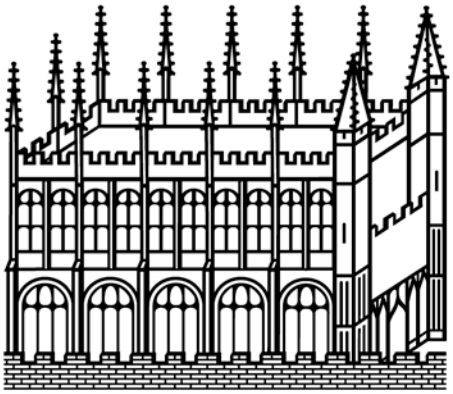

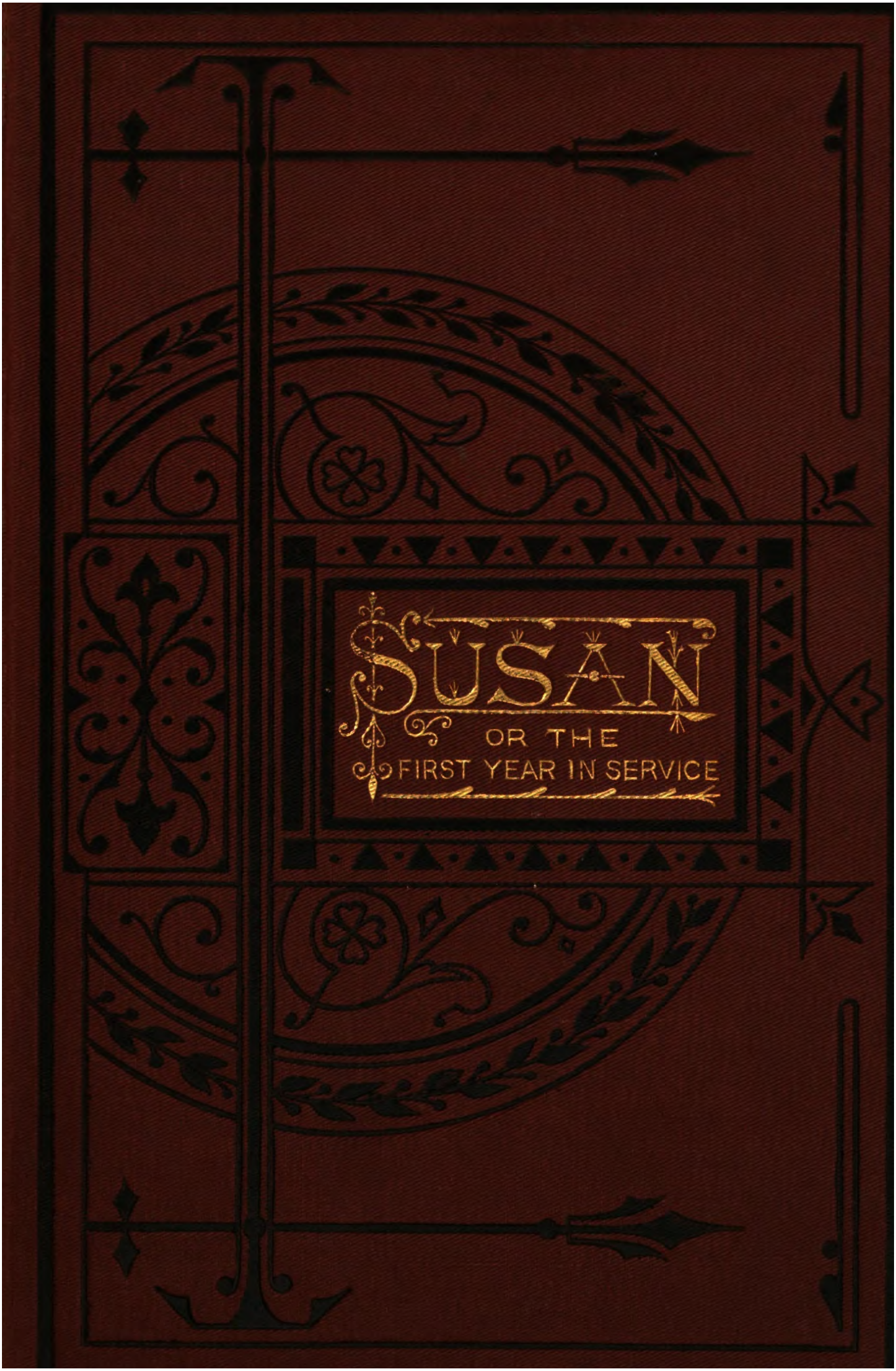
SUSAN
OR THE
FIRST YEAR IN SERVICE

1489. e. 1504.

SUSAN'S PICTURE.

Page 31. *Susan.*

SUSAN;

OR,

THE FIRST YEAR IN SERVICE.

" While I do my duty
Struggling through the tide,
Whisper Thou of beauty
On the other side."

NEALE.

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SUSAN;

OR,

THE FIRST YEAR IN SERVICE.

"O MRS. CARTER, you are the very person I wanted to see!" said Mrs. Vernon, as she drew up in her pretty pony-carriage at the gate of a neat farmyard.

"Then you're just in time, ma'am," answered the farmer's wife, "for I was setting off to the vicarage to see about my servants being confirmed."

"It's about servants that I want to speak to you," said Mrs. Vernon, "for you know all the girls about here. Can you recommend me a good nurserymaid?"

Mrs. Carter considered for a moment. "Indeed, that's a hard thing to find," she said, with a shake of her head; "I'm sure the trouble I had with my last was such that I was glad when my children

were old enough to do without her. I do know of some that are out of place, but I feel almost afraid to recommend them."

"I should not want her for a full month yet," said Mrs. Vernon, "as I only gave notice to my present maid this morning, and I should not object to trying one who had not been out before, for we have a clever upper nurse, who could soon teach her if she were sensible and obedient enough to learn."

"*Sensible and obedient,*" said Mrs. Carter, in a considering tone; "yes, those are the two great points in a young servant, but you don't often see one who has them both."

"You think the two qualities seldom go together?" said Mrs. Vernon.

"Indeed, from my experience," replied Mrs. Carter, "it seems as if they didn't. I had one maid that was sensible enough, a sharp, clever girl, that did everything well, and got through her work in no time; but, O dear, she thought she knew better at sixteen than I did at six-and-thirty! I could never trust her to obey an order when my back was turned. My children were delicate and I was careful of them, so she thought me fidgety, and nearly cost me my baby's life by keeping it out

one night in all the dew. I sent her away for that, and then I had Martha Jones, straight from the National School. She was very good and obedient, but so awkward and slow that I couldn't teach her anything. If you'll believe it, ma'am, it took her two hours every morning to wash and dress four children. Ours is a busy house, where every one has to look sharp, and it put my husband past all patience to see Martha dawdling about. 'Send her off,' he said to me; 'she'll make the children as helpless as herself.' So we parted with her; but, as she had a good character for steadiness, her mother got her to the vicarage when little Master Temple was born, and there she's been ever since, much to her credit; but I hope she's learnt to look sharper, or I pity the children there."

"She certainly would not have done for *me*," said Mrs. Vernon, laughing, "for Wilson, our nurse, would never put up with a lazy, helpless girl. But do you really think you can't tell me of even *one* who would be well-disposed enough both to mind what was said to her, and to take a pride in her work?"

"Well," said Mrs. Carter, "I'll consider about it, ma'am, and let you know if I hear of one to suit."

Mrs. Vernon thanked her and drove on, and Mrs. Carter set off on her walk to the vicarage. There she sat a little while in Mr. Temple's study, and talked with him on the subject of her dairy-maids being confirmed, and he showed her how she might help them in their preparation as well as he could, while six little Temples kept up a perpetual thumping, bumping, laughing, and screaming in the room overhead.

"We are going to the City to-morrow, sir," said Mrs. Carter, as she rose to take leave; "can we do anything for you there?"

"Nothing, thank you," said Mr. Temple; "unless," he added, laughing, "you can find us a nurserymaid. Mrs. Temple is in despair. Our poor girl has had to go home sick for some weeks, and there's no one but Martha to mind all the children."

"What! with the new baby, and the little twins too!" exclaimed Mrs. Carter. "O dear, that's awkward! Mrs. Vernon has been asking me the very same thing this afternoon, and while I'm inquiring for her, I may hear of some one for you. It would be only temporary, I suppose?"

"No—only temporary," replied Mr. Temple; "Maria will come back when she recovers."

* * * *

"So you're at your old work, Mary," said Mr. Carter to his wife, when he heard her questioning the labourers about their daughters out of place, "trying to find servants for your neighbours; now just you keep out of that—it's a thankless office. Do as I do, and let 'em find maids for 'emselves."

"Do as you *say*, you mean," said his wife, laughing, "for it's not what you *do* at all. It was only the other day that you went out on purpose to find a man for Farmer White."

"Did I? Oh, well, White was so badly off, and there was poor John Davis out of work," said Mr. Carter, excusing himself as if he had done something wrong.

"Well, tell me some nice *girls* out of work, then," said his wife, "for Mrs. Vernon and Mrs. Temple both want nurserymaids, and they're as badly off as Mr. White."

"Oh, I can't find two!" said the farmer. "There's only one girl that I know of fit for places like those."

"Well, one might do," said Mrs. Carter, "for Mrs. Temple only wants her for a while, and Mrs. Vernon can wait a month. Where is the girl to be found?"

"Why, we shall be driving past there to-

morrow morning," said the farmer. "It's Susan Rogers, the stonemason's daughter. She's a very nice lass, the eldest of nine children, and her mother wants to get her out directly."

About nine o'clock on the following morning Mr. and Mrs. Carter stopped in their dog-cart at the door of the stonemason's cottage, and told Mrs. Rogers that they had heard of a temporary and a permanent place for her daughter, if she were willing to try one or both.

"Indeed, that she will," said Mrs. Rogers, highly pleased. "Squire Vernon's is the very place I was wishing to get her into, and if she could go to Mr. Temple's for a month first, she'd just be learning her work and getting her hand in."

"That's what we thought," said Mrs. Carter; "and if you like it, I'm very glad we came."

"Indeed, I'm very grateful, and so is Susan," said Mrs. Rogers, turning to her tall, nice-looking girl of eighteen, who stood blushing beside her. "We take it very kind of you, ma'am, and of Mr. Carter too, to have mentioned her."

"Not at all!" said the farmer, eagerly disclaiming the idea of being kind, "you've no need to thank me. You see it's just this, Mrs. Rogers:

when I come to a house again and again, and see girls always at their duties and giving their minds to them, instead of flaunting and flirting and figging up finery for themselves, I 'm very glad to do them a good turn if the chance comes in my way. And now, if Susan can be ready by the time we come back from the City this evening, we 'll call for her and her things, and take her safe to the vicarage on our way home."

"Oh, I 'll be ready," said Susan, brightly; "my things are all ready, except what mother can send me."

And the mother and daughter turned cheerfully into the house, rejoicing that the opening had come for the first of a large, expensive family to make her own way in the world.

CHAPTER II.

It was in the dusk of the evening that Mrs. Carter took Susan into the vicarage, where her coming was hailed with joy by Mrs. Temple, a little delicate woman, whose back had ached all day with stooping over her twins, they being at that enterprising age when babies will be always on the floor, though they don't know how to take care of themselves when there.

She spoke kindly to Susan, and took her at once to the nursery. It was a fair-sized room, but strangely close and airless, though the evening was cool and the fire low in the grate. Susan felt choky as she entered, and glanced towards the window, which was not only shut but fastened, as if it had not been opened all day.

Martha, a good-natured, heavy-looking young woman, was sitting by the fender; the new baby, a few weeks old, was lying in her lap, and the twins, who could just toddle, were tugging at her apron, both wishing for the baby's place, and

neither of them able to get it. The three elder children, all under seven years old, were riding on three cane chairs, with which they kept up a perpetual thumping over their father's head while he was writing his sermon down below, it being one of the peculiar arrangements of the house that the room chosen for the day-nursery was that immediately over Mr. Temple's study.

"O my dears, what a noise!" said Mrs. Temple, as she tried in vain to make herself heard while introducing Susan to Martha.

"We're wanting our tea, mamma!" they all shouted at once; "and Martha says she doesn't know how we're to get it, so we're riding instead." And again they thumped their chairs mercilessly about the floor.

"How is that, Martha?" asked Mrs. Temple, gently; "they should have had their tea, you know."

"Yes, ma'am," said Martha, helplessly; "I don't know why they haven't. I thought Anne would have been here to bring it up; I named it to her, but I suppose she hasn't remembered."

"Should I go for it, ma'am?" said Susan, timidly, struggling between her shyness and her eagerness to be of use.

"Yes, indeed, Susan," said Mrs. Temple, looking quite bewildered; "that would be the best thing to do."

Susan left the room, found her way down the back-stairs, and, guided by the smell of something burning, soon discovered the kitchen door.

