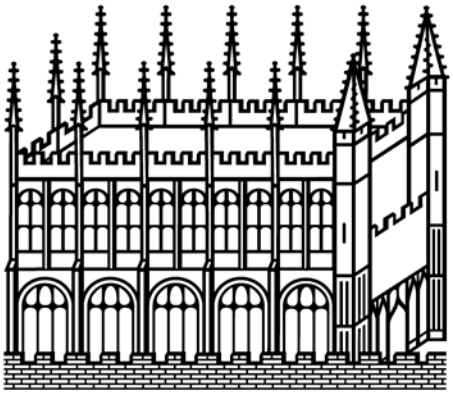

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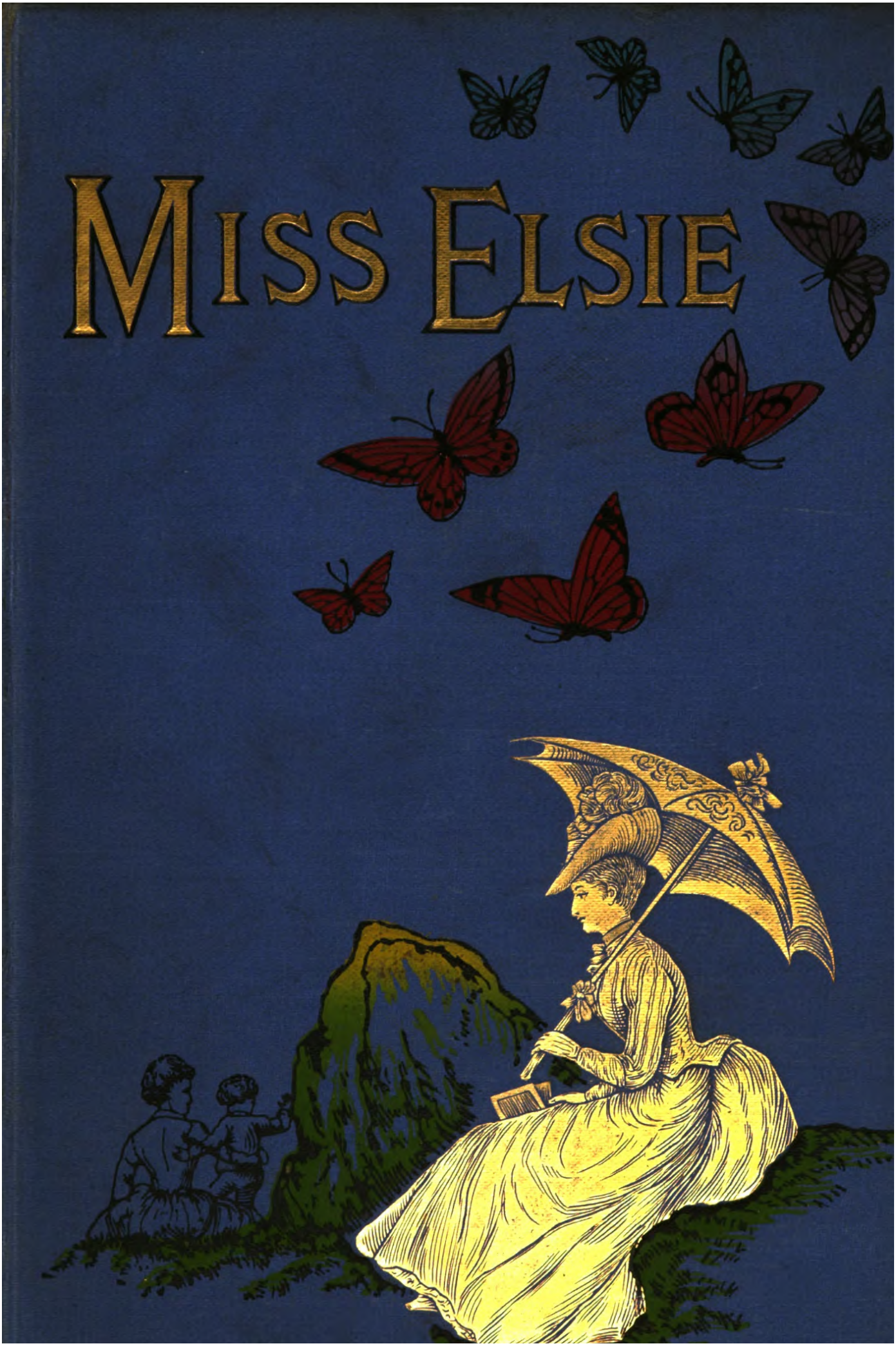
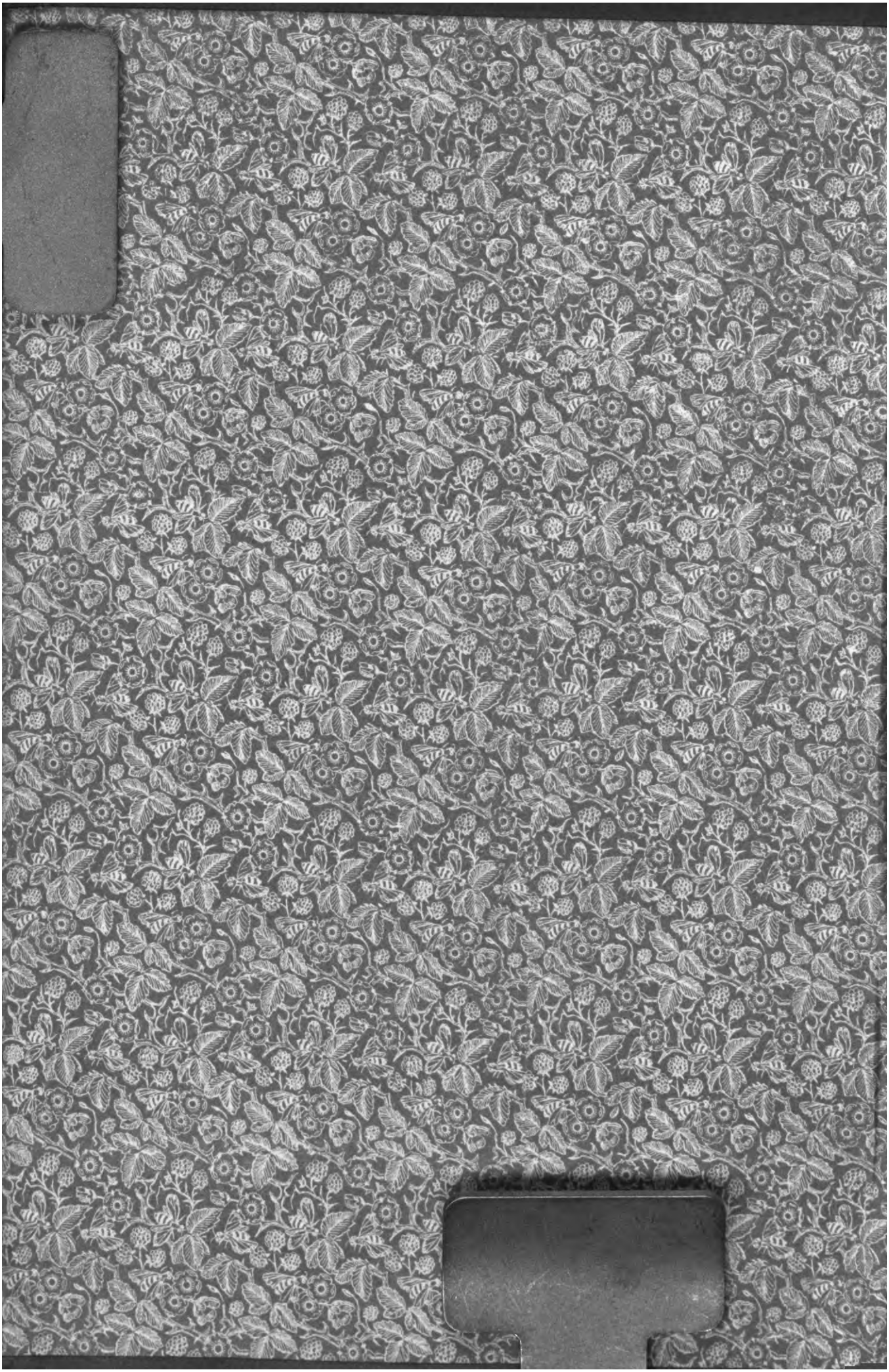
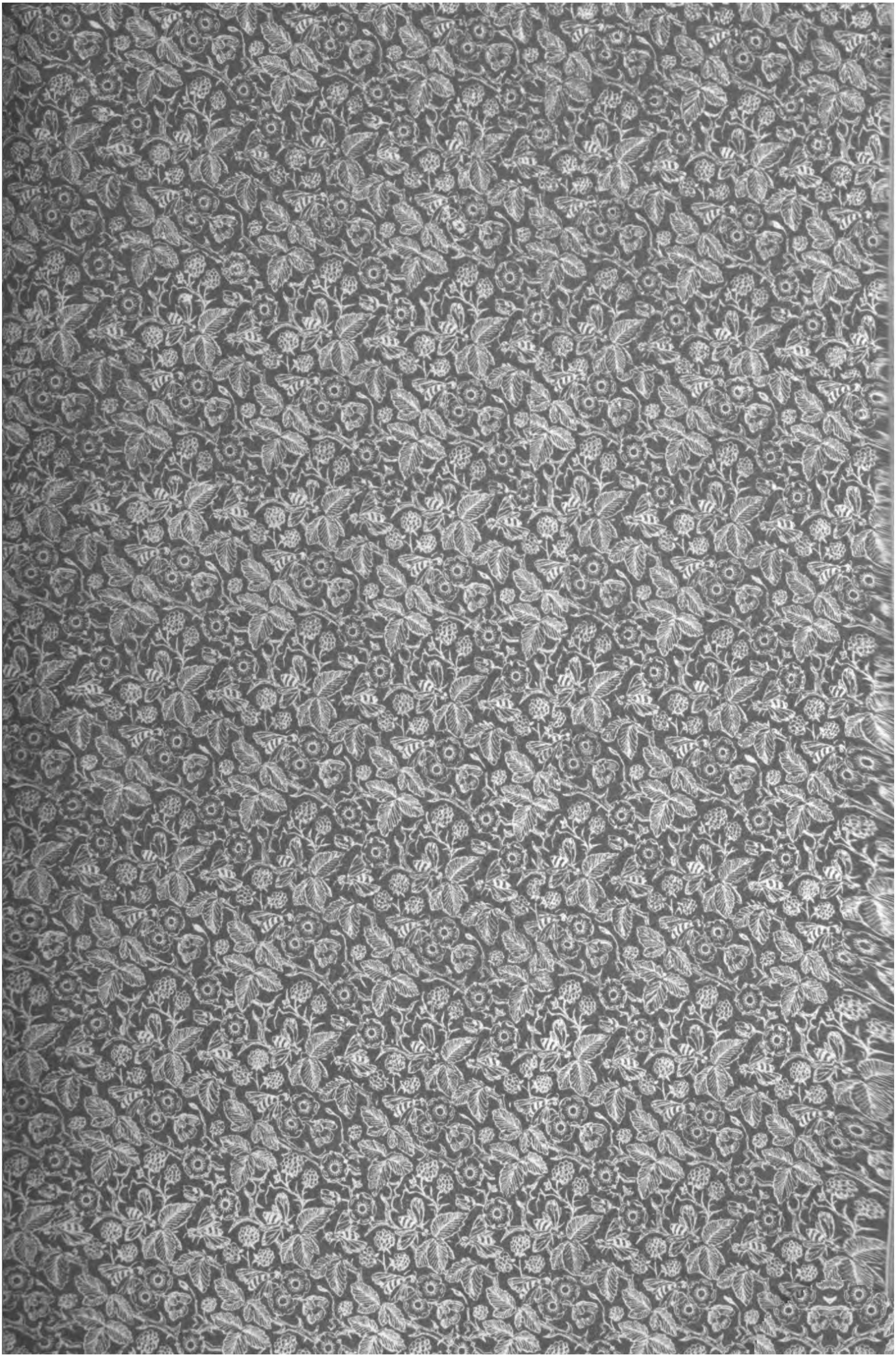
MISS ELSIE







[*See page* 29.

MISS ELSIE

A Simple Story of Single-Hearted Service.

BY

H. MARY WILSON,

AUTHOR OF 'CRIP,' ETC.

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The sweetest joys we have on earth
From sorrow have their birth,
And if the grief be good and true
The joy is holy too.

Sunshine and shadow weave the woof,
To be celestial proof;
The garment which the soul must wear
Upon the heavenly stair.

ISAAC WILLIAMS.

MISS ELSIE

A Simple Story of Single-Hearted Service.

INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO L—— IN HER COLONIAL HOME.

DEAR L——

Do you remember a day two years ago, when during our happy summer outing you and I found ourselves on the edge of an adventure?

Our little pony-cart was trundling along a thread-like road which crossed a Scottish moor. We were very merry you and I.

Our holiday was a fortnight old, but we had not wearied of our independence, or the temporary isolation from all our friends.

The sun was low in the sky, turning the wealth of gorse, that filled the air with a faint scent of apricots to a richer, deeper shade of yellow, and

making it a pleasure to us to take off our broad brown hats, that the sunset glow and the cool breeze might touch our foreheads with their evening blessing.

Had we not all we wanted? Two fat ponies to take us over the ground—a well-filled picnic basket and cooking-stove under one seat, our light luggage under the other—good news from the home friends in our pockets, hearts lighter than our luggage; and then, to make us travellers complete, we discovered —you and I—that we had lost our way. Do you remember?

There was our aimless driving for a mile or so, while we looked this way and that, and your merry face sought mine with the reiterated words: 'Sister Moll! Sister Moll! do you see anyone coming?'

And before the fun could change to anxiety we had turned into a narrow valley, and found ourselves close to a lonely cottage, whitewashed and strongly built, from whose chimney a slender thread of smoke waved us a welcome, as we thought.

I remember, if you do not, the sad, hopeless face which gazed at us in silence from the open window for a long minute, and then went away. A face so set and fixed in its melancholy, that the evening glow, which was painting everything else with rosy happiness, seemed but to deepen its gloom.

We did not see it again, for it was a short, middle-aged woman, who answered our knock, and gave us

the required direction to the nearest village, adding, as an apology for not asking us in to rest:

'My young mistress will see no one just now, miss.'

Young mistress! But the hopeless face which we had seen had been surrounded by hair as white as snow!

We went away, puzzled and curious, guessing rightly that we had caught a glimpse of the title-page of a pitiful story.

After a drive of five miles we reached the little town to which we had been directed; but no one could tell us anything of the lonely cottage and its unhappy inmate.

That was two years ago.

Yes! and last summer all the pages of that closed volume were opened, and I read it to the end.

I am giving you the story here in detail, partly in my own words and partly in Hannah's.

I think it will interest *you* first, dear L——, and then your class of servant girls.

Did you not ask me to bear them in mind when next my pen took a journey?

Your loving sister,

MARY HAMILTON.

PART I.

MISS ELSIE'S CHILDHOOD.

CHAPTER I.

Sweet is the smile of home; the mutual look,
When hearts are of each other sure;
Sweet all the joys that crown the household nook,
The haunt of all affections pure.

KEBLE.

I MUST gather the threads of my story one by one. I must begin at the beginning, and take the first single thread—one that is dull-coloured, but useful; which in its strength really forms the foundation of the fabric, and without which the nature of the material would be completely changed.

To do this, I must take you back a quarter of a century, and shall ask you to look with me into a humble cottage, shadowed by clustering pine trees, whose straight, upright trunks are now a warm glowing red, in brightest patches here and there, where they face the full beauty of the summer sunset sky. These shades of warm colour have no voice accompaniment but the fitful twitterings of the

birds, as, in longer and sleepier intervals, they say their 'good-nights' to one another. Their 'good-nights' are 'good-byes' too to the young girl who sits in the cottage near the open window. She is resting after hours of busy bustling; and, with a sudden pang of regret for the chain of happy days that we call 'childhood,' of which this day is the last link, she has chosen the little old wooden stool, and is sitting at her mother's feet. She has slipped her hand under her mother's as it lies on the blue-checked apron, and now she suddenly presses her round cheek upon it with a little sob.

They are, to all intents and purposes, alone, for Christopher, the girl's brother, can hardly be reckoned as a companion just now. He, poor lad, is lying back on the settle; all his faculties locked in profound sleep, his head resting on his arm, quite tired out after his long day's shepherding.

The mother's other hand—a hard-working one, seamed with toil—rests upon the girl's shoulder with a light but loving touch. She has never been one to pet either of her children, her discipline, if anything, leaning towards unyielding strictness; but they love the touch of her strong hand, and Hannah, at least, has learnt, as she says, 'to notice the little bit of change in mother's voice when she speaks of "my girl," or "my Chris."'

It is, maybe, the very strength of her nature which keeps back the loving words or the caressing touch; yet her heart, too, is very strong in its

motherliness. So they sit and drift out of a long silence, first into desultory talking, then into earnest conversation, and on into silence again.

'I think there's no more to be done, Hannah,' the mother says presently. 'Your box and basket are both fitted and tied up. When your letter comes I shall look to hear if your things do nicely, and if the lady is satisfied as to your neatness.'

Hannah nods; but, realising a sudden desire to cry, of which she feels ashamed, she does not speak.

'Chris is a-weary,' says the mother, after a pause, looking across at the length of the boy stretched out upon the settle, where a square red patch of sun-light from the open door is shining upon him with a happy effect of complete rest. 'Ah! and he's getting main like his father,' she sighs, as her thoughts turn to the 'good man' who, having gone 'away home' some months before, in his going has made a necessity for further changes and more 'good-byes' in this small home-circle.

Hannah raises her head.

'Mother!' she says, earnestly. 'Chris is going to be son and daughter both to you when I am gone. He told me he would. And you mustn't miss me *very* much, mother. Oh! why must I go!'

'It's well, lass; it's well. One change brings another; and, besides, I'm not one to keep my child from the blessing of honourable service.'

Hannah's face seeks her mother's with an eager look of enquiry. During all these days of preparation there have been few, if any, words of counsel, and she has sometimes wondered vaguely how she will manage when 'puzzling things turn up, and she cannot ask mother what she ought to do.' And Mrs. Carlin, partly reading her daughter's truth-telling face, yet saying to herself 'last words wear the longest,' has waited until the usual bustle of making, mending, washing, ironing and packing Hannah's clothes is over, before she speaks. Now she draws her child closer to her side, and looking, not down into the earnest, upturned face, but through the open window, and across the mists, lying in the meadow, to where the light of hope and wonder is 'painted on the crimson sky,' she repeats slowly and impressively:

'Honourable service. That is what it is to be, Hannah. I have no need to tell a child of your father's to be *honest.* But remember this, lassie—for it's just what most of us forgets—your *time* is your mistress's, just as much as the furniture and other things she puts into your care. Be honourable about *that.* Remember, it must be always God's glory first, and duty to your mistress next. Then, lassie, never, *never* forget to pray. Try to be "*faithful* always—unto prayer," as the good Book says, and when you're puzzled, child, and don't seem to know which way to turn,

God will make all plain. Prayerful and faithful, Hannah!'

Mrs. Carlin repeats these last words slowly, as she looks down into her daughter's brown eyes, dimmed now by natural tears. The soft beauty of the sunset seems to be reflected in her rugged, care-lined face, as she stoops and gently kisses the girl with rare tenderness.

Thus stooping, she catches the low whisper, 'I *will* try, mother;' and, quietly, she adds the guiding keynote, 'God helping you, lassie.'

Then a silence falls upon them both—a helpful silence. For these two hard-working women cannot often sit with their hands in their laps, without a conscience-prick of something left undone that ought to have been done; and to be able to do this to-night has a touch of solemnity about it, intensified by the feeling that their hearts are very near to each other, and very close to God. It is a silence which speaks, for the full voice of love is there.

