seasons there was always a large pile of wood or chips lying there, besides which, the boys had scooped out a broad, deep hole, to make a duck pond. Mrs. Grimsby threw all her slops and broken victuals into the yard, and when she washed at home she hung her clothes there. This was always sure to end in a great quarrel with the boys, who complained that she never minded where she went, but upset everything and spoiled all they did, just as though nobody had a right there but herself.

Directly across the middle of the yard, forming a line of division between the two families, was planted a double row of sun-flowers, which had grown up very tall and close. This had been done by the young Grimsbys who were extremely jealous of the Greysons, and had often accused them of stealing. Even their mother had thrown out broad hints at times, to Hesper, about missing her wood and chips, which almost broke the poor girl's heart, and roused her father's indignation to the highest pitch. It so happened at one time, that she came in to make a complaint when Mr. Greyson was at home. She had scarcely commenced however, when to the great terror of the children, their father rose up, and with a look and tone that could not be mistaken, he commanded her to take herself out of his premises directly, or he would assist her in a way that might not be very pleasing. Mrs. Grimsby did not wait to finish her sentence, but beat a hasty retreat, and never ventured in again unless fully assured of the enemy's absence.

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The yard, however, was the great scene of action. Notwithstanding all Hesper's persuasions and entreaties, Fred and Charlie would resent every injury, and sometimes provoke assaults. In fact the Greysons and Grimsbys were continually at war. Fred was a high-spirited boy, and it was entirely useless for Hesper to reason with him.

"You wouldn't talk so about it, if it was yourself," he would answer. "If they let out our rabbits, we will untie their goat, and if they worry Coaly we will let off their duck pond."

Through that palisade of sun-flower stalks many a word of defiance was spoken which received an oyster shell for a reply, and many a challenge was given which ended in a desperate conflict. The Grimsbys being the oldest, were usually triumphant, and the Greysons would come off with scratched faces and bloody noses. When Hesper wept and their sick mother rose from her pillow to entreat and reason with them, as she only knew how to do, they would promise that they would try to do better; but at the next outbreak Fred's excuse would be, "mother, I did try, but I couldn't help it."

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This was the greatest trial of Hesper's life. She would send them into the yard to get them out of the way, and would often have to bring them back again, to keep them out of trouble. At last she appealed to her father.

"Let them fight their own battles," he said. "If our boys get beaten it will teach them a good lesson, but if they beat the Grimsbys, they will keep on their own premises."

What could she do? her heart ached and her tears flowed freely, but she said no more. Poor children! they little thought how cruel it was to grieve so good a sister.

There was one other member of the Grimsby family, towards whom Hesper's whole heart went out in one great flood of affection. This was little Tommy—an infant not a year old. There was something in his little innocent face and soft dark eyes, which appealed to her warmest sympathies. He was a neglected child, and therefore was often troublesome. His mother, with her daily employment, could not attend to him, and Juliana would not. Before his mother came home from work, he would get tired and hungry, and would scream with all his might. Juliana, by scolding, and shaking, and by various other unreasonable methods, endeavored to still him, but finding it useless, she would tumble him into his cradle or lay him down in the entry and run away up stairs. She well knew that if she did this Hesper would take care of him, for she never could bear to hear him cry. Little Johnny, too, was very fond of him, and they would play together for hours. It was very interesting to see how the poor simple child and the feeble infant loved one another.

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"They are very much alike," Mrs. Greyson would say, as she watched them. "One is an infant in mind, and the other in body. God help my poor boy! He will never know what it is to grow in knowledge and wisdom, till he is born unto a better life." There was one person, however, who did not agree with her in this, and that one was Mr. Byers. He lived in an old tenant house, not far from the Greysons, where he occupied two rooms by himself, and did his own house work. He supported himself by doing light work, in the way of gardening and other odd jobs, as people chose to employ him, and at night he wrote little facetious articles or short sermons for the daily papers, which were usually very acceptable. He had taken a great fancy to simple Johnny, for he said there was more in that child than people imagined, and if the poor innocent could only put his silent thoughts into words, he would say some things that would astonish the world. Often when he was at work in the fields, simple Johnny would come to visit him, holding a corn-basket over his head as a protection from the sun, for the singular child had taken a great dislike to wearing a hat. Mr. Byers would help him through the fence with his basket, and provide him a seat on some old log or a large stone. Then he would go about his work again, while the child watched his progress with silent interest. Now and then the good old man would stop to gather a few berries or wild flowers for his little friend, or sing him a merry old song, with which the child seemed to be particularly delighted.

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Mr. Byers was very fond of children generally, and nothing delighted him more than, after his day's work was over, to wander along the seashore with a whole troop of little ones around him,

joining in their sports, or telling them stories of such a marvellous and amusing character, that the children always listened with the deepest interest. At such times he usually carried Mrs. Grimsby's baby in his arms, for he took a particular fancy to infants, and truly speaking, if nature had gifted Mr. Byers with another pair of arms, he would certainly have borrowed another baby, for he held to the maxim, that "the more of a good thing the better." Simple Johnny clung to the skirt of his coat, and the rest of the company followed promiscuously, as they pleased.

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In his presence alone could the young Greysons and Grimsbys remain for any length of time, upon amicable terms, and if any disagreement did occur, which could not be settled by moral suasion, he had such a summary manner of seizing the offender by the convenient parts of his garments, and threatening him with a dip in the water, that they were very careful not to provoke his indignation. George Grimsby, however, being usually the largest boy of the party, had the audacity to question in his mind whether this threat would ever be put into execution. Accordingly, one night, he waxed so bold that in his play he threw Fred Greyson's cap into the water and tumbled Johnny into a mud-hole. Quick as thought Mr. Byers laid the baby upon a heap of sea weed, and seizing George by the collar, sprang upon a big rock near by, with wonderful agility. In he plunged him at once, and, to use familiar terms, he soused him up and down and swaddled him about like a big dish cloth. Then, standing him upon his feet, and giving him a smart shaking to start the circulation again, he ordered him off home in such a decided manner that George obeyed without a moment's hesitation. Mr. Byers was greatly exhausted with this performance, nevertheless he reflected upon it with great satisfaction. Out of this, however, grew a long continued feud between the worthy gentleman and Mrs. Grimsby, to which time alone was able to afford the least modification.

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CHAPTER VI.

AUNT BETSEY.

AUNT BETSEY was sister to Hesper's father. Her husband was comfortably situated, and they had no children. They lived in a large, old-fashioned house, where everything was convenient, and there was no one to trouble them. She was one of the most precise, prudent, pains-taking women in the world, and was also very peculiar. Every part of her house was as neat as possible, and she never allowed any one, not even her husband, to change the place of a single thing. On the floor of her sitting room was a handsome, home-made carpet, of aunt Betsey's own manufacture. The hearth rug, also, was her handiwork, and from its originality, is worthy of particular description. The pattern was a great yellow flower-pot, containing a huge bouquet on a dark ground. In the centre of the flowers was a monstrous white rose, and around it a profusion of leaves, buds and blossoms, among which might also be seen a bird, a butterfly, and a bunch of cherries. She was very proud of this, first, because she had planned and made it all herself; and second, because it had won a prize at an Industrial Exhibition, several years previous. [56]

In this room, directly across the wall overhead, was a great wooden beam, such as is often seen in old-fashioned houses. In this beam was inserted a stout iron hook, and upon this hook hung a large cage, containing several canaries. The reason why this cage was placed so high, was because aunt Betsey was also very fond of cats, and kept quite a number. She allowed them to sleep on her rug, to chase each other about the room and frolic over the tables and chairs just as they pleased; but when some of them came bounce into her work basket and upset everything, she would scold in good earnest. Besides her birds and cats she also kept a great many flowers, and her plants were the admiration of the whole village. On account of the leaves and dirt she kept them all in her kitchen. The windows were towards the south, and in the winter she kept a fire burning all night, lest they should freeze. Her flower-stand was constructed in the form of a pyramid, each shelf being filled with rare plants, while upon the very top was a splendid cactus in full bloom. People said that aunt Betsey had nothing to do but to make herself comfortable and happy, but she thought quite differently. What with her birds, cats, flowers and housework, she was always busy. All the time she could spare from these she devoted to fancy needle-work, which consisted of bead-bags and purses, needle-books and pin-cushions, lamp-mats and embroidery. She was also engaged upon a satin bed-quilt, which had occupied her at intervals for several years. It was made from bits of satin, cut into a diamond shape, not more than an inch across; these were basted upon paper, and then the edge of a sufficient number sewed together in the form of a star. There were stars of all colors, filled in between with others of black satin. Even to aunt Betsey this seemed an almost endless undertaking, but she was determined to persevere, for she was quite sure that when it was completed it would win the first prize at the Exhibition. [57]

One morning, as she sat by her open window, busily engaged in matching her stars together, she chanced to see aunt Nyna coming up the street, leading simple Johnny, who, as usual, carried Fido under his arm, while Bose followed behind.

"Good morning," she said, as they came near, "What's the news?"

"Good morning," replied aunt Nyna, "I have just been down to see thy brother, and find him much worse."

"Worse! why, what's the matter?"

"Why, two or three days since, he hurt his foot very badly, and I suppose he went out again too soon, for he has worried it into such a state that now he is quite sick." [58]

"Mercy me! Do tell!" said aunt Betsey. "Well they are always in trouble. Almost every day I drop in there, just by way of encouragement and to tell them how things ought to go, but of late I have been so busy with my bed-quilt I haven't had time for anything else. Well, I suppose that now I must go or they will think hard of me."

"So I would for poor Hesper's sake," said aunt Nyna. "She has

just as much as she can attend to, and it is hard work where there is so much to do and nothing to do with. I am taking Johnny home with me to keep him awhile, and if thou wouldst just take the other two boys a few days, it would be a great help to Hesper."

"Mercy me!" exclaimed aunt Betsey, raising her hands in astonishment, "I should as soon think of taking two wild Indians into my house—besides I should never get my bed-quilt done in the world."

"Well, and what if thee shouldn't? It would be of little consequence compared to helping the poor girl."

"Really!" replied aunt Betsey, very tartly, "I should like to know!" She commenced sewing again very diligently, without looking up or speaking another word, so aunt Nyna turned away.

"There, I am glad she's gone!" said aunt Betsey. "Somehow or other I never could bear that woman, with her theeing and thouing." She tried to settle down to her work and feel as quiet and comfortable as before, but her conscience troubled her sorely.

"Well, if I must, I must," she said at last, starting up. "I'll go and bring them home with me, and bear it like a martyr." She rolled up her bits of satin, drove all her cats out of the room, and then put on her bonnet and shawl.

"It won't do," she said, "to go into such a family empty-handed, though where their wants are so many, it seems almost entirely useless to give them anything."

She gathered together some broken victuals—tied up a bundle of old cast-off garments, and with this under her arm, she set out.

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CHAPTER VII.

A FAIR ATTEMPT.

"O FRED! Here comes aunt Betsey, with a great budget," said Charlie, who was looking out of the window. "Let's hide under the bed till she is gone. She never stays long;" and without another word under they went.

"What do you want to hide for?" asked Hesper.

"O, because we know she don't like us," and Fred drew his head back quickly, for she was just opening the door.

"Well-a-day, Hesper!" said aunt Betsey, with a doleful countenance, "I hear you are in trouble again, and I have come down to see what I can do for you. How is your father, this morning? I declare I never knew he had hurt him till just now. Where is he?"

"In there," said Hesper, pointing to the little bed-room where Mose and Johnny usually slept. "He has been restless all night, but he is asleep now."

"Well, then I won't disturb him, for I am so hurried with work that I can't stop a minute. I left everything in a heap and came down directly, when I heard of your trouble. I declare I am all out of breath with hurrying," and she threw herself into a chair by the bed.

"Well, Susan," she said to Hesper's mother, "I should think you would get all tired out with being sick so long, but I think Hesper looks almost as frail as you, and I shouldn't wonder at all if she should give out."

"I am afraid she will," said her mother, and she sighed deeply.

"O, no!" replied Hesper, cheerfully, "I haven't the least idea of it. I didn't sleep much last night, and am rather tired to-day, but I don't feel sick at all."

"Well," said aunt Betsey, "there's no use in undertaking too much, and I have really come down with the intention of doing something to help you."

Here she hesitated, for she really dreaded to make the proposition.

"You, Charlie;" whispered Fred—"if I should catch at her foot how she would jump."

The thought of aunt Betsey's surprise quite overcame Charlie, and in spite of his efforts he could not restrain a laugh.

"Mercy me!" exclaimed aunt Betsey. "What's that?" and she looked directly under the bed. Her expressions of wonder, and the angry manner in which she eyed them over her spectacles, was perfectly irresistible, and laughing with all their might, they crept out.

"Well, I declare!" said she, "you act as though you weren't half civilized, and I almost repent of my resolution. As I was just saying to Hesper, I came down to take you home with me, to spend a few days. It will be a great relief to your mother and sister, for I know you are bad boys, and are dreadfully troublesome."

The boys were sober in a moment. Fred looked at Charlie and Charlie at Fred, but neither of them spoke a word. Now that aunt Betsey had given the invitation, she was quite determined they should go.

"Well, what is the matter?" said she, "I don't want you to work for me. I only want you to behave yourselves, if you can, and I will do all I can to please you. You shall have some apples to roast, and if your Uncle Nathan is willing, I will give you one of his great pumpkins for a jack-o'lantern."

It was evident that she had touched the right chord, for the boys assented immediately. Hesper was much pleased, and began to prepare them as soon as possible. Soon all was ready, and they set out, with the parting injunction from Hesper, to be good boys.

It was so quiet and peaceful after they were gone, and Hesper's mind was so much relieved, that after making some gruel for her father's dinner, she sat down in the great rocking chair, and in a few moments was fast asleep. Poor Hesper was almost sick. Mose watched her from day to day, and when he saw her cheek grow pale, his heart failed him. He sat very often upon the old log by the mill-dam, but it was not to think over his own troubles. They were all forgotten in his care for Hesper, and knowing not what else to do,

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he prayed for her most earnestly.

CHAPTER VIII.

POOR SUCCESS.

AUNT BETSEY did not find the boys so much of a hindrance as she had expected. They sat very quietly by the fire, looking at the pictures in a book of Natural History, while she continued sewing upon her bed-quilt as before. She soon had occasion though, to stir up the fire, and as she did so, she spied a great muddy foot-mark directly across the white rose in the centre of her rug. "O dear!" she exclaimed, "did I ever see such dirty children?" She was just beginning to scold, when she checked herself, for she thought that she was most to blame, for not telling them to clean their feet well when they came in. Charlie said he was very sorry, and Fred proposed that they should go out and scrape their boots directly. Meanwhile Aunt Betsey took the rug into the kitchen, and after a little drying and brushing it looked as well as ever.

"Well," said she, "it isn't so bad after all, and if I don't meet with anything worse, I'll not complain."

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When she went back she found that the boys after they had cleaned their boots, had left them in the entry, which pleased her very much. She gave them some apples to roast, and then she concluded to go down to her husband's store of an errand.

"Be very careful," said she, as she went out, "and behave yourselves properly till I come back."

When the boys had roasted their apples, they set them aside to cool, and began to play with the cats.

"Fred," said Charlie, "shouldn't you think that Aunt Betsey would be afraid that her cats would eat the birds?"

"O no," said Fred, "for they hang so high they cannot get at them."

"But," continued Charlie, whose curiosity was always wide awake, "I wonder what the birds would do if they should see this old grey cat close to the cage?"

"Let's try;" said Fred. "I'll hold her tight," and the "next moment he was standing up in a chair, under the cage, with the cat in his arms.

"I can't reach," said he. So he got down and looked about for something higher. Now that he had undertaken, he was quite determined to see the result of the experiment. While Charlie looked out for Aunt Betsey, Fred rolled the dining table into the middle of the floor, placed a chair on top, and then climbed up again with the cat. Of course the birds fluttered about in a great fright, and as might have been expected, the cat sprang at them. In his struggle to hold the cat, Fred lost his footing. He grasped at the cage to save himself, but the hook gave way, and down they all came together. Charlie opened the door and rushed out into the entry, followed by all of the cats. At first he thought he would take his cap and start for home immediately, and then he concluded to go back and see what had become of Fred. There he sat among the ruins looking very much bewildered.

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"Are you hurt?" asked Charlie.

"No;" replied Fred, "but I expect I shall be, when Aunt Betsey comes."

He got up quickly, and with Charlie's assistance, they rolled the table into its place again.

"O dear! what shall we tell her?" said Charlie.

"Tell her the truth," replied Fred, and then they both stood still and looked at the cage. Some of the birds were clinging to the wires, panting for breath, and one poor little fellow had his head thrust out, and his legs hanging down, perfectly helpless. The cage was bent all out of shape, and the glass cups for the seed and water were dashed in pieces.

"I wish that little bird would take his head in," said Charlie. He put his finger gently against the bill to push it back, and the bird dropped motionless on the floor of the cage.

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"He is dead!" said Charlie, and both boys burst into tears. They could have borne Aunt Betsey's anger, they could have borne punishment, or anything that might have come because of this, without being deeply moved, but the sight of that little dead bird

was heart-rending.

"Do you suppose that God sees it?" said Charlie.

"Yes," replied Fred, "for it was only last night, Hesper told me that not a sparrow fell to the ground without His notice." And as this thought came home to them with full force, they were wholly overcome, and burst into loud lamentations.

"Mercy me!" said Aunt Betsey, as she opened the door, "what is the matter?" and then she stood still in astonishment. "How did this happen?" she asked.

Fred tried to summon moral courage enough to tell the whole truth, but his heart failed him.

"O dear!" he sobbed, "the cage fell down, and one of the birds is dead."

"How sorry I am;" said Aunt Betsey. And she looked more grieved than angry. "I am sure I thought the hook was strong enough." She took the cage, and was about placing it on the table, when she observed the seed and the water scattered all over the cloth.

"Why! how is this?" she asked, and then she minded Fred's jacket was in the same plight.

"I don't know how to understand it," she said—"did the cage fall upon you?"

"No," stammered Fred, "I fell on to the cage."

She shook her head and looked very serious. "It is plain," said she, "that there is something wrong about this, and now I want you to tell me the whole truth. I am sorry for the injury done my carpet—I am sorry for the loss of my bird, but don't tell a lie Fred, for that would be worse than all."

Fred took his old calico handkerchief from his pocket, and after he had wiped his eyes, he looked up to Aunt Betsey with an honest face, and told her the whole truth.

She did not speak, but she sat down and thought a long time. It seemed to her that she must send them home directly—that she could not have them in the house another minute. Then she thought of poor Hesper—of her sick father and mother, and the disappointment it would be to all.

"I will try to be patient a little longer," she said. She took up the cage and began to sweep the pieces of glass together.

"Don't you mean to do anything to me?" asked Fred. "I think I deserve it."

"No;" said aunt Betsey, looking very sober. She opened the cage, and taking out the dead bird, laid it in his hand—

"There," said she, "if that don't make you feel sorry, I don't know what will." Both of the boys burst into tears again, and cried so loud that aunt Betsey was right glad to pacify them. She put the dead bird out of sight, and told them they had best sit down by the fire, while she spread the table. They did as she desired, but they did not speak or stir from their chairs, and she knew by their deep sobs that their sorrow was unaffected. After dinner she asked them to wind some silk for her. They were glad to do anything she wished, and while Charlie held the skein, Fred wound it very carefully. When they had finished this, they asked her to let them do something else. She said she had a great basket of unshelled beans in the kitchen, and if they wished they might go out and shell them. She went with them, and after giving them some low seats, and a great basin to put the beans in, she went back to her work. For a long time she heard them chatting together and the beans dropping into the pan very fast. "I am glad," she thought, "that I did not send them home. They seem to be very good hearted boys, only a little mischievous." Then her thoughts became so much occupied with matching her pieces, that she forgot all about them.

Suddenly there came a terrible crash, and then a scream. She rushed into the kitchen as quickly as possible. There was her flower-stand completely overturned—the plants, pots and earth, scattered all about the floor, and Charlie lying in the midst. His nose was bleeding, and as he got up he was a most pitiful looking object. Fred stood by, pale with terror.

"He only went up the steps"—stammered Fred by way of explanation—"to smell of the flower on top, and it all broke down together."

Aunt Betsey gave way to her feelings in tears, for this was indeed a little more than she could bear.

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"There, now," said she, "that is enough. Get your caps and boots this minute, for I mean to take you straight home. I don't know what will be done with you for this, but you can't expect much mercy."

The boys obeyed in silence. They dreaded to go home, but they dared not say a word against it. As they went along, accompanied by aunt Betsey, Fred looked up to the hills and woods beyond, longing for a chance to slip away and hide; for, as aunt Betsey said, he didn't know what would be done with them, but she held their hands tightly and walked very fast, for she was much excited.

"There!" she exclaimed, as she threw open the door and made her appearance before Hesper, "I have brought them back. I would have kept them longer, but"—and she burst into tears—"they pulled down my cage and killed my bird, and broke my flower-stand all in pieces. I will sew for you—I will wash or bake, or do anything else to help you, but as to keeping these boys I can't. If I were in your place I would send them to the House of Correction directly." She waited for Hesper to reply, but she did not. The poor girl sat with her hands folded and her eyes fixed upon the floor. Her silent look of sorrow was more touching than words. Aunt Betsey could not bear it.

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"I will come again," said she, "when I feel better," and she went away. Tick, tick, tick, went the old clock in the corner, and that was the only sound to be heard. Fred wished that she would scold, or beat him, or do anything but sit and look so sorrowful. Simple Johnny, who had come in to get his basket of playthings to take to aunt Nyna's, knew that something unusual had happened. He looked from one to the other, and when he saw the tears rolling down Hesper's cheeks, he stole softly up to her. He put his arm around her neck and laid his head on her bosom.

"Dear Johnny," said Hesper, as she clasped him closely to her—"though you are a poor, simple child, yet you never make your sister's heart ache." That was enough. The silence was broken, and moved as by one impulse, both boys rushed towards her and hid their faces in her lap.

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"Don't cry, Hesper," sobbed Fred, "don't cry! and we will do all we can to help you. We do want to be good boys, but we don't know how." Hesper took their hands in her own, and looked steadily in their faces. She was very earnest, and her voice trembled, but she talked to them as only a loving and gentle hearted sister could. She told them, in simple words, of their father's and mother's sickness—of the weariness and hard labor of Mose, of the helplessness of little Johnny, of her own heavy trials, and then she told them very kindly, but so plainly they could not misunderstand, that now they were old enough to think of these things, and if they could not be of any assistance, they might, at least, try not to add to the trouble. Her words were fitly spoken, and they went down to the deep places of the children's hearts. She had appealed to reason and affection, when they expected nothing but punishment and reproof.

"I wish we could do something," said Charlie. His little childish face was the picture of anxious care, and his eyes were swollen with weeping. Poor children! for them it had been a day of hard, but salutary experience.

"I'll tell you!" exclaimed Fred, who was quick for a thought—"let's take the great basket and go down where Capt. Clark's ship is building, and ask him to give us some chips." Both boys made a rush for the basket at once.

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"Hush! hush!" whispered Hesper. That was enough; they checked themselves in an instant, and stole softly out of the house. That night, if aunt Betsey could have looked into the old shed, and seen the great pile of chips there, she would have been astonished. The ship-yard was a far better place than the House of Correction.

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CHAPTER IX.

HESPER'S NEW FROCK.

"HESPER," said Mose, one morning, just as he was going to his work—"how much does it take to make you a frock?"

"O, never mind," she replied, "I don't want a new one. But there is one thing I do want, Mose, and that is that you should get you a good warm coat for winter. You will feel the need of it bitterly, when you come out of the hot mill into the cold, north wind, or perhaps a driving snow-storm."

"I can't have a coat till you have a new frock," said Mose decidedly.

"Well then," said she, "I shall try to get one as soon as possible. Perhaps the fairies are weaving one now, and will bring it along the next time the moon fulls. We will wait and see."

It happened very strangely, that not long after this conversation, aunt Betsey came in. She was very sorry that she had not been able to help Hesper by keeping the boys, and now she was determined to make amends in some other way.

"Hesper," said she, "I have been thinking I would make you a new frock. I looked about the house and found an old black, bombazine dress, which will do very well to alter for you. I have come down now to take your measure, but I must be very quick, for I am still in a great hurry with my bed-quilt, and I wish to get the dress done to-night."

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Hesper thought she should not like a black bombazine dress, but she would not say so, lest she should wound aunt Betsey's feelings. So she let her take the measure as she desired.