"Come in, please," said the cook, an honest, fresh-looking woman, who was taking a burnt loaf out of the oven; "you're very welcome, I'm sure. I saw Mrs. Carter bringing you, and I was right glad for mistress's sake, for she's been run off her feet with the twins."

"May I get the children's tea, please?" asked Susan, gaining a little courage, and determined to lose no time.

"The children's tea? yes, to be sure," said Betsey. "Dear me, Anne," she added, turning to the housemaid, a good-looking girl, with a large mock brooch, and a very smart cap on her head, "I thought Martha asked you to take it up at five."

"Well, how could I," said Anne, carelessly, "when it was my plate-cleaning day?"

"Well, let's clear the dresser," said Betsey, "and then—what's your name, please? *Susan* —then Susan can cut the bread and butter."

The clearing of the dresser was no easy matter; it was covered with all sorts of things both in use and out of use. Pans, mugs, and kettles, instead of being put in their proper places, were set down here and there; two or three aprons in different states of untidiness were flung in among them, and a tray full of breakfast things, which had never been washed up since the morning, was standing in front.

"These aprons are yours, Anne," said Betsey; "and will you just take these breakfast things into your pantry? I don't know why they're left here."

"I left 'em there thinking you'd wash 'em up for me," said Anne.

"Well," said Betsey, "it's not my work, you know."

"No," said Anne; "but I thought perhaps you'd do it as it was my plate-cleaning day."

"Well, so I would," said Betsey, "if I hadn't had the baking to mind; but just move them, that's a good girl. You've done your plate now, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Anne, carelessly, "I've done it."

"And has Charles Thompson finished mending the pantry window?"

"Yes," said Anne, in an off-hand manner.

"That's a good job," said Betsey. "He's been a long while about it, and charged master a pretty penny for time; but he'll not be coming again now."

"How do *you* know he'll not come again?" said Anne, saucily. "I shall see him again to-night, anyhow."

"Where?" asked Betsey, surprised.

"At the practising," said Anne; "he's coming into the choir."

"But he's no singer!" said Betsey.

"He's going to try, anyhow," said Anne, laughing. "Well, I'd better be washing these things up, or I shan't be ready for church."

And taking up the tray she left the kitchen, singing.

Betsey explained to Susan that Anne and Martha went every Wednesday night to service in church, and stayed to the choir practice afterwards. Betsey added that she should like to do this too, but that really she was so "*throng*," and had so little time to get out, that it was useless for her attempting to do anything for her soul, and she hoped the Lord would forgive her.

Susan wondered in her own mind why Betsey

could not be religious in the kitchen, and why Anne could not take it in turns with her to go to church; but she was too shy to say what she thought.

"There," said Betsey, "you've cut enough of bread and butter now, Susan, and very nicely you've done it; you're a handy body, I see."

"I do my best," said Susan, modestly; "but I've a deal to learn, for I've never been out before."

"Haven't you?" said Betsey. "Well, I shouldn't have guessed that by the way you shape."

"It was my mother that taught me," said Susan, her heart clinging to the home she had left.

"Eh dear!" said Betsey, as she brought a jug of milk from the dairy, "I wish *my* mother had lived to teach *me!* You must tell me all about yours some day."

"Yes, that I will," said Susan, heartily, "when we've got time; but I must take the tea upstairs now."

"Yes, and you haven't got the spoons. Anne, we want the teaspoons, please," Betsey called out.

"You can have 'em for fetching 'em," Anne called back from the pantry. And when Betsey

brought them they were as dull as pewter, in spite of the plate-cleaning which Anne talked so much about.

As soon as the children and nurses had had their tea, and Susan had cleared away the tea-things, the nursery became the scene of a general scramble. There were six little ones to be undressed, and the hour at which the evening service was held happened to clash with their bed-time; but Martha did not consider this any obstacle to her going to church. The baby, having been bundled into its night-gown, was given to Susan to hold and pacify as she could, it being always inconveniently wakeful at night, from not getting enough of fresh air during the day. Then Martha set about preparing the other children for bed, with a total want of method which greatly hindered her desired speed. Nothing was in its right place at the right time; everything that ought to have been ready had to be fetched; little garments were strewed about and trampled on all over the floor; the children were popped in and out of the bath, just to *say* they had been in, but *washed* they certainly were not.

"I like church nights," said little Johnny, "because then I don't get soaped."

"*I* don't like them," said little Edward, "because then I'm put to bed only half dry."

"And I don't either," said little Letty, "because then I don't get my hair plaited, and it all comes in my eyes."

"Well, you mustn't mind; there's no time to be particular," said Martha, with the air of one who had much higher duties to fulfil. "There are the bells beginning already. Run to your beds, children!" And the little things scampered into the inner room and tucked themselves up as they could.

"There's no time to straighten," said Martha, as she went to put on her bonnet, leaving the nursery littered over like a ragwoman's shop; "we can let that be till the morning."

"Oh, I'll straighten," said Susan, "as soon as I've got the baby to sleep."

And not very long after Martha, Anne, and their master and mistress were all gone to church, the baby was safe in the cradle, the other children also asleep, and the things that lay about the room had been spirited into their proper places by Susan's neat hands. What did she do next? Take advantage of every one being out to go downstairs and have a gossip with the cook? No, she

had more sense of duty. She remembered that the day-nursery would be wanted by the children the first thing in the morning, therefore she swept and dusted it, filled the kettle and the coal-box, raked out the dead fire and laid a fresh one all ready to light, then made herself tidy, and went down comfortably to supper when the other servants came in.

She had reason to be glad of her own forethought next morning, when she was the only servant in the house whose work was not behindhand. Anne was late in rising, and had the stairs in a cloud of dust when her master and mistress came down; the dining-room fire was laid with wet chips, and on a chilly October morning there was smoke but no blaze; the kettle was not boiling when it ought to have been, and breakfast was half-an-hour late. Mr. Temple had to eat it in a hurry, as he had an early engagement in his parish. A day so badly begun was not likely to go on very well; the family dined at half-past one, so before that time Susan proposed to get the children ready.

"Oh, you needn't do it yet," said Martha, "for the dinner's never in till near two."

"I'd better be beforehand," suggested Susan, "as I've to help in the waiting."

The children were made neat, and went down to the drawing-room, where for some forty minutes they racketed about and made their father's head ache, while he sat tired in his chair, patiently wondering how soon he should get anything to eat. When the clock had struck two the dinner was announced by Anne, and the children rushed to it like hungry cubs. Susan helped to cut up their meat, and their father supplied them as fast as he could; but the joint, though black outside, was red within, and carving was no easy task. Mrs. Temple, mindful of the butcher's bill, warned him not to cut it to waste.

"It 's so very much underdone, Letty," he pleaded gently in excuse.

"Is it, Edward?" replied his wife; "it looks quite *over*-done from here. I never know how that happens," she added, with a puzzled face.

Mr. Temple did not know either, but he looked very pale and weary, and Susan saw with compassion that he ate the merest morsel of meat, and seemed glad when the joint was removed. His wife did not notice this at all. Poor little woman! she thought there was no one like him in the world, and would have broken her heart if he had died; but she had no idea that a punctual, well-

cooked dinner every day after his hard morning's work would have gone far towards keeping him in health. The same irregular state of things went on all through the day: three o'clock was the proper time to take the children out for a walk, but Johnny's pelisse was torn, and the time Martha chose for mending it was just when he ought to have had it on, and, being slow with her needle, a little darning took her a long time. When it was done, Susan dressed the three older children and put on her own things, while Martha sat on the rocking-chair and rolled the baby up in a great number of wraps; after which she laid it down in the cradle close to the fire, and asked Susan to dress the twins, while she went to put on her own bonnet and shawl. The twins were ready long before Martha was, and Susan began to think that she was never coming.

"Oh, here you are at last!" she exclaimed joyfully, as Martha appeared with her bonnet on.

"Are you out of patience?" asked Martha, surprised.

"Well," said Susan, "won't the baby get cold being so long in the house with his wraps on? He 's very hot now, I 'm afraid."

"Oh, he'll soon cool," said Martha, "when he gets out of doors."

"Shall I just make up the fire," asked Susan, "that it may be cheerful when we come in?"

"No," said Martha, "it'll do; we shan't be out long."

"But I'd better open the window, hadn't I?" said Susan; "it'll make the room so much pleasanter."

"Well, you can," said Martha, "if you like to take that much trouble."

Susan threw it wide open, and let in the first rush of pure air that had sweetened that room for some days.

By the time they all turned out of doors, the best part of the autumn afternoon was over; nevertheless they took a long walk, and came all the way back in the twilight. Johnny was tired and the twins were cold, and when they returned to the nursery, lo! the fire was out. Susan shut the window and lighted it again as fast as she could; but no heat could be got at first, and the little ones fretted and cried till their mother came to see what was amiss. While she was comforting them, Susan hurried down for the tea. All was confusion in the kitchen as usual. Mr. Temple had

come in from a long parish round, and found his study fire out when he wanted to write his letters; he had ordered it to be relighted, and had begged for his tea in the meantime, as it was past the hour, and he was very tired. Betsey was in a fuss trying to make his toast, while Anne was grumbling at having to light the fire. She thought her mistress would have looked at it, she said, while her master was out; her mistress, however, had trusted to Anne looking at it herself.

"As if I was likely to think of it," said Anne, "when she didn't name it to me!"

While she stood idling about and excusing herself a bell rang, of which she took no notice. Presently it rang a second time.

"Do answer the bell, Anne," said Betsey.

"What bell is it?" said Anne, carelessly; "I 'm sure *I* don't know."

"It 's master's dressing-room: he 's wanting something, you know," said Betsey, looking up from her toasting.

"Well, he 's told me to light the study fire, hasn't he?" said Anne, provokingly. "I can't do two things at once."

"But the fire could have been lighted while you 've been talking," remonstrated Betsey. "I 'll

go and light it myself if you 'll just go and see what he wants; it 's a shame to treat master so! There—he 's ringing again now—do go."

Susan felt ashamed. She stopped short in her bread-cutting, and looked at Anne in surprise.

"Just you run and answer the bell, Susan," said Anne; "I've not got my apron on, but you 're tidy enough."

Susan ran quickly upstairs, and was down again in a moment.

"What does he want?" asked Betsey.

"Water to wash his hands."

"Hot or cold?"

"He doesn't mind which, he says, so that he gets it quickly."

"What a man he is for water!" said Anne.

"Well, he hasn't had much to-day," said Betsey, "for you took him none at noon."

"Because there was none hot," replied Anne, in her offhand way.

Susan filled a jug from the kettle, and ran up with it at once. Anne laughed at her for making such haste.

That same night at family prayers, the evening lesson happened to be the chapter from the Epistle to the Ephesians in which the verses occur,

"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters . . . . in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ. Not with eye service as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, with good-will doing service as to the Lord and not to men." Susan remembered another passage of the same kind, in which servants are exhorted to be dutiful to those whom they serve, "not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward." As Mr. Temple stood reading, she made up her mind that he certainly had a double claim on her respect as one of "the good and gentle." She recalled the many discomforts he had suffered through the day, simply from his servants' neglect, and she almost wondered that he had not fired up, and lectured them all round.

But it was a cross he had learnt to bear, for he had, in truth, an uncomfortable home. Like most clergymen he was not rich, and as experienced servants could only be had for high wages, it followed that his servants were young.

Martha appeared much the oldest of them all; for though she was only three-and-twenty she had the gravity of a middle-aged woman, and the gait of a very old one. She was steady and good-tempered, and always kind to the children, but her

dawdling habits and want of common sense made her, notwithstanding, a very bad nurse; and as she considered that religion had nothing to do with her daily work, she did not feel it a Christian duty to try to overcome these faults.

Betsey and Anne were still girls in their teens, scarcely older than Susan herself. Betsey was very upright and warm-hearted, and would have been glad to learn if there had been any one to teach her; but, like many other girls, she had gone to service without the slightest knowledge of the duties she undertook to perform. Milliners and dressmakers have to serve an apprenticeship before any one thinks of paying them for their work, and if Betsey had had to do the same with her cooking, it would have tended very much both to the health and economy of the family she served.

Anne was thoroughly unprincipled. She shirked her work whenever she could, and exacted help from her fellow-servants which she was too selfish to give in return; she encouraged the visits of Charles Thompson without her mistress's knowledge, and treated him to glasses of ale out of her master's cellar; she was smart and tawdry in her dress, and neglectful of everything under her care; all the while she professed to be a "religious"

person: though her religion, as it consisted merely in church-going, psalm-chanting, and hymn-singing, and did not influence her to be honest, steady, or industrious, was of course no real religion at all.

Thus it was that Mr. Temple had an uncomfortable home; and yet the work at the vicarage was only such as could have been very well done by a few sensible, well-disposed girls, if they had set about their duties with method and good-will.

CHAPTER III.