How often smiles will mingle with our tears, and laughter tread upon the heels of care!

And so it is that these still moments are suddenly broken by a stifled yawn from the slumbering Chris, followed by an astonishing crash, as he rolls himself, sleepily, off the settle and on to the floor.

There he sits, his big blue eyes blinking at his mother and sister, while his tired brain, naturally

slow of action, tries to grasp the fact that he is no longer in the happy land of dreams.

He looks so irresistibly funny that Hannah jumps up from her stool with a merry laugh, and, with her hands upon his shoulders, begins to shake him back into wakefulness.

'Is it time to get up?' he asks, drowsily; and she answers him:

'Quite time to get up—off the floor, you funny old Chris! Wake up, wake up! you've got to eat your supper yet.'

Then, seeing that he is beginning to stretch his long legs and find his feet, she bustles about between the little corner cupboard and the table, talking brightly all the time.

Her mother watches her lovingly, but anxiously. This sudden interruption, has it come too soon? Would her child remember those few earnest words of advice; or has the opportunity for sowing seeds of future earnestness gone for ever?

They have a merry meal. Hannah puts aside, for the time, the thought of to-morrow's 'good-byes; and Chris, feeling that the occasion calls for unusual effort on his part, talks more than is his wont.

'Mother,' he says presently, 'the wee missie come into the home-field again to-day. She was all by-alone too—just like the other times—no one to mind her, and she such a wee thing!'

'Have you found out what her name is yet, Chris?' asks Hannah, with interest; for this little

child has been quite a 'puzzlement' to these honest cottage folk.

Three or four times lately Chris, while sitting on the hillock in the field, his eyes vigilantly following the sheep that are scattered far and near, has been visited by a tiny child—a little fragile girl—who has quietly taken up her position on the grass beside him. Saying few words, and these with a quaint self-possession, she has watched him out of a pair of very earnest eyes ; and then, after a few minutes has risen to her dainty feet, to put her small white hand into his big brown one, with a sedate 'good affernoon, Big Boy.' After this she has invariably trotted away across the uneven field, picking her way with lady-like grace, until, reaching the small gate under the hawthorn, she has passed into the shady lane, and so out of Christopher's sight.

Chris, in his solitary hours, loves to think about his strange little visitor, and watches eagerly for her return; though when she comes he is his shy, slow self. He half fancies she may be a species of fairy from some world far more beautiful than his own. That she is a being far superior to himself he firmly believes. 'The wee missie' he always calls her; his inventive powers not being sufficient to supply a better name, and his respect and awe being too great to admit of his asking her what is her own.

To-night, at last, he has a more satisfactory answer for Hannah's oft-repeated question, and he says, 'Ay! and she told me herself, did the "wee

missie." She come in and sat down on the grass, just the same as before, but she did not look so smiling-like as usual. So I made bold and said:

'"Is missie tired to-day?"

'"No, Big Boy," says she; "I'm *solly*, not tired. Are *you* ever solly, Big Boy? It isn't nice to be solly, is it?" and she shook her head quite slow from side to side.

'"Big Boy," says she, after a minute, "I'm going *light, light* away. Will *you* be velly solly too?"

'You may think I said I should be real sorry, and that pleased her. I see it did. Then I made bolder still. I was afeared I should never know if I didn't ask at once.

'Wee missie!' said I, 'am I too presuming if I asks what is your name, missie?'

'"I don't know what *is* p'esuming," says she; "but my name is Elsie. Didn't you know that? How velly funny! I've been in that house over there, six, eleven—oh! lots of days; and nurse says we are going away again velly soon."'

'*I* know!' breaks in Hannah; 'your "wee missie" must be staying at the Old Farm. *Do* go on, Chris! It is quite like a story. What comes next?'

'A story?' sighs the lad. 'I'm no hand at telling a story. I'm too stupid. I couldn't even find the words to say what I wanted to the little lady afore she went. She set and made a little bunch of daisies, and looked at me every now and then. I

was twisting and plaiting up some rushes, and it just came into my head to turn them into a tiny basket for Miss Elsie. So I made one, and for all it looked so clumsy, you should have seen her clap her baby hands when I held it out to her, and said, "Please, Miss Elsie, will you take this when you goes away, and think of me sometimes, please, missie?"

'She got up and took hold of my hand and said, "Oh! *thank* you! What a *kind* Big Boy you are! It is a *lubly* little basket. Good affernoon. Will you really be *velly* solly when I don't come and see you any more?"

'I can tell you I held her little soft hand and had quite a lump in my throat when she looked at me like that. But I couldn't think to say anything but "I shall want you *badly*, missie; nobody else ever comes nigh the sheep-field. Please God, you'll come again one day!"

'"Please God, I'll come again one day," she said, just as if she didn't wholly understand the words I said, but as if she liked the sound of them all the same. "Is that a prayer, Big Boy?"

'I told her "yes"; and then, says she again, "Good affernoon, Big Boy;" and I said, "Good-bye, Miss Elsie;" and she went away; and,' adds Chris, miserably, 'that's all; for I'm thinking there's no chance that I'll ever see the "wee missie" any more.'

Christopher forgets, you see, the many strange

meetings there have been, and may still be, in this wide world, that is narrow enough for some odd jostling.

Mrs. Carlin proceeds to throw some light upon this little account of Miss Elsie by remembering that the sister of the cook at the Old Farm is staying there for a few days, and has brought one of her mistress's children with her for a little change. That is what she has been told, and probably this child is Miss Elsie herself.

Then the supper is finished and cleared away, the candles lighted, and the old family Bible laid upon the table.

'Shall Chris read to-night, mother?' asks Hannah.

But the mother answers, 'Not to-night, lass;' and, drawing her chair to the table, she places her clasped hands upon the closed Book, and, with reverent care, repeats slowly the first eighteen verses of Ephesians vi. Hannah's face shows that she guesses why her mother has chosen to repeat 'the chapter for working folk,' as she calls it, and she registers a determination to learn the verses too, that they may help her through the difficulties that she knows must lie in the new life that is before her.

Though Mrs. Carlin has never learnt to read, a fine memory has partly supplied this deficiency, enabling her to repeat a great deal of the Bible by heart, as she has done to-night.

As for Hannah, the passages thus repeated by her mother ever afterwards recall those quiet evening hours, and as she reads them her mind can conjure up the peaceful picture—the bowed head, the serene, contented face, and the look of hope and love in her mother's eyes; the dim light of the two candles, almost overpowered by the clear silvery moonlight, as it streams through the unshuttered windows, and the first jubilant notes of the nightingale as he begins his liquid song of love; then, more dimly, her own figure and that of Chris, seated in the shadow upon the settle, side by side, and listening gladly to the divinely-inspired words of practical counsel.

And these wise words, wisely chosen, form the text upon which Hannah's future life, unconsciously to herself, grew into a beautiful and, until now, unwritten commentary.

CHAPTER II.

To give
Means with God not to tempt, or deceive,
With a cup thrust in Benjamin's sack.
He gives what He gives. Be content!
He resumes nothing given—be sure.

MRS. BROWNING.

ANOTHER thread in the story, and this a glittering one.

The evening following upon that spent by Hannah in quiet, chequered happiness with her mother and Chris, a lady was sitting in stately loneliness by her drawing-room window, many miles away.

It is necessary, as a beginning, that I should give you a little idea of what this house and its mistress were like, for it is here that many years of Hannah's life were spent.

The house, long, low, but substantially built stood alone, unbefriended by any near neighbours, and half-way to the summit of one of our loveliest

Surrey downs. Sheltered on three sides by the far-reaching and protecting arms of fine old elm and pine trees, and with its face turned towards a wide stretch of bracken-covered common, it wore an aspect of happy peace and luxurious plenty.

The lawns, closely shaven and velvety to the foot, the stiff flower-beds, and the trim neatness of the shrubs and borders, all showed the touch of lavish care. Yet in all this something was lacking.

Those who at rare intervals—for the mistress loved her solitude—entered the lodge gates, and found their way up to the imposing but unwelcoming front-door, noticed this want, if no one else did.

Mrs. Sulden, the vicar's wife, for instance, was always conscious of a feeling of pity in her heart for this rich lady of the Hall; and as she stood looking through the glass door at the wide, cold, stone-paved floor, and waited for the solemn butler to let her in with a funereal bow, it was only this feeling which made the stiff afternoon call at all bearable.

This pity had a luxuriant growth in her warm, motherly young heart, for none felt more fully the bareness of that fair, well-kept home, where the 'something' was missing without which life would have been to her one dull, unsatisfied blank.

And this something?

It was the happy, heart-filling presence of little children.

No little feet ever clattered over the tesselated pavement, or scampered, with an accompaniment of silvery laughter, up the broad oak staircase. No child's soft voice—the sweetest music—ever mingled with the gravely-measured tones of the mistress and her maids. And so the vicar's little lady felt sad as she looked at the erect figure which sat before her, receiving and answering her earnest efforts at friendly conversation with an apparently forced attention and stilted replies; and truly she was one to be pitied. But this mistress of the Hall herself would have indignantly repudiated the idea of any need for sympathy.

Her daily thought was one of thankfulness that she had been spared in her widowhood the worry and bother entailed in the bringing up of children.

When her husband, Squire Geary, died, she had mourned him with the bitter grief of one who had loved and lost the one interest and hope of her life; but she hid her sorrow from all eyes, and seemed to stiffen and freeze at the words and looks of condolence offered by her neighbours. After that, her one interest had been to keep all as *he* had left it.

The house and grounds must always be in perfect order, the stables well filled, the conservatory gay with flowers. All this she superintended and directed with rigid exactness; but no one could see that she won from it any pleasure for herself, and certainly it gave none to others.

Only during her daily solitary drives, and regularly once on Sunday at the village church, did the outside world see Mrs. Geary; but even to the casual observer she looked so unapproachable that, as I say, few found their social duties sufficiently binding to force them into an interruption of her stately solitude.

This evening she sat by her drawing room window, and looked—just as Hannah's mother had been looking the evening before—at the warm sunset glow, which shone now through the dark tree trunks like a golden picture of some brighter home seen through the iron bars of this world's cares.

Mrs. Geary's face wore the expression of one who never feels really happy. She was, you see, 'one of the unloving, who taste not some of the purest joys in which the soul may delight itself, and live;' and to-night her thoughts were as gloomy as the shadows which lay sulking behind the trees and shrubs. Her thoughts ran somewhat in this way:

'Why cannot the child stay where she is? Why should I be forced into her guardianship? I, who hate the noise and racket of children about the place! It would upset everything if I consented. Where could I put the child's nursery? Which of the maids could I spare to look after her? None! It would alter the whole routine of the house. No! Cousin Sydney must keep her himself; or if, as he

says, his quiver is too full already, then let her go to school, or—or——' Here the thread of her thoughts became slightly tangled, as she remembered that the child in question, not having at present reached the mature age of four years, could hardly be considered eligible for any boarding school. But, in spite of this drawback, Mrs. Geary repeated a very emphatic '*No!* she cannot come here; I refuse to accept the responsibility;' and she deliberately folded up the letter that was lying in her lap, consigned it to its envelope, and then to her reticule, with the air of one who had made a firm and unalterable decision.

Ah! but down in her heart lay an unexpressed doubt, a hesitating 'And yet—and yet,' which would make itself heard before long.

The door softly opened.

The imposing butler entered with cat-like tread, and, bearing in his hand a dainty tray, tendered to his mistress her evening cup of coffee. She stopped him, as he turned to leave the room, by asking:

'Forbes, has the new under-housemaid arrived?'

'Yes, madam' (the title universally accorded to the Squire's widow), 'about half-an-hour ago, I believe.'

'Then I wish to speak to her. Let her come here before you have supper.'

'Very good, madam;' and Forbes, that model of propriety, quietly left the room.

Outside the closed door, however, his whole

demeanour changed. His face wore a comical look of astonished curiosity that mingled oddly with the lines of sombre gravity which formed his settled expression. He bent his erect figure and slapped his right leg with an emphatic and undignified 'Well, I'm blessed! What's in the wind now? I never knew the missus do that before. She always leaves the new gals for Mrs. Samper to regulate; and here's a chit of a maid, whose name even I haven't heard as yet, to be showed into the drawing-room for a hinterview.'

So mused Forbes as he walked along the passages. Then, with his hand raised to open the door that was before him, that remarkable facial change again took place. His mask of propriety was assumed, and it was Mr. Forbes the sedate, Mr. Forbes the pompous, who confronted that world of which he felt himself king—the servants' hall.

He addressed himself to an elderly woman, who, in the capacity of housekeeper, enjoyed the privilege of spending her summer evenings near the open window, clad in the glory of a purple silk gown. Her hand was constantly smoothing this robe of state, with an unconscious movement of satisfied self-importance, which contrasted amusingly with the smiling good-humour of her face and short, round figure.

'Mrs Samper,' said the butler, 'I am requested by madam to send the noo young woman into the drawing-room.'

'Indeed! And what to do, Mr. Forbes, if you please?'

'To be hinterviewed, Mrs. Samper, I believe; but madam did not specify.'

The housekeeper rose from her chair and rustled to the end of the room, where Hannah, who had been sitting upon the edge of a chair near the door, now stood up at the approach of this great lady!

Mrs. Samper carried a kindly heart under her silk gown, and, moreover, was not yet too old to remember those uncomfortable first hours of her first place; so the tone of her voice was even kinder than usual as she said:

'Hannah! Madam wishes to see you this evening. I may say this is not a usual proceeding, but you must take it as a mark of favour; go with Mr. Forbes, my dear.' Then, seeing the frightened look in the girl's face, she added, with a smile:

'Come, come! No one wants to eat you, child.'

Hannah murmured a timid, 'Thank you, ma'am,' feeling grateful, in her loneliness, for these first encouraging words.

As she followed the butler along the passages and hall, she wished from the bottom of her simple heart that her country boots did not clatter so loudly upon the tiled floor.

At present I have given you no idea of Hannah's

general appearance at this important period of her life, except that I hope to have conveyed the impression that she carried, for all to see, a good honest, truthful face.

Perhaps it is a trying moment to choose, but I should like you to see her as she stood, after her low, old-fashioned curtsey, waiting shyly for her mistress to speak.

She was not the ideal country maid, tall, plump and rosy, but below the average height, and with a pale, thin face, which, without telling any tale of ill-health or delicacy, gave her a certain look of daintiness and refinement that suited well her slim figure. She wore a dark serge gown, made very simply, and partly hidden by a white linen bibbed apron. Her brown hair was neatly covered by a close-fitting muslin cap, the result of many anxious thoughts on the part of her good mother, who had a laudable desire to make 'her girl' look her best, without indulging her in any of those minute head-dresses which were so fashionable among our maid servants in those days, and which Mrs. Carlin described as 'wretched little dabs of crochet, looking for all the world as if the girls were ashamed to wear what marks them for servants.'

Hannah's pale face had two great charms—characteristics that were enough in themselves to make it a lovable one; a pair of earnest brown eyes, steady of gaze, in spite of their shyness; and

a small resolute mouth, which seemed to promise a power for good, a strong will for the right. This was Hannah. And she was beautiful, if, as we are told—

> Beautiful faces are those that wear
> Whole-souled honesty printed there.

Mrs. Geary, of course, hardly saw all this, but she noted the evidences of a careful mother's training, and liked even the superficial appearance of this little new maid.

It is a noticeable fact that all the world, even strangers, felt kindly towards Hannah Carlin; and Mrs. Geary's voice, even to herself, sounded less austere than usual as she said:

'You are Hannah Carlin, I believe! I hope you had a comfortable journey, and that you left your mother well. Your clergyman, I hear, spoke very highly of her worthiness when he wrote.'

The girl's face flushed, and her eyes shone with a loving pride at the kind mention of her mother. She took a step forward, and, curtseying again, said:

'Thank you, madam. My mother desired me to deliver her humble respects and grateful thanks to you for your kindness.'

This was the little set phrase that Mrs. Carlin had framed, and with which she had commissioned her daughter; and Hannah felt a satisfaction in having so early an opportunity of parting with this responsible chain of words.

'I can see that you have a good mother,' went on Mrs. Geary, unable to suppress a smile at this old-fashioned little maid, 'and I am sure you will try and be a credit to her and give Mrs. Samper no trouble. She will explain all your duties to you in the morning. This is your first place, I believe?'

'Yes, madam.'

'And you are—what age?'

'I am nearly twenty, madam.'

'So I was given to understand, and that you were strong too. You do not look either.'

'Indeed, madam, I am *very* strong, and can work quite as hard as a grown woman, if you will be pleased to try me. Are you thinking I shall not do for the place, please, madam?' and the brown eyes were so full of anxiety that again Mrs. Geary smiled as she answered:

'Mrs. Samper will have to decide that, Hannah. Willing hands and hearts make good servants, remember.'

Then there followed a long pause.

The girl wondered whether she ought to go, but, in her shyness, stayed, not having had her dismissal.

Her mistress seemed to be drifting into a total forgetfulness of her presence; but then Mrs. Geary was not herself to-night, as may be seen by this unparalleled unbending to interview a new domestic. She twisted and untwisted the steel chain of the

little bag at her side, and her thin lips pressed one another firmly.

Hannah stood and waited. And then a question came, as if forced unwillingly to the surface:

'Do you know anything of the management of children?'

Hannah was quite ready with an answer, for she felt sure it would be a satisfactory one.

'Yes, madam. I have been helping Mrs. Morgan's nurse for nearly a year, while mother was looking out for me. Lately I have had the entire charge of Miss Pearl. She is nearly four years old, madam.'

Mrs. Geary winced.

Her reluctant thoughts would travel in one direction — would hover round the little child against whom, she told herself, she was determined to close the door of a sheltered and luxurious home.

She dismissed Hannah with an abrupt 'That will do. You can go to your supper now.'

'Thank you, madam,' and the little under-housemaid found herself on the way to the servants' hall once more.

She never guessed the strange tumult she had left behind her in that peaceful, beautiful drawing-room. There was no outward sign of disturbance. Even the fluttering of the leaves on the verandah had ceased—the evening breeze had died away with the setting sun; but, as is often the case, the

occupant of the room was not in tune with her surroundings.

All the reasons for and against the coming of this little child again ranged themselves in battle array, and that strong self-will, which had lately closed her eyes and heart to everything which could ruffle her calm, self-indulgent life, seemed for once to have deserted the Squire's widow.

Something spoke with a loud voice within her—loud in contrast to its usually stifled tones. Something made itself heard persistently.

She had a vague feeling that, sitting thus, she was an impartial witness of a conflict between two equally matched opponents—as if the decision would not personally affect herself. Yet it was herself all the time!

She uttered no prayer for guidance, and she fancied, in the end, that the act of decision had been her own; but, in truth, God had been leading her, however unwillingly, to think:

'After all, I suppose I must take the child—for a while at any rate—and see how the plan works. This new maid seems suited to look after her, and I need not see more of the child than I choose. It will certainly be as little as I can help.'

And so it was that Mrs. Geary decided to answer the letter in the affirmative. She felt it was much against the grain that she did so; but she yielded to what she called an odd chance—though there is no such thing—the coincidence that Hannah

Carlin was a trained nurse-maid, and competent to take all the responsibility of the child off her hands.

It is not well to be always inquiring into the motives for the good deeds done around us; but it is given to me to know that Mrs. Geary was urged to this step by this one thought: 'What would *they* say—the world, with its rasping tongues of criticism—if I refused?'

CHAPTER III.

Alone, apart from mother dear,
And father's gracious eye.

. . . .

A place where others are at home,
But all is strange to me!

KEBLE.

MRS. GEARY decided, in her own mind, that the advent of this little orphan child ('who really has no claim upon me,' she had said, in her letter, 'being but the only child of my husband's cousin and college friend') should make no difference in the household arrangements, should be settled in with a few words, and that there the matter should rest, without any further trouble.