Before night aunt Betsey made her appearance again, with the dress all finished. She helped Hesper put it on, and then viewed it with great satisfaction.

"There," said she, "it fits nicely. I'm glad I've done you some good at last, though I don't want to boast of it. You needn't try to be saving of it, but wear it just as much as you please,"—and then she went away, before Hesper had a chance to say how she liked it. The skirt of the dress was very scanty, and so long that it came almost to her feet. The waist was short, and the sleeves large, and it was made so high in the neck that she could scarce bend her head. It felt very uncomfortable, but Hesper tried not to think of it, though she found it very hard to do so, for when she sat down to her work, she had to turn her head this side and that, to keep it from choking her, and almost the first thing she did, was to step on the skirt and fall. It was a real vexation, but she thought that aunt Betsey had taken a great deal of pains, and therefore she ought to be very grateful.

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"Bless me! Hesper," said her father, as soon as he saw her—"is that you? Why you look like some of the strange, black shadows I see in my dreams."

"O! dear child!" said her mother, when she awoke, "you are all dressed in mourning. It makes me feel gloomy."

Mose expressed his disapprobation in very strong terms, and as for Fred and Charlie, they laughed with all their might at Hesper's strange appearance. Even simple Johnny pushed away the dress when it touched him, with a look of great dislike. She felt awkward and uneasy, and longed to slip on her old frock again, but she thought of aunt Betsey's kindness, and determined to persevere.

After Fred and Charlie had gone to bed that night, they began, in low whispers, to talk over matters and things. By making a few inquiries, they had found out the whole history of Hesper's new frock, and now they were considering the possibility of getting her another.

"How much money do you suppose we could get for our rabbits?" asked Charlie.

"O, not much," replied Fred. "They aren't good for anything but to eat."

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"To eat!" exclaimed Charlie, "I would not sell Billy and Bunny for people to eat, not for all the money in the world."

"And I don't want to," said Fred, "but that's the only thing we can do."

"Well," replied Charlie, as he drew a long breath, "then we will,

though I wish we could think of something else."

The next morning they went out bright and early to get their rabbits, resolved to make the sacrifice, but one was missing. They searched all about the yard, and peeped into every crack and corner, but it was nowhere to be found. Charlie cried, and Fred scolded.

"There," said he, "the Grimsby boys have stolen him, and I'll call them thieves every time I see them. If it wasn't for Hesper, I would tumble them both into the duck pond. I'll call them thieves though, anyhow."

"No, no," said Hesper, who stood close behind them. She had heard the crying and came out to see what it meant. "If you begin with hard names, you will soon come to blows. Leave it to me, and see if I can't get your rabbit again, without any trouble. Perhaps the Grimsby boys know nothing about it, and then you would have no reason whatever for calling them thieves."

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Fred was just beginning to argue the case, when Hesper said, "Now don't," in such a pleasant, persuasive way, that he gave it up and went off, but it was a great disappointment.

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CHAPTER X.

A GREAT SECRET.

THERE WAS no person in the whole village kinder, or more considerate to those in trouble, than Capt. Clark. He owned several large ships and part of the mill where Mose worked. He was formerly a sea-captain, but now he lived at home with his aged mother, for he had no family of his own. When he heard how much trouble Hesper had with her two brothers, he offered to employ them on his farm during the harvest.

One Saturday night, just as the full moon was rising above the hills, Fred and Charlie finished their day's work, and were about to return home. Capt. Clark called the boys into the great store room, and told them to fill their handkerchiefs with apples and corn.

"Now boys," said he, "you have worked well, and I am very much pleased. Here is a new silver dollar for each of you, and when you go home, tell Hesper that I say you have behaved like men." It seemed to the boys as though they could feel themselves grow taller that very minute. Their hearts really did expand, as they thought that they had been doing something useful, for which they were justly praised and rewarded. "I never felt so happy in all my life," said Fred, as they trudged along towards home, with their stout oaken sticks over their shoulders, to which they had attached their bundles.

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"Nor I, either," replied Charlie. "Only think, Fred? Two great silver dollars! What shall we do with them? We can buy a whole lot of ducks, and have a pond of our own."

"Yes," said Fred, "and some more rabbits."

"No!" exclaimed both boys at once, "Hesper's frock! O, now we can do it!"

"I don't know how we shall manage about buying it though," said Fred, "for I am sure I don't know how, and if we tell Hesper, she won't let us do anything about it."

"Can't we ask aunt Nyna?" suggested Charlie.

"Just the very one!" replied Fred, "and here we are, close by. Let's go in now"—and both boys started upon a run, up the lane that led to the cottage.

The good lady was very much surprised as she sat at her tea table, to see these two little fellows come marching in with their sticks and bundles.

"Whither now, my young travellers?" she said. "Have ye come to bid me good bye?"

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"No," replied Fred, "we've come on business."

"On business!" she repeated, with a comical look—"well what is it?" Fred laid the silver dollars on the table.

"There," said he, "Capt. Clark paid us those for our work. Now we want you to take them and buy Hesper a new dress—a real good one, and have it made in the very prettiest way."

"Heaven bless ye, darlings!" exclaimed the old lady. "How delighted Hesper will be! Yea, I will go down to the village as soon as possible, to purchase it, and if one of you will manage to bring me her old frock to-night, I will have the dress all finished on Monday."

"Well," said Fred, "we will run home directly, and as soon as we get a good chance, one of us will bring you the frock. Good night"—and away they started. When they came in sight of home, they observed George Grimsby standing at the front door, crying and making a great noise. As soon as Fred saw him he thought of the rabbit, and made up his mind to call him a thief. But he remembered what Hesper had said, and changed his purpose; besides, just then he felt too good natured.

"What's the matter, George?" he said, very kindly.

"None o'yer business!" returned George. "I've a right ter cry when I'm a mind ter, without everybody's askin' me what's ther matter."

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"So you have," said Fred, and he was just about giving him a poke with his stick, when he changed his mind again, and instead of doing so, drew two large apples from his bundle, and held them towards him. George stopped crying and stared at him with open mouth and eyes.

"Don't you want them?" asked Fred. He put out his hand slowly, still looking Fred in the face. Then he snatched the apples, and turning about, ran through the entry without speaking a word.

"There!" exclaimed Fred, indignantly, "did you ever see such actions! Now I am sorry I gave them to him. I mean to tell Hesper of that." Mose and Hesper both laughed well when Fred made his complaint.

"I can tell you what made him act so," said Hesper. "It was because he was ashamed of having answered you thus, and if I am not much mistaken, he will speak very pleasantly the next time he sees you." While they were talking the matter over, the door was opened a little way, and the lost rabbit hopped into the room. Then the door was quickly closed again.

"There!" said Hesper, "see what your apples have brought you already. How much better that was, than calling him a thief!"

After tea, when there was a good opportunity, Charlie stole up into Hesper's chamber, and threw her old frock out of the window. As had been previously agreed upon, Fred was below to receive it. Away he went with it to aunt Nyna's, and was back again before Hesper missed him. It was almost impossible, however, for the boys to keep from letting out the secret. They were constantly whispering together—sly hints were dropped, and finally they were obliged to tell their mother, lest it should prove too much for them. When Hesper missed her old frock and searched the whole house for it, Fred and Charlie had to run out into the yard to keep themselves quiet. Their mother told Hesper not to worry about it, for she had no doubt the frock would come back again. The poor girl couldn't think what it all meant. Monday morning, the boys stepped into aunt Nyna's to see how she got along, and they went in again at night, to tell her they had gone home, and now she could come.

"Why don't you eat your supper?" said Hesper, as they sat whispering over their bread and milk.

"O, we are only talking over a little business," replied Fred.

Their father was not yet able to work in the mill, but he had been engaged by Capt. Clark to keep his accounts. Now he sat by the fire writing, looking very pale and sober. Mose was there too, studying over his old geography, and their mother, who could sit up a little now and then, occupied the great rocking-chair in the corner. She well understood the feelings of the boys, and smiled often as they gave her expressive glances.

At last the door opened—both boys sprang to their feet—*aunt Nyna* made her appearance and unrolled the frock.

"Here, Hesper," said she, "is a nice, warm dress, which two good people sent you. I can't tell their names, but I hope you will find them out."

Hesper seemed very much surprised, and the boys dropped under the table. Their father looked up from his writing, and Mose laid down his book.

"There," he exclaimed, "didn't you say, Hesper, that when the moon full'd again, the fairies would send you a dress?"

"But, who are the fairies?" said Hesper.

Aunt Nyna pointed under the table. The boys could restrain themselves no longer. They rolled on the floor and laughed till they were tired. When they became quiet, in some measure, *aunt Nyna* told the whole story, though they kept crying out all the time for her to stop. Hesper's heart was too full to speak. She slipped away to her chamber, and when she had put on the dress, she went down again. It fitted so nicely and looked so pretty, they could scarce praise it enough. Fred and Charlie were perfectly satisfied with the way they had spent their money.

"Come here, my boys," said their father, "I want to say to you plainly, that I am proud of you, and whatever befalls me in life, I will always thank God that he has given me such good children."

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CHAPTER XI.

JULIANA.

THE story of the two silver dollars was soon known all about the village. Capt. Clark heard of it, and so did aunt Betsey, but she was careful not to say anything. She was so anxious, however, to see the new frock, that she made an excuse to call. She took one of her own flower-pots, containing a beautiful rose-bush in full bloom, and carrying it down, made Hesper a present of it.

Of course Hesper was delighted, for she was very fond of flowers, and when aunt Betsey saw how much real pleasure it gave her, she felt very kindly towards her, and said many things in praise of her good management.

Directly after aunt Betsey had left, the door was slowly opened, and Juliana Grimsby stole into the room. The poor girl acted very awkwardly, and Hesper thought she had never seen her look so ragged and dirty before. Her hair was all in a heap, and, as if conscious of her unattractive appearance, she did not raise her eyes from the floor when she spoke.

"I want something of you, Hesper," she said, "but I am almost afraid to ask you." [87]

"O fie," said Hesper, laughing, "don't be afraid. What is it?"

"Well, mother said if I would ask you for a bit of your dress, she would try to get me one like it. But I told her you wouldn't want me to have one from the same piece."

"Why not?" said Hesper. "It would be just the thing; for then we could see which would keep them whole and clean the longest."

"Nothing ever keeps whole or clean to our house," said Juliana, with a doleful look. "I've got tired living so, for my part. You can't think how much ashamed I feel when I peep into your room and see it looking so neat and orderly, while our house is nothing but dirt from one end to the other."

"Can't you get a chance to clear up a little, while Tommy is asleep," asked Hesper.

"Clear up!" repeated Juliana, "just look here!" and she threw open the door of the room, "Did you ever see such a sight?"

The breakfast table was standing in the middle of the floor, covered with dishes and broken victuals. The beds were unmade, and dirt, and grease, and cobwebs, met the eye wherever one looked. Old shoes, and chips, and oyster shells, were strewn about the floor, and the chairs were loaded with garments of every description.

"There," said Juliana, "isn't that enough to discourage anybody? Mother calls me a real do-nothing, and so do all the neighbors, but I won't try to be any better, for it's no use. If I could only run away from this house and live among decent people, I should be as neat as anybody, but now all I can do is, to take care of the baby, and quarrel with the boys." [88]

The poor girl actually shed tears at her miserable condition.

"I don't know as you will like it," she continued, "but I feel, now I have begun, that I want to tell you all. I have seen the time, Hesper Greyson, when I actually hated you, because I knew you were better than myself; and at the same time I tried to be like you. But I couldn't, for mother and all of 'em were against me, so I gave it up and was ten times worse than ever. What would you do if you were in my place?"

"I would never give up," said Hesper, "so long as I was able to pick up a chip, or handle a broom. I would begin now." Juliana looked round despairingly, and shook her head.

"It's no use," said she. "I might as well undertake to clear up the duck-pond."

"Try," said Hesper. "Try, and I will help you."

"I've almost a mind to," replied Juliana, as she caught a little of the hopeful, persevering spirit of her friend.

"Well," said Hesper, "you put on some water to heat, while I run up and change my dress". It was not many minutes before she was back again. While the water was heating, Juliana cleared away the table and made the beds, and Hesper swept the floor. She brushed the cobwebs from the windows and walls, and cleared out every [89]

nook and corner where the dust had not been started for months. Then Juliana began to wash the dishes, while Hesper took some water and cleaned the windows. It made a wonderful difference in the appearance of the room—a whole flood of sunshine seemed to come in at once. When this was done, they got a great tub of water, and both together began to scour the floor. It was really astonishing when one part was finished, to see how it contrasted with the other.

"I wouldn't have believed it," said Juliana. "It certainly looks enough better to pay us for the trouble!" Before they had finished, they heard a great noise in the entry.

"There are the boys!" exclaimed Juliana. "Isn't it too bad! but they shan't come in." She sprang up, and pushing the door together quickly, turned the key. The boys commenced kicking and pounding with all their might, while Juliana scolded. This waked up Tommy and he began to cry.

"O dear!" whimpered Juliana, "I knew it would be so. I wish I hadn't begun."

"Don't be discouraged," said Hesper, "but let the boys in."

"No, no," sobbed Juliana, "they will spoil everything if I do. I know 'em too well."

"Let me," said Hesper. She opened the door very gently, and the two boys were about to rush in, but when they saw Hesper, they stopped.

"Be very careful," she said, "for we are washing up the floor, and want it to look nice. Little Tommy has just waked up, and if you will take care of him, it will help us very much."

"I don't want ter take care o' Tommy," said George, with a dogged look—"and what's more, I wont."

"Well, then," said Hesper, "perhaps you and Benny would like to take the pail and get us some more water."

"No; we wont do that nuther," replied George, "for I don't want to have it clean." He twisted the buttons of his jacket as he spoke, and pouted out his lips in a very unbecoming manner. Hesper was puzzled. She stopped to think one moment; then she laid her hand on his shoulder, and stooping down so that she could look into his eyes, she said with a pleasant smile—

"Please, George, wont you get us some water? We want to have it all clean here to-night when your mother comes home, and make her wonder how it was done. Then, too, I will give you and Benny some corn to parch this evening, and you can have a nice time." George glanced up to Hesper's face and half smiled; she put the pail into his hand and away they went. When they came back, they sat the pail down by the door, and stood without.

"Can't we carry Tommy out to see the ducks?" asked George.

"Yes, if you please," said Hesper. She put on the baby's hood, and after wrapping him up in his cradle quilt, laid him into George's arms, who carried him very carefully into the yard.

"There!" said Juliana, "I call that a complete victory! and I see how it was gained, but I am sure I never should have the patience to do so myself."

"O, you would soon learn," said Hesper, "and you would find that it saved a great deal of trouble in the end." After this, the girls went on working and chatting together, till they became very social and friendly. Juliana opened her whole heart to Hesper; and Hesper, in return, wondered they had never been so well acquainted before. It was almost night before they finished, but then the work was not only done, but done well. The boys had been very obliging; they brought several pails of water, and took care of Tommy all the time. Moreover, they became gradually very much interested in the work, and when all was finished, they confessed that it looked a great deal better. Last of all, Juliana gave her own face and hands a good washing, which they greatly needed. Then Hesper combed out her long, beautiful black hair, and after braiding it, she tied it up behind with some bits of blue ribbon. When the boys saw this, they were determined not to be outdone. They carried a great basin of water and some soap out into the yard, and scrubbed their faces and hands with all their might. It was quite a novelty to the Grimsby family to be so clean, and they seemed to enjoy it highly.

"There!" said Hesper, after they had spread the table for supper, "I think I will go now, as there is nothing more to do," and she looked about the room with perfect satisfaction. There was a clean cloth upon the table that night—the knives and forks had been

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scoured, and the teapot, which set upon the stove, shone like new silver. The fire burned briskly, and little Tommy was asleep in his cradle. As Hesper turned away, she felt that a good work had been begun, and was quite confident that it would not end here. Not long after her return home, there came a low tap at the door. She opened it, and there stood Juliana.

“O Hesper!” said she, “you can’t think how pleased mother is! She has gone now to get my new dress. Father has sent us some money from California, and she says we shall all have better clothes. I am dreadfully tired, but O, I am so happy! and I can’t tell you how much I love you,” She threw her arms around Hesper’s neck, and laying her head upon her bosom, wept like a child.

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CHAPTER XII.

NEW PROSPECTS FOR MOSE.

ONE delightful afternoon in the time usually known as "Indian summer," Hesper thought she would take simple Johnny out for a walk. They went up over the hills, and away down past Capt. Clark's corn-field, to the great barn beyond, where Fred and Charlie were still at work. When they saw Johnny with her, they begged her to let him stay until they came home at night, so she left him and went away into the woods beyond the Rolling Mill. She walked along the borders of the stream, gathering here and there the bright colored autumn leaves, which seemed to be more brilliant and beautiful than ever. As she climbed up to the top of an old rock, which jutted out into the pathway, to gather a few leaves of a bright scarlet color, she heard the sound of voices, and looking down upon the other side, saw Capt. Clark and Mose talking together. They observed her at the same moment, and called her to come down. Capt. Clark rose up quickly, and put up his strong arm to help her.

"Come, Hesper," said he, "you are certainly a good little fairy, for you are always near when most wanted. I am laying a plan to get your brother away from you, and I know when you come to hear it, you will have too much good sense to say no."

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She sat down by Mose and looked him in the face. He seemed both glad and sorry. His old geography was open in his hand.

"Hesper," said he, "you told me the Lord would help me, and now your words are about to prove true."

"Why!" she exclaimed, "are you really going to sea?"

He smiled and looked towards Capt. Clark.

"Well," said the Captain, "he thinks he shall, if Hesper is willing."

"If I am willing!"

"Yes, Mose says that if every one else gives their consent, and you are unhappy about it, he will not go."

"Why Mose!" said Hesper, "I thought you knew me better."

"You never think of yourself," said Mose, "but when I think of father's poor health and mother's sickness, and the children to take care of through this long winter, I feel as though I ought not to go, for then all the burden and care will rest upon you, and though you are a patient little thing you are not able to bear it."

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"Never mind that, Mose, if you have a good chance, don't lose it. Leave all the rest with the Lord."

Capt. Clark turned his face towards the stream as she said this. If any one had been watching him they would have seen him brush away a tear. He was a very benevolent man, and he always said, that there was something in the love which this brother and sister bore one another, that touched his heart.

"Hesper," said he, "you are right. Tell him to go—it will be both for his health and interest, and you can safely trust to the Lord for the rest. I can also assure you, that as far as I am concerned, you have one friend who will never see you suffer. Now I will leave you to talk the subject over together." And he walked away down the path, towards the mill.

"Well," said Mose, "now for my story. Capt. Clark has talked with me very often of late. He said he thought I was working too hard, and asked me if there was anything else I would rather do. I did not tell him for some time, because I had tried to forget it myself and be patient; but to-day he found me poring over my old geography, and then he asked me how I would like to visit foreign countries. Before I thought, I told him all, and he said I should go to sea if I wished—that his new ship would be ready in the course of a few weeks, and if I decided to go, he would ensure me an easy place and good wages. O Hesper! it made my heart leap right up within me; but then I remembered I had not a cent to fit myself out with, and therefore I could not answer him."

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"What is the matter, Mose?" said he, "I should think you would be right glad of such a chance."

"I was ashamed to let him know how poor we were, but he questioned me so closely, and when he found out the cause of my silence, he told me he would let me have all I needed and right welcome. Now, Hesper, what shall I do?"

"Go!" said she, "go, Mose." The tears stood in her eyes and her voice trembled as she spoke. "We shall miss you very much, and I, most of all, Mose, for you and I know each other's hearts and our thoughts are very nearly the same, so it will be hard parting, but if it wasn't the best thing for both of us, the Lord wouldn't have so ordered it."

"It will be a long time that I shall be away, Hesper, and I am afraid that when I mention it to father, he will set his foot right down, and shake his head, and there will be an end of it."

"O dear," said Hesper, "I had forgotten him. It will be just as he takes a notion. How I wish he could see things as we do. But he must always look on the dark side. How shall we manage to tell him, Mose?"

They were silent for a few moments.

"Hesper," said Mose at last, "the more I think about it, the more certain am I that father will not let me go. Every cent I have earned, has gone to support the family, and now, while his foot is still so lame, I don't see how he can do without me. We had best give it up where it is, and say nothing more about it."

"No," said Hesper. "Don't give it up, Mose. Let's try at any rate. I will send the children to bed early, and then, while mother is asleep, you can ask him."

"Well," said Mose, "I don't think it will be of much use, but I won't have it said that I gave up without trying. I must go back to the mill now. Mr. Brown gave me leave of an hour's absence, while they were repairing the machinery, so I came here to rest me."

That night, when all was quiet, Hesper took her work and sat down by the fire, while Mose bent studiously over his old geography. Their father sat by the table writing as usual, and their mother was asleep. Not a word was spoken for a long time. At last the clock struck eight and Mose looked up as if a thought had suddenly occurred to him.

"Father," said he, "if I could get a first rate chance to go to sea, should you be willing?"

"What!" said his father, dropping his pen and looking him full in the face.

Mose repeated his question.

"Do you know of any such chance?" asked his father.

"Yes sir." And then Mose told his whole conversation with Capt. Clark. He waited for his father to reply, but he did not. Mr. Greyson silently reached up for his hat, took his cane and went out. Hesper was so disappointed she could not speak. Mose thrust his old geography into his pocket with a vexed and angry movement.

"There!" said he, "I might have known it would be so! How foolish I was ever to have hoped for anything better! Now all I have to do is to go back to the mill again, and work like a slave till it kills me, which will not take long, and the sooner I die the better."

He spoke bitterly, for he was sadly disappointed.

"Mose! Mose!" said a gentle voice. He turned and saw that his mother had risen from her pillow, and was resting upon one arm. The striking of the clock awoke her, and she had heard all. Just then, as the light shone upon her face, showing the smooth black hair parted on her white forehead, and her large dark eyes in which there was such tender sadness, she looked very beautiful. Mose went, and kneeling down beside her bed, hid his face in her pillow. She laid her hand gently on his head.

"Don't be discouraged my poor boy," said she. "The greater the trouble, the nearer is God, and I know that He will aid you if you do not despair."

Her low sweet voice and gentle touch, was like oil upon the troubled waves, and though the poor boy's frame shook with emotions which were hard to control, yet beneath her soothing influence, he at length became calm. When the first bitterness of his disappointment had passed, he raised his face, and kissing his mother's pale cheek with all that affection which had strengthened and deepened from his childhood, he went back to his reading. It was nearly an hour before their father returned. Mose and Hesper were still sitting by the fire. He did not tell them that he had seen Capt. Clark, but he had been with him all the time.

"Hesper," said he abruptly, "are you willing that Mose should go to sea?"

"Yes sir;" she replied meekly and without hesitation.

"Do you consider, at the same time," he asked, "that the work will be harder and heavier for you—that there will be more care, and one the less to labor?"

"Yes sir; but I am willing to do and bear any thing if he can only go, for it will certainly kill him if he works in the mill much longer."

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"But," he continued, "supposing that your mother should be worse—perhaps die, and I should be taken sick, what would become of us then?"

Hesper's eyes filled with tears and her lips quivered—"I don't know sir," said she, "but I think the Lord would care for us."

"Poor, simple child!" said her father—"there are a great many people left to the care of the Lord, who perish miserably. Think of the fathers, and mothers, and little children, who die for want of bread, and of the wretched beings in our great cities, with scarce a mouthful of food and no shelter from the heat of summer, or the piercing cold of winter. Does the Lord care for them?"

Hesper was silent a few moments, and then a great thought stirred her heart, sending the blood to her cheeks, and the brightness to her eyes.

"I don't know sir," said she, "why such dreadful things happen, but I do know that when I have said the Lord would help me, and have given all up to Him that He always has. I would not like to starve, but if I should, I would try to be patient, for God alone knows what is best."

Her father looked at her in astonishment. He did not speak, but he leaned his face upon his hands. He thought of the time when he was a little child and went with his father to the church. Heaven seemed very near him then, and God both good and great. Hesper's simple words had touched his better feelings. He longed to be a child once more, and feel that confidence in the heavenly Father's love, which he had once known. When he spoke again his manner was greatly changed.

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"Mose," said he, "if you want to go to sea, I am perfectly willing. You have a first rate chance, and ought to improve it."

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CHAPTER XIII.

A BUSY TIME.