ONE Sunday evening after the children were in bed, and the nursery was set in order, Susan went down to the kitchen in search of some ink to write a letter home to her mother. Every one was in church except Betsey, who was trying to cook two suppers at once for the parlour and kitchen, besides doing some arrears of Anne's work, which had, as usual, been left on her hands. She looked flushed and tired, and Susan mentally resolved that she would stay and help her instead of writing a letter, as she had meant to do.

Betsey gratefully accepted her kindness, saying, "I was quite glad to hear you coming down-stairs, Susan, for I feel very lonesome and low-spirited to-night."

"What ails you, Betsey?" asked Susan, kindly, "I hope you've had no bad news from home."

"Home!" said poor Betsey with a sorrowful laugh; "eh, Susan, I've got no home. There's

only my poor little sister that lives in the City with an old woman I found to take her in. My mother died of consumption when I was quite a child, and my father—well, he was unthinking, and he went away. I've had to do for myself ever since I was twelve year old, and now it's a hard pinch to find money to pay for little Polly's schooling; but I'd like her to be a better scholar than I am. And then I'm so *throng* you see, it makes me feel a bit tired—not that I'd mind that though, if it didn't hinder me on a Sunday from thinking about my soul."

Betsey always spoke of her soul as if it were something quite apart from herself, a sort of separate existence for which she was unable to provide.

"That's just what I've heard my own mother say many a time," said Susan, "when there were eight of us, and I was but fourteen. What with the washing, and the stitching, and the children, and getting things ready for father, she'd be so tired that when she went to church on a Sunday she could hardly keep her eyes open."

"Yes," said Betsey, "and that's how it is with me. I feel tempted to ask the Lord sometimes how I'm ever to get to heaven when I'm obliged to live all for this world."

"Mother used to think that too," said Susan; "she fretted over it many a time, especially when she was ill, as she often was, of course. But when father was working in Manchester, we went to live there for two years; and when little Patty was born, and mother was near dying a few days after, there came a clergyman to see her, and she told him all her trouble, and how she'd never been able to serve the Lord as she wished because of serving her family. '*But you must do both at once*,' says he."

"Well, I'm sure," said Betsey, "that was poor comfort! How *could* she do both, I'd like to know?"

"Well," said Susan, "that's just what mother asked him, and she cried and was quite upset, for she thought he was making things harder for her than ever. But he explained what he meant, and spoke so kindly about it. 'I suppose,' he said, 'you work so hard for your family that you haven't ten minutes in the day to call your own, until you're so tired that you just throw yourself down to sleep.' 'Yes, sir,' says mother, 'it's just that way; I'm working from morning till night without a minute's rest.' 'Well, then,' he said, 'it's plain that if you can't serve the Lord in your

work, you can't serve Him at all; but be sure of this, *it's in your work that He means you to serve Him.* Try it when you get well. Do all the things you've been doing for your family, but do them for the Lord, and see if you don't do them better than you ever did before.' Then mother asked him if he thought our Blessed Lord would notice such common things as she had to do all day, and he said, 'Why shouldn't He? Didn't He condescend to *live* among common things at Nazareth? Didn't He help in them, as far as we know, for many years of His life? And wasn't He as much the Son of God then, as when He was healing the sick or raising the dead? Depend upon it,' he said, 'the Blessed Lord doesn't despise either you or your work if only you do it *for Him.*'"

"Well, to be sure!" said Betsey. "Perhaps that was a true word too. Did your mother take comfort in it?"

"Yes, that she did," replied Susan. "When she rose up from that illness, she set herself to view things differently from what she'd ever viewed them before; and when the work was hard, or the washing was heavy, or she was kept from church by her baby, she used just to offer it all up to the

Lord as something she 'd got to do for His sake. Oh! it made her a different woman! Mother's never fretting about her soul now; she 's always cheerful, and doing her best to serve the Lord Sunday and Monday alike."

"She must be glad," said Betsey, "that the clergyman came to see her. He must have been a nice man, I should think."

"He was nice," said Susan, earnestly, "going about those dirty streets and back alleys doing good all day. We 've not forgotten him though he 's far away now. And he gave us something to remember him by when we were leaving Manchester. You 'll never guess what it was."

"A Bible, maybe," said Betsey, "or some good book?"

"No," replied Susan, "it was just a picture of our Blessed Lord working in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth when He was a young child. It hangs up in our kitchen at home, and I 'm sure it 's kept us from being idle many and many a time."

"I wish I could get such a feeling about *my* work," said Betsey, earnestly, "I should think a deal more of my cooking if I felt it was pleasing the Lord."

"Well, I'm sure, in pleasing master you would be pleasing the Lord," said Susan, gently. "The Bible itself, you know, tells us as much as that."

"I'd do anything for master!" said Betsey, warmly; "he's the only person that ever found time to say a word to me about my soul."

"Well," said Susan, "if you don't mind my naming it, I think master would be greatly pleased to have his meals punctual and his meat a little more done. I've noticed him, you know, at the table, and it seems to take away his appetite if the joint isn't roasted enough."

"Dear me!" said Betsey, quite concerned; "and that's always happening, either through my forgetting the fire, or my getting orders so late."

"I wouldn't wait for the orders, if I were you," said Susan. "I'd just go to mistress and get her leave to put the joint down at the proper time, and then if you had the fire all ready, and took notice by the clock how long it was cooking, you could judge what time to allow for pieces of different sizes."

"So I could," said Betsey; "and I'll begin to-morrow."

And she kept her word, not only on the morrow

but all through the following week, until it became a habit with her both to mind the fire and to look at the clock; and the result was that Mr. Temple, when he came in from a parish round, found his dinner ready for him and was able to eat it, nor did he fail to make some kind remarks on Betsey's improvement, which Susan eagerly reported to her for her encouragement.

CHAPTER IV.

"I DON'T know whatever 's come to Betsey!" said Anne to Martha, as they walked to church one evening. "She 's as mad after her work as Susan now!"

"I wish Susan was going to stop with us for good," said Martha, dolefully; "she 's a deal more help to me in the nursery than ever Maria was. I shall be badly off when she goes, I 'm sure."

"Oh, she 's one of those lucky ones that get to a grand house," replied Anne. "She 's not likely to stop with us when she can go to Squire Vernon's. I 'd like to be in her place, I know."

Anne was vulgar-minded enough to despise her master because he was not rich, and because he had the candour to say sometimes that he could not afford this or that. She envied Susan for going to a place where she imagined there would be plenty of leisure and opportunity for dressing, flirting, and fun. She forgot that in large houses, where many servants are kept, there is always

plenty for them to do; and she would have been rather astonished if she could have seen the amount of work that Squire Vernon's two housemaids were expected to get through every day.

Susan's month at the vicarage came to an end. She left, commended and regretted by all, and experiencing a foretaste of that true friendship which a conscientious servant has such power to win, in the course of time, from all ranks of people among whom her lot may be cast.

Betsey particularly lamented her leaving, as she had become much attached to her, and their chances of meeting again would be few, Mr. Vernon's house being out of Mr. Temple's parish, and many miles nearer to the county town.

It was evening when Susan arrived at her new place, and the manor-house looked imposing with the broad staircase and long passages lighted up. There were a dozen servants in it, men and maids. About half of them were middle-aged, and knew their business thoroughly; the other half were young, and were being well trained to their work. Mrs. Vernon was her own housekeeper, and perhaps the exemplary way in which she performed her duties had a good deal to do with her servants being so industrious and attentive to theirs. She

had been brought up in every luxury, and was a very accomplished, highly-educated woman; but she was also sincerely religious and thoroughly practical. She brought her good sense and clear intellect to bear upon her domestic concerns, was a good wife, a good mother, and a good mistress. She understood all about cooking, nursing, housework, and needlework, and considered that nothing was beneath a lady to do except doing things badly.

When Susan was ushered into Mrs. Vernon's nursery, she saw at a glance that it was a very different place from the one she had just left, and that the difference did not arise merely from its being more spacious and less crowded. There was nothing costly to be seen, the furniture was simple and unpretending enough; but cleanliness, order, and a general look of thrift made it a most cheerful and inviting room.

Wilson, the head nurse, a brisk, neat-looking person, about five-and-thirty years of age, was dressing the eldest child, a girl of seven, before sending her down to the drawing-room; and Susan could not help admiring the skill with which she arranged the long curls, and the patience with which little Amy stood to have it done. She soon

discovered, however, that this patience was due to the child's vanity, which Wilson did not scruple to encourage, as she found it convenient. Susan withdrew her eyes from the conceited, pretty little thing, who was turning her head all ways to show off her long hair before the new nursery-maid, and turned her attention to the other children, who, with more simplicity, remained quite absorbed in their play.

Guy, a fine sturdy boy of six, as tall as his sister, but a contrast to her in every other way, was building a house on the nursery floor; while Rose and Lilly, two little fat things, both under four years old, were handing him the wooden bricks.

Susan made friends with them all by offering to help; but Guy's admiration of her building exploits was cut short by Wilson desiring him to come and be dressed, remarking to Susan that she always dressed him the last, because he was such a rough boy, he would make himself not fit to be seen in five minutes.

Susan gathered, less from Wilson's words than from her manner, that she had favourites among the children, and that Guy was not one. Amy seemed only too ready to catch her tone from her nurse, and, perched on a high chair against the

wall that she might not disarrange her hair, she sat like a little statue of vanity, looking down with contempt on her brother, who submitted to his personal adornment with rather a rueful face, casting side-long glances at his bricks all the while.

His toilet was just finished when the drawing-room bell rang for the children to go down-stairs, and Amy stepped forth, in all the glory of her starched frock and broad sash, while Wilson called on Susan to admire her neat little figure, till the child wriggled with conceit as she walked; and Guy went jumping down the stairs before her, thinking only of how many steps he could take at a time.

When they were gone, Rose and Lilly were put to bed, and Susan was initiated in all her new duties. Her month's experience at Mr. Temple's proved very useful to her now; but still she found that she had a great deal to learn, for she had been under no real teaching as yet, and whatever was done in her new place was expected to be done very well.

Wilson was an excellent trainer of young girls in every kind of work. She was a clever woman, and had that proper pride in whatever she did that

would have made her scorn to do it badly. Her love of order was great; she had a place for everything, and everything in its place; and Susan could not help contrasting her quick, methodical ways with poor Martha's dawdling habits, which kept her and her charges in a sort of scramble all day long.

Whatever Susan had done tolerably well before, Wilson could put her in a still better way of doing now. And the girl's spirits rose as she went about, briskly obeying orders and taking hints, for she had gone to service with no intention of jogging on easily, but with that honest ambition to excel in her work, and that conscientious desire to adorn her own station in life which every right-minded woman must feel.

The next day she was set down to needlework, and won some praise from Mrs. Vernon for her skill in doing it.

"But I dare say," said Wilson, with a patronising air, when her mistress had left the room, "that you can't cut out and place your own work; can you, Susan?"

"No, indeed," replied Susan; "I wish I could; but we were never taught that at school, though mother kept me there till I was sixteen."

"Ah, there it is!" said Wilson, laughing. "These schoolmistresses, with their certificates, or whatever they call them, that we hear so much about now-a-days, seem to teach the girls everything but just what 'll make them most handy. I know lots of young servants that spend what they might have for savings in putting work out, because they can't shape their own clothes. But you shall learn, Susan, for I see you've good notions; I can tell by the way you hold your needle. I'll lend you paper patterns to practise with, and you shall fix them and cut them out."

"I should like that very much," said Susan, eagerly.

"To be sure you would," said Wilson, approvingly. "Why, dear me! you're not a woman if you can't cut out and place work. To be helpless about those things stands in one's way all through life. We parted with the last maid just for that reason; she was no help to me with the sewing at all—couldn't make a child's shirt any better than Miss Amy, though she was past seventeen. *I* should never have been where I am now if I'd begun life in *that* lame fashion!" she added, with an air of conscious superiority.

CHAPTER V.

Days, weeks, and months went by at the manor-house with a quiet regularity; much company came and went at intervals, affording abundant employment for the household generally, but not at all disturbing the daily routine of the nursery.

Before the following summer Susan had become very expert at all her duties, very fond of the children, and much valued and approved by her mistress; and besides a knowledge of her work she had gained a good deal of experience, which made her feel much older than her age.

A large establishment is a little world in itself, where much display of character may be seen; and in this one there was a great variety of persons, good, bad, and indifferent. There were some who worked well for conscience sake, some who worked well from mere cleverness, and others who worked only because they were well looked after, and others again who worked as little as they could help and soon got dismissed; for though Mrs.

Vernon was very patient with young beginners, the idle and unprincipled made but a short stay under her roof.