She had a conversation with Mrs. Samper, during which she begged her to make the few necessary alterations that would be required to turn two rooms, as far removed from her own as possible, into a day and night nursery for Miss Elizabeth Perry, who was to find a home at the Hall for the

present. She further requested her to arrange that Hannah Carlin should be appointed nurse to the child, with an increase of salary, if advisable; and then she dismissed the subject and Mrs. Samper at the same moment.

As she left the room every inch of the housekeeper's portly figure was bursting with suppressed —emotion she would call it; curiosity would be a better word. Suppressed, because no one dare question 'madam.'

Poor Mrs. Samper! So little had been told her! So much remained to be guessed at; and it was so lowering to have but one answer for the shower of questions that would greet her in the servants' hall when she told her news, only a reiterated, 'I'm sure *I* don't know.'

However, there is a pleasurable pride in being the bearer of important information, and Mrs. Samper chose her time well, wishing the enjoyment to be an uninterrupted one, and coupled with the soothing delights of a strong brew of tea.

See how impressive is her attitude, as she sits at the head of the table, having just supplied the wants of all; not even, in her excitement, forgetting that Mr. Forbes expects exactly six lumps of sugar in his tea! One hand holds her cup and saucer, the other rests upon the tea-cosy, and all eyes are fixed upon her. Wonder is painted upon every face, for has she not uttered words that open a door to all kinds of possibilities?

'I have been told to-day of a very important change that is going to take place in this family,' she had said.

Ah, well, however disappointing the end of the communication might prove, Mrs. Samper must have felt that this moment of culminating interest would suffice her. The palpable way in which they all thirsted for her next words, the murmurs of Lor', now! what can it be?' and 'Oh! *do* tell us right away; *do!*'—the complete subjection of the lady's-maid, who had been giving herself airs all day, but who now said, 'Dear Mrs. Samper, whisper it to me *first*, there's a dear,'—all this was very delicious; but it must not be prolonged, and soon 'the murder was out,' and all eyes at once took a new direction, looking with mingled feelings of surprise, envy, and interest at Hannah, who sat transfixed at the prominent position that she found herself taking in the matter.

Of course, she was called upon to repeat again what took place during her interview with 'madam.' This she did readily and simply, filled with wonder at her good fortune, and winning at least one friend by adding:

'Please, Mrs. Samper, I hope you will be so good as to direct me in my new duties. I'm afraid I shall make a great many mistakes unless you do.'

The lady of the house might decide as often as she pleased that, the order once given, things

should go on as before; but she had to open her eyes at last to the fact that, when she agreed to connect a little child-life with her own, she did more than just portioning two of the rooms in the house and one little servant-maid to her use.

It was like turning the current of a little stream, that it might fall into the dark still waters of some silent pool. The little stream would flow with a few trickling drops at first, but it would come faster by-and-by, and make a pleasant babble as it mingled with those shaded waters which would never be so still and gloomy again.

The child was to come in three days' time. You would scarcely have believed that there was need of so much bustle; so much running up and down the servants' staircase; so much swinging of that heavy green-baize door upstairs which divided the left wing from madam's part of the house; so much arranging and re-arranging of the furniture, shaking of carpets, and scrubbing of floors.

It was all very delightful to Hannah; and the hope of a child's love made her forget her shyness, and begin to feel 'at home' in her new place sooner than she would otherwise have done.

She pleased her fellow-servants by the bright, ready way in which she accepted all the many bits of advice and counsel that they forced upon her, and the good-tempered smile with which she saw her careful arrangements—the position of the beds, or the nursery-table and chairs—all altered by any one

of the maids who thought she 'knew how things should be a deal better nor Hannah.'

Mrs. Geary did not trouble herself to come and see what kind of a nest had been prepared for the poor little homeless fledgling. She felt that would be an unnecessary trouble. But it was a very cosy place to which Hannah carried her little charge on its arrival, and it was a cool, soft pillow upon which the little fair head rested, in blissful unconsciousness that she was in a house of strangers.

The nurse who had brought her from her temporary home was being entertained downstairs, and giving the housekeeper all the information she could about 'the little miss.' Hannah had begged to have the child at once, while sleep was holding her in its loving embrace, that she might not be brought to tears by having 'good-byes' to say. The woman had consented, kissing the sleeping child earnestly, and saying:

'Well, she's a dear little creetur', *that* she is! and we've all been real hurt at having to part with her, though it's only four months since the ship brought her from India. If you've got a heart for the little ones, you'll be glad of this day.'

Then Hannah, eagerly holding out her strong young arms, with a happy smile, had taken to herself the care and love of a lifetime.

I daresay you know the delight of waking in the morning to the busy chatter and happy songs of the

young birds under the eaves? But there is a sweeter sound than this, and it greeted Hannah's ears, even before her eyes were open, on the following morning.

A merry baby voice was singing—

Nellie B'igh, s'uts her eye
When she goes a-s'eep.

The tune, more perfect than the words, was accompanied by the pat, pat of the child's hand on the counterpane, while her eyes were fixed upon her 'own rag doll,' which sat in a prominent position at the foot of the bed, placed there by kind hands the night before. The child thought she was in her own little bed in that happy home across the sea, and, as yet, was oblivious to the nearness of strangers. Was she hoping for the dear mother's morning kiss, poor little maid?

Ah, me! we must hope a merciful forgetfulness is covering up those pictures of the past that still rest in the tiny brain, bringing an occasional bitter burst of tears for 'my mudder.'

Hannah felt a little nervous about drawing the child's attention to her presence, and asked, in rather a hesitating voice:

'How is little Miss Elizabeth this morning?'

The song stopped in the middle—just where Nelly Bligh was receiving instructions to sweep the kitchen—and the child's wide blue eyes looked full at the speaker.

Hannah quite expected a burst of tears, and to

have to use all her arts in combating an attack of shyness. But she was mistaken.

The child was quite accustomed now to kaleidoscopic changes in her small life, and had a happy capacity for adapting her independent little soul to existing circumstances. So she only answered deliberately:

'Are you a new nursie for me, I wonder?' Then she added, in a tone of offended dignity, 'Me's not Miss 'Lizabeth—me's Elsie.'

'And I *am* your new nursie, dear. Will you call me Hannah? That's not a hard name to remember, is it?'

Hannah was beside her little mistress's crib now, longing to cement the union at once with a warm kiss, yet afraid to take the initiative—afraid of offending the little lady so early in their acquaintance.

But she need have had no fear.

The little one was no more proof than anyone else against the girl's lovable face; but, putting up her fat hands, patted her cheeks in a friendly way, saying:

'Nannah is not a *velly* hard name at all!'

Then the baby-lips offered themselves for a sweet kiss, and the new nurse found, of all in that house, the first and the warmest place in the child's affections.

So busy was Hannah, and so absorbed in her new

work and interest, that three of the morning hours passed away before the thought came that 'madam' had as yet made no sign that she would like to see Miss Elsie.

She looked at the clock.

It was past ten; and it was some time ago that she had met Forbes carrying up a tray of hot things for the dining-room breakfast. Mrs. Geary was downstairs, at any rate.

Hannah had planned out, with Mrs. Samper's help, a simple routine for the day; subject, of course, to her mistress's approval.

The nursery breakfast was never to be later than eight o'clock, and must be followed—after the bedroom had been put in order—by an hour spent in the garden. Hannah meant to insist upon Miss Elsie having a sleep from twelve to one.

'It will be good for the child. Don't you think so, Mrs. Samper? She does not look over strong, and that will give me a clear time for housework, too.'

The afternoon could be devoted to a longer walk, and to a little easy instruction too, Hannah thought.

But on this first morning the young nurse was much puzzled how to proceed. She did not like to take her charge out into the grounds until she had received that expected summons to the dining-room, and yet the bright sun and the soft summer air seemed to reproach her for keeping within doors.

Hannah waited.

Little Elsie, seated upon the floor in a patch of sunlight, amused herself by rocking her doll violently to and fro in an inverted footstool. And no message came from Mrs. Geary.

Presently the nursery door was pushed open, and the lady's-maid entered.

'Well, Hannah,' she said, in a tone a little too patronising to be quite pleasant, 'how do you find you manage your new work? I expect you feel rather strange—like a fish out of water, I daresay. But you'll get more accustomed to it after a bit.'

Now, as Hannah was feeling quite in her element and very contented, she could only smile a little at this speech; but, instead of answering it directly, she went over to the child, and, lifting her up, said:

'Will you come and say good morning to Parker, madam's own maid, Miss Elsie?'

The little one looked gravely at the new-comer, but with no responsive smile. Yet she followed her nurse's guiding hand, and stretching out her own baby one, placed it in Parker's, while she said, solemnly:

'Good affernoon.'

The lady's-maid, wishing for a warmer reception, held out both hands. 'Won't "the wee missie" come and sit on Parker's knee?' and she tried to add to her attractions by pointing out the showy coral and gilt brooch which fastened her collar.

Elsie, however, was not to be tempted; she only

looked at Hannah, and said something which puzzled them both exceedingly, because they could not guess the road upon which the words "wee missie" had sent her thoughts travelling.

'I want to see Big Boy velly much indeed!'

Parker giggled, and began to say something very foolish about a 'forward little thing to talk like that at her age;' but the look of surprise and objection upon Hannah's sensible face checked her, and she stopped, finishing the sentence with a silly laugh.

Elsie, forgetful of their presence, was standing, with funny little wrinkled brows, thinking out loud.

'Big Boy velly solly when me go light, *light* away. Big Boy have sheeps. I lub Big Boy velly much, I do.'

Hannah, with a sign to Parker to keep still, was watching the child. She tried to understand the drift of her thoughts, and felt as though she *ought* to know more than she did.

Elsie shook her curly head with a sorrowful air.

'Where *is* my Big Boy, nursie?'

'Hannah doesn't know at all, dear!' Yet still the girl felt as if she did know—as if she was forgetting something; and when the child suddenly ran to her basket of toys, turning them over, upside down and round about, and murmuring baby words, until, with a cry of delight, she found a very misshapen and crushed basket of twisted rushes, she caught her up in her arms, and, laughing aloud with pleasure, cried:

'Why, Miss Elsie, dear, of *course* I know who your Big Boy is! What a stupid I must be, not to have thought of it before! Why, it's none other than our good old Chris—the very best brother in the world!'

'But,' interposed Parker, 'what are you thinking of? Wherever could your brother have come across the child, when it was only yesterday that I heard you say he had never been beyond your village in his life?'

'Why, it was in this way,'—and Hannah, pleased to have something to tell that would interest an upper servant—and, with the child in her arms, watching her face and taking in every word—began the little story of the quiet sheep-field, and the way in which Christopher Carlin had seen Miss Elsie.

It may occur to you that these two servants were wasting their mistress's time.

So it occurs to me.

But so it did not occur to Hannah or Parker, and the story was progressing—told with delight by the former, who loved to dwell upon the days passed in her dear old home; and listened to with pleasure by the latter, who was not sorry to while away a few moments which ought to have been spent in dusting her mistress's bedroom—when again the door opened, and this time Mrs. Samper walked in.

'How much longer are you two girls going to

stand chattering here?' she said. 'Work stands still while tougues are wagging. Parker! madam's boudoir bell has had to ring twice, and you'd best be off.'

Then, as the girl hurried away, she turned to Hannah with a vexed air, saying:

'I really thought better of you, and didn't expect to find you wasting your time in this way, the very first morning you had things more your own way. I'm more disappointed than I can tell you.'

Hannah's heart began to rise in rebellion at this reproof, and the hot colour rushed to her pale face; but the impertinent words which might have followed were checked by this thought: 'The housekeeper is quite just in what she says. I *have* failed in that "singleness of heart" for which I meant to strive. I have gone very near that "eye-service" which is the path trodden only by "men-pleasers," and not by the servants of Christ.'

So she took the words of blame meekly, as she should, and told Mrs. Samper that she was very sorry, and would try and not give her cause for fault-finding again.

'Well, girl, you can't say more than that; and I'm quite ready to believe that you'll try and remember for the future that your time is your mistress's as well as the furniture.'

'Please, Mrs. Samper, those were almost the

very words mother said to me. I *do* hope I sha'n't go to forget them again.'

Then, remembering that Mrs. Samper might be supposed to know something of Mrs. Geary's movements, she asked:

'What shall I do, please, about taking little Miss Elsie out into the garden? Am I to wait until madam has seen her?'

'Aye, that reminds me. I came to tell you that she will see Miss Elizabeth in her boudoir in about half an hour. You are to take her yourself.'

As the housekeeper left the room she smiled, for these words, uttered in a tone of great indignation, followed her along the passage:

'Me's *not* 'Liz'buth; me's Elsie.'

CHAPTER IV.

A gift is as a precious stone, in the eyes of him that hath it.

HAVE you never watched one of the little ones, in wayward naughtiness, hiding its face, and thrusting away, with baby-fingers, the gay toy for which its little heart was longing only a minute before?

And do not 'children of a larger growth' sometimes turn from the beautiful gift the Father is offering to them—blindly closing their eyes to its attractions—and hiding in their foolish hearts the healthy longing for this new thing?

'It shall be yours—your own—and it is very fair!' say the Giver. 'But the gift is also a trust, and bears My mark upon it.'

They hear the words, and, though they see for themselves the *worth* of this gift held out to them, this condition of responsible trust rises up between them and its enjoyment.

Thus it was that Mrs. Geary refused the proffered treasure of a little child's love. She pressed down the longing for something to cling and look up to her which had begun to take root in her heart —she turned away her face. Weak-hearted and self-absorbed, she would not accept it. And why? Because she saw that there was this mark of a great responsibility, and she was afraid.

But there is a divine command that 'nothing be lost,' and this beautiful gift, so coldly refused, this admiring and clinging affection belonging to one of 'His little ones,' was not wasted. It became the crown and joy of another, though humbler, life.

The first interview between Mrs. Geary and her ward fared in this way:

After the low knock at the door and the permission to 'come in,' Hannah and the child entered the room, the latter looking like a small dervish in her stiffly-flounced, clean white frock.

Mrs. Geary, looking her well over with a critical eye, said:

'Come to me, Elizabeth!'

But the child shook her saucy little head, and, with an indignant stamp upon the carpet with her tiny foot, protested again:

'Me's *not* 'Liz'buth; me's Elsie. *Evely* body calls me 'Liz'buth, and me's Elsie!'

This was not a very fortunate beginning, for

'madam' was not one who was accustomed to hearing her words objected to.

She answered stiffly enough:

'I shall call you what I choose, Elizabeth, and—I do not approve of abbreviations;' this she added after a pause, as if wishing to justify herself in the eyes of the maid.

'Now come here,' she went on, 'and give me a kiss. Don't be shy.'

Hannah led the child to her mistress's side, and Elsie received a little dab on her cheek from the thin face that bent over her.

The little one was not frightened, for, as I said, she had already been too great a traveller to be shy; but she was very defiant, if you please.

The interview was short, and was brought to a close by Mrs. Geary saying:

'And if you have any difficulty in managing the child—which is more than probable—you must consult Mrs. Samper, Hannah. You may take her away now, and I will see her at this same hour every day, but at no other time unless I send for her.'

So the young nurse, after curtseying low, led her little charge away, feeling bitterly disappointed that this looked-for meeting had produced no love on either side.

All the way to the door little Elsie reiterated again and again:

'Me's not 'Liz'buth! Me's *Elsie*, me's Elsie.'

Probably it was this perverse and monotonous

little chant which deepened the frown on the brows of the Squire's widow, and which caused her to exclaim, as she was left alone:

'I have seen enough of that child to be sure that she has a nasty temper and an unruly will. It is well that I should have so little to do with her training.'

Meanwhile Hannah was exclaiming in her vexation, 'Oh! Miss Elsie, dear, why *couldn't* you behave prettily to the lady? You ought to love her and kiss her nicely.'

'But she says me's 'Liz'buth, and me's *not*—me's Elsie,' persisted the child; 'me's mudder's little Elsie.'

And then at the sound of that dear name the poor little maiden melted into one of those rare but pitiful bursts of tears, sobbing out over and over again with plaintive hopelessness, like the bleating of a deserted lamb, 'Me wants dear, *dear* mudder! Elsie wants dear mudder!'

Hannah, hugging her closely, tried to soothe her with loving words, while her own eyes filled with tears and her heart rose with sympathy; but still the deep-drawn sobs shook the tiny frame, and the sad cry continued. At last, in despair, Hannah went to the nursery rocking-chair, and, with the child in her arms, rocked and sang until sleep came, and did the work wherein her love had failed. It comforted little Elsie by taking her to that happy land of dreams, and showing her there such bright

pictures and pretty sights that she forgot her loss for the time; but that she did not reach that goal of forgetfulness readily, even in her sleep, was shown by the sobs and moaning cries that disturbed her for some time after her eyes were closed.

The little kitchen-maid had struggled upstairs with the nursery dinner, and had had a whispered conversation with Hannah before the tired little one stirred in the crib where she had been laid an hour before. There was her watchful nurse ready to greet her with smiles as she came back from dream-land, and that queer little rush basket was at hand to send her thoughts along happy channels.

You may be sure that 'Big Boy' was talked about a great deal. Hannah tried, in the simplest words she could find, to tell her little mistress much of her happy childhood's days in the old home—those days when she and Chris had trodden the lanes together as the seasons went round, making their little fingers black with 'berry-gathering,' or red with snow-balling; learning to watch with 'thinking' eyes the growth and home of every little familiar bird and flower, and to

> See in every hedgerow
> Marks of angels' feet.

And so the misery of the morning was laid aside and forgotten.

One day, Hannah was sent with little Elsie to

the lower lodge to carry a message from Mrs. Samper to the old couple who lived there.

'And you might stay a little while, if you like. It will cheer the old folk a bit to have a young thing to talk to. They don't see many people now-a-days; but they once had a tribe of children round them, I believe.' These were Mrs. Samper's words as they started off for their walk. The afternoon was cloudless, and a

> Sighing wind so softly stealing
> Gently stirred the tinted leaves.

Elsie, in her perambulator, clapped her baby hands as the bright red leaves—autumn's first tears—fell on to her white pelisse. She nodded merrily as she looked up at the overhanging branches, calling aloud in a happy little voice:

'Sank you, Mr. Big Tree. Elsie likes you to play wid me velly mush.'

Next she tried to throw some of the leaves at Hannah, and laughed roguishly when one hit her on the cheek. Hannah entered into the fun, and there was more happy laughter in the avenue than the birds there had heard for many a long year.

'Funny, funny Nannah!' cried the child, as they stopped at a little green gate, and her nurse lifted her out of her carriage, and the game was concluded with a kiss and loving squeeze.

Hannah found old John Kingston and his wife sitting side by side on the garden bench in the sun-

shine; and when she had delivered her message Mrs. Kingston fetched her a chair, begging her not to hurry away for a bit.

Elsie found a seat on the old man's knee, where she sat quite quietly, playing with the bright buttons of his waistcoat, while the others talked. The old man had the most to say, which was his wont and his privilege, for he was older than his wife, and had reached that length of years when the limbs must rest and the thoughts are busy.

'So this wee lassie has come to live amongst us, eh?—a bit of tender green among ripe corn and withered leaves. Well, God grant she may keep our hearts young wi' her pretty ways! for it's my belief that we should not let our hearts get stiff, and hard, and cold, like the rest of us. How does madam like having a bairn about the house, my girl?'

'I don't think she's very fond of children; at least, she's not accustomed to them, I'm sure,' Hannah answered, prudently keeping to herself her conviction that Mrs. Geary's feeling regarding the child had reached dislike, if not repulsion.

'And so she misses a deal o' pleasure,' put in Mrs. Kingston.

'Ay, *that* she do; for it's the children that's made the world so green to the wife and me. And those days is the sunniest that bring our children's children to see us;' and the old man raised his stooping shoulders to look through the lodge-gates

and along the turnpike road, with a large-hearted love shining in his dim eyes, as if he fancied he might see those dear ones coming now.