A FEW mornings after this conversation, Mrs. Grimsby made her appearance in Hesper's room. She had been listening for some time, and as soon as she heard Mr. Greyson leave, she took her hands out of the wash-tub, and came in with her arms all smoking.

"So," she commenced, "I hear that Mose is going to sea. I shouldn't have known it if one of the neighbors hadn't told me. It's rather strange, living in the same house, and doing all I can to be friendly, that everything should be kept so private. If I had been aunt Nyna, or Capt. Clark's mother, or some of those people who set themselves up so, perhaps it would have been different. But I don't know as I care—I am certain of one thing, that I am an honest woman, and the time will come when I shall have the place I deserve."

"O," said Hesper, with a smile, "I thought several times about coming in to tell you but I have been so busy with getting things ready for Mose, and finding out what he needed, that I really had no chance."

"Well," said Mrs. Grimsby, "if you had only come in and asked me, I could have told you all about it, for I fitted out my husband for California all myself. But howsomever, I shan't offer my services. I know better than to throw away my good will upon those that don't know how to prize it."

Hesper did not answer, so Mrs. Grimsby made bold to walk about the room, examine everything, and ask a great many questions.

"Well," said she at last, after she had opened the door, and was just ready to step out. "I thought I would just drop in and tell you, that if you wanted anything of me, you will find me ready and willing, even though I should stay at home from my work to help you"—and she shut the door before Hesper could have a chance to thank her.

As soon as she was gone, Hesper arose and put her handkerchief over her head to run up to aunt Betsey's. There was so much to be done for Mose, that it was quite impossible for her to attend to it all. She had good judgment for one so young, but she lacked experience, and even now, her head ached with thinking and her eyes with weariness. Aunt Nyna was doing all she could for her, but even this was not enough. The time was short, another pair of hands was greatly needed, and Hesper resolved at last to apply to aunt Betsey. She went in very doubtfully, and found her sewing as usual upon her bed-quilt. It didn't seem to grow very fast, with all her labor. Hesper sat down beside her. Snip, snip, snip, went aunt Betsey's scissors, as she cut out a fresh supply of diamonds from the bits of satin, and then she began to stitch away again with all her might. They talked upon various subjects for some time, till at last Hesper summoned courage to ask her.

"Mercy me!" said aunt Betsey, "I don't see how it will be possible! I am in such a hurry! I declare, I am obliged to work night and day! Why don't you hire some one?"

"We don't know of any one," said Hesper, "even if we could afford to."

"Well," said aunt Betsey, "what, with my housework, and my bed-quilt, and the things I have to attend to, and all the rest, it will be quite out of my power. You must take the will for the deed, and I will make Mose some present which will do quite as well." Hesper came away greatly disheartened. She wondered how aunt Betsey could be so selfish, and then she thought it was because she had nothing else to care for but herself and her own comfort.

"O dear," she said, "it is better to be poor and have a warm heart. Maybe if I was in her place, though, that I should be a great deal more selfish." She went home and seated herself again to her work, resolved to do the best she could without assistance. It was not long before Juliana came in with Tommy in her arms.

"Hesper," said she, "mother says she thinks I can help you a little, if I try, for I can sew quite fast. I don't know much about making things, but I can always learn when I have a mind to, and I am sure I would do any thing to help you." She put Tommy on the floor to play with simple Johnny, and then took her seat by Hesper.

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She had brought her thimble with her and went to work directly. At first she was awkward, and had to be told a great many things, but she soon learned, and then was quicker with her needle than Hesper.

"How strange it is," said Hesper, "when I get almost discouraged, something always happens to cheer me. Do you know, Juliana, I was just ready to cry when you came in this morning?" The sullen expression which usually hung about Juliana's face, vanished in a moment, and she looked up with a pleasant smile.

"Hesper," said she, "I find it the easiest thing in the world to labor for those I love, and if I can do anything to make you love me, it will be all I want." That night they could scarce believe they had done so much. The work seemed to have grown under their hands without their knowing it, and they had enjoyed every moment. After this, Juliana insisted upon helping Hesper till the work was all finished. Mrs. Grimsby said the reason why she was so willing, was because she thought Hesper a little better than her own folks, and as soon as Tommy was old enough to leave with the boys, she meant to take Juliana out a washing with her.

As Mose was not obliged to work in the mill now, he improved all his leisure time by making himself busy about the house, doing all he could for their comfort and convenience. Uncle Nathan had promised him a load of wood for the family, and Capt. Clark offered to lend him his horse and wagon to go after it, so one pleasant morning he took Fred and Charlie with him, and started for the wood-lot. On their way they met George and Benny Grimsby.

"Jump in," said Mose, "if you wish to," and they did not wait for a second invitation. When they came to the wood-lot they went to work with all possible diligence to fill the cart. Mose praised them, and they worked all the faster.

"It is too bad," said George, who felt very good-natured, "that you are going away so soon, Mose. I like you first rate, and I don't know what we shall do without you." Mose laughed.

"George," said he, "when I am gone, you will be the oldest boy in the house, so you must take good care of the others. Be kind to Hesper, won't you? and if Fred and Charlie are troublesome, or do anything to vex you, don't take any notice of them, and they will soon learn better."

"No," said George, with great dignity, "we used to quarrel and fight once, but we have given that up long ago." To be sure, six weeks seemed quite an age to such a boy, but it was no longer ago than that, since the Greysons and Grimsbys had a serious battle, in which the Greysons were severely beaten. Mose had been wanting, for a long time, to get an opportunity to talk with George, and though he placed little confidence in his promises, yet he was glad if he would think about it.

"Now," said Mose, "if you will be a first rate boy, and do all you can for Hesper, I will bring you home something that will please you."

George began to wonder immediately what it would be, and he thought it would be no harm to modestly suggest, that he would like either a monkey or a Chinese umbrella—he wasn't very particular which—but of the two, he should prefer a monkey. After this, the boys followed Mose as closely as his own shadow. They told their mother what he had promised, and asked her if she didn't think they had best sell their ducks, so as to keep the monkey in the duck-house, but she quite disconcerted them by calling them little simpletons, and telling them they had best wait till they had it. By the untiring industry of Hesper and Juliana, everything was at length made ready. Mrs. Grimsby, out of pure good will, washed all the clothes they made, ironed them neatly, and stowed them away in the chest they were to occupy, but she told all the neighbors of it, and said that she shouldn't have done it if she could have well helped it. Aunt Nyna made Mose a present of a very nicely bound Bible, and aunt Betsey brought him a large bundle of old newspapers, which she had begged of a neighbor. The night previous to his departure, there came a loud rap at the door, and upon opening it, Mose beheld Mr. Byers' benevolent countenance.

"Get your hat, my boy," said he, "and go to walk with me. My heart is full and I want to relieve it."

Accordingly Mose complied with his request, and they turned their steps towards the sea shore. As they seated themselves on an unfinished spar, Mr. Byers asked if the ship in which Mose was to

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sail would touch at Canton.

"Yes, I believe so," replied Mose, "at some time in the course of the voyage, for we are to be gone two years or more, and shall visit several ports."

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"Well, then," resumed Mr. Byers, "doubtless you will meet with Harry Nyna, and I want you, Mose, to take a sharp observation of that young man, for if I can trust anything to my knowledge of human nature, I should say he was exceedingly progressive."

"Progressive!" repeated Mose. "Well, why not?"

"Ay, let me tell you, I think a young man is altogether too progressive, when, at the age of seventeen or eighteen, he smokes his cigar in public, drinks brandy behind the barn-door, and plays cards on the hay-mow."

"What!" said Mose, in astonishment.

"Ay, that's a fact; and his mother—dear good lady,—never suspected it. She's just like all the rest of the women—Lord bless 'em! So good themselves they think everybody else is, and whoever they love, is next kin to perfection."

"Harry is a good-hearted boy, though" said Mose thoughtfully.

"As good as a ripe October peach with a doubled kernelled pit in it, and generous as summer sunshine. But that is the great difficulty with him. He is too generous to say no, and goes in for a jolly time whenever he can have one. Nevertheless, I love him with all his faults, and really feel a fatherly solicitude for him. Not on his mother's account, however. O, no, Mose! no! It's purely for his own sake, although I think Mrs. Dorothy a most excellent woman, and should I ever think of marrying again, I would certainly give her the preference. But, then, that isn't what I came here to talk about. Mose," resumed the old man, after a few moment's silence, "you are to be gone a long time, and perhaps I may never see you again, and possibly I may be dead when you come back."

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"O, I don't think so," said Mose.

"Nor I either," continued Mr. Byers. "I only said possibly, and as I would like to be remembered, I have concluded to give you this;" so saying, he drew a monstrous old silver watch from his pocket, and laid it in the hand of his young friend.

Mose drew back, unwilling to accept of a gift which he knew was of so much value to its possessor, but the old man urged it upon him.

"Take her, Mose," said he in a husky voice. "She's a faithful creature, and worth a dozen of the new-fangled concerns they have now-a-days. She's just what a good woman ought to be, for she has more of inward worth than outward beauty, She never wears any other than a cheerful countenance and always keeps her hands busy. Take her, my boy, I had rather give her to you than any one. Whenever you look at her, think how fast time is travelling on to eternity, and may the Lord teach you to so number your days as to apply your heart to wisdom."

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Mose did take the watch, thanking him most sincerely, for he knew the old man's feelings would be deeply wounded, should he persist in refusing.

"Now Mose, my boy," he added, "I am going. You needn't walk home with me, for my heart is full, and I want to shed a few tears by myself. Good bye, and God bless you." He seized Mose warmly by the hand, and giving it a hearty shake, he turned away, walked quickly up the sands and disappeared in the darkness.

The morning on which Mose was to take his departure had at length arrived. The "Sea Gull," as handsome a ship as ever rode the waves, lay at anchor in the harbor below. A fine fresh breeze was blowing, and the boat was waiting at the wharf to take Mose and several others on board. Mr. Greyson's foot was so much worse that he could not go out, and therefore Mose took leave of his parents at the house. He told his father to keep up a good heart and take the best of care of himself till he came home, and then they should all live more comfortably. But Mr. Greyson shook his head with a most melancholy look and turned away as he faintly said, "Good bye."

Next Mose kissed his mother, and when she lifted her calm, pale face to his, and said so earnestly—"God bless you, my boy, and keep you from all evil"—he could not restrain the tears that were almost choking him, and he had to wipe his eyes a great many times before he dared make his appearance at the door. Capt Clark was waiting for him with his wagon, to take his sea-chest and other things down

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to the boat. As the wagon was large, they took Hesper and simple Johnny in, and then Capt. Clark called to Juliana, who stood in the door-way with Tommy in her arms, to come too, which she did with as little delay as possible. When all was ready they drove off, while Fred and Charlie, with the Grimsby boys and Bose, followed behind.

They soon came to the wharf, and Capt. Clark took charge of the baggage, leaving Mose to talk with the friends who had come to see him off. Hesper shivered like a leaf as she stood on the wharf, holding simple Johnny by the hand, for the morning was cold, and her heart was heavy within her. She thought how lonely she should be without Mose, and in spite of herself the tears would roll down her cheeks.

"Don't cry, Hesper!" he said, cheerfully; but there his own heart failed him, and the choking feeling came again. So he only kissed her and, whispered—"Pray for me every night, sister." Then he jumped into the boat and they pushed off.

"Stop! stop!" cried some one at the head of the wharf, and looking up, they saw Mrs. Grimsby coming in great haste, with a bundle in her hand. [114]

"Here," she said, as she tossed it to Mose, "is a little package of medicine which I meant to have given you before. There are old linen rags, and salve, and pills, and powders, and anything else you will want, should you be sick, and if you don't need them, why some one else may."

"That's a wise woman," cried out the Captain of the ship, who stood in the bow of the boat. "Three cheers for the ladies!" and they all took off their hats and hurrahed, which pleased Mrs. Grimsby very much.

The boys followed the boat down to the end of the wharf, where they waited to see her reach the ship. George made up a sorry face to cry, when suddenly a thought occurred to him.

"Mose!" he called out at the top of his voice, "don't forget the monkey!" Mose laughed outright—"Don't forget your promise!" he shouted in reply, and then the boat shot out beyond hearing.

CHAPTER XIV.

AUNT BETSEY UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

UNCLE NATHAN'S orchard was a long distance from his house, and adjoined aunt Nyna's garden. When the apples were ripe enough to gather and put up for sale, uncle Nathan employed both the Greysons and Grimsbys, and aunt Betsey came down, of her own accord, to see that the boys did not carry away any, and also to take particular care that they put a good proportion of the small ones into the barrels intended for market. There was quite a high stone wall between the orchard and aunt Nyna's garden, and close beside this wall, in the garden, grew a famous peach tree. It was a source of great profit to aunt Nyna, for the peaches were very large and luscious, and always commanded a very high price.

One day, during the apple gathering, aunt Betsey stood by the wall and regarded the peach tree with a longing gaze. She glanced down at the wall and then up to the tree, and measured with her eye, as though she was revolving a subject of great importance in her mind.

"Nathan," said she to her husband, "doesn't that branch of the tree hang over the wall?" [116]

"Well—yes—a little," he replied, carelessly.

"Then," said aunt Betsey, with an eager look, "according to law and common custom, all the peaches on it belong to us, and I wish you would send up one of the boys to gather them."

"I shan't do any such thing!" said uncle Nathan, decidedly.

"Well, then," she replied, "if you won't, I will; for what's ours is ours, and I'll have it at any rate."

"Indeed you will!" said uncle Nathan in surprise; "I wouldn't touch one of those peaches for my right hand, and what's more, I tell you not to." It was very seldom that he spoke in such an authoritative manner, and therefore aunt Betsey was considerably disconcerted. She said nothing more, but secretly resolved that have the peaches she would, and as it was high time they were gathered, she felt that the sooner she secured her part the better. That afternoon she had the minister and his wife to tea. She put on her best black silk dress, which she had kept very carefully for more than ten years. She also put on her blandest expression of countenance, and talked so piously that the minister and his wife supposed her to be a perfect model of goodness and propriety. It was sometime after nine when her visitors left, and as uncle Nathan was very much fatigued, he retired immediately, leaving aunt Betsey at her sewing. [117]

"Now," thought she to herself, "as there is such a clear, bright moon, I will just run over and get those peaches." She took her basket and hastened forth, but had not proceeded far, when she bethought herself that she had on her very best dress. For a few moments she hesitated, and almost made up her mind to go back and change it, but the fear that she should get hindered or discovered, decided her to keep on and risk the consequences. The way was long and lonely, but aunt Betsey was a very resolute woman, and would go through fire and water to accomplish her purpose. Arriving at the orchard, she crossed it very quickly—mounted the stone wall, and laying hold of the branch, had already deposited several of the peaches in her basket, when she heard a fierce growl, and the next moment Bose seized her by the leg.

"Mercy me!" exclaimed aunt Betsey, as she tumbled down on the wall, all in a heap—"O Bose! you dear, good dog! How you frightened me! Let go of me, Bose! do, there's a good fellow! Oh! Oh! Why, I'm aunt Betsey, don't you know me!" But just then, Bose seemed to be no respecter of persons, and the only proof he gave of his goodness, was that of letting go of her leg and seizing her by the dress, which he shook fiercely, rending and tearing it in the most shocking manner. Every thread which gave way, seemed to draw right from aunt Betsey's heart, but there was no helping it. She attempted to conciliate Bose by patting him, but it rather appeared to increase his fury, and to all her terms of affection and endearment, he only answered by significant growls. [118]

"O dear!" she exclaimed at length, "what shall I do! I never saw such a savage, unmanageable brute in my life!" She sat still for

some time, and the dog gradually loosened his hold. She felt greatly relieved, and drew up her feet gently to spring from the wall; but the moment she did so, Bose seized her dress in a new place, and tore it most shockingly. Aunt Betsey grew desperate.

"Begone! you villain you!" she exclaimed, as she beat the dog upon his head with her basket. She discovered immediately, however, that this was an altogether mistaken movement, for Bose seized her at once by the arm, and set his teeth so firmly that she cried out with pain.

"O merciful Heaven!" she moaned, "I believe I have done wrong, or I never should be punished so terribly. But O, Lord!" she added devoutly, with uplifted hands—"if thou wilt only bring me out of this difficulty, I never will do the like again." Even her prayers, though, [119] seemed just then to be unavailing, for the dog would not let her stir an inch. If she remained quiet any length of time, Bose sat down beside her, but the moment she started he seized her again. At one time, she attempted to cry out for assistance, but at this Bose became perfectly furious, and therefore she desisted.

"Well," said she at length, after she had been sitting upon the wall for about two hours, and saw no prospect whatever of an escape—"I suppose I have got to sit here till morning, and how much longer nobody knows, for this horrid brute acts as if he was possessed. I declare I wish this peach tree had been in Sodom before ever I touched it. What a pretty sight I shall be, going home by broad daylight, with my dress all in tatters!" and she began to cry in good earnest.

The dew and the chilly night air made her shiver, but Bose seemed to resent even the movement that she made to draw her shawl around her.

After sitting quiet for a long time, she heard the village clock strike twelve. Once more she attempted to slip stealthily from the wall, but again she was rudely detained by her watchful sentinel. Moaning and sobbing in utter despair, she concluded to submit, and wait till morning should bring relief.

Suddenly, however, a most alarming sound fell upon her ear. It was the village bells ringing briskly, as if for fire. She bethought herself directly, that in her haste, she had left some blazing brands upon her hearth, and that in consequence perhaps her own house might now be in flames. The thought made her almost distracted, but she dared not make the least movement to depart. [120]

Once more she listened intently, and distinguished a confused sound of voices. Sometimes there appeared to be only a single one, and then to be many. Again they would seem to come near, and then go a great way off. The shouting, also, was not in the least like the cry of fire, and therefore she did not know how to understand it. She began to think, at last, that she had suddenly become deranged, and all this noise and confusion existed only in her imagination. It was not long, however, before she discovered lights glancing among the trees, and soon saw a party of men, with lanterns in their hands, coming through the orchard, directly towards her. Again she began to wonder what all this could mean, when her imagination suggested that some bloody deed had been committed in the village, and now they were out in quest of the perpetrator. A thrill of horror passed over her, and as the men came nearer she ventured to call out to them.

"O, here she is! here she is!" they all shouted at once, as they hastened towards her, and immediately they blew a terrible blast on the fish horns they carried with them, as a signal to others that the object of their search was found. Mr. Byers was the foremost of the group; and in his company were the minister, doctor, lawyer, schoolmaster, two deacons, the town clerk, and the editor of the village paper. [121]

"Why, Mrs. Hastings!" said Mr. Byers, as he held up his lantern and surveyed her—"how came you here?"

"Well," replied aunt Betsey, trying to put on a fair face before this honorable company—"you see my husband has been putting up his apples, and as he left all the barrels in the orchard, I thought I would just take a run down before I went to bed, to see that all was safe, when the first thing I knew this horrible dog laid hold of me, and has kept me here ever since."

Mr. Byers held his lantern over the wall. Bose sprang up to him, wagging his tail and looking delighted, as if conscious he had done his duty. Then, seizing aunt Betsey's basket in his teeth, he shook it

with a fierce growl, scattering the few peaches that yet remained in it.

"O, ho!" said Mr. Byers, "it is very easy to see through all this, now that we have a little light on the subject. How happened it, Mrs. Hastings, that the widow's peaches lodged in your basket?"

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"Well, Mr. Byers," returned aunt Betsey, tartly, "if you must know, I will tell you. Please hold up your lantern, and if you look carefully, you will perceive that one branch of that tree hangs a little over our orchard; therefore all the fruit on it belongs, by good rights, to us. I thought, since I was down here, I might as well take them now as at any time, and I defy all the world to find fault with me. What's right is right, anyhow, let people say what they will."

Aunt Betsey had stepped down from the wall, and now stood before them with her dress all in tatters, her arms akimbo, and her head thrust forward, looking the very picture of defiance.

"Woman!" said Mr. Byers, gravely, as he gave her a contemptuous poke with his cane—"I am ashamed of you! you are a disgrace to humanity in general, and your sex in particular. What is legally right is not always morally so; and for you, with your abundance, to steal peaches from a poor widow woman, is, to say the least, a sin in the sight of God, for which you have been justly punished."

"Friends!" he added in a louder tone, as he turned to the group behind him, which had gradually augmented till the whole population of the village seemed to be present, "this woman is more to be pitied than blamed, for to carry such a narrow contracted heart in the bosom, is the greatest curse that can fall upon any human being, and for the sake of that Christian charity which thinketh no evil, let us hush the matter up as soon as possible."

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"Yes," said the editor, significantly, "I shall hush it up according to my usual custom. I have a very excellent method of disposing of such matters."

Aunt Betsey burst into tears. Her husband came up and offered his arm. She took it and walked home, accompanied by such an escort as no woman in the village ever had before. Behind and before her went her neighbors and friends, talking over the matter with perfect freedom; and from their remarks the unhappy woman had not the least reason to doubt, that although they compassionated her sincerely, yet her inconsiderate act met with their unqualified condemnation. From that day (or we should rather say night) forth, aunt Betsey considered herself hopelessly disgraced in the eyes of the whole village, and to the end of her life, the very mention of peaches made her shudder. How true is it, that the ruling passion of one's nature, however carefully guarded, will at some time or other betray itself.

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CHAPTER XV.

SIMPLE JOHNNY.

It was very hard for Hesper to keep up her courage and go about her work as usual, now that Mose was gone. Her father was more desponding than ever, and though her mother seemed cheerful, yet it was very evident that she had to make a great effort to be so. Every night, when Hesper laid her head upon her pillow, she felt that she would like to have a good long cry, but she resolutely kept back the tears, for she knew if she once began, she would soon become so disheartened that she could not attend to anything properly. So she remembered the last words of Mose, and consoled herself by doing as he had told her—to pray for him every night. These seemed to Hesper the darkest days she had ever known. Capt. Clark still remained a true and faithful friend and this kept her from wholly despairing. He did not often visit them, but out of his abundance, he gave them many things, without which they would actually have suffered. Yet even with his help, the prospect was very discouraging, and Hesper puzzled her brains night and day, to think of something she could do to earn a little money. Her mother needed medicine and comfortable food, and the boys' clothes were getting sadly out of repair. Her father still had writing to do, but he only earned enough by this to pay the rent. His foot troubled him constantly, for he could not be patient till it got well, but he hobbled about on it every day, and thus made it a great deal worse. Beside this, his general health was very poor, and he always looked on the dark side of everything, which made him unhappy and discontented. He said very little, but one could easily tell by his gloomy countenance how he felt.

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Late one afternoon, as Hesper was returning home with simple Johnny, who had been spending the day with aunt Nyna, she was overtaken by Mrs. Grimsby. The poor woman looked very tired, for her day's work had been hard. Under one arm she carried her old wash-gown, and on the other was a large basket of clothes she was taking home to iron.

"O dear," she said, "I feel as though I could not take another step! I don't believe there's a slave at the South that has to work harder than I. But then I get my pay for it, and in these hard times that is a great comfort."

"Yes," said Hesper, "I would like to go out a washing myself, if I were able."

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"You poor little thing!" said Mrs. Grimsby, in a tone of unusual kindness—"I'm glad you can't, for you would work yourself almost to death. Why don't you keep school, Hesper?"

This was a new thought, and for a moment Hesper's heart beat quicker, but then it occurred to her directly, that she had no room, and she shook her head sorrowfully.

"No," she said, "neither father or mother could bear the noise of the children at home, and there is no other place."

"Fie!" said Mrs. Grimsby, "that is no excuse at all, for you can have my back kitchen just as well as not, and be right welcome, if you will take George and Benny and keep them out of mischief. I'm scarce ever at home, and if I was, the school would not trouble me at all. Come now, you had best take up with my offer at once, and to-morrow when I go out to work, I will look up some scholars for you."

"Well," said Hesper, without hesitation, "I will, though I hardly know how to thank you enough for your kindness."

"Fie!" said Mrs. Grimsby, with seeming impatience, "I only do it for my own convenience, so you needn't say anything more about it."

Just then they reached home, and Mrs. Grimsby went directly into her own room, leaving Hesper with a hopeful heart and smiling countenance.