Susan got on pretty well with Wilson, but while she carefully obeyed her directions, and so won her good opinion, she felt no increasing regard for her as time went on. Wilson was a very clever woman, but she was not a lovable one; her best qualities belonged far more to her head than her heart, and she owed her good situation and high wages entirely to her great thriftiness, and to a faculty that she had of keeping straight with her employers at the risk of all truth and sincerity. Her plausible manner disarmed her mistress from finding any fault about the way in which the children were treated, while Susan daily witnessed her harsh injustice towards Guy, her fulsome flattery of Amy, her unwise indulgence of Lilly, and her heartless neglect of little Rose. The reason of it all was very clear. Guy was a romping, independent boy, who caused trouble to the nurses by destroying his clothes very fast, as boys will; Amy was a vain, weak-minded child, who could be flattered into obedience to her nurse, or deceptions towards her mother, or any right or wrong doings that happened to be most convenient; Lilly was

the baby whom Wilson had nursed from her birth, and to whom she was therefore partial; and Rose was the little outspoken prattler that told nursery tales in the drawing-room, and let out secrets not meant to be known.

All this made Susan's position often a very trying one. She was cautioned one moment by Mrs. Vernon against saying a word that could make Amy conceited, and the next she was expected by Wilson to humour the child with the admiration she sought; she was ordered by Mrs. Vernon in the morning not to check Guy in his out-door play, and she was scolded in the afternoon by Wilson for letting him soil his clean clothes. She was frequently desired by Mrs. Vernon not to let Lilly tyrannise over Rose, and she was as frequently urged by Wilson to remember that Lilly was the youngest, and to make Rose give in to her whims. She was often at her wit's end to know what to do between so many conflicting commands, and certainly got her full share of that grievance of which under-servants commonly complain, and which they call "having two mistresses."

But she tried to take it all patiently, and she was fortunate in having one among her fellow-

servants to whom she could turn sometimes for sympathy and advice.

Elizabeth, the upper laundry-maid, was the person towards whom Susan felt more drawn than to any one else in the house. She was a strong, active woman, about five-and-forty years of age; her face was still fresh and her eyes were bright, though her dark hair was streaked with grey. She seemed to enjoy the good-will of all the other servants, without being particularly intimate with any. Her presence had a great influence over the younger maids; they were neither giddy nor quarrelsome when Elizabeth was by; they seemed to stand in some awe of her, and yet she was the one to whom they always turned for help if they were tired or ill. She had lived in the Vernon family much longer than any of them, and had known her present master as a little schoolboy. She was one of those people that we meet with now and then in the course of our lives, who, having gone into service in youth, have so thrown themselves into the interests of the family they serve from the first, that they come to be regarded as valued members of it at last; earnest-minded, warm-hearted beings, who, having begun life with a nobler aim than mere self-advancement, end it

often honoured and beloved, and are even more missed by those above them than by their equals in rank. Such characters are always modest and retiring; it is not from themselves that we hear of their own worth, but we see it recorded now and then among the deaths in the newspapers, when we come across the homely name of some "faithful friend and servant" in such and such a family during a period of forty, fifty, or even sixty years. These faithful and devoted ones may hold but a lowly place in this world, but who can tell how high they may rank hereafter in the eyes of their Master Who is in heaven?

We hear aged ladies lament that there are no servants now like the old ones whom they have outlived; but surely it would be a grievous reflection on our honest working classes to believe that the better-educated girls of our own day, who can read their Bibles and have so much sound teaching thrown in their way, should be less competent and trustworthy than those more ignorant and less cared for ones who lived fifty years before them.

On the other hand, it is sometimes complained that old family servants are exacting and interfering, and that we can get better served by new ones. This sounds a very heartless assertion, but it has

a foundation of truth. There are cases in which the long service is owing quite as much to the forbearance of the employers as to any notable virtue in the employed. There are some people who do not bear kindness well, and who presume upon it when they have proved it long enough to feel sure that it will not fail them; and hence arise obstinacy, independence, and an unaccommodating temper in those whose duty it is to obey. These are faults to which old servants are tempted, but which it lies in their power to correct; and gratitude to those under whose roof they have found for so many years an abundant and comfortable home, should make them very careful to guard against such failings. They too, perhaps, have had something to bear with that has tried them, for it is impossible to live in daily intercourse with any one for a number of years without finding out their peculiarities; nor are masters and mistresses faultless any more than their servants. But when we think of all the domestic events that mistress and maid so often have to share, the joys they have rejoiced over together, the deaths they have mourned, the sick-beds they have watched by, the meetings and partings they have witnessed, the children they have fondled, the poor they have helped, the

counsels they have taken together about things relating both to this world and the next, the tie between them seems surely strong enough to make the one kind and considerate, the other dutiful and respectful, and both steadfast and true, so that their mutual friendship may continue unbroken to the end.

This seemed likely to be the case between the Vernons and their old laundry-maid, for Elizabeth was not the one to presume on the confidence placed in her, or to relax in any of her duties because her footing in the household was firm. She loved her master and mistress, and knew that they loved her, and she found an unselfish happiness in doing her utmost to serve and please them well.

Some people wondered to see her living on at the manor-house year after year, for there was no doubt that Elizabeth would have made a good wife, and that more than one respectable man had thought so; but servants, no less than those whom they serve, have their own little histories, and it was known to one or two that a disappointment in her youth had been Elizabeth's great cross in life, though by God's grace she had turned it into a staff to help herself and others heavenward.

She showed considerable interest in Susan, seeing her to be a conscientious and energetic girl; but she would not encourage her in any morbid dwelling upon the difficulties of her situation.

"They're just what all beginners must expect, Susan," she said one day. "Girls can't have places made on purpose for them, any more than ladies can have servants. It's hard, I know, at first to be ordered about by an upper servant like Wilson, but you must just make the best of it for a bit; and depend upon it, when you've done with that trouble, you'll have some other instead, for life wasn't meant to be very smooth to any of us."

"I know that," said Susan; "it's not smooth to my mother, I'm sure, for all she's so cheerful; and I expect it's not smooth to you either, Elizabeth, though you make so light of vexations one might think you had all your own way."

"I can't exactly call to mind any time when I had *that*," said Elizabeth, laughing, "and it would seem quite queer to me if I had it now. But you know," she continued more gravely, "there's another way much better than our own that we ought all to be taking: the way our blessed Lord went Himself, and wants us to come

after Him. *He* didn't come to do His own will, and why should *we?*"

Any one who put Susan in mind of her duty to her heavenly Master always found a ready response. Her looks now spoke more than her words as she answered gently, "I'll try to remember that."

"Yes, do," said Elizabeth; "you'll find it such a comfort whenever you're put about. And after all," she went on in a sprightly tone, "what is it to make a fuss about, if we have to be under orders? It's the same all over the world, in many ranks and callings a deal higher than ours. I often think of my two brothers, poor Bill and Sam, when I hear talk about that. They were two of the coolest, sauciest lads that ever you saw in your life, and thought it quite beneath them to obey any one at all. When they got to be above twelve years old, neither father nor mother could control them in the least, and if the schoolmaster dared to touch 'em with his cane, they just took their caps and marched straight out of school. When Bill was sixteen he ran off and enlisted for a soldier, and then Sam got wild to go to sea. Father and mother were quite set against it; but the schoolmaster said, 'Let him go, it'll be the making of him, for he'll find his level then.'

So Sam had his way, and by good luck he was got on board a man-of-war and sent off to foreign parts, while Bill was marched about with his regiment. Oh, but what a breaking-in they both got then! They had to obey as they'd never dreamt of in their lives before—to do just *what* they were bid and *as* they were bid, and to look sharp about it too; and when they saw old sailors and soldiers, and smart young officers, that were born gentlemen, all under orders just like themselves, they got ashamed, and began to see there was more self-respect in obeying those set over them than in setting themselves up. And that's what girls should learn too, before they go to service, and what their mothers should teach them."

"It's what *my* mother taught *me*," said Susan, "else I should find it harder to mind Wilson's orders than I do. But the worst is when she will do things about the children that their mamma wouldn't like; I don't know then whether to complain to mistress or not."

Elizabeth looked thoughtful.

"It's not a good thing for servants to go complaining of each other," she said, after a pause; "and it comes very badly from a young servant about the one that's set over her. If I were you,

I'd just bear it, only be very careful what you do with the children yourself, for fear you should teach 'em any harm."

"That 's what it is," said Susan, with tears in her eyes; "Miss Amy tells her mamma such fibs if any questions are asked, and Wilson upholds her in it."

"Well, you just be all the more careful to tell the truth when *you* 're asked anything," answered Elizabeth. "You can't mend Wilson, but you may mend a child like Miss Amy; or if you can't mend *her*, you can teach little Rose, that 's so fond of you, that *she* mustn't tell fibs. No good comes of meddling, and I 've always noticed that if upper servants do wrong they have to repent of it, for either their deeds come to light, or something happens to make them wish they 'd never done them. Many years ago, when I was under laundry-maid here and the old mistress was living, the maid over me was Margaret, a very fine, handsome woman, and a little bit giddy sometimes. The old mistress was very particular that the men servants should never come into the laundry—many ladies are you know, they don't like it with all the linen about; but John the footman was courting Margaret, and they couldn't see at all why he

shouldn't come and chat with her while she was ironing, and so he came most afternoons and cracked his jokes and made us all laugh, till there was a deal more fun than work, I can tell you. Well, one day in the midst of it all the door opened and who should walk in but the mistress herself with her bonnet and cloak on. You might have heard a pin drop in a moment, we were all so still. She looked surprised, but she didn't say anything——"

"Not when she saw John?" asked Susan.

"My dear, she *didn't* see him," continued Elizabeth, "for Margaret had popped him behind the big clothes-horse where the sheets were airing, and there he stayed hidden all the while mistress went round looking at things and saying a kind word here and there. Then she praised us for all being so steady to our work and went out again. I never felt so ashamed in all my life."

"Margaret and John must have felt worse than you," said Susan, "because they were to blame."

"Well, I suppose they did," said Elizabeth. "John looked foolish enough when he stepped out from behind the clothes-horse again. He didn't feel as if he'd done a very manly or upright thing, and Margaret seemed vexed with herself; but she

was much more than vexed when she found that she should never see the dear old mistress in the laundry again."

"How was that?" asked Susan.

"She died," said Elizabeth, gravely. "The Sunday week after that we were all in mourning for her."

"O dear! her death was sudden then!" exclaimed Susan.

"Not very," replied Elizabeth. "It was a curious thing: that afternoon that she came to the laundry she went the round of the whole place, indoors and out, the dairy, the poultry-yard, and the kitchen-garden, and even down to the lodge, and said a word to every one she met, as if she 'd been taking leave of them. She got cold, somehow, pottering about here and there, and she was too tired and chilly even to go down to dinner that night, so John never waited on her again, and I know it hurt him many a long day after to remember that the very last time he 'd seen her was when he played that mean, sly trick upon her in her own house. Be straightforward, Susan, whatever you are, and then if things go crooked, you 'll feel at least that *you* had no hand in making 'em so."

It was on their walk home from church that this conversation took place. As Elizabeth said these words they reached the back-door and Susan went at once to the nursery.

CHAPTER VI.

It was at the end of her first summer at the manor-house that a new kitchen-maid, coming from Mr. Temple's parish, brought Susan some tidings of her old friends at the vicarage.

Martha was still there, and going on much the same as before with the children; but the baby was dead, which Susan, remembering how it was managed, was not much surprised to hear.

What surprised her a good deal more was the news she gleaned of her former fellow-servants, Betsey and Anne. Betsey had been obliged to leave her place from ill-health, and Anne had been dismissed rather suddenly.

The kitchen-maid knew neither of them personally, and could not tell what had become of them since, but these occurrences had been the talk of the village some little time back she said.

Both reports were quite true.

Poor Betsey, with her rosy face and brisk step, which deceived people into thinking her strong, had

inherited her mother's hopeless disease; the sudden variations of heat and cold to which a cook's work exposed her, soon brought out the first symptoms; her energy and good-will had carried her through the winter after Susan had left, but when the spring came she had had to face the hard truth, not only that her life would be short, but that the power of earning her living was already gone.

Anne's case was not one to excite much compassion. Her deceitful and dishonest practices had been suddenly discovered by her master, and with them had come to light other facts still more fatal to her character; she had been discharged in haste as unfit to remain among respectable servants, and she had braved it all out as only a hardened girl can.

Her disgrace was hushed up; she was married, but not creditably, to Charles Thompson, and a most uncomfortable wife she made. Her husband lost favour through his connection with her, and they were obliged to remove to the city to earn their bread.

All this Susan did not learn till long afterwards, but she had heard enough to make her feel sorry and anxious about her old companions; and she thought of writing to Martha, and asking for more

particulars about them. Her duties, however, left her very little leisure for any pursuits of her own, and events occurred very soon which put letter-writing out of her head.

In Mr. Vernon's grounds there was a wood, through which a short cut could be taken from the high-road to the park; in hard frost and dry summer weather the children were allowed to pass through it, but at most times it dripped and steamed with damp, and was, by Mrs. Vernon's orders, strictly forbidden ground.

At the gate of this wood Wilson stopped with her flock one damp autumn evening, and signified to Susan her intention of taking them in.

"We mustn't go," said Guy; "it 's full of wet leaves, and mamma won't let us."