'Do they come to see you often?' Hannah asked, with interest.

'Ay, as often as they can, you may depend. But it's none so easy for townsfolk to get out of their busy treadmill, and there's not one of our bairns as lives nigher than ten mile. But—God bless them!—their hearts are always nearer us than that, and their love makes the road easy when they can find time to come and see the old folk.'

'That's just it,' said Hannah, smiling, though something rather like tears shone in her eyes. 'I know if I could go home to-morrow, I'd feel like running all the way, I should be that glad to see mother and Chris.'

'Well, my girl, never you mind the aching for home. It's a good pain in its way. I make no doubt it's better to feel that, and to long for the beauty of the day when we *do* get to see our own folk, than to have no home to ache for; or, worse than that, not to have the longing in our own hearts at all. That's what me and my missus feels about the Home up yonder, isn't it, mother? The welcome's always ready there, and that's certain; and if we are called first, before the bairns—as, please God, we shall be—we'll be there to help to welcome them too, that's all.'

A smile lit up his rugged face, and was reflected

in the placid eyes of his old wife—a smile so beautiful that Hannah, looking from one to the other, learnt how thin a veil really hangs between the seen and the unseen for those whose gaze is ever upward.

This was the first of many happy half-hours spent at the lower lodge. The housekeeper never raised an unreasonable objection to the young nurse's occasional request that she might take Miss Elsie to see Mr. and Mrs. Kingston. They soon found a warm place in the girl's loving heart; and, for themselves, 'the sight of her blithe young face gives us a glow that keeps our worn-out old hearts warm for days;' so said old Kingston one day.

When Hannah had been nearly a year in service she had her first holiday. Mrs. Samper sent her home for a week, and she went richly laden; for she carried with her many kind words of approbation from the old housekeeper, who desired her to tell her mother that she had 'done a year's faithful service, and well deserved a few days' change.'

I think the happiest moment in the girl's life was when she repeated this message to Mrs. Carlin, and met the look of loving satisfaction in her mother's eyes. To feel that the history of the whole twelve months might be told without pain on either side; surely this was enough to gladden a mother's heart, and to bring those gay tones into Hannah's voice as she trod the old home ways.

She had insisted upon taking up the round of duties which she had laid aside a year ago, pleading, 'Let us go back to the dear old times, mother, just for these few days.'

Her mother smiled, and acquiesced. She was glad at heart to have the few days' rest, and to be able to hide from those loving young eyes the weariness that had seemed to 'settle in her bones of late,' as she expressed it.

The evening hours were lingered over lovingly.

Good, slow-going Christopher fought against his sleepiness, that he might not miss any of the quaint speeches and funny doings of little Miss Elsie. Hannah found her charge an untiring subject of conversation; while Mrs. Carlin sat back in her chair listening too, but all the time struggling against the longing that was creeping over her to beg 'her girl to give up service and come home for a bit.'

And then there came another last night in the old home.

Hannah, mindful of that evening a year ago, said:

'We will have the chapter for working folk again, mother, shall we? You shall say it always on these last nights before I go back to my place, until that happy day comes when I may stay and take care of you in your old age.'

When the solemn words were heard through the room, there came a little break in Mrs. Carlin's

voice that sounded half like a sob, as she repeated, 'that ye may be able to stand in the evil day, and *having done all to stand;*' but Hannah, though she just noticed this, did not dwell upon it until many weeks later, when she understood what it meant.

The morrow saw her back at the Hall, still miserable with the 'good-byes' that had been said in the morning. But she yielded to little Elsie's soft, loving caresses, and, with the half-saucy, 'Nebber mind, nursie dear; Elsie will take you to see your own mudder some day,' in her ears, she was soon comforted.

CHAPTER V.

And art thou then so glad,
Beloved, in thy sleep?

. . . . .

Thou liest at thy goal
Upon the Master's breast,
And wearest the high smile
Of a victorious rest.

B. M.

ONE morning in the following spring found Hannah walking slowly up and down the shady walk which led from the lawn to the kitchen garden. Little Elsie was wheeling her rag doll in its perambulator —a vehicle of dilapidated appearance, though the absence of its front wheel did not seem to lessen its charms in the eyes of its owner. She trudged along in sturdy happiness, giving its occupant very motherly advice and counsel, and scolding it occasionally for the palpable insecurity of its position, while Hannah slowly followed in her wake.

The winter had passed without any episode of interest.

Hannah's daily work had settled into a quiet routine, which was only ruffled by an occasional passage of arms between madam and her little charge. Some day Elsie may climb the higher steps of that charity which 'beareth all things' and 'is not easily provoked,' but just at present the full strength of her warm-hearted affection goes out to the dear 'Nannah' whose motherliness is fully supplying her need. She resents the tone of stern authority, the cold-sounding 'Elizabeth,' or the indifferent morning kiss which constitute her daily interview with Mrs. Geary.

Hannah often wonders what will be the outcome of this state of things, when Elsie, no longer a child, must hold a closer intercourse with her guardian; and she tries her best to promote a growth of esteem and respect upon this barren soil, where love does not seem able to grow, and finding her best hope in,

> With patient hands removing
> All the briers from the way.

It was not very long before she began to see an answer to her prayerful working.

But to-day Hannah's thoughts have taken quite a different channel, and her brown eyes look sad and anxious as, for the twentieth time, she draws an envelope from her pocket to re-read the home news that the post brought her.

The envelope contained one short letter, written in Christopher's difficult round-hand. How plainly the handwriting conjures up the picture of the farm lad sitting at the cottage table, with compressed lips, with head bent low to one side, in order to get a long angle of vision, and with elbows well squared, while the pen slowly travels along the pencilled lines!

'DE'R SISTER' (so the letter ran),

'I hope this wil find you wel, as it leves us at present. Mother, her side have been bad, but is esier to-day, and you are not to fret about her. Mrs. Jones is real good, and cums of a morning to do wot I has no time for. Mother sends her love; so do I. We hopes "wee missie" is quit wel. So no more from

'Your loveing brother,

'CHRISTOPHER CARLIN.'

Hannah seemed to read between these few lines that a cloud of trouble was rising in the horizon of her life. Already the gloom of it was darkening the landscape, and the fear creeping into her heart.

Tears stood in her eyes, and she sat down upon one of the garden seats with a sudden feeling of weakness, as the thought came, 'Perhaps mother will die!' Then she started to her feet again, and walked quickly after the child, longing, like some dumb animal, to run away from the sharp pain that the

thought gave her, clenching her hand as she tried to force the pitifulness of it out of sight.

'Chris says I am not to fret; and he says she was easier when he wrote. She *must* be better;' and Hannah looked up through the trees, as if a whisper of comfort might grow out of the unintelligible twitter of the birds above her. Then her anxious thoughts reverted to another part of the letter: 'He says Mrs. Jones comes in every day. Mother *must* be bad if she has to let a neighbour do her work. It's not like mother to sit still, unless she really *can't* go about the house;' and her fears suddenly took such vivid shapes that the poor girl covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

Little Elsie was very much astonished.

She stood gazing up at her nurse from her low point of observation, full of wonder at finding that 'big peoples could cry too.' She was just beginning to pull at her apron, when she saw Mrs. Samper's portly figure coming towards them over the lawn. Leaving her doll, without a thought for its forlorn condition as it lay under the overturned perambu lator, she scampered off to meet the housekeeper, crying:

'Oh, p'ease, Mrs. Samper, Nannah *is* so crying. Do come and make her better!'

And the kind old woman's hand was on Hannah's shoulder, gently guiding her back to the garden, seat, even before she knew of her approach.

'My poor girl,' she said, 'you've got bad news! Why ever didn't you come and tell me before? Trouble's a burden that wants a helping hand more than any other load. Come, come! You mustn't cry like this—you're frightening Miss Elsie!' for Hannah, who possessed one of those strong natures where tears are rare, found that, once the flood-gates were open, it was difficult to close them again. She struggled with her sobs, and at last put Christopher's letter into her friend's hand, saying: 'Please read it.' Then, taking the little one on her knee, and burying her face in the sunny curls, she gradually regained her composure.

'I can see your mother must be ill,' said Mrs. Samper's cheerful tones, presently; 'but, lassie, surely you've no cause to think she's in danger. I think he's told you the worst; and, you see, he says she's better.'

'But she must be as bad as bad if she can't do anything for herself,' answered poor Hannah, raising her flushed face to look into the eyes of her comforter.

'Ay! but maybe it's only rheumatism; which keeps her still for a bit. Come, girl, you really mustn't fret, as she says. It's not a bit of good looking at troubles through one of those magnifying glasses, so to speak. I expect you'll have a letter to-morrow that will make you feel quite ashamed of these tears, it will be so full of good news!'

'Oh, do you really think I am making myself too

anxious? But then you don't know mother, nor what she is to Chris and me.'

'But I know what my mother was to me, child,' said Mrs. Samper, with a sudden change in her face, 'and I'm thinking that's much the same.' Then she added, after a moment's thought, 'I'll tell you what I'll do. If the postman doesn't bring you a letter in the morning, I'll tell madam of your trouble, and ask for you to go home, for the one night at least. And now cheer up, and try and not think about it more than you can help; but when you *do*, make your thoughts into a bit of a prayer, and that will do you good, and your mother too.'

Hannah, by this time, could find a smile for her kind old friend as she answered: 'That I will, and thank you, Mrs. Samper! You are very good to me.'

'Well, well! I'm always glad to help the lassies that are steady and mind their work; but I'm forgetting what I came out to tell you. Madam's had a note this morning from Mrs. Sulden, to ask if Miss Elsie may go and play with little Master Guy this afternoon, and so you are to take her for an hour or two after dinner. That comes in nicely to help you to forget your worries for a bit. And Miss Elsie will like to go, won't she?'

This to the child, who had been watching her face all this time, while her little soft hand stroked her nurse's tear-stained face.

'Yes; Guy's a velly nice boy. S'all me go, Nannah?'

'Yes, dear; madam says we may. But, Miss Elsie, you must behave better if you go this time. Do you remember what a naughty temper you had there last time? and it was all about such a little thing. Hannah was so very sorry. Do you remember?'

'Yes, I yemembers; Elsie was solly too.'

'Then you won't do so again, dear?'

The child did not answer at once. She looked into her nurse's face with a pair of solemnly round eyes; then she pointed her fat finger to the surface of pinafore under which lay a very loving but passionate little heart, destined to cause some trouble to herself and others, and said:

'Nannah! me's got sumfing naughty in here, and it does come out sometimes, and I yeally *can't* help it!'

Mrs. Samper had begun to retrace her steps to the house, but she was not out of hearing, and stopping close to a standard rose-tree, she bent to smell the one fragrant bud which was just beginning to unfold its glories, her desire being to hear how Hannah would answer this queer little speech. Knowing the girl as well as she did, she was not surprised when she heard her say:

'No, dear! Miss Elsie is a very little girl, I know, and this "sumfing" is big and strong and ugly. But, dearie, don't you remember Hannah told you that the loving Good Shepherd is strongest of all? He would like His little lamb to ask Him to keep her from having these naughty, bad tempers.'

And Mrs. Samper continued her way, saying to herself:

'Well! she's a good girl, and no mistake. I do hope her mother's not so bad as she thinks. Poor girl! she'd feel it bitterly if she was taken.'

That afternoon was passed pleasantly at the Vicarage.

Guy was a happy little soul, and his nursery the merriest, sunniest spot in the house—a large airy room, bright with flowers and pictures, and with the frequent visits from his young mother, who carried sunshine in her heart for every one, but who kept the biggest bundle of sunbeams for her 'darling.'

Hannah's little lecture had the desired effect, and the visit was brought to a close without any display of temper. As she kissed little Elsie, and tucked the counterpane under her dimpled chin that evening, she told her how glad she was that the 'naughty sumfing' had not 'come out' that day. The child was very nearly asleep, but she murmured a drowsy:

'Elsie *is* a good 'ickle girl;' and then her sleepy blue eyes closed, and she went straight away to the 'realm of sleep,' where these 'little lambs are folded like the flocks.'

Her day's work ended, and everything neatly folded up for the night, like the petals of a closed flower, Hannah went down to the servants' hall for her supper. She found a merry party there,

and, as her occupations had helped her to lay aside her fears and the troubled doubts of what might be passing in her own home, she entered into the fun at once, and was as happy as the rest.

Mrs. Samper looked at her as she took a seat by her side, and was pleased to see how effectual her words of comfort seemed to have been.

Hannah listened, with the rest, to the story which Forbes was telling. It was a well-worn but always welcome anecdote of the days when he was in his first place.

'Indeed,' he was saying, 'I may say I was in no ways to be pitied, because I found myself in a situ*h*ation where my mistress was more than *h*ordinary particular. It is well to be regulated in our youth; but, for all that, I could not forbear a smile when I had to ask the mistress for the cellar key the first time, as my duty was to draw the beer. She was an old maiden lady—real nervous, as I knew—and she had a mortal fear of hany one of her servants being hintemperate. "Forbes," says she, as she slips the key from off the chain at her side, "I have a rule which I must explain to you before you fetches the hale. I wish you to whistle hall the time you are down in the cellar. Begin when you leave the dining-room door, and continue to whistle until you are back again. Then I shall be sure that you have not yielded to any temptation to sip the beer!" *

* A fact.

'Hof course, it was no good my protesting that I was not one who would go for to do such a thing. She said she did not doubt me in the least. It was for her hown satisfaction entirely that she gave this order; and, believe me, all the three years that I spent as page-boy under her roof, I had to whistle hevery time I went down to the cellar, and that was twice hevery day! It was a plan that I may call both hingenious and amusing;' and the butler's pompous face beamed with a genial smile as he listened to the half-indignant, half-laughing comments on his little story.

Some one begged for another tale, and he was yielding with feigned unwillingness to a round of persuasion, when the sudden ringing of the back-door bell—an unusual event at this hour—created a diversion.

The little kitchen-maid, who was sent to answer it, came back with the words: 'Please, Mrs. Samper, it's a young man as wants to speak to Hannah!'

A titter was raised among the maids, followed by a chorus of silly remarks, led by the flighty Parker.

Hannah rose to her feet and turned towards the housekeeper with a face which had grown very pale, not with anger, but from a sudden terrible misgiving.

It was a silent appeal for leave to go.

'Ay! lass, go along, and keep a brave heart;'

then, as Hannah left the room and closed the door behind her, the kind old soul added: 'Poor girl! poor girl! I'm pretty certain it's her brother come to tell her bad news.'

Mrs. Samper was right. Yet, on the other side of the closed door, not a word had been spoken. Hannah had looked into Christopher's white, hopeless face as he stood under the passage lamp, leaning his tall form against the wall. She had looked, but had asked nothing. What need was there for words? She only ran to him with one deep drawn sob of agony, and then the two orphans clung to one another with bowed heads and streaming eyes, in 'that simple, primitive love which knits us to the beings who are nearest to us in our times of anguish.'

When Mrs. Samper opened the door of the servants' hall ten minutes later, Hannah and her brother were still standing in the same place. That they had only each other now was the feeling in the heart of both; but the silence was broken now by whispered words. Chris was telling all there was to tell, while Hannah wept unrestrainedly, as she realized, more and more, that the voice to them 'more comfortable than the day' had been silenced in that long, long sleep.

In the midst of our bitterest sorrow there comes

to almost all of us a merciful call to take an active part in life. 'Labour,' says one wise poet, 'physics pain;' and which of us may sit with folded energies to learn grief's lesson?

Many kind hands helped Hannah with her preparations for the midnight journey; many kind words followed her as she and Chris stepped into the moonlight, and made their way to the nearest railway station, there to take the night train, which, as the day dawned, would bring them to their darkened home.

A few hours later they stood side by side, and looked down at their mother's face, calm in the marvellous peace of that God-sent sleep.

Awed and soothed, Hannah whispered: 'Oh, Chris, how glad she looks!'

For into that tired face had crept the peace which comes with the knowledge 'of the secrets of that Speechless Rest.'

Mrs. Carlin had passed away quietly, in her sleep.

There had been no last words—no 'good-byes' to her two children; and perhaps the suddenness of the loss made it harder for their young hearts to bear.

But for her?

The eyes that had been watching for His coming—the lips that had already learnt the heavenly language—would they smile less gladly because the angels had borne her so swiftly through the dark river?

CHAPTER VI.

Ah ! what would the world be to us,
If the children were no more ?
We should dread the desert behind us
Worse than the dark before.

LONGFELLOW.

WITH her mother's death, Hannah had lost one great incentive for doing well in service—a hope which had helped to 'keep her straight,' as she expressed it. She told me, once, how ambitious she had been in those days; and when I looked surprised, she explained that every penny she could do without had been safely laid in the bank; and that even during that short eighteen months, and, in spite of the smallness of her wages, it had grown to three pounds. Each additional office stamp in her orange-coloured banking book had seemed to her like a renewed promise that in a few years she should be able to go home

and start some little business, and work and work, that her mother might rest.

This hope had checked her desire for the bright-coloured ribbons and those little extra indulgences that she longed for, as all young girls will. This ambition to 'put by for mother' had often brought to her lips the 'I can do without it,' which had turned her eager eyes from the tempting shop windows.

Poor Hannah! Here was one of those little sadnesses that always go with a great trouble. She could not bear to touch 'mother's money,' as she had always called it; and, though she still added to it as time went on, she often wondered sadly to herself why she did so, feeling sure that she could never spend it on herself.

A wise use was found for her money in after days.

And now there grew a closer bond of sympathy between the little motherless Elsie and her nurse, and a greater need for each other, too. With the soft baby arms round her neck, with the caressing cheek laid to hers, and with the lisping words of pity for 'dear, dear Nannah' in her ears, the young servant-girl found much comfort and help.

Rest, too, came to her aching heart in the quiet talks with old Mr. and Mrs. Kingston. She often found her way to their cottage during her walk

with the child, and was always so careful to ask leave to do this, and never to exceed the half-hour that she was permitted to stay, that Mrs. Samper had almost made up her mind to say to her, 'Hannah, I am sure I may trust you to go when you like to the lower lodge without asking permission every time,' when something happened which effectually put a stop to this intention, and which led to a worse catastrophe than this.

And it came about in this way.

Little Elsie, now nearly six years old, and having quite outgrown the perambulator mode of progression, was, one afternoon, trotting by her nurse's side on her way to the lower lodge.

The avenue was clothing for Christmas-tide. Each branch and leaf was fringed with delicate frost-needles, which sparkled and dropped, one by one, upon the laughing child's outstretched hand.

The sun looked down upon the frost-bound earth. There was a crisp feeling in the air, and the two trod the path gaily, for there was music in every step as their feet rang upon the hard ground.

'How did the beautiful white needles come on the trees, Hannah?' asked Elsie. 'Was it the fairies?'

So Hannah took the child's thought and deftly wove it into a little story. She knew that 'Beauty is God's handwriting,' and could 'welcome it in every fair sky—every fair flower.'

She told how the great and solemn Frost King

in his Snow Palace, had called his little men together by thousands, and had sent them forth with the command to make this old world beautiful and very white, like the dress of the angels. She described how some were laden with bundles of frost-needles, some with bags of feathery snow, and others with sheets of glassy ice. She stooped and gathered a blade of grass, and showed Elsie how evenly and daintily the white fringe had been fastened along the edges, and the child clapped her hands and cried:

'How clever the frost men are!'

Then Hannah picked up a small stone that lay in their path, and Elsie saw that even its dull brown surface had received a crown of feathery hoar-frost.

'Everything is lovely to-day! Can the Frost King teach his men to make everything beautiful?'

'Yes; but the King has an enemy, who comes sometimes to undo all his work. I don't think he will come to-day; but sometimes a great king from the south-west blows with his warm breath upon this Frost King's work, and all the tiny needles fall to the ground, and in a little while they are all gone!—changed by the enemy into dirty-looking water.'