At the beginning of the next week the school was opened. There were eight scholars besides Fred and Charlie and the Grimsby boys. Juliana knew very little about reading and spelling, so she improved the opportunity, and soon was able to assist Hesper, which she did very willingly. As for simple Johnny, he could not be persuaded to stay in the school, so Hesper let him go out to play as he had been in

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the habit of doing. He knew very well how to take care of himself. Moreover, he had such an innocent expression of countenance, and was so gentle and inoffensive, that every one was kind to him. At first Hesper used to worry a great deal about him, but she soon became accustomed to having him away. He never went far from home, and almost always returned at the right time. They could easily tell where he had been by the little tokens he brought back. Sometimes he would have a pinafore full of blocks from the ship-yard—a bunch of field flowers, or a handful of smooth white pebbles gathered on the seashore. But of late, he had puzzled them, for he had returned several times with a most beautiful bouquet of choice garden flowers, tastefully arranged and tied with a string, and sometimes with his little basket full of ripe, rosy apples and peaches.

“Who could be so good to him?” said Hesper; “it must be some lady, I know.” But the poor child could not tell, so the matter remained a mystery. One night he was out later than usual. The weather was now quite cold, so that Hesper felt all the more anxious. She wrapped her mother’s shawl about her, and went out in search of him, though she did not feel much alarmed, for she expected every moment to meet him. First she went to the ship-yard and along the seashore. Next to Capt. Clark’s, where a large party of boys were husking corn—then to uncle Nathan’s and aunt Nyna’s, but he could not be found at any of these places. It was now almost dark. The wind was cold and chilly, and a few light flakes of snow were falling. Hesper’s heart beat quickly, and she ran home as fast as possible to see if he was there, but nothing had been seen of him. Again she hastened forth, questioning the people along the street, but they could give her no information. At length she met a little fellow, who told her he saw Johnny not long before dark, gathering acorns in the wood beyond the Rolling Mill. Away she flew as fast as her feet would carry her, and was soon ranging about in the midst of the wood. It was so dark among the trees she could not see the way before her—the briers laid fast hold of her—she stumbled over the roots in her pathway, and finally lost one shoe in the low, swampy ground, whither she had unconsciously wandered, yet still she urged her way onward.

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“Johnny! Johnny!” she called at the top of her voice, in the hope that he might make some sound in reply. She stopped to listen, but heard nothing save the mournful sighing of the winds among the pines, and the falling of withered leaves around her. She seemed utterly alone and desolate, and her heart failed her.

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“O, merciful Father!” she exclaimed, “what shall I do!” and she burst into tears. Again she struggled onward in the midst of the darkness, till she came to the roadside. There, trembling with cold and excitement, she knelt down beneath a spreading oak, and lifting her hands, she cried out—

“O, Father in heaven! I pray thee to take pity on me and help me.” As she spoke, a bright light flashed upon her face, and looking out from the overhanging branches, she saw a man passing with a lantern.

“O, sir!” she exclaimed, as she sprang forward, “will you help me find my brother? He is lost in these woods, and it is so dark I cannot see one step before me.”

“Certainly! certainly!” he replied in a very friendly manner. “In these woods did you say? and how old a child?”

“About ten years, sir. Poor Johnny, he is a simple child, yet nevertheless he is very dear to us.”

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“Indeed!” said the gentleman—“he must be the same child who has been to my house so often of late, and to whom my Kate and Alice took such a fancy. I will go with you by all means,” and he immediately led the way into the wood. He held up his lantern, looking carefully about, and calling at short intervals—but they heard no sound in reply. Hesper never seemed so weak and faint-hearted before. She wept like a child, and had it not been for the encouraging words of her unknown friend, she would have despaired of ever seeing Johnny again. She soon discovered from the gentleman’s speech, that he was the new doctor, of whose skill and kindness she had heard so much. He was very wealthy, and had always lived in the city till the past year, when he purchased an elegant residence in this town. She knew from what people had said, that he was very benevolent, and would do all he could to assist her. After they had searched through the wood in various

directions, they went down over the other side of the hill, where there was a low, swampy hollow, not far from aunt Nyna's. Here the bushes and trees grew very closely, and the long ivy vines interlaced the whole in such a manner, that it formed an almost impenetrable thicket. As the doctor held up his lantern and looked before him, he seemed to hesitate.

"Really," he said, "if the poor child is here, it will be almost impossible to find him. I think, on the whole, we had best go back and get other assistance."

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As he spoke, Hesper felt something rub against her. She looked down, and to her inexpressible joy, beheld Bose, standing close beside her, wagging his tail and seeming very happy that he had met with her.

"O here, sir!" she called out to the doctor, "is this faithful old dog, and he will find him if anybody. I would trust him sooner than I would myself."

"Here, Bose!" she continued, pointing to the thicket—"Johnny! Johnny!" Bose started in the direction in which she pointed, scenting the air keenly. Then he ran back again to Hesper, wagging his tail, and looking up in her face wistfully, as if very desirous of doing her will exactly, if he only knew what it was. She went with him then to the borders of the thicket, and pointing in again, called out, "Johnny! Johnny!" with all possible earnestness.

In sprang the dog at once, and she could hear the under-brush cracking beneath his feet, and the branches sweeping by him as he passed. After a few moments the doctor called again, and then, as they stopped to listen, they seemed to hear the sound of a child crying. Directly, out rushed Bose like a mad creature, and seizing Hesper by the frock, pulled her after him.

"O, he has found him! he has found him!" she exclaimed, and was about to spring at once into the thicket, when the doctor withheld her.

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"Let me go first, with my lantern," he said, "while you remain here, for I think I can be of more service to him than you, poor child."

He turned his steps in the direction whence the sound had proceeded, and in a few moments, guided by Bose, found simple Johnny lying flat on his face, moaning and weeping most piteously. The child's hat and little basket of acorns were upon the ground beside him, as though he had accidentally fallen asleep there. The doctor raised him up, and spoke to him kindly. He brushed away the long, wet ringlets from the poor child's face—put his hat upon his head, gave him his basket, and then led him out to the place where Hesper was anxiously awaiting them.

The instant the poor child recognized her, he uttered a cry of joy. He seized her by the dress, and laying his head against her, made the low soothing sound he usually did when pleased. Hesper, unlike herself, scarce knew what she said or did, but when she minded how damp the child's clothes were, and how he shivered with cold, she took off her great warm shawl and wrapped it closely about him. As they all three walked home together, the doctor asked her a great many questions about herself and family.

"Well, Miss Hesper," he said at last, as he was about to leave her, "I am right glad that I have met with you, and shall endeavor to see you again, very soon." He stooped down and kissed Johnny, and as he turned away, he dropped something into his basket, which afterwards proved to be a bright golden eagle.

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE SHEPHERD'S CALL.

It was only a few evenings after Johnny's adventure in the wood, that Hesper stood hesitating and trembling on the great stone steps at the doctor's front door. She raised her hand to the silver bell knob, and then withdrew it, as if her courage failed her.

"No," said she at last, "I will not fear, for I am doing right, and I know he is too kind to refuse me." She did not allow herself another moment for reflection, but gave the bell quite a vigorous pull. In a few moments a great red faced Irish girl came to the door.

"Please, ma'am," said Hesper, dropping a very respectful curtsey—"Is Dr. Smiley in?"

"No;" said the girl, and she was just shutting the door, when a pleasant voice called out from the parlor—

"Stop, Ellen; he came in just now, and went up to the library." The next moment, a very pretty young lady stepped into the entry.

"Come in," she said, "and I will speak to father."

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Hesper timidly crossed the threshold, and stood in one corner. "I will wait here," she said, in a very humble manner, "if you will be so kind as to tell the doctor that Hesper Greyson wishes to see him."

"O please do come in," said the young lady, as she took Hesper by the hand and led her into the parlor. "Here is a nice warm fire, and I know you must be cold."

"Mother," she continued, addressing an elderly lady who was seated by a work-table, sewing—"Here is the very Hesper Greyson of whom father was speaking—sister to little Johnny."

There was another young lady—rather older than the first—seated at the piano, who started up directly when she heard this.

"Let me give her a seat, Alice," she said, "while you speak to father." She drew a velvet cushioned ottoman to the fire, and Hesper sat down, though she felt very much out of her element.

"How do you do to-night, my dear?" asked the elderly lady, who laid down her work and regarded Hesper with great interest.

"Quite well, I thank you," replied the poor girl, though her pale face and sorrowful eyes seemed to tell a very different story. "It's my brother that's sick ma'am. Poor Johnny! he's a simple child, but then we all love him so much, that it troubles us sadly when anything ails him."

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"What! Johnny sick!" said the doctor, who just then entered the room—"and how long has that been?"

"Ever since the night he was lost in the wood, sir. We did not wish to trouble you while we could do anything ourselves, but indeed, he has grown sick very fast, and I hope you will not take it amiss that I have come for you, for there was no one else to whom I dared go."

"You have done just right, exactly," said the doctor in a most encouraging manner, "and I shall be right glad to render you every possible service. I will go with you directly"—and he went out to get his hat and coat.

Kate, the eldest daughter, also stepped out of the room. She soon returned with a very pretty silk hood in her hand. "Here, Hesper," she said, "this is too small for me, and if it will be of any service to you, you shall be right welcome." As she spoke, she stooped down, and loosening the handkerchief under Hesper's chin, she tied the hood upon her head in its place. The poor girl, worn down by watching and anxiety, had come to the doctor's house with many misgivings, and thus to meet with such unexpected favor and kindness quite overcame her. She could not speak, but the great tears, more eloquent than words, chased each other swiftly down her cheeks.

"Dear girl!" said the elderly lady as she took off her spectacles and wiped her eyes—"if there were more in the world like you, I should want to spend all my life time in doing good."

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When the Doctor was ready, and Hesper arose to depart, the young ladies followed her to the door, assuring her that they should be happy to assist her in every possible way, and promised to call next morning and see how little Johnny got along.

Upon arriving at the house, the doctor found the poor child

tossing to and fro upon his bed, in a small, close room, adjoining the kitchen. It was a miserable place, but it was the best that could be afforded. Mrs. Greyson lay upon her own bed in a corner of the kitchen, and her husband sat by the fire in one chair, with his foot resting upon another. Aunt Nyna, who was always a friend in need, was moving quietly about with her usual placid look, making everything as neat and orderly as possible, while Mrs. Grimsby, who had just brought in a bowl of nice warm gruel for Mrs. Greyson's supper, was seated by Johnny's bed-side. Fred and Charlie had been sent up to bed some time previous, but contrary to the supposition of all, instead of being fast asleep, they were then sitting mid-way of the stairs, shivering with cold, but listening intently to all that was passing below. Hesper regarded the doctor anxiously as he took Johnny's hand in his own. The poor child's face was crimson with fever—he moaned and tossed about constantly, and seemed to be insensible to all around. The doctor shook his head doubtfully.

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"He is very sick," he said. "Can you tell me what you have done for him?"

Aunt Nyna, who had taken upon herself the responsibility of being his nurse, told him all, with the greatest precision.

"That is right," he said, "I could not have done better myself. But," he continued, "I must be frank with you. I fear the poor child is beyond the reach of medicine. His head has been affected from his birth, and he has not sufficient vital energy to meet the trying crisis."

"Indeed sir!" said Hesper, with a faltering voice and a face white as the drifted snow—"I can't have our Johnny die."

"Hesper! Hesper my dear girl!" said aunt Nyna, as she drew her close to her bosom, "be patient, and let the Lord's will be done."

"Poor little fellow," said the doctor, in a soft, sympathizing tone—"it would indeed be a sad loss to those who love him, but to him it would be a most blissful change."

"Yes," said aunt Betsey, who had just arrived, and entered the room in time to hear the doctor's words—"I think so too—you oughtn't to cry, Hesper—nobody ought to. Though it seems a hard thing to say, yet it would be a mercy to you all if he should be taken away; for if he should live to grow up, he would always be a poor miserable creature."

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Just then, Hesper wished that aunt Betsey was dead herself, or that she never could hear her speak again. He "a poor miserable creature!" Wouldn't he always be a comfort and consolation to those who loved him, if he should live a hundred years? So she reasoned, and she could not see it otherwise; though when the first gush of sorrow was over, she felt that the doctor had spoken truly, and that the better world would give to the poor child, blessings and powers he never could enjoy below. She was soon able to restrain her emotions, and then sat down by his bed as quietly as before.

After the doctor had given the poor child a soothing draught—under the influence of which he soon fell asleep—he went out, and began to talk with Hesper's father and mother. He stayed a long time, conversing in a very friendly and encouraging manner, and offered to do whatever he could for both of them. Mr. Greyson informed him, however, with a most melancholy expression of countenance, that he would never get his pay. The doctor's only answer was a good-natured laugh, and when he left, he promised to call again next morning.

Hesper did not close her eyes to sleep that night. She sat by Johnny's bed-side, carefully administering his medicines—soothing him in his restlessness, and praying that a blessing of healing might descend upon him from above. The night seemed very long, and as the clock slowly struck each passing hour, Hesper grew faint with weariness, yet she could not be persuaded to leave her post of duty. Towards morning, however, she was rejoiced to see that Johnny rested more quietly upon his pillow—the fever flush had faded from his cheek—his hands grew cool and as he turned his eyes towards her, he seemed to recognize her with an almost imperceptible smile. Her heart was so full of this happy change, that she could have wept for joy. She longed to speak to aunt Nyna, but the good old lady was dozing so peacefully in her chair, that she was not willing to disturb her. So she stole quietly to the window and looked out, to see if there were any signs of morning. The eastern sky was already crimson with the early light, and the beautiful day-star was shining clear and bright over the distant hill-tops. It seemed to Hesper that

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it was like the great, cheerful hope which had arisen in her heart, and she turned from the window with a joyful countenance.

"Hesper," said aunt Nyna, as she awoke from her sleep, "how is Johnny now?"

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"O much better," whispered Hesper. "His fever has entirely left him, and you cannot think how still and quiet he lies, though he is very weak, and breathes so lightly I can scarce hear him."

Aunt Nyna started up quickly at this, and went to his bed-side. She looked him earnestly in the face, and counted the feeble beatings of his pulse.

"Hesper," she said seriously, "Johnny is no better. I fear he will leave us very soon."

Hesper said not a word, though her lips grow white and she trembled violently. She bent over the dear child whom she had watched and tended so carefully, and kissed his pale cheek.

"Johnny, darling," she said in a low tone, "do you know me?"

He looked up with a faint smile—his lips moved, and he distinctly whispered "Hesper." It was the first word the child had ever clearly spoken, and it was his last, for in a few moments after, he turned wearily upon his side, and with one long drawn sigh, the spirit gently departed.

"Poor lamb!" said aunt Nyna, as she brushed away the damp ringlets from his forehead, and tenderly closed the long fringed lids—"he has heard the Shepherd's call and gone home to the fold of love."

But Hesper heard not; she had never looked on death before, and it was too great a trial for her loving heart. With a faint moan she sank down by the bed-side, and when aunt Nyna raised her up, she found the poor girl had fainted.

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CHAPTER XVII.

THE NEW HOME.

MANY weeks passed by after Johnny's death, during which several important changes took place in the Greyson family, but Hesper was unconscious of them all, for she was very sick. Her youthful strength had been so overburdened with care and anxiety, that she sank beneath it, and a long and dangerous illness was the result. She knew nothing of the comforts and conveniences by which she was surrounded, or who they were that watched so faithfully by her bedside. To her the passing time was one long, dark, troubled dream to which she saw no ending.

It happened at last, however, that one clear, bright, winter morning, she awoke from a peaceful slumber, and opened her eyes as it were on a new life. She gazed about her in silent wonder, but saw nothing that would remind her of the past. The neat and prettily furnished room which she occupied, was altogether new to her. The bed, with its covering and curtains of beautifully flowered chintz—the nice carpet—the cozy fire burning in the grate, and the picture of Christ with Mary sitting at his feet, above the chimney-piece, all seemed like objects in a dream. There was only one thing which had a familiar look, and that was a great rose-bush, in full bloom, which stood in the window seat, with the morning sunshine falling brightly upon it.

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"O dear!" sighed Hesper, "I fear that this will all vanish, and the dark, terrible night come again." Then she remembered of having heard said—when and where she could not tell—that some people believe that when they die, they come into a world where everything is so much like the one they have left, that they cannot realize they have passed through the change called death. So Hesper thought perhaps this had happened to her, for she could scarce recollect anything of the past.

The sound of some one moving near her, attracted her attention, and she was about to stretch out her arm to draw the bed-curtain aside, when she found that she was scarce able to move, and the sight of her own hand, so pale and wasted, greatly surprised her. In a few moments a door was opened, and some one asked, in a low tone—

"How is she this morning?"

"More comfortable, I think," was the reply. "Father says that this sleep she has fallen into, is very refreshing, and he hopes she will be rational when she comes out of it." The curtains were then drawn aside, and Hesper saw Kate Smiley's fair, sweet face, bending over her, while near by stood Mrs. Grimsby with her bonnet and shawl on. She had her old wash gown under her arm, as usual, for she was going out to work, and had only stopped in a moment to inquire about Hesper.

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"Where am I?" said Hesper, "and where are all the folks, and what has happened to me?"

"O!" exclaimed Kate, "she is wide awake, and quite herself again! Dear girl! How glad I am! Do you know that you have been very sick—so that we scarce thought you would live? Father said you would certainly die if you stayed where you were, so he had you and the family brought to this house, where you could be more comfortable, and Alice and I could care for you. Now I am so glad that you are better that I must run and tell father directly."

She left the room, and Mrs. Grimsby sat down on the side of the bed.

"Hesper," said she, "I cannot tell you how lonely we have been since your folks moved from our house. Juliana cries every day about it, and I never felt so sorry for anything in my life, for now I suppose since you have got into such a nice place, and have such fine friends to care for you, that you will forget all about us."

"O Mrs. Grimsby!" said Hesper, "wasn't you a friend to me in my greatest need? and didn't you do for me what no one else could? No: I never shall forget you as long as I live"—and with her slender white fingers, she affectionately clasped the great toil-hardened hand which rested on the bed beside her, Mrs. Grimsby raised her checked apron and wiped away the tears which were flowing freely down her cheeks.

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"There!" she said, as she started up with an effort to be cheerful, and drew her shawl around her, "I won't be a child! but really, Hesper, I care more about such little things than any one would suppose."

"Then don't let that thought trouble you any longer" said Hesper, "but send Juliana and the boys to see me, and kiss little Tommy for me, for I shall always love you, and shall come to see you as soon as I am able."

"That is all I ask," said Mrs. Grimsby. "Good bye, darling. Be very careful of yourself"—and she left the room with a light step and smiling countenance.

Although Hesper was very much better, the doctor would scarce allow any one to enter the room for several days. Her mother stole in now and then, and Hesper was astonished to see how, fast she had improved under the doctor's good management, though she was still very weak and feeble. The poor girl thought she would like to see her father, and yet she dared not ask to, for he always appeared so cold and distant, and had so often spoken unkindly to her, that she had a secret dread of meeting him. [146]

One evening, however, when she felt much brighter than usual, and was sitting up in bed, supported by her pillows, her mother came and told her that if she felt able, her father would like to speak with her. Hesper assented, and her heart beat violently, when, in a few moments after, she heard the sound of his approaching footsteps. With a half frightened look, she glanced up at his face as he bent over her. There were tears in his eyes, and his voice trembled as he spoke.

"God bless you, my precious child!" he said—"I cannot tell you how impatiently I have been waiting to see you, for I never knew how dear you were until I feared you would be taken from me." He raised her gently in his arms, and drawing her close to his bosom, kissed her again and again. Hesper felt that the cup of her happiness was full. How pleasant it was to be resting in her father's arms, while his tears mingled with her own. It seemed as if the prayer which she had so often repeated—"Let thy kingdom come"—was now fully answered, for the peace and joy of heaven was in her heart, and all her father's past unkindness was forgotten.

"Hesper," he said, "I have prayed night and day that God would spare you; for often, when I have observed your faith and patience, I have longed that you should love me as you did others, and I want to show how much I can love you in return." Hesper's pale cheek was pressed close to his— [147]

"Father, I always have loved you," she said, "but I never could say so till now."

"I do not doubt it, my dear child," he replied. He laid her gently upon her pillow again, and taking a seat beside her, he talked to her a long time about little Johnny—the letters they had received from Mose—their new home, with the fine large garden in the rear, which they would all take so much pleasure in cultivating when the spring opened, and many other things, to which Hesper listened with the deepest interest; and when he left her, she felt so tranquil and happy, that she sank into a pleasant sleep, which seemed to do her more good than all the medicine she had taken.

After this, she improved so rapidly that she was soon able to talk with all who visited her, and she was astonished to find how many kind friends she had. Among others, George and Benny Grimsby made their appearance, with their clothes neatly brushed, and their faces as clean and bright as soap and water could make them. At first the boys were very awkward, and scarce knew what to say, but Hesper soon touched an answering chord.

"Well, George," said she, "I had a letter from Mose to-day, and he wrote that I must tell you, he had bought a real Guinea monkey." [148]

George opened wide both mouth and eyes, as he gazed at her in breathless attention, and Benny immediately drew his thumb from his mouth, where it had been, ever since he entered.

"He says, too," continued Hesper, "that he means to teach him a great many comical tricks before he comes home, and then, if you have been good boys, you shall have him for your own."

"Don't you think we have been?" exclaimed George—"we did all we could to help your father when he moved, and we have been up here every day since you were sick to see how you were, and mother says she doesn't know what she should do without us."

"Yes," said Hesper, "I don't know of any better boys in town, and I will tell Mose so when he comes home."

The boys looked very much gratified, and they continued talking about their expected present with great animation, until aunt Betsey came in, who looked so sharply at them, that they thought it was time to be going. They lingered at the door however, and in a whisper begged of Hesper a parting kiss. With many a side-long glance at aunt Betsey, they received the favor, which was readily granted, and departed perfectly satisfied.

"Fie!" said aunt Betsey, as she took off her moccasins and shook the snow from them against the grate—"I wouldn't have such great lubberly boys kiss me; besides, I don't think it will do you any good, listening to their noisy talk."

"O," said Hesper, "it is a real pleasure, now that I am so much better."

"Well," said aunt Betsey, "I am glad if you are, though I am sure, the night I watched with you, I hadn't the least idea you would live till morning. I didn't watch with you but one night, Hesper, for I was obliged to hurry so fast on my bed-quilt, that I could attend to nothing else."

"Is it done yet?" asked Hesper.

"Done!" repeated aunt Betsey, as she closed her eyes, and leaning back in her chair, rocked nervously to and fro—"yes; don't you know about it?"

"No;" said Hesper. "What is it?"

"Well, after working night and day, I finished it just in time for the great Exhibition. But, don't you think! Mrs. Larkin sent in one which was considered a great deal the handsomest, and won the highest prize, while mine was hardly noticed. It was made of pieces only half as large as mine, put together in all sorts of fanciful figures. I said, when I looked at it, that it was a sin and a shame for people to waste so much time upon things which were of so little use. Mrs. Larkin had much better been making garments for the poor, or improving her mind by useful reading."

"It is too bad," said Hesper, in a sympathizing tone, for she knew that aunt Betsey must be greatly disappointed.

"So it is," she replied, "for after all the time I have spent upon that bed-quilt, it is just good for nothing. I can't bear the sight of it; and, Hesper, if you should ever live to be married, I will give it to you for a wedding present."

Hesper thanked her for her good intentions, but she thought to herself that it was not at all likely she should ever marry, and if she did, she should not want a satin bed-quilt.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

A PLEASANT SURPRISE.

THE winter months passed swiftly away with the Greyson family, in their new home, but it was not till the spring opened, and the pleasant sunshine and warm air came again, with their invigorating influences, that Hesper was able to regain any of her former strength and buoyancy of spirits. When the weather was mild, and the sky clear, she would steal out and work for a short time in the little flower garden, but the good doctor still kept his eye on her, and would not suffer her to engage in any fatiguing employment. It happened, fortunately, that there was no need of it, for Hesper's mother was now so much better, that she could attend to the household duties, and Mr. Greyson, who was constantly employed, earned enough to support them all, comfortably. The doctor had made some extensive purchases in the way of new lands, and what with ploughing and planting, draining meadows and clearing woodlands, he not only managed to keep Mr. Greyson, but also Fred and Charlie busy. The services of the Grimsby boys too were often required, and though, as might have been expected, a crooked word or a hard look would often pass between them and the young Greysons, yet the promise which they had made to Mose, and the presence of Mr. Byers among them, prevented them from breaking out into open hostilities. [152]

One clear, bright summer day, Mr. Greyson and the boys were at work in a beautiful pine grove—a part of the doctor's woodland, clearing away the under-brush for the accommodation of a pic-nic, which was to be held there the following week. "Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted Fred all at once, "there comes mother and Hesper."