"Hold your tongue, sir," said Wilson, decidedly. "Will mamma let you disobey *me?* I 'll teach you something different from that."

Guy was silenced, but looked distressed.

"Come, Susan," said Wilson, "lift Rose over the stile."

"Indeed, I 'd rather not," said Susan, gently; "the place is all in a smoke with damp, and mistress did give such very strict orders about it."

Wilson looked quite taken aback.

Instead of turning upon Susan in the authoritative way she expected, she began to excuse herself by saying that the wood was so much shorter than the road, and that she was tired of carrying Lilly.

"Let me carry her for you, then," said Susan; "I'm not tired at all."

"No," replied Wilson, "Rose will want carrying too before we get home, and she 's heavier, so I should come still worse off."

"Well, they 'll both run a bit on the road," argued Susan, "but we can't set them down in the wood."

"You can do what you like with Rose," said Wilson, whose temper was rising, "but I shall take Lilly where I choose. I 'll not be bothered with Master Guy either. Miss Amy will come with me I know."

"O yes," said Amy, who, in any dispute between the nurses, always took the side of the one in power, and she began to climb over the stile.

Susan took Rose and Guy by the hand, and turned off into the road, and at the same moment Wilson disappeared with Lilly into the depths of the wood. Susan secretly wondered at her self-will, for if she, through inexperience, ever allowed the children to do anything that was unsafe for

their health, Wilson came down upon her very sharply, and asked her, in the name of common sense, why she didn't know better.

She got some clue, however, to Wilson's object in going through the wood when she arrived at the lodge and found her seated there in the middle of a long gossip with her friend the coachman's wife.

No more passed between them on the subject of their dispute; but that night when Mrs. Vernon, attended by Wilson with a candle, came round to look at her children in bed, Amy was not asleep, but sitting up, flushed and restless, with a violent cold in her head.

"My dear child," said her mother, "how uncomfortable you seem! How you are coughing and sneezing! I hope you have not been into any damp places to-day?"

"O dear no, mamma!" said Amy, plausibly; "we only walked where it was quite dry."

"The wind was very strong in the park, ma'am," said Wilson, "as we came home this evening. I think that must have given Miss Amy cold."

Mrs. Vernon tucked the clothes carefully round her little girl, kissed her, and left the room, followed by Wilson.

Susan, who was about some of her duties, and had heard all that passed, came over to the bedside when they were gone, saying, kindly—

"Oh, my dear, why didn't you tell your mamma the truth? You know you got wet in the wood to-day; you were drying yourself at the fire in the lodge."

Amy made no answer.

"It 's so wrong to tell stories," Susan went on; "it makes God very angry with us. And mamma would never be hard on you if you 'd tell her the truth. It seems such a shame to deceive her when she loves you so much!"

Amy turned aside her head and pretended not to hear; it was a way she had whenever she was reproved. The frank confession of having done wrong, the eager promise to do better that a kind word can win from most children, were not so easily won from her. Her self-satisfaction made her proof against all such appeals. Susan turned away with a sigh. What could a young nurse do with so unchild-like a child?

Wilson brought her own punishment upon herself by her headstrong disobedience to orders. Lilly had caught cold as well as Amy, and being a delicate child, was thoroughly out of order, and

cross and fretful enough to try the patience of the most amiable nurse.

This went on for a week or two, during which the doctor had to be called in. Amy was much pulled down also. The parents grew anxious, and at length decided to send all the children for a fortnight to the sea.

The manor-house was full of visitors for the shooting season. Mrs. Vernon could not leave home herself.

"But surely," she said to her husband, "such an experienced woman as Wilson, and such a steady girl as Susan, may be trusted with the children alone."

Mr. Vernon thought so too, and accordingly rooms were taken for the nursery party at Rockley, a pretty bathing-place some fifty miles away.

The little girls were excited at the prospect of the journey, but Guy clung to his garden, and to his great friend Joseph the gardener, whom Wilson regarded as her natural enemy because he encouraged the boy in pursuits which made his clothes muddy.

Joseph was a well-to-do, middle-aged man. He had high wages, a thrifty wife, and a comfortable cottage to live in; but he had no children of his

own, and it was the great cross of his life that he had none. He believed them to be God's best gifts, and he had that romantic admiration for other people's children very commonly felt by those who have missed the *delights* and never known the *cares* of a family. He was a religious man too, and had a quaint, candid manner of showing it that was very offensive to Wilson, who called him a canting old hypocrite; but in this she was very unjust, for if Joseph sometimes quoted Scripture to others, he quoted it much oftener to himself; and his religion was of that kind which prevented him from taking so much as a potato or an apple from his master's grounds without leave.

On the last day before the children were to travel, he brought, as a parting token of love, some choice perennials of his own for Guy to plant in his garden; and at this work the boy had been very peaceably and happily employed during the afternoon, while the nurses were busy packing, and the little girls hindering them as much as they could.

The new border was just completed, and Joseph had stepped forward to admire the skill with which the child had arranged it, when Wilson and Susan

with all the other children came down the steps from the terrace above. They had brought the little girls out for a short run on the gravel, and were now come to look for Guy, as it was time to go in to tea.

The little boy pointed exultingly to his garden, expecting them all to admire it; but a look of terror came over Susan's face, and Wilson stood stock-still, pointing grimly, in return, to his clothes.

Guy looked down at himself, and discovered for the first time the great patches of mud on his blouse and knickerbockers.

"Oh!" he said piteously, his face flushing scarlet, "I never thought——"

"No," echoed Wilson in her severest tone, "*you never thought!* And pray, sir, why *didn't* you think? You incorrigible boy—you young pickle—you 're the plague of the nursery! that 's what you are. I put that clean suit on you with my own hands at noon to-day; everything else is packed up, and now will you please to inform me what you mean to travel in to-morrow?" she continued, growing quite theatrical in her wrath.

Guy evidently could not inform her. He stood speechless, the picture of shame, with his eyes bent on the ground. Lilly stared up at Wilson

with a face full of babyish awe; Rose hid herself behind Susan; Amy, in the spotless cleanliness of her stiff chintz frock and white stockings, looked down on her brother in his disgrace with an air of triumphant contempt.

"Don't be too hard on him, Mrs. Wilson," said Joseph; "it 's some plants I 've brought him that he 's been busy after, and he 's leaving his garden to-morrow, ye see."

"Yes, and a good thing too," answered Wilson, fiercely; "it 's all very well for you, Joseph, to take his part, but if you had to dress and wash him two or three times a-day, you 'd just wish him at Jericho, as I do!"

"I reckon we should miss him if he was gone there," said Joseph with a twinkle in his eye, as he leant his arms on the top of his spade and looked at Guy.

"*You* might, but *I* shouldn't!" retorted Wilson, quite unsoftened. "I 'll tell you what you deserve, Guy," she added, turning herself more directly to the victim of her wrath, "you deserve to have every one of those plants pulled up out of your garden and thrown away."

The words had scarcely passed her lips when Amy sprang forward, dashed round the little flower-

bed, and tore up all the newly-planted flowers by the roots.

Guy snatched up his little watering-can, and was about to empty the contents over his sister. Susan caught his arm and stopped him just in time. He hid his face in her apron and burst into a flood of tears.

"Well, I am sorry for him, *that* I am!" exclaimed Susan, warmly, ready to cry with indignation herself as she put her arm round the child to comfort him. "O Miss Amy! how *could* you do such a cruel, spiteful thing to your brother?"

Amy slunk back astonished. Wilson also looked disconcerted for a moment, but quickly recovering herself, she said to Susan—

"Don't you find fault with Miss Amy; she's a very good girl, that always keeps her clothes clean."

And she turned to carry Lilly up the steps.

"Never mind, Master Guy," said Joseph; "just you tell mamma all this, and see what *she*'ll say to your sister."

"No," said Guy, sturdily, "I'll not tell tales; papa says it's a mean thing to do."

"Then you're a *man!* that you are," said

Joseph, his face glowing with affection for the child. "You're a rare little chap! Shake hands, and God bless you, sir, for you're going away to-morrow. And as for those plants, I'll plant 'em, and water 'em, and see if I don't make 'em grow before you come back."

Guy put his little hand into Joseph's large one, and smiled through his tears, as Susan led him away; but Wilson looked back, and called out that "folks who had no children of their own had better leave off spoiling other people's;" at which cutting remark Joseph winced, and turned again to his wheel-barrow.

Later in the evening, when Guy had been regaled with dry bread for his tea, arrayed in his evening suit, and sent down to the drawing-room, Susan appeared in the laundry with a rueful countenance, and the muddy blouse and knickerbockers hanging over her arm.

"What's up now?" said Elizabeth, who saw she had come to ask a favour, and did not know how to begin.

"*All*'s up, I think," said Susan, dolefully; "we haven't a thing unpacked for Master Guy to travel in to-morrow, without he puts on his best suit and spoils it. I was coming to ask if you'd

let me just wash these through myself here this evening?"

Elizabeth took hold of the muddy clothes and looked at them solemnly for a moment. Then she looked at Susan and laughed.

"He's caught it from Wilson for doing this, I expect," she said.

"He has so!" said Susan; "and poor Joseph has too. But Miss Amy's the one that deserved to catch it, for what do you think she did?" And she briefly recounted Amy's spiteful act. It seemed to decide Elizabeth about the clothes at once.

"Just leave these things with me, Susan," she said, "I can do them better than you can, I think; and if you'll come for them the first thing in the morning, you'll find them clean and aired, ready for Master Guy to put on."

"Well, you *are* kind!" exclaimed Susan. "I couldn't for shame ask you to do them for us, when I knew it was only yesterday that you got them up so nicely."

"Boys *will* be boys," said Elizabeth; "and a little mud on one's clothes isn't half so bad as spite or injustice. Take a word from me, Susan, now that you're going away. Mistress is trusting you and Wilson; show yourself fit to be

trusted. Be just to the children, and whatever others are, above all things, be straightforward."

"Yes, indeed, I will," answered Susan. "I'm determined to do my very best; but it'll be difficult for me, I know, sometimes."

"I know that," said Elizabeth; "but never you mind; do what's right, and depend upon it, you'll be righted yourself at last."

CHAPTER VII.

It was not without many little warnings and injunctions that Mr. and Mrs. Vernon sent their children away from home. Among other things it was desired that they should make no acquaintances at Rockley. This decision was very unwelcome to Wilson, as, though it referred of course to the children, it must, in a great measure, affect their nurses also. She was of a sociable turn and fond of company, and she did not choose to make a friend of Susan, being very jealous of the distinctions between upper and under servants.

Mrs. Vernon was quite unconscious of having given her any offence. Like most careful mothers, she wished her children's playmates to be of her own choosing; and as her orders were neither unreasonable in themselves, nor given in a disagreeable manner, she naturally expected them to be obeyed.

Susan had no idea of anything else; and was therefore rather startled when, on the second

morning of their stay at the sea, Wilson proposed joining company on the beach with a maid and two little girls rather older than Amy, who were seated under the cliffs near them.

"I think mistress would rather we didn't," suggested Susan, timidly.

"You can be as disobliging as you please," replied Wilson, coldly; "but that maid is tatting the very pattern that I want to learn, and if I choose to get her to teach it me, who's to hinder me, pray?"

Susan felt that it certainly was not in her power to do so; but she resolved to keep apart from strangers herself, and, as far as she could, to keep the children apart from them too. Lilly, who was Wilson's pet, she was seldom allowed to touch, and Amy was quite beyond her influence; but she took Guy and Rose by the hand, and led them away over the sands to gather shells.

The stranger maid, who was a very talkative person, soon became quite confidential with Wilson; and her two charges, who had been staring very hard at the little Vernons, and making remarks loud enough for them to hear, were not hindered by any shyness from striking up a friendship with Amy. The flattery and time-serving of

children older than herself was very acceptable to the little vain girl, and in the course of two hours she had completely caught their tone, and yielded herself to their biddings with that natural weakness of character which made her always a mere puppet in the hands of any one who made much of her.

What was begun that morning was carried on the next, and so on all through the week, till the acquaintance had grown into intimacy with the rapidity peculiar to sea-side friendships, and neither the nurses nor children were ever seen apart.

Susan, meanwhile, held steadily to her own resolve, kept aloof from the whole affair, and helped Guy to make a collection of shells, an amusement that soon so engrossed him and little Rose as to make them independent of any other. Her situation was, however, a very trying one, for she durst not remonstrate with Wilson, and yet she felt sure that Amy was getting harm, and that the two little Bensons were the very last companions that Mrs. Vernon would have chosen for her.

They were the children of a wealthy tradesman in a large manufacturing town, who, instead of being brought up to adorn, by a good education

and modest manners, the really respectable position which their father held, had been pushed forward in company and turned into little women before their time; over-dressed, over-indulged, valuing everything by what it cost, vying with each other which could give herself the most airs, they were as unchild-like as it is possible for girls of nine and ten years old to be; and being well supplied with pocket-money, they lavished foolish presents on Amy, which she, acting on a hint from Wilson, was prepared to conceal from her mother.