Elsie looked all around in her wonder. 'Are the needles nothing but water?' she asked.

They had reached the lodge gate now, but Hannah stopped half way down the little garden

path, and taking a long slender ice-point, which hung from one of the shrubs, popped it between the child's rosy lips; laughing, as Elsie, her eyes very round with astonishment, exclaimed:

'It is water! So it is! But so cold!'

They found their two old friends bending over a cheerful fire, and Hannah took a seat between them, to unfold the delights of a basket packed full of good things by the kindly housekeeper. She turned to say a warning, 'Don't run away, Miss Elsie!' and then began to talk upon a subject very near her heart.

Christopher, through the recommendation of Forbes, who had deigned for once to interest himself in the affairs of one of the under-servants, had been engaged as one of the under-gardeners at the Hall, and was to come that very day to take up his abode with old Kingston and his wife.

Hannah was greatly delighted with this arrangement—thought it perfect—and was never tired of talking about it to the old couple. They, too, felt glad at the prospect of having a young lad about the house once more.

Hannah begged to be allowed to run up and look once more at the little room and all the comforts prepared for Chris—the warm, dark red damask curtains, the kind thought of Mrs. Samper; the strip of gay carpet by the bed, which was her own purchase, and the bunch of holly, bright with berries, which stood in the old china vase on the

window-seat. There was so much to talk about and see—even the delicious-looking potatoe-pie, which was now slowly baking in the oven, and which was to constitute Christopher's first meal in his new home—that Hannah forgot how time was flying, and was only recalled to the present by hearing the old clock in the corner chime four strokes with mournful emphasis.

'Why, Miss Elsie, dear,' she cried, 'we ought to have gone half an hour ago. I *am* vexed!' and she turned to pick up the child's muff and gloves which lay on the floor beside her.

There was no little responsive voice!

Hannah looked up and exclaimed, 'Where's Miss Elsie?'

Alas! when would that question receive an answer.

Little Elsie was lost!

It took very little to convince Hannah that the child was nowhere in the lodge—hiding-places were scarce there—and soon, with flying feet, she was running back to the Hall. Her little mistress, tired of waiting, and always ready to show her independence, must have gone home. This is what Hannah hoped and tried to believe. But soon throughout that usually quiet and unruffled house it was known that Miss Elsie was nowhere to be found.

There came a sharp ringing of the dining-room bell, and Forbes, answering it, found madam

standing in the middle of the room, with one hand, that trembled a little, resting upon the table.

'There is a great commotion in the house. What does it mean?'

Even at this anxious moment Forbes chose his words with his usual care, and he answered:

'Hannah, madam, happrehends that Miss Elizabeth is lost. She missed her while she was at the lodge, half an hour back.'

With a servant's keenness of sight, he had long since, in common with his fellows, been satisfied that his mistress found no pleasure in the guardianship of her small ward, and he had not thought it necessary to soften the plain statement of their present anxiety.

What, then, was his surprise to see Mrs. Geary turn suddenly pale as she listened, and to hear her repeat after him, in a strange tone, 'Miss Elizabeth lost!'

'Yes, madam. But heveryone is now looking for her, and we expect before long to find her.'

Mrs. Geary walked to the fire, and after a pause, during which she gazed into its ruddy depths and seemed to win back her natural colour from its warmth, she turned again to the butler, and, with her usual cold stateliness, said:

'Very well; let me hear when Miss Elizabeth is brought back, and then desire Hannah to come and speak to me.'

Forbes retired with his 'Very good, madam,' and went to join the others in the search.

In the ordinary course of events Mrs. Geary should have resumed her seat and continued her needlework; but the restlessness which had infected the whole house, as was proved by the distant sounds of hurrying feet and murmuring voices, had entered the dining-room too. With steps that were unwillingly slow, Mrs. Geary allowed herself to walk to the window. There she looked through the gathering gloom at the few large flakes of snow that were just beginning to fall—very slowly at first, but faster every minute. A thick grey cloud hung like a curtain over the bed of the dying sun; no wind moved the trees: everything seemed waiting in silent suspense for the coming snow.

'The child will be very cold,' was Mrs. Geary's half-spoken thought.

Little Elsie was always 'the child,' but lately the term had lost much of its opprobriousness and gained something of interest, if nothing more.

Then her managing instinct began to assert itself. Had Hannah and Mrs. Samper thought of preparing a warm bath and hot milk for 'the child'?

She turned to ring the bell again, but changed her purpose before her hand touched it, and, instead, crossed the hall, and, mounting the stairs, found herself for the first time in Elsie's nursery.

In the general confusion the lamps in hall and staircase had been forgotten, but here a bright fire,

a rug and bath, and a large kettle of water singing on the hob, showed that loving hands had been at work. Now the room was empty.

Mrs. Geary stood with her hands resting upon the little brass cot. She looked down at the smoothed, unpressed pillows, at the old doll sitting up on the quilt at the foot of the bed, and at the other little indications of Hannah's motherly thoughtfulness.

I do not mean to tell you what were her thoughts, nor how long she stood alone in the firelight by that empty crib.

It was with Mrs. Geary as it has been with so many of us—'a little child was leading her.'

You must have noticed how sanctifying is the contact with little children. 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy.' Is it because the little ones are nearer heaven than we are? Is it because 'their angels do always behold the face of the Father?'

And have you never felt the same soothing, bettering influence in a child's nursery? Even a deserted one, to me, is full of lessons—full of hope—full of encouragement.

And so Mrs. Geary found it. At the end of her reverie she had approached a nearer knowledge of herself than she had ever cared to reach before; moreover, she began to have a misgiving that her quiet, sheltered life had been hedged in by a

narrowing selfishness which, besides excluding her from much usefulness, was shutting her out from a great deal of happiness.

She learnt this, because she was brought—not without a shudder—face to face with the conviction that, should the worst have befallen 'the child,' it would deal her a blow far more terrible than she dare realise; in that, while a fondness for her little ward had been creeping into her heart, she had, with jealous pride, allowed no one to see it but herself. And now little Elsie might never know of its existence!

In the stillness of that silent room the angels watched and rejoiced, as this proud, cold heart grew softer, as the stately head bent lower and lower, while the thin lips moved in prayer—a prayer slowly uttered, but humble and fervent.

And, meanwhile, Hannah's misery and suspense can be more easily imagined than described.

Poor girl! She followed the servants from place to place, as they searched the house and grounds. Heedless of the thickly falling snow, she left no place unvisited, and, in her distress, even looked at the same spots again and again. She followed first one party of searchers and then another, feeling as if no eyes could be so sharp as her own to find the lost child.

But now, two hours after little Elsie had first been missed, her energies failed her, and, feeling a

dizzy weakness creeping over her, she tottered to the housekeeper's room.

Exhausted by her frantic wanderings to and fro, faint with the despair that possessed her, and oppressed by the knowledge that her own negligence was at the bottom of all this misery, she sank down on the hearth-rug before the fire, and buried her face in her hands—not to weep, but to put all her remaining strength into the piteous pleading prayer that she whispered with her tired lips.

And to the two appeals, differently worded, but equally earnest, which ascended that evening to the ever-listening Ear, was the promise fulfilled: 'Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear.'

As Hannah raised herself from her crouching attitude, and began to urge her weary limbs to renewed action, her ear caught the sound of approaching footsteps.

The house had been so unnaturally still—she knew that, except for her mistress and perhaps the old housekeeper, all were prosecuting the search for little Elsie farther afield.

Probably it was knowing this that made her lift her head with a sudden look of hope in her pale face; or was it that, in her simple faith, she believed the answer to her prayer would come at once, and felt that 'nothing was impossible'?

The step was heavy, and trod the passage a little uncertainly at first, as if the comer doubted which

way to go; but soon it came straight towards the open door of the housekeeper's room.

The young nurse started to her feet, as a cheery well-known voice reached her:

'Hannah, girl,' it said, 'where are you?'

Then Chris stepped into the firelight. Chris, his head and shoulders all white with snow, his body closely wrapped in a large shepherd's plaid; Chris, so tall and manly, and with such a kindly pair of blue eyes looking down at his little sister from under the peak of his fur cap, that he looked like some good-natured giant from the land of dreams.

Just for a moment, Hannah, in the delight of seeing her brother, forgot her present trouble, and was running to throw her arms round his neck with a loving cry of welcome, and in total disregard of his epaulettes of snow.

But his words recalled the anxiety to her mind.

'Stand back, a minute, lass,' he cried. 'Look here now! When I left home I quite made up my mind that I had done with shepherding, and then the first thing I does in my new place is to find a lost lamb'; and, freeing himself from his plaid with one arm, he showed that the other held something warm and close. A little white face was resting against his rough coat, the eyes closed in a profound sleep—at sight of which Hannah gave a suppressed scream of delight, and a very fervent 'Thank God!'

Then she vented her feelings in a more practical way than the burst of tears which would have been my relief at such a moment. She helped her brother to take off his wrap, and begged him to sit in the arm-chair before the fire—'without waking the darling'—while she ran to tell Mrs. Samper the good news. Nothing objecting, Chris took off his cap, rubbed his fingers through his curly hair, and, with a delightful sensation of rest, stretched his long legs to the blaze, while he held the sleeping child in the warm glow.

She was neither cold nor wet now, for Chris, with instinctive care, when he had found her in the snow, had taken off her damp cloak and hood before taking her in his arms to wrap her round and round; but the little tired face was very pale, and the fat cheeks showed signs of a bitter storm of tears.

Hannah had flown to the nursery, and burst into the room, crying:

'Mrs. Samper! She's found! she's found! Chris found——' then she stopped abruptly, with a gasp; for, instead of confronting the plump figure of the old housekeeper, she found herself face to face with the erect dignity of her mistress.

'I beg your pardon, madam,' she faltered.

But Mrs. Geary came towards her, and a strange light shone in her eyes as she said, 'The child is found, did you say? Then where is she?'

'Please, madam, in the housekeeper's room. I was looking for Mrs. Samper to help me. My brother found her in the snow!'

'Fetch the child here at once. I can help you, if Mrs. Samper does not come;' and Hannah, bewildered, but with an added sense of some new relief, in another moment was by her brother's side again. He insisted upon carrying Miss Elsie up to the nursery himself.

His sister gave a little gasp of fright as she saw Chris, without any hesitation, place the child upon his new mistress's lap, as she sat in the rocking-chair by the fire. She ran forward to take her, but was stopped by an abrupt, 'Let her alone, Hannah!'

Then Mrs. Geary looked up at Chris, who stood in the middle of the room, rather sheepish, it must be owned, in his shyness.

'Thank you for your good service to-night,' she said; 'I will never forget it. One thing more I ask you to do: go and find one of the servants as soon as you can, and let the others be recalled at once.'

Chris found his way downstairs, and, in his hurry, ran violently against Forbes, who, lantern in hand, and followed by a doleful little procession of maids, was just returning from a fruitless search. After the old butler's ruffled dignity had recovered from the collision, he joined in the lively chorus of the maids as they heard Christopher's news.

Then Forbes suddenly remembered, with a guilty start, the unlit drawing-room, and hurried to his duties; and Mrs. Samper, coming down from her room, where she had gone to change her soaked garments, made her hasty way to the nursery.

There she found Hannah, with nervous fingers, and much embarrassed by her mistress's unbending, kneeling by the little girl as she lay on her guardian's lap. She untied the strings and unbuttoned and drew off her little garments, while Mrs. Geary looked on in silence, like one learning a new lesson, as indeed she was.

So little Elsie awoke, to find herself in a hot bath in her own bright nursery. Before she could remember the miseries that had gone before, a cup of warm milk was held to her lips, and she was exhausted enough to drink it to the last drop, and sufficiently drowsy to sink back into slumber immediately afterwards.

Hannah could not be persuaded to leave her charge again that night, so that it was not until the next day that she learnt how Christopher had found his 'wee missie.'

Trudging along the high-road, with his face to the snow that was covering the ground with a 'new soft fallen mask,' and with his thoughts turned to the prospect of his new home and new sphere of labour, he was suddenly aware of a child standing in his path, with her little white ungloved hands held out towards him.

'I can't find the Snow King any where,' she sobbed; 'and oh! I am so cold.'

Down went Christopher on his knees before the little wanderer. He had not forgotten his 'wee missie's' face, nor was he surprised at the cry which alternated with her sobs, 'Hannah! Hannah!'

'I'm little Miss Elsie's Big Boy!' he said, soothingly, 'come on purpose to take you back to Hannah! Please don't cry, missie; it's all right! And you'll not feel a bit cold before long, I'll warrant.'

While he took off her wet cloak and covered her up close to his warm breast, the little one, whose sobs had soon ceased, said slowly: 'Did God tell you I was lost, Big Boy? How *kind* God is!'

'Yes! It was He as sent me along this road to-night, missie; and I'll take such care of you, never fear!'

He put his bundle under the bank, where the snow soon hid it from view, and where he easily found it next day; and then his long legs carried him over the ground with an easy, swinging trot, which soon silenced little Elsie's chatter and sent her to sleep.

. . . . .

And at last the potato-pie was drawn from the oven. Christopher sat in the cosy kitchen and made away with it, with the keenest relish that kind old Mrs. Kingston could desire.

PART II.

TOLD BY HANNAH CARLIN.

CHAPTER I.

From choosing my own course,
And seeking my own will,
Good Lord, deliver me!
From DR. HESSEY'S '*Litany for District Visitors.*'

I HAVE been asked to tell you about the change that came into my dear young lady's life, and which drove her to go away and hide her pain in a sad loneliness. But to do this, I must trouble you with the other changes, some little and some sizeable, which came before and led towards it.

I do not feel sure that I shall be able to tell you the story in words which will please you all; but I do know that it is thanks to Miss Elsie, that I have learnt to be as ready with my pen as I am, though that's not saying very much, as you will see.

The first time that our quiet life at the Hall was altered was when madam sent Miss Elsie to a boarding-school. That was when she was

a little more than twelve years old. You may guess that this was a sadder matter to me than to the child. To her it seemed to promise a chance of knowing what other young ladies did, and thought, and cared about; for up to this time her only playfellow had been Master Guy, at the Vicarage, and he was a public schoolboy, now very ready to fill her head with all sorts of wonderful stories about Rugby, and, for all that they were great friends, a little too 'masterful' to be a good companion for Miss Elsie, so I thought. To me, her going was a real pain; and, try as I would, I could not hide from her altogether that it was so.

'Dear Hannah,' I remember her saying, as we busied ourselves over her packing, the day before she went, 'Mrs. Geary has promised to keep you here always, and that I shall find your face to welcome me when I come home for the holidays. Don't look so melancholy, you dear old thing! The time goes so very quickly; I shall soon be back again;' and she put her little arms round my neck, and gave me such a vigorous hug that, while it lightened my foolish down-hearted feelings, it also knocked my cap off my head, and into the box of dresses we were filling.

'Oh! Miss Elsie,' I cried, half laughing, half-reproachful, 'what are you doing? I've only just put it on clean!'

For she had taken my cap up, and was folding

it up neatly into a square shape, and I could not make out what she was about to do.

'Never mind, Hannah; you must find yourself another one. This is my property now; I am going to take it with me. I shall hang it up with my frocks when I get to school, and when I am in one of my tantrums, I shall go and look at it, and fancy I see your wise face underneath, solemnly reproving me for my hasty temper. Yes! it *shall* go with me,' she went on, as I tried to dissuade her. 'Why shouldn't it? *All* the princes, in *all* the fairy-tales you ever told me, *always* took a talisman with them when they went out into the world, so why shouldn't I?' and she wrapped my cap up in paper, and laid it among the folds of her muslin gown, and would hear no sense from me. So we laughed over her folly; and I thought no more about it, except that, as I packed and unpacked her boxes at her coming and going, I always found it there; and she always insisted upon keeping 'the talisman,' as she called that poor little crumpled bit of muslin!

So it was arranged that between the holiday times I should act as still-room maid, under Mrs. Samper. She was getting on in years now, and was glad to have a younger pair of legs to save her rheumatic ones a bit; and very glad was I not to have to find a new home.

I was never one for changes, and I have often

wished I could make those that won't stop in their places more than a year or two at most understand what a happiness there is in staying long enough to *belong* to your mistress's home, and to feel that you may have an humble share in the troubles and pleasures of the family. But there! this story will show them that, better than any words of mine could.

Then there was Christopher living so near me, and that naturally tied me to my place still more. It was good to watch him growing into such a steady, dependable man, and—though he always will be slow of speech and thought to his dying day—to find how well he got on with the gardener and the other men, and to see how they trusted him. We never saw much of each other in the week, but I was often allowed to go and have my tea at the lower lodge of a Sunday; and then he and I would walk together to church afterwards, and have such nice talks, chiefly about the old days and mother.

After a bit there came a time when these talks had a sort of stiffness in them; as if we each had something hidden in our minds which we wouldn't on any account show the other. We'd much better have spoken up at first. It would have spared us the only quarrel we ever had; but the fault was most on my side, I know, for I was the oldest. Besides, I've read in one of Miss Elsie's books that 'brothers and sisters are

designed to help one another,' and should 'draw one another upwards, . . . share their thoughts, and have one hope;' and I should have tried to keep it like that, I know.

I am asked to tell you about Miss Elsie; but I should like first to go aside for a minute or two, and write about that quarrel that Chris and I had; because it really helps to show how it is that I have been free to take care of my dear young lady all these years, when at one time I thought to have had a home of my own.

I'll try and make as short a story of it as I can.

Just before Miss Elsie left school, when she was nigh upon eighteen, the old gardener died, and a new man came down from London to take his place. Chris was a bit anxious to know who was to be put over him, and I looked forward to our next Sunday's talk, to learn if he thought to be happy with the new head gardener.

I felt as if I was certain beforehand as to what he would say, for I had seen James Pelliter once by that time, and thought him as nicely-spoken, as good-tempered-looking, and as superior as Chris could wish.

But when we set to talking as we sat by the cottage fire with Mr. and Mrs. Kingston after tea, I was surprised to find how very little Chris had to say about him, and that that little was not over satisfactory.

He hoped they'd get on after a bit, he said. James Pelliter knew, for sure, a terrible lot about the gardening—had grown orchids and all that; and he supposed they would understand one another better by-and-by.

For all that, I knew Chris was disappointed, and I put it down to this—that being slow in most things, he was slow in liking people as well.

But, strange to say, Chris never did get to like James Pelliter, and, moreover, he would have me not like him, too. But I would not hear a word against my new friend—for *that* he very soon became; so pleasant he was—so ready to lend a helping hand—so gentlemanlike in his dress and ways, that I was not the only one who felt gratified when he came to spend an hour with us in the servants' hall.

I was going on for forty now—at least, nearer forty than thirty—and I suppose I ought to have known better than to have let my head get so soon turned by a few flattering words.

But I didn't; and before long James and I were keeping company. Then it was that Chris and I quarrelled.

All along I'd never talked to Chris about James; for, after the first, I knew that there was no love lost between them. I could not see why. I said to myself that Chris was jealous, and I thought this all the more when he began to try and make me

believe that James was not a man to be trusted.

When I told him that James and I were to be wed in the fall of the year, we had words: which means, as you know, that we had *too many* words, because they were angry ones. After that, when we met, our talks were not easy, as you may believe, with this difference always between us. It was a shadow that had no business to be lying across our lives.

And then, one afternoon, I was in the herb-garden picking lavender—that will tell you that it was July. Miss Elsie, though just then gone a-visiting, had left school for good. So all my world was bright, and I was as happy as any woman could wish to be. I had nearly finished my work, and was just stopping to cool my face by taking off my sun-bonnet to let the air get to my cheeks, when I heard voices on the other side of the wall.

How could I help listening!

They were two of the voices that I loved best in the world, and one was loud with passion!