Mr. Greyson looked up, at Fred's exclamation, and throwing down his hatchet, he took off his hat and waved it to them as they came down the green and shady road that led to the grove.

"I am right glad to see you," he said, "though I am afraid it is 'most too long a walk for two such invalids."

"O, I have enjoyed every step of the way," said Hesper, whose cheeks were as richly colored as the wild rose she held in her hand.

"I should think mother would be tired, though, for see, she has brought dinner enough for us all in her basket. We mean to have a little pic-nic of our own, so, while you and the boys are at work, we will spread our table by the spring." [153]

"I am right glad you thought of that," said Mr. Greyson, "for I am both tired and hungry, and I shall relish my dinner much better for eating it in pleasant company." He took the basket to the spring, and then left them to prepare their table. It was a most delightful spot they had chosen, for the grass was soft and green beneath their feet, while up above, the branches of the trees, interwoven with vines, screened them from the rays of the noon-day sun. Then, too, there was a pleasant humming of bees among the fragrant blossoms of the locusts, to which the musical ripple of the spring formed a sweet accord.

Fred and Charlie found it quite impossible to wait until they were called, and the cloth was scarcely spread, before they perched themselves upon the large stones they had provided for seats. It was not long, however, before everything was ready, and Mr. Greyson was summoned.

"I declare," said he, as he threw himself upon the ground and wiped the perspiration from his brow—"I would not exchange this spot for the palace of a king, and if Mose was only here, I could desire nothing more."

"Yes," said Hesper, with a sad smile, "and little Johnny too."

"Perhaps he is," replied her mother, "though our poor eyes are not permitted to see his sweet little countenance." Fred looked up at her thoughtfully, for a moment; then he started up, and rolled his stone a little one side. [154]

"Here, Charlie," he said, "let him have a place between us, for I like to think he is here."

"Isn't there room for one more?" said a pleasant voice, close beside them. They all looked up, and saw Juliana's face peeping out upon them from the bushes.

"Yes, and welcome," said Hesper. "But pray how came you

here?"

"Why," said Juliana, "mother stayed at home to-day, so I thought I would just run over and see you. When I came to the house I found no one there, but on my way back I met with Kate Smiley, who told me where you were. I thought, on the whole, I would venture to join your party, for I shall not have so good a chance to be with you again, as I open a school next week. Mother says she can't earn money enough to supply all my need, so I must see what I can do for myself."

"And I," said Hesper, with a smiling countenance, "am going to school next week. Father has promised me that I shall go all summer."

"Yes," said Mr. Greyson, "Hesper shall have all she needs, if I work my fingers to the bone, and she shall enjoy her school to her heart's content, for I mean to make up, if possible, for her working so hard last winter."

"O dear!" sighed Juliana, as she glanced down at her old dress—"how much I wish that I could go too. But I can't," she continued, "so there's no use fretting about it."

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They were still very much engaged in conversation, and had almost finished their dinner, when they heard the sound of a carriage coming along the road. They looked out from among the trees and saw Capt. Clark with a stranger in his wagon. They wondered who he could be, for they had scarce ever seen a more rough looking personage. His hair and beard were both long and bushy—over his shoulders he carried a stick with a bundle on it, and his clothes looked travel worn and dusty. The Captain stopped his horse just as they arrived at the spring.

"Hallo!" said he, "if here isn't a gipsey party! Come, friend, let's join them a few moments." They both sprang from the wagon, and approached the little group.

"You see, here," said the Captain, addressing Mr. Greyson and pointing towards the stranger—"a poor traveller, whom I overtook on my way from the city. The cars had started before him, and he was so anxious to reach home that he set out on foot." Before he could finish speaking, the stranger threw down his stick and bundle, and clasping Juliana around the neck, he kissed her with all his might. The poor girl screamed with surprise, but the next moment she cried out—"father! father!" and returned his salutation with a good will.

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Sure enough it was their old friend and neighbor, Mr. Grimsby, though his rude dress had so disguised him that it was difficult to recognize him.

"How is this?" said Mr. Greyson, as he shook hands with him—"we were not looking for you back so soon."

"Ah!" he replied, "I have had famous luck—better than I could have possibly expected! and as I didn't want my wife going out a washing, or my children wandering about the streets, while I was so well able to take care of them, I have come home to make them comfortable and happy."

Juliana was so delighted that she laughed and cried, and scarce knew what to do, in order to express her joy.

"There, now," said Hesper, "you will let her go to school with me, won't you?"

"Yes," said her father, "she shall live like a lady, dress like a queen, and be educated like a professor, if she wants to, for I am able to do it, and mean that there shall be one Grimsby, at least, who shall make a show in the world. So come along my girl, let's go to your mother and the boys, and see if they like my looks as well as you do."

Capt. Clark helped her into his wagon, with Mrs. Greyson and Hesper, who were right glad of this opportunity to ride home. Away they all started, with happy hearts and smiling countenances, while Mr. Greyson and the boys, who remained behind, sent three parting cheers after them.

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CHAPTER XIX.

MR. BYERS ON MATRIMONY.

HESPER had at length completed her seventeenth year, but her early discipline of sorrow and toil had given her a judgment and experience far beyond that age. During the time that she attended school, a friendship had sprung up between her and Alice Smiley, the doctor's youngest daughter. They were often together, and nothing could delight these girls more, than to secure Mr. Byers' company in some of their walks, for his sage remarks and peculiar mode of expression, was to them a never failing fund of interest and amusement. At times, when a convenient opportunity offered, they would all drop into aunt Nyna's, and sup with her from her little round table, which always seemed so comfortable and cozy. Bread and butter never tasted so good anywhere else, and tea, taken from those little China cups, so thin and small that they seemed almost like egg-shells, was perfectly delicious.

One night, the good lady had a larger party than usual, for she had previously sent out her invitations, comprehending both Juliana, and Kate, the doctor's eldest daughter. Aunt Nyna was in fine spirits that day, on account of having received a letter from Harry, and with it quite a sum of money, which he desired her to use according as her pleasure or necessity demanded. After tea, when they had all sat down together, the good lady, in the fulness of her heart, besought the pleasure of reading the letter to the company, to which they readily assented. In it, there was, as usual, a message to his "little wife," assuring her, that if he continued to succeed as well as he had of late, he should come home soon, and claim her as his bride in reality. The young people laughed when they observed that Hesper blushed deeply, and Mr. Byers immediately offered her a large palm-leaf fan.

"Thee shouldn't notice it when ladies blush, friend Byers," said aunt Nyna, as she laid down the letter and regarded Hesper with a pleasant smile. "Once the good child only laughed at such things, but now she blushes, and is silent. Canst thee tell me what makes the difference, Hesper?"

"O," replied Hesper, still blushing and smiling, "it is because I am older, and because—because I don't know why."

"That's it exactly," said Mr. Byers. "I am entirely satisfied with your explanation, it is so perfectly natural."

"But," continued Hesper, recovering her self-possession, "I don't see how Harry ever came to call me his 'little wife,' or why he still persists in doing so, now that we are both so old."

"Then let me tell thee," said aunt Nyna, with an expression of great interest. "I can well remember the first time he ever saw thee. He was five years of age, and thou only five days when I took him with me to see the new baby. I never saw a little fellow so delighted with anything in my life. He kissed the baby's soft round cheeks, so tenderly—looked with wonder and admiration at the little tiny hands, and then prayed us to let him take her in his arms, just one moment. Finally, he asked the baby's name. The father—he was well and cheerful then—told him it was Hesper. The little fellow shook his curly head thoughtfully, as he said—'I don't like it—I would much rather have her named sissy, or little Miss Muffit,' of whom he had learned in his nursery rhymes.

"We all laughed; at which the poor child seemed greatly disconcerted. 'Look here, Harry,' said thy father, and he took him kindly on his knee. 'When my little baby first came to me, it was evening—the sun had gone down behind the hills, and the great clouds which were sailing through the sky, were of many beautiful colors. As I stood at the window, thanking God that he had given me such a precious little daughter, I looked up, and there I saw a beautiful bright star, in the midst of the clouds, shining calmly down upon me. It was the evening star, and years ago the people called it Hesper. It was so very bright and beautiful, that the same thankful, prayerful feeling came over me, that I had when I first looked upon the face of my new-born child. Then I said I will call my little daughter Hesper, for she came to me in the evening, when the night shadows were falling upon the earth, and it may be, as the years pass on, she will become like yonder star, a light to the pathway of many, so we shall bless God that he ever sent her into this world.

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That is the reason, Harry, why I called her Hesper.' The little fellow sat in silence, a few moments; then he looked up with his face all aglow with pleasant thoughts. 'I like it now,' he said, 'for the stars are the moon's babies, and if she came down from God, it is right to call her Hesper, for she, too, is a little star baby.' It was a simple, child-like thought, but it pleased us much, and for months after, thy mother called thee her 'star-baby.' When it was time to go, I could not make the little fellow willing to part from thee. He stole timidly up to thy mother's bed-room and looked her long and earnestly in the face. 'Please ma'am,' he said, at length, in his coaxing, child-like way, 'won't you give me your baby?' Thy mother laid her pale hand gently among his curls, and said—'My dear child, I would not part with my precious baby for all the wealth of the world.' The little fellow was disappointed. His lips quivered, and his eyes filled with tears. 'Never mind, Master Harry,' said thy father, by way of consolation. 'Wait till you are older, and better able to take care of her, and then you shall have her for your little wife, if you will.' He seemed well contented with this promise, and went away quite willingly. In after years, thy father disapproved of it, when Harry called thee by that name, but thy father himself was first at fault, for the child never forgot the promise, but has called thee his little wife, from that day to this."

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"And in all probability, he will call her so to the day of his death," said Mr. Byers, "only in a higher and more truthful sense."

"No, no;" said Hesper, seriously, "I never shall marry. I said so when I was a child, and I say so now."

"Pshaw!" said Mr. Byers, with seeming impatience, "who ever heard such nonsense! A good looking, useful, affectionate girl, making a resolution at seventeen, to be an old maid to all eternity! Why, you deserve the censure of all sober-minded, rational people. If I were only a young man of twenty, the first thing I would do, would be to offer myself to you, and I don't know," he added, "but what, even now—" Here he hesitated, and looked over towards Hesper, with that indescribable twinkle of sly humor in his eyes which was perfectly irresistible. The whole company burst into a hearty laugh, and Hesper, falling in with the old man's merry mood, signified her willingness at once to receive a formal proposal.

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"Attention, girls!" said Mr. Byers, after the laugh had subsided—and putting on a more serious countenance, he assumed at once a lecturing attitude. "I have somewhat to say to you on this subject of matrimony. It is now more than sixty years that I have looked the world in the face, and I feel, by this time, that I have a right to say that I know something about it. From sixteen till twenty-one I sowed my wild oats like any young fellow. At twenty-five I married, and began life in real earnest. I was a poor man, and had to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow. As time passed on, and the little ones began to gather around my table, I thanked God and worked all the harder. But fortune often made wry faces at me, and sometimes cast me headlong into the slough of despond. I didn't stay there long, however, for the thought of Hannah and the children set me on my feet again, and called up energies I never knew were mine. When Mary, the eldest, was sixteen, she went into a decline, and fading slowly like a spring violet, at length she died. It was a heart breaking thing to us, but before we had fairly recovered from it, Willie, our second child, was upset in a pleasure boat, and drowned. Scarcely a year after, our blue-eyed Charlie died of a fever. Then I cannot tell you how entirely we placed our affections upon sweet little Fanny, our last remaining one, nor how hopelessly we mourned, when we found that the hand of the Destroyer was upon her also. O, girls! Heaven grant that you may never know such hours of watching and anxiety as we experienced, when, one night in mid-winter, the dear child lay upon her pillow, suffering beneath the croup, that scourge of childhood. I never shall forget how piteously she moaned, stretching up her trembling hands to us, and praying us for relief. Our utmost exertions were in vain, and at length, after hours of suffering, the little creature sobbed and moaned her soul away into the hand of her Creator." The old man was silent for a few moments, and then continued.

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"It was too much for my poor Hannah, for the saddest, loneliest thing in this wide world, is the heart of a childless mother—one who has watched faithfully and tenderly over her little flock, and followed them one after another to the grave. She may carry a quiet face before the world, but inwardly the broken chords are still bleeding, and the busy fingers of memory, with frequent touches,

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keep the wound ever open. Thus it was with Hannah. She tried to be cheerful, but the blow was too heavy, and at length she sank beneath it. Twenty years she walked by my side, and shared the cup of my joy and sorrow. That score of years was full of toil, and care, and trouble. If I had never married, I might have escaped that experience. But no: I thank God for it! With all its shadows, the memory thereof is pleasant, and I am twice the man that I should be without it. Girls! you will never know what real life is, till you have learned to love with all the heart and soul— to live no longer for yourselves, but for others, never mind what the consequences may be.”

Kate Smiley looked up timidly, and in her own, gentle, unaffected manner, repeated these lines of Tennyson’s—

“I hold it true whate’er befall,—
I feel it when I sorrow most;
’Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all.”

“That’s it, exactly!” exclaimed Mr. Byers; “God, knew when he placed us in this world, what was best for us, and all these sad experiences which spring from our hearts’ best affections, work out a wonderful weight of good at last. The ‘wise man’ says, ‘with all thy getting, get understanding;’ and I say to you girls, with all your getting, get husbands.” [166]

“But,” said Kate Smiley, who had already refused several offers, “you certainly wouldn’t have a woman take up with anybody, for the sake of getting married, and may be if she refuses two or three offers, because they do not seem suitable, that she will have to be an old maid at last, in spite of herself?”

“No, girls, no!” said Mr. Byers with much emphasis, “don’t throw yourselves away, under any circumstances, but wait till Mr. Right comes along, if ’tis half a century, and if he never comes, then die happy in the thought that you did the best you could.”

“But, supposing,” said Juliana, with a mischievous look, “that I, for instance, should think I had married Mr. Right, and in the course of a few years he should prove to be Mr. Wrong—perhaps take to drinking and other bad habits—abuse me shamefully—threaten my life, and make me in all things as miserable as possible.”

“O, that’s an extreme case,” said Mr. Byers.

“But then you know such things happen.”

“Well, then, I’ll tell you what to do,” said the old gentleman, very decidedly—“rake up the fire, turn the cat out of doors, tie up the baby in the table cloth, and taking it on your back, start for parts unknown immediately.” [167]

They all laughed, but Hesper shook her head.

“No:” she said, “that would be utter selfishness. I should say stand by him till the last moment. Love, suffer, beseech and entreat, and if all availed nothing, then die for him, or with him, but never forsake him.” Mr. Byers regarded her seriously and affectionately.

“O Hesper! Star of Peace and never failing Charity,” he said, “where will thy long-suffering end! God grant thou mayest never be brought to the trial!”

CHAPTER XX.

THE THANKSGIVING DINNER.

"ISN'T it almost time for Mose to come home?" said George Grimsby, one day, as he came into the kitchen, where Hesper was at work.

"Almost," she replied. "Capt. Clark says that we can expect him in the course of a week or two, though I shall try not to think of it too soon, for the ship may have a long passage, and then I should be very much disappointed."

"What a pity it is," remarked George, "that he can't be here next Thursday! We shan't have half so good a time without him."

The day to which he alluded, was the annual Thanksgiving, and the Grimsby family, with uncle Nathan and aunt Betsey, Capt. Clark and his mother, with aunt Nyna and Mr. Byers, had been invited to take dinner with the Greysons. The children had talked of nothing else for the last fortnight, and Hesper herself had looked forward to it with much pleasure, though she knew that thoughts of the loved and absent would cast a shadow over her joy. She was, however, surrounded by so many comforts and blessings, and the future looked so bright before her, that she could not repine one moment. With a light step and a smiling countenance, she went about the house doing all she could to provide for the comfort and convenience of her expected guests. Her cheeks grew rosy red with exercise, and as she sung little snatches of songs while about her work, her voice sounded so sweet and pleasant, that her mother, who was sewing in the next room, laid down her work to listen. Every sly corner and piece of furniture was visited with the broom and duster—the tin ware and the great pewter platters on the kitchen shelves, shone like new silver, and not a spot could be seen upon the floor, she had scoured it so faithfully.

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She was so much fatigued upon the night previous to the eventful day, that when she went to her chamber, she fell asleep as soon as she touched her pillow, and did not awake till the morning sun was shining brightly into her window.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, as she sprang from her bed, "how came I to oversleep myself thus, upon this morning of all others!"

She dressed herself quickly, and ran down stairs in great haste, expecting that her father would be quite vexed with her, for being so late; but to her surprise she found the table spread, and the breakfast nearly ready, though her mother had not yet risen. Her father had been up some time, and he had attended to these things as faithfully as she would herself.

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"Indeed," said Hesper, as she warmed her hands by the blazing fire, "I little thought of sleeping so late."

"I am glad you did," said her father, "for you needed the rest, and I always like to do anything about the house, when I have the opportunity."

Hesper could not help thinking how differently he appeared from what he did a year ago, and just then, it seemed to her as though no one was ever blessed with half so good a father. As he bent down to turn over the great back-log, which sent whole showers of sparks up the chimney, she imprinted a warm kiss upon his cheek.

"Thank you, darling;" he said, "that is the sweetest reward I can have for my labors."

Fred and Charlie could scarce wait for breakfast to be over, before they prayed Hesper to let them have their new jackets, which, with the rows of bright brass buttons, seemed to them more beautiful than anything they had ever seen. They had informed the Grimsby boys of their new possessions in rather a boastful manner, but were somewhat humbled when George told them, in return, that he and Benny had whole new suits. At Hesper's suggestion, however, they concluded to defer the matter till they had brought some wood to kindle a fire in the parlor, which was soon done.

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During the night there had been a light fall of snow, and now the ground looked even and white as far as one could see, but the sun was shining brightly in the clear blue sky, and whole flocks of little snow larks were flying from tree to tree, or leaving their tiny foot-prints in the snow as they hopped about in search of food.

As Hesper stood by the window and looked out, a carriage drove

up to the door, and Mr. Grimsby, with his wife, and little Tommy, and Juliana, and the boys, sprang out, all dressed in their best, and looking never so happy. Hesper had scarce time to welcome them, before uncle Nathan and aunt Betsey arrived. Next came Mrs. Clark with aunt Nyna and Mr. Byers. Mrs. Clark told Hesper that she did not know as the Captain would come—"for," said she, "he received word yesterday, that he must come to the city immediately, on important business. He said he should be back this morning, if possible, but that you must by no means wait for him."

They did wait however, for Mr. Greyson was very anxious that all should be there, and it was with great reluctance that at last they took their seats without him. A mammoth turkey—the gift of Capt. Clark, lay like a fallen hero upon a dish in the centre of the table. His sides, so nicely brown, were swollen almost to bursting with the savory dressing within, and the rich juices were oozing from every pore. This was no ordinary sight to any of these good people, and the boys looked on with breathless interest, as Mr. Greyson commenced the operation of carving. George Grimsby carefully regarded each piece as it fell, and indulged in a thousand secret longings for the portion which contained the coveted wish-bone, for he had the greatest faith in its power to bring about desirable results. To his unspeakable joy, it actually did fall to his share. As quickly as possible he disengaged it from its surroundings, and polished it without delay.

"Here," he said to Fred, who was his right hand neighbor—"let's wish together."

Not liking to attract the attention of the company, the boys held the bone below the table, and pulled with all their might. It did not part easily, but the boys were resolute, and at last it separated.

"There," exclaimed George triumphantly, as he held up his part—"I have my wish, and now I will tell you what it is—I wish Mose would come home to-day."

"That is right!" said Hesper. "So do I." And "so do I" was repeated all around the table.

"There comes Capt. Clark," said aunt Nyna, who sat nearest the window. She put down her knife and fork as she spoke—'rose half way from her seat, then sat down again and glanced smilingly at the company. The next moment the door opened and Capt. Clark entered, with a young man—rather tall, with black whiskers, and his complexion somewhat darkened by exposure to the weather.

"How do you do, good people?" said the Captain, very politely. "Allow me to introduce to you—"

"Mose! Mose!" exclaimed Hesper, as she overturned her chair in her haste, and sprang into his arms.

All arose from the table at once to receive him. Tears, and kisses, and smiles, were mingled together, for a more heartfelt greeting was never known.

"How are you, my boy?" said Mr. Greyson, with joyful earnestness, as he grasped his hand.

Mose looked at his father in astonishment, as he replied. Instead of the sullen, despairing look, which he had worn for years, his countenance was now radiant with hope and happiness. He spoke, he looked, and acted, like a man who had confidence in God and himself, and was both able and willing to do his duty in the world, whatever it might be. Then, too, Mose looked at his mother—so sick and feeble when he left home that he feared he never should see her again—but now she stood there with tears of joy in her mild eyes, and the glow of health upon her cheek. He had saved every cent of his earnings, that he might come home and minister to their wants, as far as possible, but all around him he saw signs of comfort and prosperity, for which he was wholly unprepared. They had purposely kept their removal to the new home a secret, and now they fully enjoyed his surprise.

"How has this all happened?" he asked—"What good spirit has aided you?"

"Here, Mose," replied his father, as he laid his hand on Hesper's shoulder—"is our fairy. She labored without fainting when our burdens were the heaviest. Her faith and patience were both example and rebuke to me in my despondency. Her never failing love and goodness has warmed my heart into action, and her truth and simplicity opened the way whereby others stretched out their hands to help us. God bless her! No better angel than she has ever

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crossed our threshold."

The poor girl blushed painfully at this unlooked for praise, from the usually silent lips of her father, and she was in no small degree relieved, when the attention of the company was turned from her by George Grimsby, who stole up behind Mose, and pulling him by the coat, asked in a loud whisper concerning the whereabouts of his Guinea monkey. Upon being assured that the desired object might be expected by the regular packet, early next morning, he returned to his seat with a smiling countenance.

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Again Mose looked round upon the little group, and then, turning to his mother, he said in a faltering tone—"all here but one!" His loving heart missed the welcome which would have come from the little one who was now slumbering in the dust. That sweet, childish face, with the clustering ringlets and soft blue eyes, was pictured distinctly in his memory, and as the thought came home to him that he would behold it upon earth no more, he bowed his head upon his hands and wept. Hesper sobbed aloud, for the wound was yet fresh in her heart, and then, for a few moments, there was a hushed and reverent silence throughout the room.

"Come, children," said Mr. Greyson, at length, as he motioned for Mose and Hesper to take their seats at the table, "let us think no longer of the grave, but of the bright heaven beyond, where the child of our love sits down with the angels to a feast of Thanksgiving, far more joyful than any that earth can know." At these words the whole company resumed their seats, and soon the passing shadow had vanished from their countenances.

"Hast thee brought me no message from my boy Harry?" said aunt Nyna at length, who for some time had maintained a considerate silence, but now ventured to speak.

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"Aye, that I have," said Mose, thrusting his hand into his coat pocket. "Here is a letter and a daguerreotype"—and he passed them over at once to the good lady.

With eager hands she opened the miniature, while Hesper peeped over her shoulder.

"Why!" she exclaimed, with a look of astonishment, "how he has altered!" and Hesper, as she gazed at it in wonder, thought so likewise. Instead of the merry, frank looking companion of her childhood, here was an individual, apparently much older, of a very intellectual cast of countenance, with large, thoughtful eyes, and a high, white forehead, from which the dark hair was turned back, displaying to great advantage its breadth and fulness.

Mose started up and glanced at it. "O!" he said, "I have made a mistake! That is Mr. Clyde, who came home as passenger in our ship. He is a fine fellow, though rather singular. We became very good friends on the home passage, and at parting he gave me his miniature. He is stopping in the city now, and says that if I remain at home till spring, which I think is likely, he may possibly look in upon me some day."

So saying, Mose drew another daguerreotype from his pocket, and exchanged with aunt Nyna.

"That's him!" she exclaimed, joyfully—"only looking more like a man and ten times handsomer."

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The color deepened upon Hesper's cheeks, and her eye brightened, as she gazed at it; for in the frank, manly countenance before her, she recognized at once the companion of her childhood. There was the same richly clustering hair, above his open brow—the eyes beaming pleasantly upon her as of old, and the same cheerful smile lingering about the mouth, which had never spoken any other words to her than those of kindness and love. Her heart beat quickly, and fearing that the rest of the company might observe her emotion, she resumed her seat. Through the whole of the day, in the midst of all the sport and enjoyment, memory still kept the countenance of her early companion before her, and when she retired to rest that night, it still looked out upon her through all the wandering fancies of her dreams.