It was while Susan was grieving over this, and thinking that when she got back to the manor-house she would consult Elizabeth about telling Mrs. Vernon how she was deceived, that she found to her relief, from remarks dropped by Wilson and Amy, that the Bensons' visit to Rockley was ending, and that they would leave on the following day.

Soon after breakfast the next morning, a full hour before the children usually went out, Wilson left the room, taking Lilly with her, and making a sign to Amy, who seemed to understand it, as she followed her out. Susan, who was sewing at the window, presently saw them leave the house by

the front door, and guessed that they were going to the train to see their new friends off.

It was so. For a quarter of an hour Wilson and the Bensons' maid gossiped together on the platform at the railway station, while the children walked up and down with their arms round Amy, till suddenly the train appeared, a very long one, and in a moment all was hurry and confusion.

The Bensons had got into a carriage near the engine; Wilson was holding Lilly up at the window to kiss them, and saying her own last words at the same time, when Amy caught her arm and whispered nervously—

"O Wilson! look—look there!"

Wilson did look, and what did she see but Mr. and Mrs. Vernon themselves stepping out at the other end of the train.

"Papa! mamma!" shouted Lilly, with all her might. But papa and mamma were at the luggage-van, intent on finding a hamper of home fare which they had brought for the children, and in the buzz of the crowd they did not hear the little voice calling them, nor guess that their pet was so near.

Wilson clapped her hand over Lilly's mouth before she could call again, and, with Amy holding

on at her dress, rushed across the line in front of the engine before the porters could stop her, got out of the station over some broken building ground, and running down bye-streets and alleys, reached the back door of the lodgings just as Mr. and Mrs. Vernon with their hamper drew up in a hired carriage at the front. She burst unceremoniously into the kitchen, startling the old landlady and her daughter, and panting out, "We were in a shop!—master and mistress are come!" she ran breathlessly up the back stairs, Amy clattering after her as fast as she could go.

"Well, I'm sure!" said the old woman, with an astonished face, as she shut the kitchen-door after them; "wonders never cease! To think of Mrs. Wilson, that stands so much on her dignity, coming tearing into one's house like that! Whatever 's come to her, Kitty?"

"I don't know," said the girl, laughing. "I think she said her master and mistress had come."

"Well, and if they *have* come," said her mother, "need she run like mad, and look as scared as if there was a bull at her heels? It has a very queer look to *me*, it has!"

And the old woman nodded mysteriously at

her daughter as if she thought all was not right.

Wilson set Lilly down at the door of the sitting-room, and allowed Amy to lead her in, while she herself retired to recover breath.

"Oh, here are the others!" said Mrs. Vernon, as she turned from caressing Guy and rose to take Lilly in her arms. "My child," she continued to Amy, "how hot and breathless you are! You must not exert yourself so, or we shall have you ill again."

"We were in a shop, mamma, and saw you pass," panted Amy, improving upon Wilson's falsehood.

"Susan," said Mr. Vernon, as Guy was jumping round him, "bring the other children's hats, and we 'll all go down to the beach."

They all turned out, a happy little party. Mr. Vernon carried Lilly on his arm, Amy held his other hand, Guy and Rose went skipping along on each side of their mother, the nurses followed at their leisure some way behind.

Wilson vented her annoyance at the sudden arrival of her master and mistress in many complaints to Susan. It was the strangest thing she had ever seen, she said, and the most incon-

siderate. Who could have expected them to arrive at that early hour? They must have left home before eight o'clock in the morning. And why had she not been informed that they were coming? Mrs. Vernon had written only yesterday, and said not a word about it. In her last situation she should not have been treated with so little respect.

In this strain she ran on for some time, while Susan was quite at a loss how to reply; for to her it seemed a very natural thing that parents should come to see their own children unexpectedly if they chose; and her own conscience was so clear of having anything to conceal, that the sudden apparition of Mr. and Mrs. Vernon had been almost as pleasant a surprise to her as to the little ones themselves.

It was the knowledge of this that really annoyed Wilson most of all. She could not but feel that Susan, the young, simple under-nurse, whom she had patronised as her inferior, held now a far more dignified position than she did herself; for Susan was at ease in her quiet straightforwardness, while Wilson was uncomfortable in her plausible deceit. She would not for the world have owned to this, however, so she tried to carry it off by the very common refuge of throwing the blame of her

discomfort on others, and by showing at the same time the most officious attention to her master and mistress during their short day's visit, watching their every look and anticipating all their wants with an excessive servility of manner, much less pleasing, if more marked, than the simple goodwill of an upright servant who knows that she has nothing to be ashamed of.

Susan felt that all this was just that eye-service which the Bible condemns, and almost wondered that Mr. and Mrs. Vernon were deceived by it; but both her own shyness and the remembrance of Elizabeth's plain hints against meddling, as well as a feeling of gratitude towards an upper servant who had taught her much useful work, held her back from saying a word that could in any way injure Wilson in the opinion of her employers.

Mr. and Mrs. Vernon departed again towards evening, apparently well satisfied to leave their children for another week in Wilson's charge; and Susan could only hope that the surprise of their unlooked-for visit might put her more on her guard against disobeying orders and leading Amy into deceit. It was not long, however, before she found that such hopes were vain.

For a few days there was no one about with

whom Wilson or Amy cared to make acquaintance, so the nurses and children kept together, and all went on happily enough; but on the last morning of their stay at Rockley, as the whole party entered a shop to purchase some toys, they found there a respectable-looking young nurse and a pretty little girl, both dressed in deep mourning, and evidently strangers, as they were asking their way down to the beach. While the shopwoman was directing them, Wilson turned round.

"If you will wait a few minutes," she said to the stranger nurse, "*we* can show you the way; for we are all going down to the beach, and shall be glad of your company."

The young woman, who was a shy, quiet person, looked rather surprised, but thanked Wilson civilly and remained in the shop. Her little charge, whom she called Maude, and seemed very fond of, was much attracted by Rose and Lilly; and on leaving the shop, Wilson encouraged her to join hands with them and run on before, while she set herself to make acquaintance with the nurse.

The two little Vernons, who were now in full health, ran too fast for Maude, who was very fragile, and pulled her down on the ground between them. Her nurse was darting forward to help

her, but Wilson, who did not like conversation to be interrupted, stopped her, and called out authoritatively, "Guy, pick up that little girl directly." Guy, who was walking with Susan on the other side of the road, ran to the rescue at once, picked up the little girl very tenderly, and kissed her to console her for the fall. Her nurse thanked him, and as they had now reached the beach, was about to say "Good morning," and take Maude away to play by the waves. But Wilson begged that she would not part the children, and invited her to sit down and chat while the little ones amused themselves together.

Susan went off as usual with Guy to gather shells, and made this time a vain attempt to take some of the other children with her. Rose was too much taken with the pretty little stranger to be persuaded to leave her now, and Amy, who loved an opportunity of showing off before new acquaintances, seated herself close to Wilson and the other nurse, where she soon overheard a great deal more of their gossip than was at all good for her.

Wilson presently discovered that her new friend came from a neighbourhood where she herself had formerly lived, and that they had some mutual

acquaintances about whom she had endless questions to ask. The gossip continued all morning, till the sight of Susan returning with Guy over the sands warned Wilson that it was time to take the children home to dinner. She beckoned Rose and Lilly to come to her, but little Maude was unwilling to part with them.

"Poor little thing!" said her nurse, "she's so pleased to get some one to play with."

"She's an only child, I suppose?" said Wilson in reply.

"Yes, she is now," said the nurse; "but she was the middle one of three. We've been in sad trouble," she continued, her eyes filling with tears; "her brother and sister have just died both in one week, and she was as near as possible dying too. The moment she could travel we brought her off here for change of air."

"Dear me!" said Wilson, surprised; "I thought she looked delicate. And what sort of illness was it?"

"Scarlet fever," said the other nurse, quietly.

Wilson started to her feet like one electrified.

"Whatever were you thinking of not to tell me?" she exclaimed, forgetting all politeness in her surprise and dismay. "It's the most deadly

thing a child can have, and the most catching too!"

"O dear, I'm very sorry," said the young nurse, much distressed; "I really didn't know there was such danger—I thought in the open air——"

"Open air indeed!" said Wilson, very angry; "why, the children have been clasping hands and putting their arms round each other! The mischief's done I expect, and it's as much as my place is worth!"

"O dear, I'm so sorry," repeated the young woman; "but if you remember, it was yourself that spoke first and made friends with us; I never do talk to strangers generally," she added, evidently much hurt at what Wilson had said.

"Be off, Miss Amy, as fast as you can!" was all Wilson would deign to say now. "Come along Rose this minute, and you too Lilly," she added, stooping to snatch the child up.

But the friendliness which she had encouraged at the beginning was not so easily put an end to when she wished. Lilly fought and struggled to remain, and Maude clung to Rose with some vague childish fancy that she was her own lost sister come back to her. The three little

girls had to be parted by force, and all set up a loud cry.

"What is the matter?" asked Susan, as she and Guy joined the rest on their way up to the house.

"Don't ask me," said Wilson, in an undertone; "I never was so shamefully treated in my life. Those people have come straight from a house full of fever and never had the sense to tell me!"

Susan was very much startled, but could not help seeing the injustice of Wilson's attempt to throw upon the other nurse all the blame of what really was a breach of duty on her own part; she could not but remember the shyness with which the young woman had hung back when first accosted, and how entirely the acquaintance had been of Wilson's own seeking.

She felt very sorry for her, however, for it was plain that her long experience made her fully alive to the danger she had incurred; the dread of consequences to herself, far more than to the children, in case her fault should be discovered, weighed heavily on her mind, and made her last day at Rockley anything but the lively one she had intended it to be.

"No harm will come of it, I think," she said to

Susan, as they were packing up that evening; but she disbelieved her own words, and had recourse to her usual method of concealment and deceit. Amy was easily persuaded to hide everything she knew from her mother; Guy, being engrossed with his shells, and not having played with Maude, was not likely to think of her again; Rose being so young might soon be made to forget, with a little management, what had taken such hold of her mind for the time; and Lilly could not speak plainly enough to give information on any subject whatever.

Thus Wilson comforted herself, and returned with her charges to the manor-house, where she began her duties again with an energy that seemed to challenge every one to respect her as a valuable servant.

CHAPTER VIII.

During the first few days that immediately followed their return, Susan was more unhappy than she had ever been at any time since leaving her own home. She felt that evil was impending; that the consequences of Wilson's disobedience were only too likely to fall on the children, that their parents were ignorant of the risk they had run, and that it was wrong to let them remain in such ignorance, and yet she could not clearly make up her mind as to what she ought to do; and, to add to her difficulty, Elizabeth had gone away on a holiday, and she felt afraid to take any decided step without her advice.

She resolved, therefore, to wait for her return, and in the meantime there soon arose enough of trouble in the nursery to occupy all her time and thoughts.

One after another the children had all begun to complain. Guy could not eat, Amy could not

play, Lilly was fractious and fretful, and Rose was drooping, and begging to sit on Susan's lap all day.

"What ails my darlings?" said Mrs. Vernon. "I'm so disappointed, Wilson, that they have not come back from the sea quite strong."

"And so am I, ma'am," said Wilson, plausibly; "I can't account for it in any way."

Her assumed innocence, however, was not quite proof against the discovery she made one morning, when, on taking up the two younger children to dress them, the dreaded eruption, in its most unmistakable form, was the first thing that met her eyes.

She put the little girls back into their cots, much to their dismay, and left them fretting there while she hurried into the day-nursery to speak to Susan, shutting the door after her.

"Susan," she began, in a tone of entreaty, very different from the authoritative manner she generally adopted, "you 'll not breathe a word that can get me into trouble, will you now? I've come to tell you before I tell any one else: Rose and Lilly have got the fever."

"I can make no promises—indeed I can't," said Susan, greatly distressed. "I doubt if I haven't done wrong already in keeping silence so long."

"But you 'll not tell mistress now? You 'll not do me such a bad turn as that?" said Wilson, in great alarm.

"I hope you 'll save me the trouble by telling her yourself," said Susan, firmly, "for I 'm sure it 's the only right thing to do."

"*Tell her!*" cried Wilson, in a tone of mingled contempt and anger; "tell her! at the risk of losing my comfortable place and my twenty pounds a-year! Susan, you 're a *child!*" And she marched hastily out of the room.

Great was the consternation throughout the manor-house when the doctor came and declared the little ones to be suffering from scarlet fever, and the older children to be no doubt sickening with the same serious complaint.

Where had they caught it? That was the mystery, for they had never been out of the house since their return home. They must have brought it with them, the doctor said; their sea-side rooms had perhaps been infected, or they had mixed too freely among other children there. O no, he was told that such could not be the case. Mrs. Vernon had been far too cautious to take infected rooms for her children, and Wilson solemnly assured her master and mistress, in the doctor's presence, that

they had made no acquaintances at all. Amy eagerly confirmed her statement, and Susan was not present to contradict it; nor was it thought necessary to question her on a matter about which there seemed to be no doubt.