I let the lavender fall to the ground, and listened with a beating heart.

Christopher's voice was quiet, as it always is, and his words came slowly, so I could not hear all he said; but I gathered that he had in some way withstood James Pelliter, and had made him angry.

But how angry!

It made me shudder and tremble to hear the foul words which passed the lips of the man to whom I had given my love.

But worse was to come.

All at once I heard Chris cry out :

'Pelliter! for Hannah's sake mind what you do!'

And then James cursed me, and cursed the day when he had first seen my foolish face and listened to my strait-laced talk! I don't know what else he said, for I felt stunned and bewildered by the sudden shock that hearing such words from one whom I had believed was good and true had given me.

Once—long afterwards—I was standing on the top of a strong rock, with my feet firm and steady, and then, all at once, when I was feeling safest, I found myself slipping—slipping—because the ground that had looked so sure was falling! And that is much the same sort of horrible feeling that comes when one whom you have in your heart learned to believe as better and nobler than any other, suddenly shows his real self to your horrified eyes.

I don't think there can be a worse pain, or a more terrible awakening.

But almost immediately another sound came, which roused me, making me forget myself. Or perhaps it was the sudden absence of sound ; for the torrent of cruel words ceased abruptly. There was a moment's dead silence, followed by the thud

of a heavy blow—a cry of pain—then the noise of hurrying feet.

Oh, how I longed to see what that high wall was hiding from me!

With trembling limbs, I turned and followed the path, until I reached the green door which would let me into the paddock on the other side of the wall.

The key was in the lock. As I turned it and pushed back the door, only *one* thought came in a whisper to my lips: 'Chris! Chris!' for I believed that he had been killed.

But when I looked into the field, there was Chris standing with his back against the wall, and his eyes looking straight before him.

Had I been dreaming?

'Oh, Chris, Chris, what is it?' and, at my call, he turned a bit towards me.

Without changing his position, he answered:

'All right, lass! It's all right. Go back to your work. I'll be round presently.'

But something in his voice sounded odd, and I ran to his side.

It was not all right!

A little stream of blood was running down the brown cheek that was turned away from me, and his eyes had a strange dimness in them that made my heart ache.

I made him lie down on the grass, and got to work at the cut, which was near the back of his

head, in among his thick wavy hair. There was a pond near by, and with my handkerchief, in a clumsy sort of a way—for my hands trembled so—I bathed his face, and stopped the bleeding as best I could.

I did not speak a word!

There was all the while in my heart too new a sorrow and too fierce an anger for me to find words just at first.

But when Chris was more himself he looked into my face and sat up slowly. Then I made him tell me all.

'Chris, why did he knock you against the wall? Tell me.'

'Never mind that. He didn't hurt me much!'

'Chris, tell me! I must know! Had he—had he been drinking?'

The answer came very reluctantly, for it was:

'Ay, lass!'

'Have you seen him like this before?'

Again came the sorrowful—'Ay!'

I sank down in the long grass, and hid my face in my hands for very shame, as I sobbed out:

'Then—then this was why you never liked him?'

'This, and other things, lass!' and then I felt his strong arms round me and his dear face close to mine. 'Hannah! Hannah!' he said. 'I didn't think you would find it out like this—all so sudden. I was puzzling how to let you see, bit by bit, what sort of a man Pelliter really is. But he has always

been so different with the others to what he is with me ; and—and, you know, it was better for you to see than for me to tell you.'

I drew closer to him, wishing I could tell him how sorry I was for my hastiness of late. The words wouldn't come; but I think Chris understood what I wanted to say.

And then he told me all about it, and I learnt what sort of a man I might have wed if God's mercy had not come between us.

'He had never been over steady,' Chris said, 'and was fast losing all hold over himself. Sometimes his passion made him like a madman—just as I had heard him to-day; and yet, for all that, he was clever enough to be able to hide his worst side from most.'

This was the story that I whispered to Mrs. Samper that evening, as we sat together in the housekeeper's room. I can remember that the warm feeling of the sun as it shone upon us, and the comforting touch of her kind old hands on my head, seemed to me one and the same thing. My cold, aching heart was warmed by her sympathy, and she let me talk it all out with her, as long as I could, and that did me good.

But there was that in my heart, besides sorrow and pain, which gave me no rest. When I went to bed that night I could not sleep.

I lay, with dry eyes, looking at a patch of moonlight on the wall.

It was the saddest and darkest night I have ever known!

It seemed to me as if my love for James Pelliter had suddenly, in that one bitter moment in the garden, been changed to a burning hatred. It was not only because he had been able to hide his real self from me all these months, and to make me love him—all for nothing; but because he had struck and wounded my dear old Chris—the best brother any girl ever had. My thoughts went travelling painfully over those different days of the past year when James Pelliter and I had met. I thought of how he had talked; I remembered what promises he had made to be a friend to his brother-in-law when we were wed; and, worse than all, I called to mind how he had led me on to talk of those things that we keep deepest down in our heart—our best thoughts, I mean.

I felt that I hated, *hated*, HATED him!

So the hours went by.

I know *now* that Someone was watching me in my trouble, for bit by bit I got quieter.

I lay as if waiting for something. At last this thought came to me. It came quite clear and plain, in the stillness, like a message from God. Do you think it was a message from God?

> He *prayed* for them that did the wrong:
> Who follows in His train?

CHAPTER II.

Shadow and shine is life, flower and thorn.'

TENNYSON.

THOUGH I shall never have children of my own, I think I know what all the different feelings are which come into a mother's heart. There's sometimes pride, anxiety, fear about the future, amusement, grief, disappointment; and there is always the *love* which never gets tired. I hope my dear Miss Elsie will forgive me for saying that I have felt all these for her.

I think God wished me to try and take the place of a mother to her—in an humble sort of a way, I mean. And her love for me has been my greatest happiness.

In those days, after the trouble which I told you about, it was pretty to see all the little ways my dear young lady had for trying to comfort me, and to help me to forget my heart-ache. If I was sitting with my needle, she would come with one of

her books, and read out loud to me by the half-hour. Sometimes it was a history book, full of strange accounts of the doings of the queer folk who lived in England before the English had learnt how to behave. Dear me! How Miss Elsie used to laugh when I drew a long face of disgust at hearing about the floors strewed with rushes and only changed once a year!—or the way in which they ate their victuals—with their fingers!

When things had gone well in Miss Elsie's world, and she was merry, she would ask me the funniest questions, after she shut up the book, about what we had been reading, and would look really pleased if I answered right; while her pretty laugh would tell me if I had made a stupid mistake.

We were not always happy, though. Sometimes my dear young lady would flounce into the room, her face all awry, and that one wrinkle in her forehead which spoke as plainly as words that things had not gone smoothly in the dining-room.

And this brings me to tell you about 'madam.'

When she allowed me to see the love she had in her heart for Miss Elsie—that time that we lost her in the snow—I felt as glad as could be, and hoped a happier time would come of it. I felt sure things would come straighter from that very day.

Well, so they did, but not as happily as I had let myself hope. Madam did show her feelings some-

times. She would take the little one to her side, and they would talk quite prettily; or they would go out for drives together or about the garden, and get on amazingly well.

But that was only sometimes.

At other times she would be quite different. She would look at her in the old cold, distant way, as if she had shut up the way into her heart with an icy door; and Miss Elsie would shrink away surprised, or the spirit of opposition that was in her would rise up and make her angry. It was this that made me afraid.

I suppose madam had been so long without love that she really did not know how to *do* with it—how to manage it, I mean; and I am not quite sure that she ever went to the great Love to learn the way, though perhaps it is presuming of me to say so.

It was a difficult training for Miss Elsie in many ways. There would come days, making a week or more, when all would be sunshine; (I am speaking now of the time when she came home from school for good) when madam would even go so far as to consult her about the doings of this or that, making her feel the gladness of being old enough to be a companion to her guardian. And then, perhaps, a little naughty speech of Miss Elsie's, spoken in fun, but taken in earnest, would change everything; and for days, long days, there would be this coldness and constraint between them.

My dear young lady could not brook the being 'found fault with for next to nothing,' as she said, and her hot temper would sometimes get the better of her, so that an impertinent speech, said in a moment of passion, would make their hearts farther apart still. How sorry I used to feel, you may guess; and there seemed so little that I could do, except the 'praying always with all prayer,' that *my* chapter reminded me of.

But dear Miss Elsie did struggle against the passions that were so hot within her. I could see that.

Then there was Master Guy Sulden to give her a helping hand at times, though I won't be saying that he and Miss Elsie did not fall out now and again. However, he had a very bright, sunny way of smoothing over other folk's rubs, and, with him by, she would often feel stronger to keep back the fiery words.

Master Guy was at Oxford, studying very hard, they told me, and with a fair promise of taking his place among the learned men of his day.

How proud Miss Elsie was of all his successes!

My memory brings back to me the day when a little three-cornered note came up from the Vicarage, written by Master Guy's mother, to tell Miss Elsie that he had taken a first place in his last examination, and done far better than even they had dared to hope.

After telling the good news to Mrs. Geary, my

dear young lady must needs fly up the stairs, two steps at a time, to show the note to me.

When I had read it, and she had given me a good hug, 'to let off a little steam,' she said, she flung herself down on the nursery couch, before the fire, her face radiant with happiness, her eyes sparkling, and her breath coming quickly in her excitement.

'Guy is really splendid!' she cried. 'How proud we may be of him! Now he will be home directly, and we shall see him. Perhaps he will come *to-day*. He said he should come off home directly the lists were out. Dear brother Guy! I expect he will come and tell us all about it as soon as ever he can. Don't you think so, Hannah?'

She turned her flushed face towards me, with an eager look upon it, and I thought I had never seen her look so lovely. I wished in my foolish heart that Master Guy could see her too.

We don't often get our wishes nearly as soon as they come, but *I* did, pretty nearly, that day.

As we sat there in the half light of the dying day, still talking, we heard a quick step upon the stairs.

Well, I certainly had enough of a mother's heart in me to be able to read the look in my dear young lady's eyes, as she sprang to her feet, and waited for the opening of the door. That was the very *last* time that I ever heard her call Mr. Guy 'brother.'

So he came and joined us in the fire-light. He was just the same as ever, and yet a little different—

which sounds as if I was Irish in my talk. I noticed that their hands were clasped in welcome, but that the usual brotherly kiss was left out, and I wondered. I noticed that Mr. Guy looked at Miss Elsie a great deal, as if he could not keep his eyes away from her bonny face; yet he talked to me more than he did to her; and I wondered again!

'Well,' he said, at last, 'I was hoping I should find you in the nursery. It is the cosiest room in the house, and just the place to spend an idle hour in. How jolly it is to be lazy, after the grinding of the last few months! Do you know, Mrs. Hannah (which was always his name for me), my brain was so crammed, so closely packed, when I sat down to my paper the other day, that I felt convinced the information I should want would be in the most un-get-at-able corner, and that I should have to waste all my time in raking for it. Just as the piece of music we are looking for is always at the other end of the portfolio, you know.'

We laughed, and he added: 'But, you see, my luck was as good as ever.'

I made bold to say that there had been something more than luck in the case; and he answered readily, in his bright way:

'You don't like that word "luck," and you're right this time, Mrs. Hannah, as I believe you always are.'

Miss Elsie was unusually silent, and I thought,

maybe, they would talk more naturally if I left them for a bit, so I said:

'Mr. Guy, I hope you'll not be above having a cup of nursery tea with us, though you are such a great man now;' and I laid aside my needle.

'I've had one cup already with Mrs. Geary in the drawing-room, before I found my way up here. We have been having a long talk'—he looked a little mischievously at Miss Elsie as he said this, I thought—'but that's not any reason why I should refuse your offer of another, is it? And Elsie wants her tea, too, I dare say. Eh, Elsie?'

But as I left the room Miss Elsie was thinking of the other part of his speech, and was asking, 'You were having a long talk with Mrs. Geary just now. What *was* it about?'

And Mr. Guy answered: 'That's just what I've been wanting to tell you for many a day, dear heart.'

So I closed the door gently, with a feeling of reverence in my heart. Was I not shutting from my sight the beautiful, solemn picture of young love?

I was longer over my tea-making that day than I have ever been before or since. But—will you believe it?—when I went back, Mr. Guy's first words were:

'Why, how quick you have been, Mrs. Hannah! We've hardly had time to say anything.'

That was all very well, but I could see that if the words had been few, their meaning had been full enough; for the happiness in their hearts was shining in their eyes, and it was not many minutes before Miss Elsie's old nurse was told all about it.

When I smiled, Mr. Guy said: 'Why, I believe the naughty old thing has been guessing how it was all the time, and isn't a bit surprised!'

Well, how could I help guessing? The rest of the day they spent with madam. She kissed Miss Elsie, and wished her every happiness in words, and with a look that was as warm as could be. It had been a match of her own arranging, and so there was nothing to object to.

The next day, as Mr. Guy had gone to London, nothing would do but we must go and tell old Mr. Kingston all about the good news.

My dear old friend still lived at the lower lodge; but Mrs. Kingston, though some years younger than he, had been called away first. Six months before she had died, rather suddenly; but the old man never fretted much, dearly as he had loved her.

'She doesn't seem to be gone very far off,' he used to say; 'it might be as if she was in the next room. When I'm half dozing, sometimes, I fancy I feel her hand slipping into mine, just as it often did. It feels very companionable. Christopher and me, we is often talking about her, and by-and-by there won't be no need of talking—I shall see her again.'

Christopher managed for the old man. As carefully as any son could—or daughter, I might say—he contrived to do everything but just what the woman did, who cleaned up for them on Saturday.

To-day we found Mr. Kingston looking very sadly, as he sat by the fire in the large arm-chair, to which my brother lifted him every day; but he greeted us with a happy smile, and we made ourselves 'at home' at once. I set about doing a few odd jobs in the room that I thought might save Chris a bit—setting the tea-table, and filling the kettle, and such like. Then I took out my work-case, and began to mend a rent in one of the window-curtains.

I left Miss Elsie to do the talking.

She took the wooden stool, and sat beside Mr. Kingston, resting her small hands on his knee, and looking up eagerly into his dear old face.

She was telling the story of her new-found happiness, and she knew there was ready sympathy here.

His poor hands, crippled and twisted with rheumatism, rested upon her soft plump ones while he listened; and, seeing it pleased him, she made the telling as long as she could. When she stopped, he said, very earnestly:

'Ay! ay! it's the beautiful story over and over again. We old folks always see our young days the clearest, and I can mind, just as plain as if it was yesterday, the sunny gladness of my courtin' days. Ay, ay! it's beautiful! And may a loving Father

bless the beginning, so that it may grow into as happy a married life as my old woman and I have had together!'

He paused and gazed into the fire, while two large tears trickled down his cheeks. Seeing how weak he was, I went up to him and said:

'Mr. Kingston, you're not fit for the talking to-day. Let Miss Elsie sing a bit to you, and then we'll leave you to get rested by the time Chris comes in.'

'Nay, nay, lass,' he answered. 'I must expect to be a bit weary nowadays, and to have a new ache or two. What think you Chris read to me last night? He'd got hold of a book written by someone who must have had a deal o' tiredness, for it was written just so comforting as may be; and there it said that, when we got old and began to break up, we should bear in mind that each new pain or weakness was "God undressing us for the grave." That's not a bad thought, is it? The little ones get tired at bed-time, and the undressing is a worry to them, I'll be bound; but it's the hands of love as are doing it.'

Then meeting a wistful look in Miss Elsie's eyes, he smiled. 'Does this seem sad talk to you, to-day of all days, missie? It's no' sad to me! But that's because my day's near done. It's very near bed-time now!'

My heart ached to hear him talk like this. I could not see my young lady's face, for she was

resting her cheek against her hand, and her eyes were fixed on the flames. We were silent for a time. I had nearly finished my mending, and I expect Miss Elsie's thoughts had gone on a journey —perhaps to London—when the old voice suddenly began again, but in quite a new tone, almost as if he had been having an argument with himself, and was saying the last words out loud by mistake:

'Well! what if missie *do* think it oncalled for? It's on my mind to say it, and I don't believe she will take it amiss.'

Miss Elsie started. She had evidently forgotten where she was.

'Me!' she said, bewildered; 'are you speaking to me?'

'I'm wanting to say somewhat to you, missie, if you'll not take it amiss;' and reassured by her smiling shake of the head, he went on very impressively: 'I want you to believe the words of a very old man, missie! I want you to remember *this:* when the dear Lord draws two hearts together, like yours and Master Guy's, there *must* be a giving and taking on both sides. It may seem plain sailing at first, ay! and will be, I daresay, while the sweetness is so new; but, sooner or later, some little thing will come and need a deal of patience. You see, dearie, sharp words that come so quickly from a hasty tongue, prick as bad as anything.' The dear old man knew what was our young lady's temptation —yes, and Mr. Guy's too. He knew, as we all did,

what a bad thing such a training as madam gave her was for a nature like Miss Elsie's. He'd been thinking over the future, I expect, and feeling a bit afraid.

While he was speaking, Miss Elsie turned her face away, and when he paused she sat very still, and said never a word.

'You mustn't be vexed with an old man, now, missie,' he went on, feeling a bit uncomfortable at her quietness. 'You've told me many a time that your heart's a bit wilful, and your tongue a bit hasty, now haven't you? It's only that, thinking it over, I wanted to bid my dear young lady to watchfulness. But there! I've said all that was in my mind, and we'll leave it now.'

Miss Elsie stood up and said quietly, 'Yes, it was your kind old heart that prompted you to say that, I know. Now, I mean to make you some hot buttered toast for your tea, and to help you to eat it too.'

She began to bustle about, and after a while was in her own merry way again over the tea-making.

But I never felt quite sure how far she liked what Mr. Kingston had said.

Before we left, she offered to sing an evening hymn, and he said at once:

'Ay! do, missie; and let it be that beautiful new one that you sang last time, if you will be pleased to sing it again.'

While Miss Elsie's sweet voice was filling the room with the words,

. Grant to life's day a calm, unclouded ending,

Christopher, grown to be a tall, bearded man now, came in, and stood waiting in the shadow until the music stopped. When we got up to go, I drew him outside the door after us.

'Mr. Kingston looks very sadly, I think, Chris,' I said; 'you'll get him to bed early to-night, won't you?'

'Yes; he's been a bit peaky all day,' Chris answered. 'It's one of his bad days. He'll be better in the morning, I'm thinking.'

And so he was.

When I saw my dear old friend again the light had gone out of his dim eyes, but the smile was still there, making his rugged face beautiful. The burden of his tiredness had been lifted from him for ever.

CHAPTER III.

Alas! how light a cause may move
Dissension between those that love!
. . . . . .
A something light as air—a look,
A word unkind, or wrongly taken;
Oh! love, that tempests never shook,
A breath—a touch like *this* has shaken.

MOORE.

THOSE were happy, merry days for us all. The house was more than usually gay too. Miss Elsie's twenty-first birthday came soon after Christmas, and madam allowed her to give a musical evening to all the friends she had. Well, these had never been permitted to be many, but the evening went off nicely, as it could but do, with Mr. Guy's clever head to superintend the evening's amusements.

Moreover, weeks went by without any clash between Miss Elsie and madam. I began to think that my dear young lady and Mr. Guy had, at one time or another, been having a talk about these

frequent rubs; for I used to notice that if Mrs. Geary tried her—mistook an answer she gave for an impertinence when none was meant, which she did pretty often—Miss Elsie's right hand would close over her left and press the diamonds there. And certainly the words were far oftener kept back than in days gone by.

Ah, me! did my dear young lady get to feel too sure of herself, and off her guard?

Mr. Guy, being, as I said, so clever, was to be a tutor at Oxford when he settled down. But an uncle, who had often shown him much kindness, now wished him to travel for a few months before he married, and, I believe, promised to give him money enough to cover all his expenses.