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CHAPTER XXI.

A NEW PHASE OF FEELING.

THE next morning after the arrival of Mose, as Hesper was at work in her chamber, there came a light tap at the door.

"Come in," she said, and Mose entered.

"Hesper," he said, as he took a seat by her side, "there was one thing that I did not have an opportunity to speak to you about last night, so I thought I would come to you this morning. When I was in Canton with Harry, we often sat down together, and talked about home folks. The poor fellow's heart yearned sadly after his friends, and if he didn't think it would seem altogether too unmanly to leave such good business as he is in at present, I don't believe he would stay there another day. He often mentioned you, for he said that of all his playmates, there was not one who seemed nearer or dearer to him than you; and then, Hesper, you must forgive me, but I couldn't help telling him what a patient, true-hearted sister you were: How thoughtful, industrious, and"—

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"Fie, Mose!" said Hesper, blushing deeply—"He must have thought you wanted to recommend me."

"Not by any means! for it was altogether unnecessary, as he thought full enough of you already. I let him read all your letters."

"Why, Mose! I wouldn't have thought it! I only wrote them for you, and they weren't fit for any one else to see."

"Harry thought they were, though, for he read them again and again, and then he asked me if I supposed you would be willing to write such letters to him. He said he was often very lonely so far away from home, and sometimes discouraged, but if he could be expecting such pleasant little messengers from you, it would put new life into his heart and strength into his hands, and he could be more content to remain there, so long as duty or necessity demanded. I told him I had no doubt you would be willing, for you were always glad to do anything that would make another happy. More than that, Hesper, I will say, that although Harry is one of the kindest, best hearted fellows in the world, yet he isn't what he should be. I love him as I do an own brother, but then I saw that he was easily led into temptation, and liked a good time a little too well. Now this would be precisely the reason why some people would advise you not to write him, but I don't think so."

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"No, no;" said Hesper. "It's love, not hatred, that calls back the erring, and I should be the last one to turn away from Harry in such a case."

"He isn't a bad fellow by any means," said Mose—"only inclined to be wild and thoughtless. You can have more influence with him than any one, Hesper, and therefore I say write to him by all means, for there is no knowing what dangers your kind and encouraging words may save him from."

"I will, most certainly," replied Hesper, earnestly—"But, then," she added with some hesitation, "I don't know how to begin. I would much rather he should write to me first."

"Which he has done," said Mose, as he drew a small package from his pocket and tossed it into her lap. "He gave me that, the day I left, and as he put it into my hand, he said—'Mose speak a good word for me to your sweet sister, for though I am sometimes wrong in head, yet I'm true at heart, and shall remain so, if Hesper will consent to be my guiding star.'"

There was a somewhat nervous movement to Hesper's fingers as she attempted to untie the string. As the knot did not yield readily, she clipped it at once with her scissors—tore off the wrapper in haste, and there was a letter and another likeness of Harry.

"Now," said Mose, as he rose from his seat, "I will leave you to your own reflections, but let me suggest, that if you answer that letter, you must do so soon, for the next mail starts in the course of a few days."

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Scarcely had Mose left the room, when Hesper commenced reading her letter, and we shall consider it no betrayal of confidence, if we give an exact copy.

"MY DEAR LITTLE WIFE:

For so I must ever call you. It seems very awkward, at first, to

think of writing to you, but I feel that I must, for my heart is very full, and I wish to awaken an answering spirit in return. The sight of your brother Mose, and the long conversations we have had together about home, has made me almost wish to be a boy again, and to wander hand in hand with you over my native hills once more. It is nearly three years now since we parted, and time must have made some important changes in us both, but I hope it has not touched the blessed affection of our childhood. You are in your eighteenth year now, and I in my twenty-third, therefore we cannot think of each other precisely as we did. I am no longer the wild, careless boy, who ran races with Bose along the seashore, or climbed the hickory trees to shake down the ripened nuts for you. Neither are you now, the little round faced girl whom I so often dragged to school on my sled, or carried over the brook in my arms, when it was so swollen as to overflow the stepping-stones. We loved each other very much then—as much as if we were brother and sister, but I do not want you to think of me as a brother now. The morning I parted from you on the wharf, you threw your arms about my neck, kissing me again and again, as the tears streamed down your rosy cheeks. I said to you—be my good “little wife” till I come back, and then you shall be my wife in reality. You only answered, as you clasped your arms still more closely—‘O Harry! Harry! How much I shall miss you!’

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After the boat reached the ship, I took the glass, and looking out, I saw that same little girl standing upon the cap-log of the wharf, with her hands shading her eyes, and gazing earnestly towards the ship. Bless her dear good heart! I said to myself, there is not one who thinks more of me than she, and I was glad to know that I should be remembered by one so faithful and true. I have seen some hard experience since then—have fallen into various temptations and done many wrong things, for I grew careless and forgetful. But when Mose came, and I read your letters, so tender, so thoughtful and kind, I longed to be good again, and to have you write such letters to me, only do not write as if I were your brother. O no: Hesper. We are what may be called a young man and woman now, therefore I would have you love me with a different love, which shall grow broader and deeper as time rolls on, and at length unite our hearts as one forever. Hesper, if you will be my guiding star, I shall learn to love all that is high, and noble, and worthy. I shall have something certain to love and labor for, and something to remind me of God and holy things in this heathenish land. Perhaps you think that you are yet too young to turn your mind to such things; but no, Hesper, you are plenty old enough to know whether you can love your old companion more than as a brother; old enough too to think of the new relations and responsibilities which life may bring, and to prepare for them gradually. You can do me much good if you will, Hesper, for there is nothing awakens a young man’s better feelings more effectually, however wayward he may be, than to know that a true hearted, pure minded woman loves him, prays for him, and is willing to trust her happiness to him.

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In two years more I shall be home again—‘Home again!’ How those words make my heart throb and dim my eyes as I write them! Then, as I clasp your hand in mine, and look upon your well remembered face once more, may it not be with the thought that I am never to be parted from you again? O Hesper! do not take away this great and pleasant hope from me, but write to me words of strength and encouragement, and both God and my own heart shall bless you. Write to me soon, for I shall wait most anxiously to hear from you.

Yours truly,

HARRY.”

Hesper read this letter with a throbbing heart and tearful eyes, and when she had finished it, she laid her face upon the table and wept freely.

“Why!” she said at length, as she brushed away her tears, “there was nothing in that letter to make me weep! How foolish I am!” With an effort at self-control she arose and walked the floor a few moments, then, observing the miniature, she took it and looked at it long and thoughtfully. Her face gradually assumed a serene and beautiful expression, and at length, seemingly unconscious of what she did, she pressed the likeness to her lips.

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“What is that, Hesper?” said her mother, who had entered unheard, and stood close behind her.

Hesper turned and blushed, but the next moment she threw her arms around her mother’s neck, and laid her head on her bosom.

“O mother!” she said, “I am glad you have come, for I am almost bewildered, and need you to think for me. There is one who is trying to steal your daughter’s heart from you, and perhaps you have come in just the right time to prevent it.”

“That, I am sure I shall not do,” replied her mother, “if it only

goes in the right direction, for I have seen enough of my daughter's heart, to know that it can contain all her affection for me, and a much greater love beside."

Hesper placed a chair for her mother, and then read the letter aloud. There was a troubled expression to Mrs. Greyson's face, but she did not allow her daughter to perceive it.

"And now, what shall I do, mother?" said Hesper, as she concluded. [185]

"Let your own heart answer, dear child."

"But its words are very uncertain. Advise me, dear mother! advise me!" she added, entreatingly.

"Hesper," said her mother, as she placed her hand beneath her daughter's chin, and looked her steadily in the eyes, "Do you think you love Harry more than as a brother."

"I—I think I could if I tried," stammered Hesper, with a very honest look.

"You do love him," said her mother, "and therefore I say—use your love and influence as far as possible for his good, and trust God for the result. I cannot help dreading for you, my dear child, the experience which such association and relationship bring, but it is all for the best; for you would always be a child in heart and mind without it. Go on and take your woman's lot as it comes, for there is a good God above, who ordereth all things well."

"Mother! mother!" said Hesper, in a faltering tone, as she crept close to the bosom of her sympathising parent, "I am afraid of life and what lies before me, and wish I could die now. I cannot bear to think of going away from you and father, to live with one who may be unkind and neglectful towards me. I will write to Harry and tell him that I love him very much, but I fear that I can never marry him." [186]

"That is childish," said her mother, "and you will know that it is, when you have had a wider experience. No, my dear child; take the cup of life just as God mingles it, thanking Him not only for the sweet but also for the bitter. Joy and sorrow is the common lot of all below, and those who drink most willing of the draught as it comes, are best prepared for a higher and holier life above."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE STRANGER GUEST.

It happened very fortunately that Mose could stay at home all winter, for Mr. Greyson's health began to fail him, so that he could not work as formerly, and therefore every cent that Mose earned, went to support the family. Hesper also took in plain sewing, which, with the time she devoted to the education of her younger brothers, kept her always busy. The interchange of letters between her and Harry, was as frequent as time and distance would allow, and so grateful did the poor fellow seem for her kindness, so tender and delicate in his expressions of affection, and so hopeful for the future, that the thought of him became to her a continual inspiration and joy. His name was mingled in her prayers, and she thanked God most sincerely for this new and beautiful phase in her experience.

The spring of that year was very mild and early, and as soon as possible, the whole Greyson family commenced gardening operations. Hesper reserved the front yard for herself, and soon converted it into a most flourishing flower-garden. Her tulips and daffodils, hyacinths and pansies, were the admiration of the whole village, and especially of aunt Betsey, who helped herself from them freely.

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One evening, about sunset, as she was very busy among the flowers, she was startled by the sound of a footstep, and turning, she beheld a strange gentleman, very tall and pale, just entering the front gate. He slightly raised his hat, and bowed coldly, as he said—

"Good evening, Miss. Is Moses Greyson—your brother, I suppose—at home?"

"No, sir," replied Hesper, "he went down to the village about half an hour since, but said he should be back soon. Will you please step in and wait for him?"

"No, I thank you," said the stranger, "I prefer walking till he returns, and perhaps I may meet him."

He raised his hat, with another stiff bow, and then turned away. Hesper looked after him with curiosity and surprise. His face, though so very pale, was handsome, on account of the regular features, large dark eyes and high forehead, but then the expression of his countenance was of a marble coldness, and his whole manner stiff and formal. She felt quite certain that she had seen his face before, but where, she could not tell. She perplexed herself a long time over this dim memory, when suddenly it occurred to her that this person must be Mr. Clyde, the friend of Mose, whose likeness he had given to aunt Nyna by mistake, on the day of his return.

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"Dear me!" said Hesper to herself, with a half shudder, "I don't see what Mose can fancy in him, for I am sure I don't like him at all."

It was about dark when Mose returned, and then he came alone.

"Hesper," said he, "I have seen my friend, Mr. Clyde. He is stopping at the hotel down in the village, and after a deal of persuasion, he has at length consented to take his baggage and come here, so I thought I would run home and tell you that you might prepare for him."

"O dear!" said Hesper, with a look of dismay, "I'm almost sorry, for he is so cold and formal, that I never shall be able to get acquainted with him."

"Well"—replied Mose, with some hesitation, "I suppose, to tell the truth, that the less notice you take of him, the better. He was always very peculiar, but he is more so now, for this reason. When he came home, about six months ago, he was engaged to a very beautiful and accomplished lady, whom he was to marry soon after his arrival. But you can judge of his feelings, when he found that only a few weeks previous she had married another, and the only excuse she made, was, that she loved this one better, and therefore felt it was right for her to marry him."

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"How heartless!" exclaimed Hesper.

"Well, in consequence of this," resumed Mose, "Mr. Clyde has become bitter against the whole sex. He believes they are all false hearted and designing, and does not wish to have any dealings with them. I think he will feel differently about this, however, when time has taken away the sting of his disappointment; but at present he is

in a very unhappy frame of mind, and I think is almost sick."

"Poor fellow," said Hesper, in a sympathizing tone. "I am glad you have invited him here. I will do all I can to make him comfortable, and at the same time will be very careful not to trouble him in any way. What a sad thing it must be to have one's brightest and best hopes in life disappointed." She thought of Harry, and inwardly rejoiced that no such dark shadow lay between them.

With all possible haste she made ready the best chamber, for the expected guest, and placed a small bouquet of her choicest flowers upon the stand. An hour afterwards, Mr. Clyde entered with Mose, and retired directly to his chamber. Hesper saw nothing of him that night, but when, at a late hour, she sought her own quiet pillow, she lay awake and listened a long time to the measured footsteps of the unhappy man who paced the floor in the chamber beyond. Her heart sorrowed deeply for him, and she besought the great Father earnestly, that a blessing of peace might fall upon "the stranger within their gates."

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Very early the next morning—just as the first peep of daylight began to crimson the eastern sky, Mose stepped quietly into Hesper's chamber, and awakened her.

"Hesper," he said, "Mr. Clyde is really quite sick. Just now, when I awoke, I heard him moan as if in pain, and I hurried at once into his room. I found him yet dressed, lying upon the outside of the bed, as though he had only thrown himself down for a short nap. He breathed quick and heavily—his face and hands were burning with fever, and he talked constantly in his sleep. I managed with a great deal of difficulty to arouse him, and gave him some water. I asked him if he felt sick, it was some time before he understood me, and then he said—'Yes, Mose, sick in every bone of my body. I have tried to throw off these terrible feelings, for the last three weeks, but now they have fairly got possession of me. Let them come though, I say, for the sooner I die the better.'"

"Then he dropped into the same troubled sleep again, and I left him. Now I want you to get up and dress you, while I run over to Dr. Smiley's, for I think this matter should be attended to directly."

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"By all means," said Hesper, whose sympathies were at once awakened. "Poor fellow, how I do pity him."

Mose left her, and she arose and dressed herself immediately. As she listened, she too could hear the quick, heavy breathing, in the room beyond, and the broken sentences he uttered in his sleep. It was not long before Mose and the doctor arrived. Upon going up to see the sick man, the doctor ordered him to be put to bed at once, and to be kept there. He said that he was evidently threatened with a fever, but by proper care and attention, it might be broken up at once. His whole nervous system appeared to be very much disordered, and therefore he must of necessity be sick for a time, before he could recover—that the best way for him was to lie still and take it as quietly as possible, and in the end, it might prove a benefit to him. He gave him very little medicine—put him on low, simple diet, and advised Mose to sit with him through the day, as his mind seemed to wander greatly.

It was no small tax upon the time and attention of the brother and sister, to have the care of a sick person added to their other responsibilities, but instead of murmuring, they rejoiced that they were able to meet this new demand upon their sympathies, and spared no exertions to make the sufferer comfortable. Mose remained with him through the whole of three days and nights, during which time the sick man only sat up long enough to have his bed made, which Hesper did as quickly and quietly as possible. She put the whole room in order in a very few moments—brought him his breakfast of nicely prepared gruel or some other light food, and then, like a good fairy, vanished till she was needed again. She never spoke one word to him or Mose while she was in the room, and scarcely glanced towards the sick man, who usually sat pale and motionless in his high backed chair, seemingly unmindful of all things. But he was not so, by any means, for he watched Hesper closely, as she stole so quietly about his room, and finally slipped out like a frightened bird.

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Upon the fourth morning he was so much better, that after his bed was made, he proposed taking his pillow and lying down upon the sofa which was very comfortable. With the doctor's consent Hesper had raised one window a little way, and thrown open the blinds to let in the sunshine and warm air. This seemed to refresh

the invalid at once, and of his own accord he mentioned how very beautiful and fragrant the running roses and jessamines were, which peeped in at the window.

This encouraged Hesper, and upon the strength of it, she gathered a small bouquet, and placed it on his table. He glanced at it as she did so, and said in a pleasant tone—

“I see you are quite fond of flowers, Miss Hesper.”

“Yes sir,” she replied with a startled look, for these were the first words he had addressed to her since he entered the house—“I like them very well, though I do not make much talk about them.”

“That is just as it should be,” said Mr. Clyde. “People care very little for things which they are continually talking about. When a woman pretends to be in love, one can easily judge by her nonsensical prattle, as to the quality of her affections, though it takes some time to find it out.”

As he said this, there was the same expression to his countenance, which Hesper disliked so much, she felt uncomfortable, and hastened to get out of the room, but just as she was crossing the threshold, he called her back.

“Miss Hesper,” he said, “your brother informs me that he cannot be with me to-day; allow me therefore to ask the favor of a book, to wile away my time with.”

“I have only one that I think will interest you,” said Hesper, thoughtfully—“and that is ‘Brothers and Sisters,’ by Miss Bremer. Did you ever read it?”

“No,” he replied. “Please bring it, for I don’t care what it is, if it will only take up my mind.” She brought the book directly, for which he thanked her very courteously, and placed himself in a position to read. About half an hour afterwards, however, when she went in to give him his medicine, she found him lying there with the volume closed, in his hand.

“Don’t you find the book interesting?” she asked, timidly.

“Yes,” he replied, “but my head is weak, and my eyes get tired so soon, that I find an attempt to read is useless.”

Hesper turned quickly, as though she would speak, but she checked herself, and again proceeded towards the door. He had observed her movement however, and called after her.

“Hesper,” he said, “what was you about to remark?”

“Only sir,” she replied very meekly, “that if you wished, I would gladly read to you, as I am at leisure at present. But then I feared you would think me too officious.”

“Not at all,” he replied. “I should be very grateful, if you would read to me a while, for my mind is full of troublesome thoughts to-day. Only,” he added, as the unpleasant expression came again over his countenance—“sit where I cannot see you.”

Hesper took her chair and placed it a little way from the end of the sofa, where his head lay, so that he could not observe her. When she first commenced reading, her voice trembled a little, but she soon gained confidence, and as she became interested in the story, she quite forgot who she was reading to. She read on, chapter after chapter, for a long time, till suddenly Mr. Clyde interrupted her.

“Stop, my kind friend,” he said; “I had quite forgotten, while listening so intently, that you were mortal, and subject to weariness. I will trespass no farther upon your good will, at present, but must beg of you to favor me in a like manner, another time. Your kindness has been of great benefit to me, and I thank you, most sincerely.”

Hesper’s face brightened with a pleasant smile of satisfaction. “I am very glad,” she said, “if I have been of the least service, and shall be happy to read to you again, whenever you wish.”

That very afternoon Mr. Clyde intimated to her, that if it would not be asking too much, he should be glad to hear a little more of the story. The next day he made the same request, and the next also, though now he was so much better that he was able to walk about the room, and even to go down into the yard among the flowers, which he greatly admired. He pleaded weariness, however, when he desired her to read, and so she continued till the book was finished. Towards the last, as they became better acquainted, he would sit beside her while she read, and no longer desired her to keep out of his sight.

At one such time, aunt Betsey happened in, and she regarded them with indignation and surprise. Her call was very short, and

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upon leaving she proceeded directly to aunt Nyna's, in a state of great excitement, and informed her of what she had seen. She said she thought such things were scandalous, and ought to be attended to immediately, more especially as report said that Hesper was already engaged to Harry. She wondered, too, what Hesper's mother could be thinking of, to allow such doings right before her eyes.

"But then," she added, "Susan always was a strange woman, and always would be to the end of time," therefore she advised aunt Nyna to go down that very night, and give Hesper "a real talking to."

To her great disappointment, however, the good lady replied, that she didn't see any harm in such things, and that she thought Hesper did perfectly right. She added still more to aunt Betsey's vexation, by calling in Fred Greyson, who was at work in her garden, and sending him to ask Mose and Hesper, with Mr. Clyde, to tea, which invitation was very promptly accepted.

At the end of three weeks, as Mr. Clyde's health seemed to be fully re-established, he began to talk of leaving, to which proposition both Mose and Hesper listened with regret, for although he was often silent and reserved, yet there were hours when all his better nature shone forth, and then he seemed to Hesper a man whom any one might respect and admire. The day of his departure was not set, but he was awaiting the answer to a letter which would determine it. He proposed starting immediately for Europe, where he intended travelling for a few years, to restore his wasted energies, both of mind and body.

"But," he added seriously, as they were conversing together concerning his plans—"I have met with so many crosses and disappointments in life, that I cannot expect much for the future. At best, the remainder of my days will be but a staying, and not a cheerful, actual existence."

Shortly after this conversation Mr. Clyde went out with Mose, and left Hesper at her sewing. She became at length very weary with her monotonous toil; so she took her gipsy hat and strolled away into the woods beyond the old Rolling Mill. After wandering about among the hills and hollows for some time, gathering ferns and wild flowers, she struck at length into the deeply shaded path which led by the side of the brook. She continued musingly on her way, till she came to the great rock where she had talked with Mose, just before he went to sea. Here she seated herself, and gathering up the violets and tender green leaves which grew profusely about her, commenced forming them into a wreath. She became very much interested in her employment, but just as she was giving the finishing touches to her work, she heard the sound of footsteps, and looking along the green pathway, she beheld Mr. Clyde coming towards her. He did not smile when he saw her, and she thought he looked paler and more serious than ever.

"Ah, Hesper!" he said, "I am glad that I have found you at last, for I have received a letter, saying that I must be in the city to-night, therefore, in the course of an hour or so, I shall be on my way."

"O, I am so sorry!" said Hesper, with the instinctive utterance of an innocent heart. She let the violet wreath fall upon her lap, and gazed up at him as he leaned silently against a tree. The changing light and shadow which came through the green leaved boughs, played fitfully over his countenance. He held his hat in his hand, and had brushed back the masses of dark hair from his high pale brow. His eyes were turned from her, yet she could see in them a look of unutterable sorrow, and around his mouth a quivering expression of anguish, as though he felt obliged to compress his lips firmly, to keep back a rush of contending emotions. She could not behold that expression unmoved. Her kindly heart beat in sympathy, and her eyes filled with tears. He turned and looked at her one moment, and then threw himself upon the grass beside her.

"Hesper, my sweet sister," he said, "I cannot leave you without telling you how much I have to thank you for—more than you can realize in yourself—nay, nay, do not shrink from me like a frightened dove. I am not quite an ice-berg, though oftentimes my cold exterior would make you think so. Circumstances have made me what I am, and given me this mask of formality, which I wear before the world, where curious eyes are ever ready to prey upon a bleeding heart, but before the never failing charity of your pure soul, I dare appear as I am. Not only must I thank you for your kindly services during

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my sickness, but also for saving me from an utter disbelief in woman's truth and goodness, for when a man loses his faith in woman, the brightest star in the heaven of his existence is quenched. Had you intruded in the least upon my feelings—had you by word, or look, or sign, overstepped the boundary which my jealous soul had placed for you, I should have hated you. But no: it was not thus, for ever gentle, helpful and retiring, you manifested your sympathy for my stricken heart in the simplest, most unobtrusive way, and always conducted towards me with that cheerful, pure-hearted simplicity, which is the greatest charm of the true woman. From this and from what I have learned of your past history, you have shown me, that however much I may have been disappointed, yet my cherished ideal of woman is not altogether false, and so I go forth to the world again, with the faint hope in my heart, that somewhere on the face of the earth, I may find that ideal, and make it the altar for my yearning affections."

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The tears streamed down Hesper's cheeks as he spoke. "O, Mr. Clyde!" she said earnestly, "believe me, although there is so much of deception in the worlds that you will find many, many women much better than my own poor self. There are many pure and faithful hearts filled with a never failing fountain of affection, scattered up and down in the world, but you will find that they scarce ever beat beneath silken garments and glancing jewels. Look for true love rather among those who serve humbly and suffer long, for the heart grows tender and truthful under the discipline of sorrow. I have not lived long in the world, but I have seen enough of it to know that."

"You are right, good angel," said Mr. Clyde, as he regarded her with an earnest, sorrowful look. "What I could not learn through years of varied experience, has come to you through your own intuitions, and now you speak it to my shame. I know myself, now, after the first feeling of bitterness has passed, that heretofore I have worshipped false deities, and laid my soul's best offerings upon shrines wholly unworthy of them, but while the arrow of disappointment still rankles in my heart that thought can give me little consolation. Time alone can heal the wound, and teach me that indifference which shall turn my heart to stone."

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"O no! no!" said Hesper, quickly, as she laid her hand upon his shoulder, and looked him earnestly in the face—"not to stone, for is there not much in the world to live for and enjoy, even though one particular affection cannot be gratified?"