An anxious time followed, in which all the care of both nurses was needed for the little patients. Lilly got through the crisis better than was expected, Amy took the disease in its very mildest form, Rose was for one night in danger; but in a few days all three were pronounced convalescent.

On the same morning, however, that this favourable report was given in the nursery, there was a heart-rending scene in a room at the other end of the passage; for there lay little Guy, the only son of the house, on whom the fever had fallen in its most malignant form, and to whose agonised parents the doctor had just broken the truth, that there was very little hope of his recovery.

Wilson was not present. Alarmed and conscience-stricken, she had fled from that room the day before, and left all the nursing to Mrs. Vernon and Susan. No one but herself could do for the little girls, she said; and thus she excused herself from a painful sight.

Guy was in wild delirium. Mr. Vernon and Susan were bending over him, trying by gentle force to keep him safe in bed; his mother was kneeling near, saying prayers for him that he could not hear. Presently she rose, clasped her boy to her heart, and kissed his flushed, burning forehead, and left the room in a flood of tears. She would go and break it to Amy, she thought, the only one of the children old enough to understand her brother's danger.

She entered the nursery and found Amy, who was just dressed, standing before the looking-glass, admiring the transparency of her own complexion after her recent illness.

The unusual sight of her mother's grief made some impression on the thoughtless child. She could but dimly realise what was going to happen, it was all such a new, strange thing, and habit had made it so difficult for her to think much of any one besides herself; but a feeling of awe came over her which she had never known before, and her conscience pricked her for the many unkind things she had done to Guy in their days of health, though that persistent concealment of all truth from her mother in which she had become so sadly expert made her keep this to herself.

Mrs. Vernon soon left her and returned to her suffering boy. As she passed along the passage she could hear his hoarse, weak voice, saying, wildly :—

"Let me go to my garden and see how the plants are grown. Oh! what beautiful shells—pick them up, Susan—they're all sparkling under your feet—hold my hand, hold it fast—I'm going down to the great waves, Susan."

And with his choking, wandering exclamations mingled Susan's gentle voice, and the motherly tones of Elizabeth, who had just returned, and had come straight to the sick-room with that ready sympathy which always made her quite one of the family in times of anxiety and distress.

All day they watched by turns in that mournful room, the parents and the two faithful maids; all day the little wild patient babbled of flowers and shells, and called first one and then another to come down with him to the great waves. At last the weak voice grew weary, there was a long, solemn hush round the bed; then, as the October twilight gathered over the manor-house, Guy fell into a sleep from which it was feared he would never wake again.

Susan had promised to let the other servants know how he was going on, and she now

left the room for that purpose, glad also to give vent for a moment to her own feelings, over which, for Mrs. Vernon's sake, she had been keeping a strong restraint. As she passed along towards the staircase a soft voice called to her from the other end of the passage; she looked up and saw Amy beckoning to her from the nursery door.

"Susan," whispered the child earnestly, as she drew near, "Susan, tell Guy that I'm sorry I pulled up his plants that day; tell him I'll not do such things to him any more."

For a moment Susan was too much overcome to reply, then, recovering herself, she said, "I couldn't tell him now, dear, he's been so very ill all day; but you must be very good and always speak the truth, then you'll go to Guy and tell him all about it yourself some day."

Before that evening was over, Elizabeth knew all that had happened at Rockley, and how the children had taken the fever.

"Poor Wilson!" was her first remark, "she has a deal to answer for; and if she has any conscience at all, she'll regret this business but once, and that'll be all her life long."

"Will she lose her place by it?" asked Susan, anxiously.

"That 's not for me to say," replied Elizabeth; "but judge for yourself, Susan; is it likely that master and mistress will wish to keep a nurse that disobeys them as soon as their backs are turned, and teaches their own children to deceive them?"

"Well—no, indeed," said Susan, "I don't see how they can; and yet—I 'm *very* sorry for Wilson."

"So am I sorry for her," said Elizabeth, decidedly, "but we must look at it from the other side as well as from hers. Just think of the sin and sorrow she 's brought into this house; think of that dear boy lying *so ill* upstairs, and his parents wondering how he caught the fever; and Miss Amy learning to tell lies to her mother's face without even changing colour."

"O yes, it 's dreadful," said Susan, with tears in her eyes; "but still it 's such a painful thing to get a fellow-servant into trouble; now that the time is come, I can hardly bring myself to do it."

"Painful things are our duty sometimes," said Elizabeth, gravely, "else one would much rather not do them; but I can't sit quietly down and see an injury done to this family that I 've served for five-and-twenty years. You *must* tell what you know, Susan, and if you feel nervous about it, I 'll

go with you myself to the mistress, and I 'll let all the other servants know that you did it by my advice. I can understand your hanging back, because you 're young, and it 's a very unpleasant thing to do. I warned you once against meddling myself, but there 's a great difference between interfering out of spite and telling the truth to those that are being deceived."

"I 'll not shrink from telling the truth if you 'll stand by me, Elizabeth," answered Susan. "When must we speak to the mistress?"

"Not till this crisis is past," said Elizabeth; "the doctor says it must soon be over, and we couldn't intrude on her in her sorrow until then; but in the meantime, if you should be asked any questions, Susan, mind you speak out and say the truth, and the *whole* truth, and nothing *but* the truth."

CHAPTER IX.

THE crisis was soon over, as the doctor had foretold, and to the surprise and joy of every one, Guy struggled through it, and awoke from a long sleep, weak and prostrate indeed, but able to recognise his mother.

Then followed a long, tedious recovery, during which the parents quite devoted themselves to the care of the son they had so nearly lost. Months must elapse, they knew, before he could regain his usual health after such an illness, and in the midst of all their thankfulness, it affected them much at first to see their once merry, sturdy boy now far more delicate and fragile than his sisters.

One evening, before he was yet out of danger, his mother left him for a short time, while she went to visit her little girls in the nursery. They were playing about in the twilight, while their nurses were sewing busily at the window.

Mrs. Vernon sat down in the large rocking-

chair, and taking both Rose and Lilly in her lap, began to show them some pictures in a scrap-book which they had never seen before. Amy also drew near, and stood leaning against her mother's shoulder. All three became quite absorbed in the book, as page after page was turned over for them.

At length they came to a picture of a little child playing on the sea-shore.

"Oh!" exclaimed little Rose, eagerly, "that 's 'ittle Maude! Just 'ike 'ittle Maude! How nice!"

"Little Maude?" said her mother, as she drew her away from the table. "Who do you mean, my darling?"

Susan started, and looked towards Wilson, as if entreating her once more to confess.

Wilson evaded the look. She appeared intent on it, but as she bent over her needlework, she said, plausibly—

"I think it 's some one she 's heard Miss Amy read about in one of her story-books, ma'am."

"O yes," said Amy, quickly catching up the falsehood, "that 's what she means, mamma."

But Rose, whose memory, when once refreshed, was very tenacious, would not be so easily put off.

"No, Amy," she said, in a determined tone, "it's *not* in a 'tory-book! it's 'ittle Maude—'ittle Maude on 'e beach. She was d'est in b'ack—*all in b'ack!*" she continued with great emphasis, standing before her mother, and gesticulating with her little hands.

"What does she mean?" said Mrs. Vernon, and as she spoke her eyes met those of Susan, who had dropt her work in her lap, and was looking earnestly at the child.

Susan rose up respectfully, and looked her mistress in the face, though her voice trembled a little as she answered—

"She means a little girl, ma'am, that the children played with at Rockley."

Wilson was thunderstruck. She nervously snatched up her work, and pretending to have forgotten something, left the room as fast as she could.

Amy, who had slipped behind her mother's chair, was making vehement signs to Susan to say no more. Mrs. Vernon turned quickly round, and detected her in the act.

"My child," she said, in a grieved tone, as she drew the little girl forward, "what are you doing —trying to stop Susan from speaking to me?"

Amy hung her head guiltily.

"Susan," said Mrs. Vernon, earnestly, "I see that something is being hidden from me. I have great misgivings about it, and I entreat you to tell me the truth."

And Susan did tell it fully and clearly, with neither exaggerations nor reserves; neither exalting herself, nor condemning Wilson, except by the facts she told. She was asked question upon question, and answered each as in the sight of One "from Whom no secrets are hid," until the whole story was out of Amy's intimacy with the Bensons, the harm it had done her, and the deceptions she had practised about it, and lastly of the children's acquaintance and close contact with little Maude, who had come in deep mourning from a house full of fever, the only surviving child out of three.

When she had finished Mrs. Vernon thanked her, and left the nursery in great distress.

In the course of that evening Wilson was summoned to the library, where her master and mistress were sitting. They were still in too much anxiety to be able to enter at any length into the subject of her misconduct. She received a month's notice, and permission to leave the moment she had suited herself with a situation—the sooner the better, she was given to understand.

"I hope you will bear in mind," said Mr. Vernon, "that it is for your *faults*, and not for their grievous consequences, that you are now dismissed. My boy's life is in the hand of God, Who may yet raise him up like his sisters; but still you can never acquit yourself of having exposed him to infection by your deliberate disobedience to orders. The injury you have done to him and us is, however, less than you have done to Amy, whom you have led into depths of deceit that could hardly have suggested themselves to a child of eight years old. It is the bad effect of your influence upon *her* that we feel most deeply of all."

Wilson had nothing to say for herself; she stood downcast and convicted; all her dignity and plausibility had quite forsaken her. At length she turned to her mistress, and ventured to make the usual request that she would "*give her a character.*"

But Mrs. Vernon was not one of those ladies who unscrupulously transfer to their neighbours' houses the troubles they are anxious to get rid of in their own; she told Wilson frankly that for her neatness and general ability she would mention her as a lady's-maid, but that to take charge of children

of any age she could never honestly recommend her.

Justly as she deserved it, this was a great blow to poor Wilson; she had chosen the nursery as her particular line of service, had been trained for it when young, and was fully alive to its advantages, which fell in with her love of power and general turn for management. An upper nurse who is competent and trusted reigns over a little realm of her own, and her comfort depends mainly on herself. She can keep her own early hours, and carry out her daily plans undisturbed by anything that may be going on in other parts of the house; while visitors come and go, bringing a press of work for the other servants, her duties remain the same, and go on in their regular routine; while others may be crowded or have to change their rooms, she sits as usual in space and order, with her own affairs under her control.

But the case of a lady's-maid is very different, especially if she happens to live in a large and gay family; she must spend many monotonous hours at her needle, often working against time; she must be always learning something new to keep pace with the fashions; she must be prepared to travel here and there, and to put up with such

accommodation as she finds; she is often required to sit up very late; she is constantly at the beck and call of her employers, and the measure of her work can often only be reckoned by the measure of their amusements.

Wilson knew all this, and looked forward to a maid's office with no very sanguine feelings. To have to turn to a fresh employment at middle age is in itself a trial, but it is one that often befalls those, in any rank or position, who have abused a trust; and such persons may be thankful for any opening that gives them a new start in life, in which they may profit by sad experience and try to redeem their own character.

Wilson bade farewell to the manor-house at the end of a fortnight, having found a situation as maid to a lady, with several grown-up daughters, who meant to give her plenty of work. She shed many tears of regret at leaving her comfortable place, and it is to be hoped that she mingled with them some tears of repentance for the troubles she had brought upon Mr. and Mrs. Vernon, and the bad example she had set to their children. Her faults were not those of ignorance or of youth, and the mischief she had done was in proportion to the influence she possessed.

Wilson's departure caused Mrs. Vernon to make entirely new arrangements for her children. Guy's delicate health made him for a long time her own especial charge.

Amy was, as soon as possible, removed altogether from the nursery, and placed under a judicious governess, who found it no short or easy task to undo what an unprincipled nurse had done, to make the child ashamed of her overweening vanity, and to teach her the importance of telling the truth. Rose and Lilly were put under the care of Susan, who was henceforth to be their only nurse, with an advance of wages, and a promise of further increase if she proved herself deserving.

It was not without much consideration that Mrs. Vernon resolved on this step.

"Susan is very young," she observed, in speaking of her plans to Elizabeth, "but her devotion to my little Guy during his illness, and her courage and candour in telling me the truth when it must have cost her a great effort, make me feel disposed to try her as single nurse."

"And I don't think you 'll repent it, ma'am," said Elizabeth. "Susan is young, as you say; but then she 's a really good girl, one that will mind your orders, and be the same behind your

back as she is before your face; and for my part, if I may be so bold as to say so, I 'd rather have a young nurse like that than an older one like Wilson, let her be ever so clever and experienced."

"I quite agree with Elizabeth," said Mr. Vernon, when his wife repeated these remarks to him. "There is something honest and simple about Susan; and after our sad experience of deceit and cunning, I value these qualities very much. I feel more disposed to trust the two little ones to her than to a stranger."