Mr. Guy at first thought of refusing his kind offer. He had made up his mind to be married in the summer, and I suppose it was an outcome of his cleverness which made any opposition to his wishes very irksome and irritating to him: I have heard it said that it is one of the snares of great learning to feel impatient if your own will is opposed. Certainly this was just the one only fault that my anxious eyes could see in my dear young lady's future husband; but I thought their great love for one another would be stronger than their faults.

How little I knew!

At last, owing to the urgency of Mr. and Mrs. Sulden, Mr. Guy said he would do as his uncle

wished, and so it was settled that he should start at Easter; and the two months before the separation were to be made the most of, in the face of the many months of travel that were to part Mr. Guy from Miss Elsie.

I feel as if my pencil would never write down the sadness that followed. It was so pitiful!—so unnecessary!—and all began from such a little bit of misunderstanding.

I first noticed that something was wrong one day when Miss Elsie came to me with her gathers coming undone, and needing the 'stitch in time.'

There was that one wrinkle in her forehead, as she stood by me, which showed that some one had vexed her. But I made no remark; I felt sure she would tell me all about it soon. She always did.

And presently out it came.

'Really, I had no idea that Guy could be so overbearing! Because I refused to say something to Mrs. Geary that he wanted me to, I have had no peace! Why shouldn't he say it himself, Hannah, if he wants it said? It's really absurd!' and she began the old impatient trick of tapping the floor with her foot, while that line in her forehead looked worse than ever.

I thought it would be best to let her talk off her vexation before going down to lunch and to meet Mr. Guy again. So I said:

'Is it something that you really can't say to madam, Miss Elsie?'

'It is something that I have told Guy will come much better from him; and I'm not likely to change my mind, as you know. Are the gathers all right now? Then I had better go and wash my hands for lunch.'

But I held her back a minute.

'Miss Elsie, dear,' I said, 'isn't this "the giving and taking" that our good old Kingston spoke about? Wouldn't it be worth while to try and do as he said?'

She drew herself away and said, with the coldest look that she has ever given her old nurse,

'You don't understand, Hannah! How can you? This is a matter that I must judge for myself,' and she left the room.

For herself? Ah, poor lamb! It took a weary time of teaching to show her that we must carry our actions to, and hold them in, the Divine Light before we can see what they really look like.

The next time I saw them together—Mr. Guy and Miss Elsie, I mean—it seemed as if all was right between them once more. I watched them from the still-room window, passing up and down the rose-walk—Mr. Guy so tall and straight and noble-looking; and my dear young lady so little and dainty, with a beauty that was fairy-like, we used to say. Her pretty merry laugh, like sweet music, reached me as I sat over my patching; and sometimes I could hear the full rich tones of Mr. Guy's voice too. So I was satisfied that the

little difference had been settled some way or another.

But the strong wills were both there, ready, in spite of everything, to come together with a clash and make mischief; and I must hurry on to the end, and shorten the work of telling the worst chapter of Miss Elsie's life.

About a fortnight before Mr. Guy was to go abroad they fell out again. I cannot tell you what was the cause, but they were both very angry, I am afraid,—Mr. Guy in a still sort of dogged way, and Miss Elsie impetuous, hot and hasty, but determined.

That evening—it was after dinner that it happened—Mr. Guy went home to the Vicarage, and my young lady came up to me. She came into her room, where I was waiting to help her to bed, and her face was whiter than I had ever seen it.

'Miss Elsie!' I cried, 'you're not well!'—and I went to pull up the arm-chair near the fire, that she might sit down. She looked almost like fainting, I thought; but she only said,

'I'm tired, nursie! Get me to bed quickly, and let me go to sleep and forget all about it!'

I thought 'it' must mean more than the weariness; but I saw that she did not want to talk. So I brought her dressing-gown to her, and brushed her hair in silence.

It was my custom to leave her then, with a 'good-night;' and often she would reward her old nurse by

giving her a kiss, as had been her custom from a child; but to-night she hardly took any notice when I left the room.

I felt uneasy about her, and so, contrary to my custom, came back to see if she was comfortable, before I went to bed. I found her door locked. Her candles were put out, for no light shone through the cracks, and I was turning away more satisfied, when piteous weeping reached my ear.

Miss Elsie crying, and I not to be able to get to her!

But to all my knocking, which I dared not make too loud, she would give no answer, nor would she heed me when I asked her to let me come to her. So, heavy-hearted, I crept away to my room and to my prayers. There was nothing else left for me to do, and I was oppressed by a foreboding of coming trouble.

The next morning Mrs. Sulden called quite early, and was a long time talking with madam, and afterwards with Miss Elsie too, in the morning-room. It seems that Mr. Guy had gone off up to London by an early train, with no message for Miss Elsie; but that, if she would like to write to him, his address would be so and so; and his mother, feeling very unhappy at the state of things, had come up to the Hall as soon as she could. She hoped, dear lady, that a little talking and explaining would put all this tanglement straight again, and that when she joined Mr. Guy in London the next

day, as it was arranged she should, she might be able to take at least a message from Miss Elsie; but I believe Miss Elsie was firm in saying only that Mr. Guy ought to write first to her.

Of course we, in the servants' hall, did not know more than I am telling you of this 'lovers' quarrel,' as we called it. Mr. Forbes had many things to suggest as possible, and 'he supposed' a good deal; but it was only guess-work, and not to be written down here.

What made me most distressed was that Miss Elsie would tell me nothing. If I pleaded, 'Miss Elsie, dear, won't you tell me what's troubling you? I mayn't be able to help you much, but it might ease you to talk it over with me; and I can't bear to see you so miserable, when perhaps a little might just set all happy again;' she would answer:

'It must be enough for you that Guy has vexed me very much. I cannot tell you any more. It's no use talking about it. When he writes it may be all right.'

'But won't you send him a bit of note first, dearie, just to break the ice?'

'He must write to me first. No! Hannah, leave me alone. I daresay it will be all right presently.'

And there we always had to leave it.

My heart ached sorely for my dear young lady; but what *could* I do while her pride stood so hard and strong between her and the little first step towards peace-making?

A week later, and the afternoon post *did* bring a note from Mr. Guy to Miss Elsie.

It was carried to her as we sat together by the nursery fire, while madam was having her afternoon rest. So I was by to see the smile, which was half-relief, half-triumph, as Miss Elsie took the letter from the silver waiter.

'Thank you, Forbes,' she said; 'I'm sorry you had to toil all the way up these stairs to bring this to me.'

'Don't name it, miss,' answered Forbes. 'I was glad to be the bearer of it;' and he went away smiling. He knew Mr. Guy's writing well enough by this time.

Miss Elsie sat and looked at the envelope, as if she was a bit afraid of reading the letter. But when I laughed and said, 'The covers never tell us as much as the inside, Miss Elsie,' she laughed too, and opened her note.

From where I sat I could see that it was quite short. Yet it took my young lady a long time to read it; and she sat and gazed at it, as it lay in her lap, until the silence frightened me.

'What is it?' I asked. 'Is Mr. Guy ill?'

'Ill! He is cruel, cruel!' and she covered her face with her hands and rocked herself to and fro, as if she was in pain.

In a moment my work was thrown aside, and I was down on my knees, with my arms round her, and, 'Miss Elsie!' I cried, 'you're making too much

of something! You're not understanding the note as it is meant! Read it again, dearie; read it again!'

My touch seemed to calm and steady her, for her hands went down from her face again, and she drew herself up stiff and straight as she answered quietly:

'Read it again? No! I know every word of it by heart; there's no mistake. But you may convince yourself by reading it, if you like. It is plain enough.'

Then she got up and stood away from me, near the window, while I picked up the bit of paper and read:

'DEAR ELSIE,

'I sail from Plymouth to-night, by the ss. Albatross, for Cape Town. Lord L—— asked me yesterday to go to New Zealand, as tutor, with his son (his own tutor has failed him at the last minute). I could but accept this good chance.

'I am much pained at your silence, and that it has stood in the way of a better "good-bye" than this.

'Yours till death,

'GUY.'

That was all; and it looked cruelly short, I thought.

I got up from the floor, and was going across

the room to try and say the best I could to take some of the sting of the pain out of Miss Elsie's heart; but she was ever one to bear her troubles single-handed if she could, and to be afraid that the comforting and petting I liked to give her would bring the 'foolish tears' to her eyes, as she said; so now I was not surprised when she turned round, and saying, with forced lightness in her voice, 'There, Hannah! You see there's nothing more to be done! We must just leave it as it is, that's all,' left the room.

But I fancied that, as she went away, I could hear her saying, over and over to herself, 'Cruel! cruel! cruel!'

And God forgive me if I, too, was angry enough with Mr. Guy! What right had he, I thought—a young gentleman who had known Miss Elsie so many years—to make so little of her love that a quarrel was to separate them like this? It's true, I didn't know what the difference had been about; but surely he was wrong to make so much about it, and to be too proud to speak the first word of apology. Often, and bitterly, I wished that they had never been brought together; and as I watched my dear young lady's face, out of which all the merry sunshine had faded, I felt it very hard that she should seem to have all the misery of the quarrel to bear, while he was going about and enjoying himself. I should not have hidden from myself that there was fault on her side too—that

if pride had kept him from peace-making, it had been pretty much the same case with her; but pity for her white face and my almost 'mother's' love were blinding my eyes.

So the days and weeks dragged on. Madam was very tender with Miss Elsie in her own way —putting up with her little fits of irritability with a new patience, and watching her with a sorrowful face, as she went about the house with drooping figure and slow steps. But madam's nature was not one to be ready with words of sympathy; nor do I think Miss Elsie could have borne to hear them if she had tried to say them.

The days grew longer, and the time of waiting hung very heavily upon all our hands, but most of all with our dear young lady.

We might expect to have news from Cape Town. When would it come?

CHAPTER IV.

Time steals them from us—chances strange,
Disastrous accidents, and change,
That come to all;
Even in the most exalted state,
Relentless sweeps the stroke of fate;
The strongest fall.

LONGFELLOW.

'YOU see, madam, this is getting thin in more places than one, and will be in holes at the next washing!'

The housekeeper was unfolding one of the large dining-room table-cloths as she spoke, and I stood by, to take it from her when its fate had been decided.

Once a year the house-linen was all looked over by madam, and this was what we were about to-day.

It was, I remember, a beautiful summer morning. The large doors of the linen-press were standing

open, there was a sweet scent of lavender in the still-room, and the warm sun shone through the open window.

'Then put that table-cloth on one side. I see, Samper, that we must drive into the town one morning, and do some shopping. Hannah, you had better write a list of what we shall want there, while we are about it.'

I took my place at the round-table near the fire-place. Madam went back again to the linen-cupboard, and, with Mrs. Samper by her side, lifted and examined the pillow-cases and towels which lay in neat heaps on the shelves.

The wide cupboard door quite hid madam from my sight; but Mrs. Samper was in full view, and came and went from the linen-press to the table, as the linen was condemned or laid aside for patching and darning.

'A dozen yards of unbleached linen for servants' pillow-cases. Put that down, Hannah.'

'Yes, madam.'

'And you will want new round-towels, Samper, I suppose?'

'Certainly, before the summer is past, madam.'

'Then add the same quantity of round-towelling, Hannah.'

'Yes, madam,' I repeated.

The work went on almost in silence for a bit. Then Mrs. Samper said:

'Here, Hannah, find your needle and fasten

this string more firmly. It will be off at the first tying.' She brought me a pillow-case as she spoke.

Are you surprised that I remember all this so distinctly? It is as clear to me as if it only happened yesterday. It seems burnt into my brain!

For just at that moment, when we were all so unconscious of this world being one of trouble and pain, the door was pushed open and madam's maid, who never could keep anything to herself for more than a minute, burst in with a scared-looking face, crying:

'Lor', Mrs. Samper! Have you heard the terrible news about Mr. Guy?'

I started to my feet; but my cry of dismay was drowned by the bitter sound of pain that came from the window-seat, as Miss Elsie pushed aside the curtain and ran forward. She caught Parker by the arm.

'What is it?' she asked.

'Lor', Miss Elsie! I didn't know you was in here!'

None of us had known. She had been sitting quietly with her book, as was her way then, not speaking or moving, for an hour at a time.

'What is it?' she asked again; her voice was strained and anxious, but not louder than usual.

It was then that Parker saw Mrs. Geary was

also in the room. She came forward and put her arm round Miss Elsie.

'Parker,' said madam, 'if you have any news you must tell it at once;' and she looked down at Miss Elsie's white face as she spoke.

'Indeed, madam—I—I'd no idea that you were here! And—and it's only what the gardener from the Vicarage says. I dare say it isn't true.'

'What is it? What is it?' repeated Miss Elsie again. She seemed to be trying to hold herself still and brave.

Then madam said quite stern-like: 'Parker, tell us at once what you have heard. And, child, don't be afraid! Things are always made worse as they are carried from mouth to mouth.'

But I don't think Miss Elsie heard what she said. With a great deal of hesitating and stammering, Parker said at last that the gardener had brought a note for madam, and was telling them all downstairs that news had come to the Vicarage of the loss of Mr. Guy's ship and of all on board.

When the worst was told, our dear young lady turned whiter still. She looked first into my face and then into madam's, as if she wanted to see whether we believed it all. Did she see 'no hope' written there?

With a bitter, bitter cry, she slid down on to the floor and fainted away.

We carried her upstairs and laid her on her bed;

but it was a long, long time before she showed any signs of returning consciousness. Before dark one of the men was sent off for the doctor.

She did not know any of us. Over and over again she would murmur through those long, dark hours, 'I *would* not say it! I have killed him! I *would* not say it! I have killed him! I have killed him!'

At last the morning light began to come through the window, and I left my chair for the first time, to go and draw the curtains closer. When I came back Miss Elsie seemed to be dozing, and, though her breathing was very heavy, I began to think this must be a hopeful sign.

A few minutes later the doctor came in. I saw at once that he was not satisfied. As his hand lightly touched her burning forehead, her eyes opened, and then the same sad words came again to her lips.

He signed to me to let more light into the room.

When I came back to the bedside, I noticed for the first time, and with a horrified start, that dear Miss Elsie's hair was quite white. It had been bleached in the fire of her agony of mind.

Tears filled my eyes, but I forced them back. This was no time for weakness. I must show that I was strong—very strong—if I was to be allowed to help in the coming sick-room battle.

The doctor beckoned me to the farther end of the room.

'This is brain fever,' he said, shortly. 'I will go and tell Mrs. Geary what must be done; but, if you are to undertake the nursing, I should wish to speak to you too. Will you come to me as soon as you can get someone to take your place for a few minutes?'

I curtseyed and answered, 'Yes, sir;' and then, with trembling limbs, tottered back to my chair by the bedside, and covered my face with my hands.

I could not keep back all the tears that came; for I felt sure that I had seen a look in the doctor's face which indicated danger, and, you know, mine was a mother's heart, so to speak. I could not be quite brave when the blow first came, could I?

But there! you will not be wanting to hear of all the thoughts that seemed to rush through my brain during those few minutes. It is of Miss Elsie—our poor, dear Miss Elsie—that we must be talking.

By the time Mrs. Samper came into the room to take my place, I had pulled myself together and was ready—for what? 'For whatever God will send us,' I whispered to myself; and then, looking down at my dear young lady on her bed of suffering, you can guess, if you have been in a like case, how strong was the cry that came from my heart:

'Lord, we love her; let her stay!'

Do you know how solemn the days are spent in a

sick-room? It is like a different life altogether—a life inside our other, ordinary life. I had never been called to do sick-nursing until that time, and I shall never forget those quiet darkened hours as we watched, and hoped, and prayed, doing everything that the doctor directed, and everything we could think of ourselves, and yet wishing—oh, so earnestly!—that we could go on doing always, instead of feeling that sad helplessness, when we came to the sitting and watching and doing nothing, which is the hardest part of nursing.

After a bit, when madam found that I could manage without making myself ill, I was allowed to take the most of the nursing. If I went for a short quick walk every day at twelve o'clock, after the doctor had been, and then had two or three hours' sleep in the afternoon, I felt that I could manage all the rest without being over-tired. I always think it was the walk every day which helped me as much as the sleeping.

The warm sunshine, after the cool, shadowed room, the noisy singing of the birds, after our whispered words and quiet footsteps, did not make me feel sad or unhappy. They seemed to fill my heart with hope, and to send me back with a new courage.

Every day, too, as I went through the garden on my way home, I looked out for Chris, and I never had to look far either. He would be on the watch for me, with a cheery smile, and the question as

certain to follow: 'How's our "wee missie" to-day?'

So I would go back refreshed to my dear young lady's room, and take my seat by her bedside.

Sometimes I would stroke the thin fingers and look at the unconscious face, hoping that my touch might bring recognition into those bright eyes. If she only knew how I longed for just *one* of the old sweet smiles! But her mind—her thoughts—were not with us, nor was her poor aching heart all those weary days.

It was nearly a fortnight after that blow had fallen, which seemed doing its best to crush the life out of our dear young mistress, and it was just upon ten o'clock at night.

Though I was out of sight of the little clock, which ticked in a sort of whisper on the mantelpiece, I knew the time, for I could hear through the house the distant sounds of bolting and barring.

It was Forbes going his rounds before the bell rang for prayers.

I remember that a shiver ran through me as I thought: 'We can shut out most strangers, but who can find a bolt that will keep death away?'

The evening was very hot, and the air heavy. The door and the windows stood open, and I waved the great palm-leaf fan to and fro; but nothing seemed to lessen the sultry feeling. The ice melted so rapidly in its saucer that I had to keep filling it

from the refrigerator, for Miss Elsie's parched lips needed it constantly.

The bed was in shadow; but I could see clearly enough, being accustomed now to the half-light.

I had been watching a bright star which was gleaming and throbbing through the open window; but when I looked back again at Miss Elsie I saw that her eyes were fixed earnestly upon my face.

Ah! how wildly my heart beat! How quickly we catch at the first little thread of hope!

Her lips moved; but not with those despairing words that we knew so well.

'Sing, Nannah!' she said; 'I am *so* sleepy.'

Was it my little Miss Elsie again? Was she lying in her little crib in the nursery? Had all this been a horrible dream? For a second my brain seemed to reel. But then the old nursery hymn forced itself to my lips, and, hardly knowing what I did, I sang slowly, and very softly:

> Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me!
> Bless Thy little lamb to-night;
> Through the darkness be Thou near me,
> Watch my sleep till morning light.

As I sang, the tired eyelids drooped.

I gently moved a little, and began to stroke the hair from her forehead, as had been my way in the nursery days.

When the verses were finished, I began over again, not liking to leave off suddenly.

But when, at last, I paused and listened, Miss

Elsie lay quite still, and so motionless that a sudden terror crept into my heart. I got up to ring the bell, but found myself face to face with the doctor.

He looked first at Miss Elsie, and then at my white, troubled face.

Then he smiled.

God had given her back to us once more.

CHAPTER V.

Woman's heart is alike in all ranks: the deepest sorrow is the one of which she speaks the last and least.

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

MISS ELSIE'S recovery was rapid, and, in most things, satisfactory. She grew stronger every day, and was willing to try all that the doctor suggested as likely to do her good. She never complained of her bad headaches or the weariness of her weakness, nor found fault with what we did for her. She was always ready with a 'Thank you;' or, 'I'm afraid I have given you all a great deal of trouble.'

But a hard, sad look grew round her mouth and in her eyes. She seemed to have left all her pretty, caressing ways on the other side of that dark time of unconsciousness; and I began to notice that she showed no inclination to hold conversation with us; nay, that she preferred not to talk at all.

It was Miss Elsie, but not our own Miss Elsie,

who had come back to us from the gates of death.

I spoke of this to Mrs. Samper one day, when I had left my dear young lady asleep on her sofa.

'I'm not easy about Miss Elsie,' I began. 'You've noticed something, Mrs. Samper, haven't you?'