Mr. Clyde shook his head seriously. "Put the question to your own heart," he said. "An earnest, joyful love for the companion of your childhood, gladdens and inspires your whole being. You are sitting in the sunshine of a great hope, and your whole future is radiant with the golden hues which your own soul casts before you. Tell me, should these hopes be disappointed, should this light go out in darkness, would you turn unmoved to the world, and find much there, even then, to make you happy? If so, then you have not the tender, sympathizing nature, which I had ascribed to you."

For the first time did it cross Hesper's mind, that such a shadow might fall upon her pathway, and her deep sympathy for her friend made her feel how terrible it would be. She laid her hand for an instant upon her heart, while an expression of pain crossed her countenance. Then the cloud passed, and the calm sweet look returned again.

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"I know," she said frankly, "that I should not be indifferent. I know it would almost crush me to the earth, but I trust it would only be for a while, and when I arose again, my soul would be stronger and better for the trial. Mr. Clyde, the only sure refuge from any such sorrow, is to forget one's self entirely, and live only for the sake of others. That is what I think I should do, and it would be my only chance of safety."

For one moment Mr. Clyde held her clasped hands in his own, and looked searchingly into her face.

"I know, you good, true soul," he said, "that you would do thus, for it is precisely the turn which such natures as yours would take, but it would be a hard task for me."

"It is always easier to advise than to do," replied Hesper, "and especially in such cases—but Mr. Clyde," she added, with great earnestness, "I believe you have a nature equal to any such thing, and that the reason of your disappointment, is because God has something better in reserve for you, than a union with a vain, false-

hearted woman.”

Her words seemed to have a powerful effect upon him, for he closed his eyes and compressed his lips firmly, while that same quivering expression of anguish which she had so often observed, played around them. It was but for a moment however, and then he started up suddenly.

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“Hesper,” he said, “I must not tarry longer, for time flies rapidly. Let me bid you farewell here. I may never see you again, and therefore when I think of you, I want to picture you in my memory as you sit here, like a wood-nymph, with this back ground of moss-covered hills, and the spring violets blooming at your feet.”

He laid his hand upon her head, and gently smoothed away the tresses of soft, brown hair. “God grant,” he continued, “that the blight of wasted affection may never fall upon you, for of all the trials that rend the human heart, there are none which wound it so deeply as those which come through the avenues of the affections.” As he spoke, he bowed his head and imprinted a light kiss upon her forehead. A tear-drop fell upon her cheek, and she knew that his manly heart must be stirred with deep emotions, or it would never manifest itself thus. She glanced up at him timidly. He clasped her hand warmly in his own for a moment, then he suddenly dropped it—took the little violet wreath from her lap, and without casting one backward glance, hastened along the green pathway.

Hesper was bewildered by her feelings. She could not understand herself, and yielding to her motions, she laid her face upon the mossy hill-side and wept like a child. She did not know before, how much she cared for Mr. Clyde, but now it seemed as though one, dear as a brother, was taken from her. Musing deeply upon “life’s mysterious destinies,” she wandered slowly along the wood-path, and then, not wishing to meet him again, she took her way across the hills to the cottage of aunt Nyna.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CHARITY SCHOOL.

As we have already stated, Mr. Byers was very fond of children, and in return, the children were greatly attached to him. In his walks over the hills and along the seashore, he was never without companions, first and foremost among whom, ranked the Greysons and Grimsbys. As the years passed on, his followers increased so rapidly in stature and wisdom, that the old man often contemplated them in silent astonishment, more particularly little Tommy, who, from a tender yearling, had progressed to a stout little fellow of some three or four years, and scorning longer to be a mere portable, used his powers of locomotion to great advantage.

As Mr. Byers was deeply impressed with a sense of his own moral responsibility, he endeavored at all times to instruct as well as amuse the children. He discoursed to them very learnedly upon the nature and habits of shell-fish—directed their young minds to the untiring industry of the wild-bees, and at one time occupied their attention a full half hour, with a lecture upon the rise and progress of mushrooms, which was occasioned by finding a mammoth specimen in a swampy hollow. [207]

For these reasons, the appearance of Mr. Byers at nightfall, was a matter of no slight interest to the young people of the village, and he was seldom seen, at that time, without a large group of children about him, of all sizes and colors. The good old man received all, and rejected none, although there were several among his followers who were highly objectionable. Prominent among these was a big boy of fifteen, familiarly known among the children as "black Jake." To the little ones, his very personal appearance rendered him an object of terror, but the older children had far more forcible reasons for their aversion to him. He had several times been in the House of Correction, and would have been there oftener, had he not managed to escape the vigilance of the law. He smoked and swore as freely as a much older person, and was always ready for any sort of desperate undertaking. There seemed, however, to be more of mischief than malice in his composition, for although he was constantly playing tricks upon his companions, yet he was very careful not to do them any personal injury, and if he robbed them of anything in sport, he was ready to restore fourfold the next moment. Only when his temper was fairly aroused, was black Jake perfectly formidable, and then he was a very lion. Few grown people dared oppose his wrath at such times, for he was entirely reckless as to what he did. For several weeks he had attended the village school, but after creating a general rebellion, and whipping the master, he turned his back with contempt upon the halls of learning, and took to the more congenial employment of hunting and fishing. In some unaccountable way he had become the possessor of a gun, and it was his constant companion night and day. He was continually prowling about the woods in search of game, and oftentimes the school girls, upon their berrying excursions, had been frightened half out of their wits by the sudden discharge of Jake's fowling piece close to their ears, or equally alarmed by his springing from the bushes directly among them when they least thought him near. [208]

At one time, a benevolent minister in the village had taken him under his especial protection, in the hopes of reforming and regenerating him; but he finally dismissed him in despair, declaring openly that he believed the boy was "totally depraved." After this fall from favor, Jake's last estate was worse than his first, and he was left by friends and foes to work out his own destiny.

Of course, therefore, it was with no slight regret that Mr. Byers beheld Jake among his little company, but he said nothing, for there were several others of the same stamp, and he could by no means reject them. His heart was drawn out with the tenderest sympathy towards the little group that surrounded him, and, to use the language of Scripture—"he had compassion on them, because they were as sheep without a shepherd." Night and day he was continually revolving in his mind some benevolent purpose concerning them, and finally, a suggestion presented itself, which he readily accepted. Without delay he hastened to Hesper and laid his plan before her. [209]

"Look here," he said, as he came into the kitchen and found her

alone, "I have an excellent project in view, but I want you to help me;—the fact is, I can't do anything without your assistance. I will tell you what it is: As I was walking with the children to-night, I thought all at once that you, and I, and a few others, could open an evening charity school, so that all these poor children who couldn't or wouldn't go to school in the daytime, could have an opportunity to learn which otherwise they would not. Now what do you think of it? Isn't it an excellent idea? Come, say yes, directly," said the old man, with great animation.

"Well, yes," replied Hesper, thoughtfully, "but, then, we shall want a hall and lights, and books and stationery."

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"O, never mind that!" said Mr. Byers—"that's just nothing as a hinderance. We can easily get all we want somehow."

"But how?" said Hesper.

"O, now don't be discouraging," said the old man entreatingly, "for I have really set my heart upon this matter. If you will only just take right hold, and stir round, and talk to one and another, it will come all right, I haven't a doubt."

Hesper smiled, and made no farther objection; but this was exactly the way with Mr. Byers. He was excellent at planning, but never good at execution, therefore nearly all his benevolent projects fell through before they could be carried into effect. Hesper felt very much interested, however, in his present plan, and determined that it should not fail for want of effort upon her part.

The very next day she set herself about the work. The first one she applied to was Dr. Smiley, who approved highly of the movement, and offered her the use of his large hall in the village, free of expense. She next went to Capt. Clark, who agreed to furnish the school with lights, and then she started a subscription paper to obtain money for the books and stationery. This was a great deal for her to do, but the good result which was like to be accomplished, inspired her, and she pressed forward without hesitation.

When aunt Betsey heard of this movement, she said she thought Hesper was making herself publicly ridiculous, and at the first convenient opportunity, she asked her what she expected to get for instructing such a set of "poor, miserable, rag-a-muffins."

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"Nothing," replied Hesper, "except the satisfaction of doing a good deed."

Aunt Betsey dropped her work and regarded her with a look of silent astonishment.

"Hesper Greyson," she said at length, "I believe you are half crazy, and you needn't be angry with me for saying it, but I can't help thinking that you only do this to make yourself popular; just like some of those missionary women and tract distributors, who are continually running about from house to house and doing anything but minding their own business. But, however, every one to their liking. If you choose to make a fool of yourself you may, but as to buying books for those miserable creatures to double into dog's ears and daub with their dirty fingers, I tell you I won't give the first copper towards it."

"O," said Hesper, with a look of smiling satisfaction, "there's no need of it, for people have been very liberal, and we have already sufficient funds to commence with. Even poor Mrs. Wilkins gave me two dollars without hesitation, and said she felt it a privilege to do so."

"Debby Wilkins!" exclaimed aunt Betsey, with a look of contempt. "Well now, I do declare! She had much better have kept her money and bought herself a new bonnet, for I must say, that her old one is a disgrace to any Christian woman, more especially one who attends church so regularly. Two dollars! Well I suppose she thought you would tell of it, and she wasn't mistaken either. Dear me! what won't some people do for the sake of popularity?"—and aunt Betsey resumed her sewing again with great diligence.

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The school at length was fully commenced, and there was a much larger attendance than had been expected. Not only did the children come, but also many of their parents, and teachers were in great demand. Even Fred and Charlie Greyson, with the Grimsby boys, were of great assistance in this respect, for they could, at least, teach the alphabet, although it often happened that some of their pupils were much older than themselves. It was no unusual thing to see little Charlie standing by the side of a good natured old colored lady—who wore both cap and spectacles—and as he slowly pointed

out the letters with his little ruddy finger, she repeated them after him with great care. The school was not only composed of pupils of every age, size and color, but also of many nations, but everything went on harmoniously, and their improvement was rapid.

There was one, however, who notwithstanding various invitations, stood aloof from this arrangement, and resisted all efforts to draw him into it. This one was black Jake, and Mr. Byers at length concluded that as he would be more trouble than he was worth, it was best to give him up. Hesper was more hopeful however, and longed for an opportunity to speak with him, which she found it very difficult to obtain.

One day, however, as she was crossing the brook between her own home and aunt Nyna's, she spied Jake on the bank, skinning a rabbit which he had killed a short time previous. His gun and a bunch of dead birds lay on the ground beside him.

"Dear me, Jake!" said Hesper, as she stopped suddenly—"what a nice parcel of birds you have! Did you kill them all this morning?"

"Yes, every one;" said Jake, briefly, as he continued his operations.

"And what a fine fat rabbit, too! Why, I declare, you are quite a sportsman!"

Jake looked up with a smile—"Yes," said he, "this is a nice little fellow, and will make a first rate dinner for me. Won't you please, Miss Hesper, to just hold him by the legs, while I pull the skin off over his back? There, that's it. Thank you."

"Why, Jake!" said Hesper, as she let go of the little creature with a secret shudder—"you did that in a real scientific manner. I don't believe I could possibly have done it myself."

"Ah!" said Jake, with a gratified look, "there is everything in knowing how."

"Yes," replied Hesper, "we all have to live and learn, and there are none of us so wise but what we can learn many things of one another. But that makes me think, Jake—why don't you come to our evening school? We should be glad to have you."

"Because I don't want to," he replied decidedly, "and what's more, I won't. I haven't been to school since I licked the master, and if I should go again, it wouldn't be three weeks before I should do the same, and that would be the end on't."

"But, Jake," said Hesper, pleasantly—"I should be your teacher, and you wouldn't lick me, would you?"

The rude boy looked up to her face with a broad grin.

"Lick you!" he repeated, while his countenance assumed an expression as though the idea was perfectly preposterous; "I would sooner cut off my right hand first—and what's more, if I saw any fellow lift his finger against you, or even make an ugly face at you, I'd skin him as quick as I did this rabbit."

"Then Jake," said Hesper, "you are just the one I want, for sometimes I have a great deal of trouble, and I need a good friend to stand by me so you'll come to-night, won't you?"

"I don't know about it," said Jake, with some hesitation—"When I get among the white boys they call me a nigger, and that makes me so mad I could kill 'em with a good will."

"Jake," said Hesper, as she laid her hand on his shoulder and looked him earnestly in the face, "if you'll be my friend, I'll be yours, and whoever treats you unkindly, it shall be all the same as if it were me. The Good Father, up there in heaven, cares nothing for the color of the skin. It is the heart alone he looks at, and therefore I shall do the same. We should all love one another in this world like brothers and sisters, Jake, so don't turn away from me when I want to do you good, but I pray you, try my friendship a little while, and if it does not satisfy you then seek something better."

Jake dropped his rabbit upon the ground, and looked up to her with tears in his eyes.

"Miss Hesper," he said earnestly, "I believe you are a good angel, for nobody ever spoke so to me before. If you'll only be kind to me and love me all the time as you do now, I'll go to school or anywhere, and do just as you want me."

There was a convincing earnestness in his manner, and Hesper felt that she had touched the right chord in a nature which had long been misunderstood.

"That's right, Jake!" she said, as she clasped his hand with

heartfelt sincerity. "Let me see you then at the hall to-night, and I will do all I can to make you happy."

With a light heart and smiling countenance she turned to pursue her way again, but had not proceeded far, when Jake came running after her.

"Miss Hesper," said he, "wouldn't you like to have these birds for your dinner? they are all quails and wood-pigeons, and you will find them nice eating."

"I shouldn't like to rob you, Jake," said Hesper, as she looked at the birds, which she really did not want.

"O please do take them!" he said entreatingly. "I'll dress them all nicely, and wash them in the brook, and carry them up to your house myself, if you only say so."

"Well, Jake," replied Hesper, without further hesitation, "I shall be greatly obliged to you if you will, and I will cook them as nicely as possible."

Away flew Jake again to the brook, perfectly delighted, and Hesper continued on her way.

There was no small commotion in the school that evening, when black Jake made his appearance among them. He regarded the whole assembly with a look of defiance, but the moment he drew near Hesper, he seemed to soften and bend immediately beneath the glance of her gentle eye. For the first few evenings he did very well, and then he grew restless and uneasy, but Hesper watched him closely, and by her unvarying kindness and attention, she at length succeeded in calling up all the powers of his better nature. Then nothing could keep him from the school, and he made more rapid improvement than any of the others.

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Before many weeks, the Charity School became a very popular thing, and visitors came pouring in from all quarters. Among them aunt Betsey at length made her appearance. At first she only came just within the door, and with her spectacles upon her nose, she surveyed the whole school with a sharp, half-contemptuous gaze. Then she drew her dress close about her, and passed along to the place where Hesper was engaged in teaching.

"Mercy me!" she said in an under tone, "what a looking set of mortals! Black, white, grey and all colors—old, young and middling. Why I don't see, Hesper, how you can stay here five minutes! more especially with that great, dirty black fellow close to your elbow!"

She spoke cautiously, but nevertheless, Jake overheard, and he brought his clenched fist down, with so-much force upon his slate, that he cracked it entirely across, and attracted the attention of the whole school.

"Mercy me!" said aunt Betsey, as she started back in alarm.

Jake was about to spring from his chair, but Hesper laid her hand firmly upon his shoulder. She felt him trembling violently beneath her touch, and she knew that his fiery spirit could ill brook control, but she did not loose her hold, and kept soothing him with gentle words, till gradually he bowed his head upon his hands and rested them upon the table before him. His whole frame shook with emotion, but Hesper knew that the poor boy had won a great moral victory, and her heart rejoiced with him. Aunt Betsey, however, was unconscious of all this, and therefore she regarded him with a very angry and suspicious look.

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"Dear me!" she said, after a few moment's silence, "I can't stay here another minute. I am really afraid of taking some pestiferous disease in this horrid atmosphere. I think your school is a very good thing, Hesper, and I wish it all success, but I don't believe I shall ever come again—good night"—and she bustled out, with an expression of countenance, which was anything but pleasing.

For more than four months the school continued in a most prosperous condition, and then, as the evenings grew very short, and many of the scholars were about to leave for their summer employment, it was proposed to suspend the school until the following September. A few evenings previous to the breaking up, however, black Jake was missing, and the sad intelligence was brought that he had fallen from the third story of a house which was in process of erection, and was now lying in a very precarious condition. With all possible haste Hesper repaired to his bed-side next day, and found her worst fears confirmed. He did not seem to suffer much pain, but the blood which flowed slowly but constantly from his mouth, showed that he had sustained a severe internal

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injury.

“O Miss Hesper!” he whispered, as soon as he beheld her loved countenance, “I knew you would come! All night I have been comforted with the thought that I should see you in the morning.” The tears of grateful affection rolled down his cheeks as he spoke, and he pressed her hand earnestly to his heart.

“The doctor says I am going to die, Miss Hesper,” he continued, “and I am willing to go, for ever since you told me that the Good Father in heaven cared nothing for the color of the skin, I have longed to go to him. I thought once that every body in the world hated me, and so I hated every body, but when I found that you loved me and cared for me, then I tried to be a better boy. I only knew how to read a very little when I came to your school, but you soon made it so easy and pleasant for me, that very often, when I was in the woods, instead of killing birds and rabbits, I would lay down in the bushes and spell out the words in the little Testament you gave me. Now I think it is best for me to die, for if I grow up to be a man, I may become wicked and careless again, and I should never be ready to go. But let me tell now, Miss Hesper, while I am able, it is your love and kindness that makes me feel so happy, and I hope God will bless you for it forever and ever.”

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Poor Hesper’s loving heart was so deeply moved by the boy’s earnestness, that she could not speak. She could only put her handkerchief to her face and weep like a child. It so happened that the old minister who had formerly taken Jake under his care, had entered unobserved, and overheard the boy’s words. With tearful eyes he now drew near the bed and extended his hand.

“My poor fellow,” he said, “I have wronged you, but it was because I did not understand your nature. I endeavored to drive you into goodness, therefore you hated me, and my labor was lost. God forgive me that I forgot ‘the charity that never faileth’—the love that ‘overcometh all things.’ But this good girl has taught me a useful lesson, and henceforth I shall endeavor to profit by it.”

The old man knelt by the side of the bed in prayer, and his words came with a perfect gush of earnestness and love. When he arose and looked upon the boy’s face again, he perceived that the spirit even then was preparing to lay aside its mortal garment. One after another the neighbors and friends dropped in, and many of Jake’s schoolmates gathered around his bed. He regarded them all with a pleasant smile—turned his eyes with a look of grateful love to Hesper’s countenance, and then, drawing his weeping mother closer to him, he breathed his life away like a weary child upon her bosom.

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A few days after this, the whole school followed poor Jake’s mortal remains to their last resting place, and the old minister addressed the assembly so earnestly and touchingly at the grave, that all were moved to tears. It seemed to Hesper a strange dispensation of Providence, that thus briefly the poor boy had been thrown upon her sympathies, and then suddenly withdrawn when his life seemed budding forth into the fulness of promise. But she felt that a wise purpose had been served, and full of strength and consolation did the thought come to her, that if only in this one instance her labors among the poor children had been crowned with success, she was amply rewarded. Thus she reasoned with herself, but she could not see deeply enough into her own nature, to comprehend, that this one simple incident had formed a chapter in her experience, clearly illustrating the pure principle of love which not only governed all her actions, but was also leading her on to still higher attainments in the future.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

AN UNEXPECTED CHANGE.

As time passed on, and Mose made several successive voyages, he was at length promoted to the rank of first mate, and then it was whispered among the village gossips, with some truth, that he had found favor in the eyes of Alice Smiley, the doctor's youngest daughter. He was not indeed her equal in point of social position or education, but his frankness and manliness of character, his general intelligence and unaffected goodness of heart, had so far won upon her, that she could easily overlook all minor differences. He was also a great favorite with her father, and therefore he would meet with no difficulty in that quarter. Hesper was very much pleased with this arrangement, but the village gossips were greatly surprised, as they had already selected Juliana Grimsby for Mose. Aunt Betsey, in particular, made herself very busy about the matter, and came down one evening for the express purpose of talking it over with Hesper.

"Look here," said she, "I think Mose is setting himself up most too high, and if I ain't much mistaken, he'll find it out before long. These people that are always trying to get themselves in among the aristocracy, seldom escape without punishment. They are petted and patronized for a time, and then pitched out all of a sudden, for some new favorite. I know how it is, for I've tried it myself afore now. If he had contented himself among common folks, and taken up with Juliana Grimsby, I should have approved of his choice, and made the bride a handsome present; but now I shan't do the least thing in the world for him. Juliana is a smart, likely girl, and would have made him an excellent wife."

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"I have no doubt of it," said Hesper, "but then every one has their own choice you know."

"Of course," replied aunt Betsey, "but it may be a mighty foolish choice though, if 'tis one's own. There are some people who don't know what is for their good half so well as others can tell them, and so they often make grievous mistakes, which, with a little advice, they might have avoided. Now if Mose had only asked me, I should have said Juliana, by all means. Just think, Hesper, how handsome she is! why, there isn't a girl in the village that will compare with her!"

"It is true," replied Hesper, "that Juliana is very handsome—much more so than Alice; but then Mose don't think much of beauty."

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"I think he does though," returned aunt Betsey, "but it's of a peculiar kind. The beauty of the doctor's purse is far more attractive than his daughter's countenance."

Hesper bit her lips quickly to keep from answering, for she was greatly vexed.

"Now, as far as you and Harry are concerned," continued aunt Betsey, "I have not a word to say. You are well matched, and I suppose, by what I hear, that he has quite a snug little fortune laid up, by this time. Let's see; you are expecting him home before long, ain't you?"

"I should not be surprised to hear of his arrival at any time," replied Hesper, quietly.

"Dear me!" resumed aunt Betsey, "what a time his mother will make! She thinks so much of her Harry. Don't you think! the other day she really undertook to pity me, because I had no children! Why, it was perfectly ridiculous! for the Searcher of Hearts knows, that I never desired them."

Just then, in rushed Bose like a mad creature—he jumped—he howled, he barked, and then laid down on the floor and rolled with all his might.

"Mercy me!" exclaimed aunt Betsey, as she sprang upon the dining table and drew her dress close about her—"The creature is certainly mad! Hesper, put your head out of the window, and scream for help as loud as you can!"

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Hesper, however, who was not so much alarmed, was regarding the dog with some curiosity, for this was rather an unusual demonstration on his part. So earnestly was her attention fixed upon him, that she did not perceive the entrance of any one, till a strong

arm was thrown around her, and a warm kiss imprinted upon her cheek. She glanced up quickly, at the pleasant, manly countenance that bent over her, and exclaimed "Harry!" for the long expected one, had really returned.

"O law!" said aunt Betsey, as she descended from the table, and shook hands with the young man, "that accounts for the dog's actions. Why, what a knowing creature he is!" She didn't stop long, however, for she and Bose never were friends, and never could be.

"Hesper," said Harry, "I couldn't wait to see mother, but sent my baggage along and came directly here. I suppose, however, the good old lady will be almost crazy till I come, so I pray you put on your bonnet and shawl and go with me."

Hesper made herself ready as soon as possible, and while she was doing so, Harry lit his cigar.

"I hope," said he, as they passed along, "that this smoke isn't disagreeable to you. Some women have a great objection to cigar smoke, but if you'll just go over to the windward it won't come so directly in your face. It's a bad habit I know, but then if I don't smoke I chew, and one is about as bad as the other. I'm sorry, but I can't help it."

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Hesper could not help feeling a little sorry too, but then, like many other women, she thought that if it was any pleasure or satisfaction to one who was so dear to her, she would try to overlook it. When they arrived at the house, they found Juliana, who had been passing the afternoon there. As aunt Nyna was not expecting Harry before she heard of the ship's arrival, of course she was greatly surprised. But her surprise could not equal Harry's, when he found that the handsome and intelligent young lady he met there, was the same Juliana who formerly lived in the house with Hesper. He had known her then, as a slovenly, disagreeable girl, against whom he had felt the greatest dislike.

"I declare!" he said, in a straight-forward manner, as he stood and gazed at her—"I never saw any one so altered in my life! and if you won't think me impudent, I will also add, or so handsome either."

A light blush quickly overspread Juliana's countenance, as she glanced smilingly up to him, which made her appear more beautiful than ever. After this Harry paid her great attention, and when she became a little more acquainted, she grew very social and entertaining.

That night they all walked home together, loitering along in the moonlight, engaged in pleasant conversation, until they parted with Juliana at her own door.