No one was more surprised at her promotion than Susan herself; she took it very humbly and gratefully, earnestly resolving so to act that the confidence placed in her might never be disappointed, and in her first leisure hour she wrote, with a full heart, to her mother, who was not a little pleased to receive the good news.

CHAPTER X.

"SUSAN, you 're wanted down-stairs, please," said the housemaid, entering the nursery a few weeks after Susan had become settled in her new charge; "there is a person at the back door begging to see you for a minute."

"What sort of a person?" asked Susan, who was very intent on a frock she was cutting out on the nursery table.

"Well, a poor body that looks as if she 'd come down in the world," replied the housemaid; "she 's rather smart about her head, but her boots are nearly off her feet; she seems well-spoken, and she 's got a young child in her arms."

"What name did she give?" asked Susan, not at all enlightened by this description.

"She wouldn't give either her name or her message," was the reply; "she says she wants particularly to speak to you, and that she knows you very well and thinks you 'll be glad to see her."

"Can it be some one that mother's sent with a

message?" said Susan, dropping her scissors on the table with a perplexed air. "Dear me! I hope nothing 's gone wrong at home."

"Well, I 'll stay with the children a few minutes if you like to go down and see her," answered the housemaid.

"Thank you, Jane, I won't be long," said Susan, and she ran down-stairs to her visitor.

She did not recognise the forlorn-looking woman who stood within the lobby, with a puny, untidy infant in her arms, and greeted her with, "Well, Susan, how are you?" as if they were old friends.

The voice sounded familiar, but the face was hard and careworn, and so disguised by the tawdry bonnet full of faded flowers, and the straggling uncombed locks of hair, that it was difficult to see whether it was old or young; she could not think where she had seen it before.

"Don't you know me?" the familiar voice asked again. "Why, I 'm Anne, you know, that used to live at Mr. Temple's—Anne Thompson now."

Susan stood aghast for a moment with surprise. Was this poor forlorn creature the smart, flirting Anne whom she remembered at the vicarage with her hair dressed so high, and her gowns so fashionably trimmed? She recovered enough presence of

mind to make anxious inquiries after her old friend Betsey.

"It 's about Betsey that I 've come to see you," replied Anne, somewhat abashed that Susan did not welcome her more cordially, though conscience told her very plainly the reason why. "She thinks she 's dying, and her mind 's quite set on seeing you once again."

Susan's heart melted as she recollected under what different circumstances she had parted from Betsey and Anne. She had left them both apparently well and prosperous hardly a year ago: now one was dying and the other disgraced, which she felt was far worse, and in her pity she begged Anne to rest herself on the bench in the lobby, and took the baby's little dirty hand in hers as she sat down to talk to its miserable mother.

"And where shall I find poor Betsey," she asked, "if I can get leave to go and see her?"

"Oh, she 's in the 'Home for the Sick' just as you enter the city," replied Anne; "she 's well done to there, and it 's good luck for her too. Her savings couldn't keep her, you know, when she gave up work, and she 'd nothing else to depend on."

"I 'm sure I 'm glad she 's there," said Susan, "for it looks a comfortable place. I think mistress

would give me an afternoon out, and then I 'll go and see her. I shall be quite pleased to go."

" You 'd better look sharp about it," said Anne, resuming the off-hand manner that was natural to her ; " for they say she can't last long. She 's that eager to see you that she sent for me and paid me three shillings to walk over with the message."

Susan's countenance betrayed some surprise at the selfishness that could induce Anne to accept payment from poor Betsey's little savings in return for an act of common kindness. Anne understood her look, and hastened to defend herself.

" It 's a longish walk, you see," she said, " and folks are not all so well off as you. Married life is none so comfortable, I can tell you that, Susan. Men are very different when they 're courting to what they are after they 're settled down. Charles is all for the ale-house now ; it 's very little of his money that ever falls to *my* share, and very few of his evenings that he spends at home with me. I 've nobody but this bit of a child to keep me company at all." And she looked at her helpless infant without the least gleam of a mother's tenderness in her face.

Susan felt shocked and grieved, but she knew not what to say. She could not think that all this misery

was entirely Charles Thompson's fault. She remembered how freely Anne had drawn Mr. Temple's ale to encourage his visits at the vicarage, and she wondered whether in his own home he was as badly attended to as the baby appeared to be. She doubted whether such a hard face and slatternly figure as she saw before her could attract any man to his own fireside, and she was taken aback at the utter want of self-respect that could allow a wife openly to publish the faults of her own husband.

To any one who reasoned at all, of course the reasons were not far to seek. A courtship begun in boldness, dishonesty, and deceit seemed to have its natural ending in a marriage of poverty, discomfort, and neglect; but it was not Anne's way to trace her sorrows back to her sins. Had she done so the grace of repentance would have been given her, and she might yet have risen up from it a different woman; but, like many others, she shut her eyes to the true cause of her distress, and laid the blame on the world and all its circumstances which she had misused. She was filled with envy at the sight of Susan, looking so neat and comfortable in her print dress and little white cap, and could not refrain from breaking out into a fit of grumbling.

Susan, however, could not linger long to listen

to her complaints. She must, she said, hasten back to her work, especially as she was going to ask for an afternoon out. She thanked Anne for coming, sent her love to Betsey, with a promise of an early visit, and went back to the nursery a good deal saddened by all she had heard and seen.

CHAPTER XI.

It was about four o'clock on a bright winter afternoon that Susan found herself inside the charitable home where Betsey was peacefully awaiting the end of her short and laborious life. An air of great comfort and cheerfulness filled the large cleanly house, which sheltered many poor cripples and incurable persons who would have found but a sorry welcome in some squalid lodging that would have been their only other alternative. Their welfare was the constant care of ladies who lived among them for the sake of doing good, and their sufferings were relieved by kind-hearted nurses who had caught the Christian spirit of the place. One of the latter led the way to the room where Betsey was lying. As they drew near it she suddenly stopped, for the door was a little open, and through it came the sound of some one earnestly praying.

Susan listened, and as the first words of the Lord's prayer reached her ear, she was sure that she

recognised the deep, feeling tones of Mr. Temple's voice. Her face brightened with pleasure at hearing it again, and she turned an inquiring look towards the nurse, who said softly, "The clergyman from the country who often calls to see her."

The prayer was ended and the blessing given, and then Mr. Temple came out into the passage. Susan curtseyed to him and received a kind greeting in return, and inquiries as to how she was getting on. The meeting gave her not a little pleasure, for his counsels had never been thrown away upon her, and the kind word of encouragement that he uttered now was not forgotten when the echo of his retreating steps had died away in the quiet house. There was a look of increased age and care about him too, that brought home to her mind the sorrow he must have felt at the loss of his youngest child. But as she was led into the sick-room, her thoughts all turned in affectionate interest to Betsey, whose face struck her as so familiar and yet so changed.

There she lay, propped up against the white pillows of her comfortable bed, her hands, once coarse with constant work, now, from long weakness, white and slender as a lady's, were clasped on the counterpane, a faint hectic flush glowed on

her thin cheek, and into her honest dark eyes there had come an expression altogether new, and that seemed not of this world.

She was delighted to see Susan, telling her she had longed for her, as she had many things to say; and then she drew forward a bright little girl of twelve years old, neatly though poorly dressed, who was sitting by the bedside with her bonnet on.

"This is Polly, my little sister," she said; "I got her here to-day because I knew Mr. Temple was coming, and I wanted him to say a word to her. And now," she added, turning to the child, "you 'd better go back, dear, for old Matty won't like you to be out when it 's time for you to be getting her tea."

"O Susan!" she resumed, as the door closed and she was left alone with her friend, "sit down here beside me and let us have a good talk. Oh, how many times I 've thought of that one we had together in the kitchen one Sunday night! The words you spoke to me then kept coming back to me many and many a day after you were gone. I made up my mind that I 'd do like your mother, and fret no more about my soul, but do all my work for the Lord, for I said to myself, 'If I don't

serve Him in that way, I shall never get the chance to serve Him in any other'; but I little thought then how short my time was to be."

"No, indeed," said Susan, feelingly; "you seemed hearty and strong when I left, and you used to work very hard."

"Well, I *did* work," said Betsey, thoughtfully, "but my work became a different thing to me after I took the right view of it. You couldn't believe how much better I shaped at everything, and how much more satisfaction I gave. You won't laugh at me, Susan, but sometimes I've even prayed that I might cook the dinner nicely, and have it ready in time."

"I'm sure no one need laugh at that," said Susan, earnestly; "I should have lost all heart about *my* work many a time if I hadn't prayed about it; and I think such prayers bring a blessing on us even in this life."

"Ay, that they do!" said Betsey; "I'm sure they brought one on *me;* for when I was ailing and tired before I gave up work, and when the house was upset with troubles, and the little baby died, and poor Anne went all wrong, you can't think what peace of mind I had in the midst of it all. And when the doctor told me there was

no hope, and I must give up, Mr. and Mrs. Temple were so kind, they parted from me like a friend, and wouldn't let me leave their house till they'd settled about my coming here to be nursed. O yes! that was a true word you told me once, Susan; Jesus of Nazareth in the carpenter's shop is the Master for us poor working girls to serve!"

Susan was much touched, and felt all her old affection for Betsey revived by this conversation, but she was afraid of fatiguing her, for her voice grew weak and a slight fit of coughing interrupted her once or twice. She suggested, therefore, that perhaps she had better leave.

"No, don't go just yet," said Betsey; "sit down again a little while, for I have a favour to ask you. It's about poor little Polly." (And here for the first time her voice failed, and the tears rushed to her eyes.) "That child," she continued, "has no one in the world but me. I've savings enough to school her for six months more; the old woman she lives with feeds her in return for what she does for her; and I've clothed her by cutting up my own frocks when they were a bit worn, and sending her things that were given to me sometimes; so she's done pretty well so far. But when I'm gone, and she's getting a big girl, you know, it will be

very different. Would you, for my sake, Susan, speak a word for her to get her a place that she may earn an honest living? for it would break my heart to think that she should be left to herself and perhaps go astray like poor Anne. It's the one thing I have on my mind."

"Don't let that fret you, dear Betsey," said Susan eagerly; "I'll never lose sight of little Polly. There are so many of us at the manor-house, it will be hard if among us all we can't hear of something for her. I'll speak to Elizabeth about her, and I'll name her to Mrs. Vernon too; she's very kind and feeling, and she asked me a deal about you before I came out to-day."

"Then here's Polly's address," said Betsey; "she's written it down herself, for she's a better scholar than I am."

And she drew from under her pillow a slip of paper on which was written, in a child's hand, the name of Polly's old woman, and the number of the dingy little room, in one of the back alleys of the city, where she had her abode.

"Now that's a weight off my mind," added Betsey, "to feel that some one will put the child in the way of working for her living. *My* work's soon done—much sooner than I thought for; but

maybe Polly's will be longer, and I shall like to think she has a friend in you, Susan."

Here they were interrupted by the entrance of a lady, who warned Betsey not to tire herself with too much talking.

Susan then took an affectionate leave of her, expressing a hope that she might soon perhaps pay her another visit.

The lady followed her out into the passage. "I 'm glad you came to-day," she said, as she closed the door, "for I scarcely think Betsey will live till to-morrow."

"Oh, surely, ma'am," said Susan, "she is not so near her end as that."

"Indeed I think so," said the lady, gently; "she has not talked so much or seemed so strong for weeks past. In cases like hers this sudden brightening foretells the approach of death. I will let you know when we lose her."

Susan walked back to the manor-house under the frosty starlight with mingled feelings of awe and comfort: awe, that she had been so near to one who stood on the borderland between this world and the next; comfort, that she had been able to undertake one little act of kindness for her before she went to her rest.

The next day brought the tidings that Betsey had died in the night, and made Susan feel doubly glad that she had not delayed to visit her.

Mrs. Vernon, who had asked many questions concerning Betsey, was soon made acquainted with all particulars about Polly. She interested herself much in the little friendless girl, went to see her when she drove into the city, and in a short time had her placed in an orphanage, where she was taught needlework and housework, and was properly trained for service. And when she was old enough to be of use an opening occurred for her, which was all that Betsey could have desired, for in a few years' time the manor-house was brightened by the birth of another son; help was then needed in the nursery, and Polly was chosen for the place. She gave herself to her work with all the energy and goodwill that had characterised her elder sister, and under Susan's kind teaching and Elizabeth's good advice soon became a valuable little maid.

Years rolled away, and found those three still working busily and happily under the same roof. Elizabeth grew old, Susan grew experienced, Polly grew into a steady woman; all three gained year by year more love and respect from those around

them. Some sorrows of course they had; changes and chances, trials and temptations came to them, as they must come to all; but they all three kept the narrow way of truth and uprightness, finding solid happiness in the thought that One, Who left heaven and toiled on earth for their sakes, was watching over them, and looking forward with bright hope to the fulfilment of His own promise, that,

"Blessed are those servants whom their Lord, when He cometh, shall find" watching and waiting.

THE END.

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