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"I declare!" exclaimed Harry again, shortly after leaving her, "what a beauty that girl is! and how charming in conversation!"

"Yes!" replied Hesper earnestly, "and what is best of all, she is good as she is handsome."

She spoke most sincerely, for she loved Juliana much, and the charity which thinketh no evil, shut out all feelings of jealousy or suspicion from her heart. Harry listened with much interest, as Hesper proceeded at still greater length to set forth the merits of Juliana, and at the conclusion, he simply remarked, that he was glad Hesper had so good a friend.

For the first two or three weeks after his arrival, Harry was quite a constant visitor at the residence of the Greysons, but when Hesper was busy about the house, he usually took Juliana out to ride, or sail, with him, and finally this became so frequent, that the village gossips took the matter up, and aunt Betsey came down to see about it. To her surprise, however, she found that Hesper did not feel anxious or troubled in the least, and therefore she set herself to work immediately, to make her so.

"I declare!" said she, after talking some time, "I don't see how you can be so quiet and calm about it! Why, if it was me, I'd tear that girl's eyes out."

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"That would not mend the matter," said Hesper, carelessly. "If he likes her better than me, let him take her—that's all."

"And do you mean to say, you wouldn't care one straw about it?" asked aunt Betsey.

"If I did, I shouldn't tell any one," said Hesper.

"But if you don't look out for your rights in time, you will be an old maid, certain."

"Well, what if I am?" was the quiet reply; "that will not hinder my

usefulness."

"Why Hesper Greyson!" exclaimed aunt Betsey. "It's a horrible disgrace to be an old maid! I tell you, if I was a young girl, I would marry an Esquimaux or a Hottentot, rather than be one!"

"And as for me," replied Hesper, "I would sooner lie down in my grave, than marry a man whom I did not sincerely love, or who did not thus love me."

"Very well," replied aunt Betsey, starting up, "I see that you have some mighty fine ideas on this subject. But let me tell you that if you won't look out for your own interest in time, and turn out a poor, miserable old maid at last, you needn't look to my husband for assistance—that's all."

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After thus relieving herself, she departed, leaving Hesper in rather an uncomfortable frame of mind. As matters continued, the poor girl herself could not doubt much longer, and when, one night, Harry came in and took his seat beside her, she knew the instant she looked in his face, what was the intention of his call as well as if he had already spoken it.

"Hesper," he said, after a short introductory conversation, "I did think, when I came home, that I loved you better than any one else in the world, but now I know that I do not. I would help it if I could, and if you say so, I will still fulfil my promise, but I feel that with my heart so divided, I could never make you truly happy."

The color faded slightly from Hesper's cheek, and there was a scarcely perceptible tremor in her voice, but she looked him calmly in the face and said—

"Harry, if you love Juliana better than you do me, marry her. You could not do yourself or me a greater wrong, than in fulfilling an engagement which you made under a mistaken impression. I do not blame you in the least. Go your way and be happy. You have my best wishes, and I shall ever remain a friend to you and yours, so long as life and breath are granted me."

For a few moments Harry regarded her with silent admiration. "Hesper," he said, "you are a noble girl, and perhaps I shall live to repent the step which I now take, in sackcloth and ashes. But O!" he added, as he started up and clasped her hand earnestly, "I cannot! indeed I cannot help it! Think kindly of me, Hesper, and forgive me."

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He pressed her hand to his lips, and turned quickly away, leaving her alone with God and her disappointment. She listened to the sound of his footsteps as he went down the pathway, and then falling upon her knees beside her chair, she wept in agony of spirit. There was but one refuge for her. The arms of Infinite Love were open to her, and like a storm-beaten dove she cast herself into them, as into an ark of safety, praying only that the void in her heart might be filled with something higher and holier than aught that earth could give.

A few days after this, Juliana came, and with tears in her eyes, opened her whole heart to Hesper. She received as kind and considerate an answer as that which had been given to Harry, and she went away comforted in the thought that by accepting his offer, she was not trampling on the sacred rights of her friend.

In the course of a few weeks the new engagement was made known, and everybody expressed their astonishment. Hesper bore up bravely beneath it. There was only one thing which deeply disturbed the serenity of her soul, and that was the idle curiosity and most contemptible pity of the village gossips. Aunt Betsey raved, and advised Hesper to sue Harry for breach of promise, directly.

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There was one, however, to whom this unexpected change was a cause of the deepest sorrow, and this one was aunt Nyna herself.

"Hesper, my dear girl!" she said, as she came one night, and putting her arm around her, drew her close to her bosom—"I had hoped one day to call thee my own child, but I feel it is ordered otherwise. Between thee and me, I will say, that I fear my Harry is not what he should be. God bless thee, dear one! I trust that He in whom there is neither variableness nor shadow of turning, hath reserved for thee better things."

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CHAPTER XXV.

A HEART BLEEDING IN SECRET.

THERE WAS an unusually large wedding at the Grimsbys, to which full half of the village was invited, and Hesper too was there, looking more beautiful than any one had ever seen her before. She wore moss rose-buds in her hair and upon her bosom, and her white dress, so floating and airy, gave her a light, spiritual appearance, which accorded well with the tender light in her eyes, and the serenity of her pale countenance. When the youthful pair stood up side by side, for the performance of the ceremony, Hesper felt the painful consciousness that as many eyes were turned upon her, as on them. They were probing the depths of her soul, to see how she bore her disappointment; but that calm, sweet countenance, betrayed nothing of the deep emotion within. Neither could the slightest affectation or insincerity be detected in her manner, when, at the conclusion of the ceremony, she went forward with others, to tender her congratulations and the kiss of affection to the newly married pair. The time, however, passed wearily to her, and feeling that she could not bear the scrutiny of curious eyes much longer, she retired at an early hour.

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Alone in her little chamber once more, the feeling of her desolation came upon her with over-powering force. Still clothed in her wedding garments, she sat by the open window, looking out through the branches of the trees upon the distant landscape which lay so bright and beautiful beneath the summer moonlight. She held her clasped hands over her heart with a sensation of pain, and as the unnatural firmness to which she had nerved herself gave way, the tears flowed freely down her cheeks. Then she thought of that land of peace, "where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven"—where "there is no more sorrow or crying, but where tears are wiped from all faces." Never before had she felt such a yearning to lay down her earthly garment and leave the crushing cares of earth behind forever.

"O, that I had wings like a dove, that I might flee away and be at rest," she exclaimed, as with tearful eyes she looked up to the cloudless heavens. "Pitying Father, take thy poor heart-stricken child to thyself!"

The air of the room seemed close and stifling to her. She longed to be away upon the hill-tops or in the woods, where she had so often wandered. Acting from the impulse of the moment, she threw her shawl around her, and stealing gently down stairs, unbolted the door and passed out. Neither knowing or caring whither she went, she pursued her way with hurrying footsteps, till she came to the village grave-yard.

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"O," she murmured, as she threw open the little gate and entered the enclosure, "ye calm, quiet sleepers, how sincerely do I wish that I too was resting among you!" Then she stopped suddenly, and pressed her hands to her forehead.

"How is it," she added, in a calmer tone, "am I beside myself, that at midnight I come hither with such wishes upon my lips, because a selfish sorrow has taken possession of my heart? Have I not parents and friends, and all the world to live for? and was life given us only to seek out our individual interests, independent of all beside? O, what a poor, miserable sinner I am!"

Weeping most sincerely over her own weakness and folly, she passed on till she came to the little marble tablet beneath which simple Johnny lay buried. The sighing of the night winds through the willows that grew near his grave, seemed like the soft whisperings of his angel voice. She cast herself with her face downward upon the green mound that covered the child's resting place, and wept without restraint. How long she remained thus she could not tell, for her very senses seemed to pass away, and she lay there in a state of dreamy unconsciousness. She only knew, that at last, a gentle hand was laid upon her, and some one called her name. Raising her head, she beheld her mother close beside her.

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"My child! my poor dear child!" said her mother, "let me take you close into my bosom, as I did when you were an infant, and comfort you with my love."

"Mother!" said Hesper, "how came you here?"

"I knew, poor child," she replied, "that your heart was bleeding in anguish, and therefore I could not sleep. I heard you when you went forth, and followed you hither, waiting a little way off, till the first gush of sorrow had passed, for I know by my own experience, that at such moments it is better for the soul to be alone with its God. O Hesper! my child! my child! I would to God I could have borne this great grief for thee! but it might not be. I know also, that it was well I could not shield thee from this chastening of His love. Bear up beneath it bravely and patiently, my child, and in the end you shall see that He ordereth all things well."

"Yes, mother," said Hesper, "take me close into your bosom, and let me warm myself upon your loving heart, for greater than your daughter's sorrow, is a conscious sense of her own selfishness and sin. I thank God in this hour of trial that you are yet spared to me—that I have your faithful bosom to shed my tears upon. I have dared once in my life, mother, to lay plans for my own future—to sketch a bright picture in my imagination, all radiant with hopes of happiness and selfish enjoyment, but I will do so no longer. The vision has passed, and left me sadder but wiser. I thank God for it! and here now, upon this sacred altar of your heart, do I pledge myself to live henceforth only for the good of others. Strengthen me, mother, and pray for me, lest my heart should fail me, for I am too weak to pray for myself."

They knelt down upon the mound together, and the mother's petition went up through the solemn silence, beseeching most earnestly that a blessing of strength and consolation might fall upon the heart of her sorrowing child. Those two weak women, kneeling at midnight in that lonely grave-yard, had angel guardians whose help was greater than that of man, and the words of prayer that ascended from those trembling lips, was answered by a blessing of peace, "such as the world can neither give or take away."

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CHAPTER XXVI.

LIVING FOR OTHERS.

"MOTHER," said Hesper one day, after sitting in thoughtful silence for some time, "I feel that I must leave home and be doing something decided and useful, or my energies will all rust out in idleness. I have a good opportunity, too, and I think I ought to improve it. Dr. Smiley informs me that a teacher is wanting in the Institution for the Blind, and he says he will secure me the situation at once, if I desire it."

"Dear me!" said her mother, "I hardly know how we can do without you, my child. That is, without your company, for it is true, that while your father is doing so well, and I have my health, that we really do not need you. But then I dread to have you go out into the great world, for it is cruel and cold, and has many sorrows for a young and tender heart like yours."

"And that is one great reason why I wish to go, mother, for I desire to pass through the furnace, that I may come out strong and pure at last. I am ready for all things but idleness, that alone burdens my spirit, and leaves me to weep over sorrows that I cannot cure."

"Well child," said her mother. "I think you are right. Act as your heart dictates, and have no fear for the result."

It was only a few weeks after this, that Hesper gave her parting kiss to her friends, and stepping into the stage coach, bade her home farewell for the first time. She felt like a lone bird cast out upon the world, but the strong purpose in her heart sustained her, and she entered upon the duties of her responsible position without fear. At first, with her home sickness and heart sickness, it was a hard struggle, and she feared she should sink beneath it, but she persevered, and gradually her new employment became to her a matter of all-absorbing interest.

The little blind children came with their soft hands and gentle touch, and traced out feature by feature of her face, that they might form a picture in their minds, of her they had learned to love so well. They were soon able to distinguish her footsteps from all others, and her voice seemed like music to their ears. Her sympathy became a necessary thing to the happiness of these youthful unfortunates, and her name was an oft repeated word in their prayers. Gradually the peace that passeth all understanding found an abiding place in her soul, and diffused its serene light over her whole countenance. There was something indescribable in her mien and manner, which drew all hearts after her, and Hesper Greyson, with her meekness and humility, became at length what she had earnestly desired to be:—"A high, pure star, to herald on the weary to the land of rest." She had learned to live above self, and had consecrated all her powers, without reserve, to the service of others. For one whole year she devoted herself most faithfully to the performance of her duties at the Institution, only accepting, at long intervals, the privilege of a few days to look in upon the loved ones at home. At the end of this year, however, she was to have a vacation of some two or three weeks. She had received intelligence that Mose had arrived, and also during her stay at home, he and Alice were to unite their destinies for life, therefore she looked forward with no slight interest to this interval of rest. She also determined, that upon her way home, she would pass through the city, and spend one night with her old friends, Harry and Juliana, for they had left home shortly after their marriage, and she had not seen them since—indeed, had only heard from them, except by an occasional letter from Juliana, in which she besought Hesper most earnestly to come and make her a visit.

It was an affecting scene to look upon, when the little blind children gathered around her, as she stood in the hall, ready for her departure. Some clasped their loving arms about her, and imprinted warm kisses of farewell upon her cheeks, while others "fell upon her neck and wept sore," as if their sorrow-stricken hearts already had a presentiment that their beloved teacher would return to them no more.

It was about sunset when Hesper arrived at the residence of her friends in the city. Her ring at the door was answered by Juliana herself, with an infant in her arms. She seemed overjoyed at the

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sight of Hesper, but Hesper, in return, could only gaze at her friend in silent astonishment, for a most wonderful change had come over her. The dazzling beauty which had once rendered her an object of such general admiration, had all faded away, leaving her face pale and careworn, and in her once brilliant eyes, there was a look of weariness and disappointment, which betrayed a hidden source of sorrow within.

"I am as glad to see you, Hesper," she said, "as if you were an angel from heaven, for I have hushed up my heart-aches as long as I can bear them, and now I want to pour them all out into your friendly bosom. You were always full of sympathy and love, and I know you are no less so now. How calm and peaceful you look, Hesper, as though you had been thinking of nothing but God and heavenly things ever since I saw you last—while I—O dear!"—and bowing her head to the face of her sleeping child, she burst into tears. Hesper put her arm tenderly around her, and laid her soft cheek to that of her weeping friend.

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"You may thank heaven, Hesper," continued Juliana, "that Harry didn't marry you, for if he had, you would have been just where I am now. No," she added quickly, "you would have made a man of him, but it isn't in me to do that. I haven't either the faith or patience; but, to speak plain, I get outrageously mad when Harry makes a fool of himself, and I let him know it, too. There's nothing to do then, but to take it out in quarrelling, and so we have it hot and heavy sometimes, I can tell you. It is only about six months now, since he fell into bad company and evil ways, but if that six months is a specimen of what I am to expect, I hope I may be in my grave before the end of another week."

"Don't be discouraged, Juliana," said Hesper, kindly—"Harry has a good spot left yet in his heart, and the 'charity that never faileth' may save him, even now, from destruction."

"Hesper Greyson!" exclaimed Juliana, "I never saw any one like you in my life. I believe you would try to reform Satan himself by the power of love, if you only had the opportunity. But then it is one thing to say, and another to do, and if you were only in my place for a little while, I believe you would give up all such thoughts forever, and grow desperate like myself."

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"I would accomplish my work, or die," said Hesper—"more especially, if I had a little one like that, to link me to the one who should be a true and loving father to it."

"My poor little baby!" said Juliana, as she pressed the child more closely to her bosom; "for his sake alone I have kept back many a hard word and unkindly feeling, for O! it seems a dreadful thing to think of a tender little one growing up after the example of such a father. Yes, for the baby's sake, if not for my own, I would do all that lay in my power to reform Harry," and she wept without restraint.

The tea hour came and went, but Harry did not make his appearance, and it was not till a late hour that he sought his home. Then it was evident that he was no longer master of himself, for, upon entering, he staggered across the room without recognizing Hesper, and fell down, all in a heap, near the sofa, upon which he had intended to throw himself. Juliana turned deadly pale, and bit her lips together with a look of desperation.

"There, Hesper," she said, "what would you do, if that was your husband?"

"I should wait until he was sober, and then plead with him as only a loving wife and mother can. Did you ever try it, Juliana?"

"No! never! The first time he came home thus, I could not find words to express my indignation. I told him that I utterly despised him, and for days not a word passed between us; but, O Hesper! they were the most miserable days of my life. I thought they would kill me. I would do anything rather than experience the like again, for I love him yet, and cannot bear to give him up."

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"Then tell him so," said Hesper, "and prove it by all your actions. I tell you his nature cannot long stand out against it. Many a worse man has been reformed by a true woman's love."

Juliana laid her child in the cradle, and taking a pillow, she placed it at one end of the sofa.

"Hesper," she said, "take hold of Harry's feet, will you, and help me lift him upon the sofa?" Hesper immediately complied with her request, and the work was accomplished with little difficulty, for he made no resistance.

"There, now, Hesper," said Juliana, in a calm, resolute tone—"let me show you to your chamber. As for me, I shall sit by my drunken husband through the night, and if morning brings him back to his reason—God helping me, I will speak to him as I have never done before."

It was long past midnight ere Hesper closed her eyes in sleep, for her heart was full of sympathy for her friend. She was very weary, however, and therefore did not waken again, till the morning sun was shining brightly into her window, and the jostle and tumult of city life had fully commenced in the street below. Arraying herself in haste, she stole quietly to the head of the stairs. She could hear the sound of voices engaged in earnest conversation below, and therefore she did not go down. A full half hour longer she waited, and then descended to the parlor. Upon entering the room she found Juliana seated beside her husband on the sofa, with her sleeping child in her arms. Harry's arm was around her, and her head rested upon his bosom. He was very pale indeed, and it was evident that both had been weeping.

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"Come hither, Hesper," said Harry, in a voice tremulous with emotion, as he extended his hand towards her, "you see me here, completely conquered. Strong man as I am, I have become weak as a little child before this woman's love. O Hesper! if there is anything that will save me from destruction, it is that!" and pressing his wife more closely to his bosom, he kissed her with unfeigned affection. Hesper knelt down beside them, and took their clasped hands in her own.

"Pray for me," said Harry, "for your prayers, I feel assured, will find acceptance before heaven." And Hesper did pray, with all the fervent earnestness of her soul, till it seemed as though the very presence of the Lord was in their midst. Harry was deeply moved, and as she concluded, he drew the hands of the two weeping women into his own.

"Be my witnesses this day," he said, "as I solemnly pledge myself, before God and His angels, henceforth to avoid all intoxicating drinks and evil association. And I will also strive, as far as in me lies, to become a faithful husband and father, and a useful member in society. Whatever my weaknesses or follies are, or may have been, I never was guilty of untruthfulness, therefore you may consider the resolution which I take now, as unchangeable." A bright, joyful smile beamed over Juliana's countenance, as she looked up to him with an expression of perfect confidence and love.

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"It is enough, Harry," she said, "and I also will promise that you shall never want for love or patience upon my part, to encourage you in your way."

A few hours after this, Hesper had once more started upon her homeward journey, and on her arrival, found not only Mose in waiting for her, but also his friend, Mr. Clyde, who had returned from his European tour, and was intending to stop with the family until after the expected marriage.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

THE EVENING STAR.

"HESPER," said aunt Betsey, as she dropped in one afternoon with her knitting, "has that Mr. Clyde come a courting?"

"Come a courting!" repeated Hesper—(using an expression which she greatly disliked)—"who?"

"Why you, to be sure," said aunt Betsey. "I asked for information, because, if he has, I should like to know for a very particular reason."

"Well, no," said Hesper, "he merely came to see Mose, and only intends remaining till after the marriage."

"Dear me! I'm sorry," said aunt Betsey, "for, Hesper, I tell you the truth—I verily believe you will be an old maid, and if you don't talk up to Mr. Clyde or somebody, pretty soon, it will be a gone case with you."

"Very well," replied Hesper—"if it depends upon my making the first advances, my fate is already decided, and my case hopeless, for I never shall offer myself directly or indirectly to any man."

"But," said aunt Betsey, after a few moment's thoughtful silence—"if you should change your mind, and Mr. Clyde or some one else should offer himself, do let me know in time, for that satin bed-quilt of mine, is packed away in the attic, with a whole chest full of other clothes, and I want to get it down to shake, and brush, and air it as it should be, before I make you a present of it; for I never shall do the least thing in the world with it."

"Well," said Hesper, "I will let you know in time;" and with this promise aunt Betsey seemed perfectly contented. She looked very graciously over her spectacles at Mr. Clyde, when he came in, and in the course of conversation, took occasion to remark that she thought Hesper had improved wonderfully during her absence from home. She was most unusually condescending and amiable, and when she arose to depart, she remarked that she should call often while Mr. Clyde was there, as she enjoyed the conversation of such intelligent people very much.

There was a glorious sunset that evening. The whole western sky seemed all a blaze with the gold and crimson splendors of the King of Day. The trees and the green hill-tops were glowing with the radiant light, and the ocean, in its waveless calm, reflecting back the brightness of the heavens, seemed like a molten sea of gold.

"Come, Hesper," said Mr. Clyde, "let us go along the brook side, and climb up the old rock, where we can watch these sunset fires die out on Nature's altar."

"Ah! this makes me think of old Italy!" he said, as they wandered along the forest path—"fair Italy! And yet, with all the splendor and beauty of that favored clime, which I have so often gazed upon, this scene is dearer far to me, because it is my own native land."

"There is no place like home, after all, Hesper," he added, as he put forth his arm to aid her up the steep ascent; "I cannot tell you how often my heart turned back with an unutterable yearning to these shores, and even to this very spot, where I saw you last, weaving violets and green leaves together, while the lights and shadows through the forest boughs were playing across your countenance."

"You have changed very much since then," he continued, as he looked her thoughtfully in the face. "You are less of the child, and more of the woman now, in experience. There is a soft and chastened expression upon every feature, and in your eyes a deep, spiritual light, such as can only come through a long and trying discipline of sorrow. O Hesper, you and I both know what it is to pass under the shadow of a great and desolating grief, but your soul has come out chastened and purified by the trial, while mine still lingers in darkness and unreconciliation. My very existence, as it creeps slowly onward, day by day, has become a wearisome burden— for what is the future without hope, or life without love?"

"Let us not think of such things," said Hesper, gently, "for the heart cannot forget its bitterness while memory continually renews its grief. Beyond and around us all, lie sweetly harmonizing influences, which we can draw into our hearts if we will, and soothe all discordant murmurings to rest."

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"See yonder," she continued, "where the evening star looks brightly forth amid the fading glories of the sunset. The twilight will deepen, and the evening shadows prevail, but that star will grow brighter and brighter, until at length it will be the fairest object to which the eye of the way-worn and weary will turn. Thus is it with the patient, persevering heart; the shadows of life may deepen and darken around it, but its light grows clearer and brighter, until it becomes a guiding star of peace to many a troubled spirit. God grant, friend, that such a high and holy mission may be yours!"

"Not mine, but yours, good angel," said Mr. Clyde, as he turned towards her; "it is already yours. Three years ago, as we sat together at the foot of this rock, you bade me go forth to the world and live for the sake of others as far as in me lay, and I did so, and all the peace I have experienced has come through that channel alone. Now, as if an emblem of our own spiritual progress, we meet again, not at the foot, but at the summit of the rock; yet over me the shadows are still brooding. O Hesper! star of peace and never failing charity, send down the light of thy love into the darkened depths of my heart!"

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As he spoke, he drew her, like a frightened dove, close to his bosom. For one moment she shrank and trembled, and then, with all the loving gratitude of her nature, she accepted this strong refuge from her loneliness and sorrow. Far off, in the distant woods, the whip-poor-will sung his plaintive song, and the soft rippling brook made sweet music below. The evening star looked mildly from the western sky, and all nature with mute sympathy, seemed to mingle in their joy, but no eye, save those of God and his angels, witnessed the consecration of these two faithful hearts. One week after this, there was a double wedding at the doctor's, against which no disapproving word was spoken, for the village gossips entered by mutual agreement into a treaty of peace, on account of the general invitation that was extended. Aunt Betsey's countenance was wreathed with smiles of satisfaction, and Mr. Byers, who always had an eye to business, retired to a corner, and covered several pages of his note book with wise remarks and philosophical conclusions, which the occasion had called forth.

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"Mrs. Dorothy," he said to aunt Nyna, very privately, when a convenient opportunity offered, "I think that the example of these young people is worthy of all imitation, and I feel, moreover, that considering our lonely condition, it behooveth both you and I, that we mutually agree to go and do likewise."

"Yea, verily, friend," replied the good lady, in her usual quiet manner, "thee hast spoken my mind exactly;" and from that time forth the matter was decided.

Years have intervened since then, but even now, in a pleasant cottage by the brook, where the spring flowers bloom earliest and the autumn leaves are last to fall, dwells Hesper, the Home Spirit, for her mission is not yet ended. Joyful little ones, with dancing feet and smiling countenances, come and go over the threshold, and he who chose that star of peace as the guide to his earthly pathway, still walks by her serene light, rejoicing in a "love that never faileth."

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