'Do you mean that quiet, silent manner she's had of late? Yes, I've noticed it. But I think it's the way that she's taking her trouble. I'm not saying it's a *good* way, mind you, keeping it all to herself without a word; but perhaps she'll be led to speak about it by-and-by.'

'It's not only that, I mean,' I said—and I felt the foolish tears coming near my eyes—'but I do miss the little loving words and looks she used to give me. I'm not doubting that I'm as much to her as I've always been; but I can't help longing for the old way of showing it. It gives one such an out-in-the-cold feeling, and makes me afraid that there's something more wrong than we think.'

'Hannah, you'll get like the old fussy hen with its one chick, if you begin to worry in this way over Miss Elsie. Let well alone, my dear, and look at the mercy which has spared her to us when we so little expected it.'

'Well,' I said, with a sigh, 'I'll try and think, as you say, that it's nothing more than a part of her weakness. I suppose it is only "fussing" which makes me think that she gets more silent as days go on.'

Mrs. Samper thought for a minute, and then she said:

'Do you tell her about things—the garden, the horses, and all that? There's old Tabby has kittens again. Why don't you take them up in your apron and show them to her?'

'I'll try; but I'm pretty certain it will be no good. Christopher picked the first blossom on that new rose-tree, yesterday; the one with that French name that stands for snow-ball. I thought it would interest her to see what it was like, as she had been by when it was planted. But she only looked at it quietly, and said, without even a smile:

'"Yes! it is much what I thought it would be like. Put it in water, please, Hannah!"'

'And that's the way it is always. Has she seen Mrs. Sulden yet?'

'No. The doctor forbids it still; and I don't wonder, for the poor dear trembled so when madam proposed it the other day; and thinking about it gave her a really bad night afterwards.'

Then we got to talking about poor Mr. Guy's good father and mother, and the beautiful way in which they were passing through this time of heavy trouble—helping each other, and bravely leaving the faint doubt about Mr. Guy's death in God's hands. None of us had ever dared to think much about that one little ray of hope—the chance that some of the passengers on the Albatross might have been picked up by a passing ship; and it was well we

didn't, or the gradual dying out of that small flame would have been sad and terrible.

It is certain Miss Elsie never doubted from the first that Mr. Guy had been parted from her by a wider stream than the widest ocean, across which no message ever comes.

I went up to the sick-room that afternoon with my apron full of little soft, fluffy balls, that were just learning how to purr with happiness and to blink at all the wonderful things in this strange world.

Miss Elsie's sofa had been wheeled near the open window, and her eyes were looking sadly and dreamily across the beautiful old trees to where the round cap of the hill was standing out against the sky. Though my step was light she heard me come in, and turned her head very slowly and wearily towards the door. A quick movement or a sudden noise would set her head aching by the hour, and her room was still kept very quiet.

I went in, and, sitting down on the chair by her sofa, spread open my apron.

'Mrs. Samper's sent you Tabby's family to see,' I said. 'Aren't they little beauties, Miss Elsie?'

How anxiously I looked for a smile as I held towards her a funny, fat white kitten, whose eyes were the bluest and roundest I have ever seen! She took the little creature into her hands, and stroked its soft pointed ears; but her face grew sadder and sadder, and, suddenly pushing it from her, she hid

her face in the pillow and burst into bitter weeping. The poor little helpless kitten rolled over and over along the floor. I jumped up from my chair. Such deep-drawn sobs as those that were shaking Miss Elsie were safe to bring on a bad head-ache, and that was just what the doctor had bidden us to be careful to avoid. When the tears stopped at last, she lay back on the pillows, white and suffering, her temples throbbing and her head burning hot. I busied my hands with the cooling lotion and the fanning, and my thoughts with wondering how those unlucky kittens could have brought about such an upset.

As dear old Mr. Kingston used to say, 'It's such bits of threads as tie us to the past,' and I could only guess that instead of amusing her, Tabby's family had recalled some talk or doing of Mr. Guy's which I had never heard.

That unfortunate afternoon threw Miss Elsie back a bit; and when I told the doctor, he advised us to let her be as quiet and silent as she chose, at present, seeing that we might often upset her in this way unintentionally.

The days crept on.

My dear young lady began to move slowly about the house; and as her strength increased, so did her restlessness.

Madam sent for me one day into the dining-room.

She was sitting at her writing-table, busy with her letters, but she laid her pen down as, after

knocking, I went into the room. I remember I noticed that her face, which I used to think looked so hard and stern, had grown softer and kinder lately, though much older too.

'I want to have a little talk with you, Hannah,' she said. 'Will you find a chair?'

I thanked my mistress, and when I was seated she began:

'The doctor wishes Miss Elsie to go somewhere for change of air, and would prefer a place that she herself has a fancy for. He says her bodily health is quite as it should be now, and he thinks a little variety of scene will be the best remedy for her sadness. Have you heard her mention any place with interest lately?'

I could only answer, 'No, madam; and I am afraid Miss Elsie would not readily be got to give her opinion about it. She is so listless about everything.'

'I had hoped you would know, if any one would;' and madam sighed. After a pause, she said suddenly:

'Hannah, you love your young mistress very dearly, I know, and for that reason I feel it is my duty to tell you that the doctor is not satisfied about her. He says that this increased melancholy silence and this restlessness are bad signs. He believes that she is brooding over the thought that if there had been no quarrel with Mr. Sulden, he would have gone by the steamer that he originally

intended to sail in, and that, therefore, she is the cause of his death. You know that she will not speak to any one of the past; but if she did, what could we say? It is quite true that in all probability he would not have met Lord L—— if he had gone to London at the time that was first arranged; but,' she continued, with another sad sigh, 'what we have to do with is the present, not the past. The doctor thinks that, as Miss Elsie is feeling this so deeply, she is also teaching herself to repel the love of every one else, as something she does not deserve. In fact, he is afraid that this morbid state of mind may permanently affect her brain, if it is allowed to go on. Do you see what I mean, Hannah?'

It made me shiver to hear my fears put into such plain words—it made them seem so much more real; but I tried to answer quietly:

'I have been afraid of this too, madam, for some days.'

'Then you will understand how anxious we are to try this change of scene of which the doctor speaks quite hopefully.'

'Indeed I do, madam; and I will do my best to find out if Miss Elsie has any choice as to place. I may go with her, wherever it shall be, may I not?' I asked, anxiously. Could I bear to let any one else watch over my darling?

But my mistress's answer quite satisfied me. Indeed, it did more, for it brought the tears into my eyes at last, as she went on to thank me warmly

for all I had done for Miss Elsie. Coming from madam, these were valued words, and, though I did not deserve half of them, I have cherished them in my memory as real treasures.

I went back to my work and to puzzle my head over plans. How should I begin to talk over our journey with Miss Elsie? How could I get her to take any interest in this change of air?

While I thought, the nursery door opened, and Miss Elsie herself came in, walking wearily, as if she had not the heart to lift her feet from the ground, and one hand, in which she held her hat, hanging limply at her side. She sank into the easy chair, and I took her a footstool, saying:

'Has your walk tired you so much, Miss Elsie?'

'No!'

'Is your head aching, dear?'

'No!'

I took her hat and gloves into her bedroom, and came back with her knitting-basket in my hand. She used to be so fond of knitting, and I had kept it near her lately without any remark, hoping she might take it up one day.

When I began upon my own work again, she suddenly sat forward in her chair, and pressing her hands tightly upon the arm, as if to steady herself for what she was going to do, looked into my face with eyes that were, oh! so wild, and sad:

'Hannah,' she said, 'I can't go on like this!

I believe I shall go mad if I do! It is *horrible* to be reminded *every*where—I—I feel as if the trees and flowers—as if *every*thing pointed at me with cruel fingers, bidding me "remember!"' Her voice grew husky and trembled as she went on, and I dared not interrupt her. This was almost the first time she had begun to speak to me of her own accord; but I could not keep back a deep-drawn sigh of relief when I learnt, through her next words, of the trouble that had been so near us, but which had passed us by, through God's mercy.

'I—I nearly ran away last night. I stood in my room for a long while, *trying* to go. But it was so dark! and—and something kept me back. I think I wanted you to come with me, Hannah.' She said this hesitatingly, and with a dreary smile that it was pitiful to see.

'But,' she went on, 'I shall have to go, if you do not take me away, Hannah!' Her voice grew terribly earnest. 'If you love me—and I believe you do—take me far away from everybody. Let me hide myself, until I can learn to bear this pain! Take me away! take me away! oh! take me away!'

I put my arms round her. It was such a happiness to me to hear her owning how much she needed her nurse. And then I said:

'You shall go directly, dear. I know it can be managed, and I will see about it at once.'

She did not return my caress—that was too much to expect—but she did not draw herself away, and an easier look began to creep into her eyes as we talked.

'Madam is so kind,' I went on, 'that I am sure she will understand your wish. Will you not tell her about it, dear?'

But here, it seemed, I made a mistake, for she stood up and turned away from me, saying, shortly:

'I can't! No!—it is impossible!'

'Never mind; I'll manage it, Miss Elsie;' and then, filled with a desire to bring her to my side again. I said, almost without thinking:

'Shall we go to-morrow?'

'To-morrow!' A gleam that was almost pleasure sprang into her face, and she came and leant against me once more. 'To-morrow. How I wish we could! To-morrow!—as soon as to-morrow!'

After that I felt that, cost what it might of fatigue and difficulty, it must be done.

'Where shall we go, dear?' I asked.

'Where? Anywhere! as far as possible. Scotland, I think. I don't care. Let us go anywhere; it doesn't matter.'

Her dull restlessness was coming back again, and I was afraid to worry her by further questions.

As soon as I could, I ran down to the servants' hall, and begged Forbes to find out if madam was disengaged and could see me.

The doctor had just come, and was with her in the drawing-room, but I was sent for all the same.

They both seemed pleased to hear what Miss Elsie had said, and, though I felt rather ashamed of myself when I explained that I had been led to suggest going as early as the next day, the doctor said at once,

'Good! good! The sooner the better!'

'Was I afraid to go alone with Miss Elsie?' was the next question.

But why should I trouble you with all that was spoken about it? I had many instructions from the doctor as to what I should do for Miss Elsie if certain symptoms showed themselves, and he sent up some medicines for us to take with us. My chief directions were, to let Miss Elsie be as free to have her own way as I could, and to try and make everything she did cheerful and interesting, without fatiguing her. We were to take our tickets for Perth, breaking the journey twice on the way, that Miss Elsie might not be over-tired; and at Perth we could settle where next to go. I was to write to madam as often as I could, until Miss Elsie could be persuaded to write herself.

So it was arranged. All that night, and far on into the morning, Mrs. Samper and I were very busy; our heads in a whirl with trying to think of all we should want, our hands and arms aching with the work they had to do.

It had all been settled so suddenly that I felt as if I was living through one of those unpleasant dreams that sometimes come to busy folk—a dream of hasty packing, hurried 'good-byes,' and efforts to catch a train that never would be caught!

But on the following afternoon, when I found myself sitting in the corner of a first-class carriage, with Miss Elsie's white face opposite to me—with our bundles and baskets in the rack over our heads, and with the country scenes changing constantly as I looked through the window—I could realize that I must throw off this 'un-real' feeling; because upon my shoulders rested all the responsibility of my dear young lady's well-being.

When Mrs. Samper's and Christopher's hands had been waved to us from the platform of St. Pancras for the last time—when I was out of sight of their dear faces, Mrs. Samper's wet with tears at the 'good-byes' we had just been saying, and Christopher's trying to give me a cheery smile—you may guess how lonely I felt, and how I trembled to think of the time before us.

It was very much the same sort of feeling that had weighed me down on that day, now so long ago, when I had parted from my dear mother at the old cottage door, to go for the first time 'out to service.'

'Away from mother, who will tell me what is the right thing to do if I get puzzled?' That had been the question in my heart then.

And now I thought again: 'Away from all my kind friends, who will advise me in difficulties?' But a mother's prayers are never prayed in vain—a good mother's words live long in the hearts of her children.

So comfort came to me, in the remembrance of that quiet talk, when I had sat at my mother's feet one summer evening eighteen years ago. I fancied I could hear the earnest tones of her dear voice, as the words came back to me:

'Try to be faithful always unto prayer,' as the Good Book says, 'and when you're puzzled, child, God will make all plain. Prayerful and faithful, Hannah! Prayerful and faithful!'

Miss Elsie's hand, resting lightly on my knee, interrupted my thoughts, and called me back to the present. But my courage had revived, and, even in the faint smile with which my dear young lady answered me when I spoke to her, I read a hope of happier days to come. 'Surely,' I said to myself, 'this cloud is big with mercy,' and, some day, 'will break in blessings on our heads.'

CHAPTER VI.

God saw best
To plant the warfare in her own poor breast,
To make herself her hardest, bitterest ill.
MISS F. RYDER.

I AM afraid this story will take too long in the telling, if I linger over the next few weeks; and, indeed, they would interest me more to talk about than you to hear, for our wanderings led us along quiet ways, and we had no adventures.

At first the change seemed to do Miss Elsie good, and she was certainly brighter. But, alas! it was only a passing brightness, and she gradually sank back into the old, dull, listless ways, which were only varied by the more distressing fits of restlessness and wilfulness.

One thing she utterly refused to do, and that was to go home again. She even did her best at one time to prevent my sending any letters to

madam, until I promised her that I would say nothing in them about going South again.

During a long walk over one of the Scotch moors, we came, one day, upon a little lonely cottage, about four or five miles from the town of D——, and nestled in a quiet valley, far away from any other house. It had been built, I expect, for a shepherd, but was now untenanted.

To my great distress, Miss Elsie set her will, very perversely, I thought, upon living here; and she roused herself to unusual energy to get her own way.

You may be sure I found and made every objection I could think of, but my poor young lady insisted, getting so agitated at my opposition that, at last, I gave in. After several letters had passed between Madam Geary and myself, we settled into our new little home.

Hiring the simple furniture from Perth, and fitting it into the little rooms gave us a good deal of work to do at first, and we arranged with an old woman—a Mrs. Nairn, who was very deaf, and not at all companionable—to come and live with us. But it was a 'dree-some' place, as you may suppose.

Yet, as the days went by, I bore the loneliness more cheerfully, for I began to see that Miss Elsie had not been altogether unwise for herself in choosing this strange place to live in. Every now and then, at rare intervals at first, I saw some

thing of the old contented look coming into her face, which reminded me of the sun shining through a watery cloud. So I put aside the thought of my own dulness, to watch for those brighter glimpses of her old self.

You have heard that, soon after we had settled into the cottage, two ladies drove up to the little garden-gate, to ask their way. This was a very unusual event, and the sight of their happy faces did me a world of good, though I dared not ask them in. I had seen that wild, hunted look in Miss Elsie's eyes as she watched them driving into sight.

It is not about them, however, that I want to tell you; but of something really wonderful that happened to us later on.

By the doctor's advice, we were staying quietly on in our little lonely home. 'While Miss Perry seems to improve, and to like the "free unwatched life," as you say she calls it, do not try to make any change,' so he wrote to me; and Mrs. Geary said much the same in the short, registered letters which came once a month, bringing me the money for our housekeeping.

I told no one how much I dreaded the winter months—the long-lasting ice, the bleak winds, and the deep snow-drifts, all of which one is given to expect in a cold, north country like Scotland. But I need not have been afraid. It was just as that beautiful proverb says, 'God tempered the

wind to the shorn lamb,' and we had, that year, the mildest Christmas that has been known for a long time.

The winter passed away, and Easter was very near. We had been seven months in exile, as I called it to myself. Not that I shall ever regret the time spent in our silent valley. No! Lonely and uninteresting as my life was, it was happy with a sweet hopefulness; for in my heart I knew that a divine tenderness for my dear young lady's burdened heart had guided our steps to this resting-place.

But the best way will be to begin and tell you how Miss Elsie looked and spoke at this time, and then you will understand the difference of things.

It was one day in Holy Week. I remember this, because we were reading the daily Lessons together every morning, instead of the Psalms, as we generally did. I had been about my regular work of bed-making and room-dusting. Miss Elsie had lately offered to tidy our little parlour herself, and, though I could not bear to see her sweeping up the crumbs and brushing the hearth, I would not say her nay; taking it as part of the beginning of better days, that her activity was returning. This was shown, too, in the long walks she began to enjoy.

Upon this particular morning, when she had

finished, she came into the kitchen, where I was busy, my arms bare and floury to the elbow, and the deal table covered with baking tins and basins. I think it was apple-dumplings I was going to make, but I'm not quite sure.

'Hannah,' said she, 'it is too lovely a day for staying indoors; and, besides, I don't feel at all in the humour for sitting down quietly to an hour's reading.'

Then, seeing my preparations for a good morning's baking, she half smiled, and went on: 'There's no chance of your coming a walk with me this morning, I suppose?'

I looked a bit doubtful and reluctant as I answered: 'Well, I might leave this for an hour or so; but it does seem a pity, with all just ready to begin, and the oven moderate, as it should be.'

'Why should you come?' she said directly. 'I quite expected to have only my own company this morning. I'll go for a good brisk walk. Perhaps I may follow the flow of the burn; it is very full now, and those falls a mile or so up must be looking splendid to-day, with the sun shining upon them. I have had a fancy, ever since I opened my window this morning, that the splashing of the stream has been a voice calling me. So I shall go, I think.'

How I loved to hear her talk like this, and to watch the interest and animation which lit up her white face as she spoke!

'That's a good idea, Miss Elsie,' I said. 'Yes,

do go; and my old legs will not come lagging at your side, keeping your paces slower than you like.'

'Don't call yourself old, dear,' she cried, with unusual energy; and she stooped to kiss me, whispering, with a sigh, '*My* hair is whiter than yours, at any rate'; then, with a quick step, she climbed the steep little staircase, and I heard her moving to and fro in the bedroom over my head.

It was not often that I noticed—being so accustomed to it by this time—that lasting mark that her trouble had left upon her. And I did not think it fretted her much either, for she scarcely ever spoke of it—never as she had done just now—and it was only once in a way that I had seen her looking at her white wavy hair, when I brushed it out at night; looking, with a curious expression, that did not seem to me one of pain, but, I was going to say, almost of pleasure. Well, I fancied she was glad to have this little visible cross to bear; as if it were part of the punishment that she was learning to accept for her past proud self-will.

As I pondered over my work, a thought took me from my paste-board and out to the little larder, which was nothing more than a small shed standing in the garden. And when Miss Elsie came downstairs again, and out of the cottage door, I called to her:

'Miss Elsie, dear. Wait a bit; I want you to take something with you!'—then I put into her

hand my smallest market basket, in which was a bottle of milk and a little parcel of cake.

'What a careful old nursie you are!' she said, as she took it from me; 'and this is the way that you tempt me to make my walk a very long one. Suppose, upon the strength of this nice-looking lunch, I keep you waiting for your dinner, what will you say to me?'—and she walked away with a lighter step and a brighter look than I had seen for many a long day.

'God bless her!' I murmured, as I watched her crossing the moor and climbing down the steep burn-side. When she was quite out of sight—hidden from me by the overhanging trees and bushes—I covered my face with my hands and thanked God, with all my heart, for His merciful answering of our many prayers, and for His loving reward of our months of care and anxiety.

My heart was fuller than usual that day, and all because there lay in my pocket a letter which gave me, in plain black and white, the right to believe all I had been hoping about Miss Elsie's improved health. It was a kind note from my mistress, and one part of it said:

'I showed your last account of Miss Elsie to the doctor, and he wishes me to tell you that he thinks it eminently satisfactory in every way. Do your best to overcome her shrinking from seeing any one beside yourself; but do it gradually. Do not try to urge her to come back just yet. It is evident

that the fresh mountain air is putting her right, and the fact which you mention, of her growing interest in the scenes around her, is a very good sign. I think we may speak hopefully of a complete cure in a few months.'

It was this which made me feel so light-hearted and full of thankfulness; certainly, I did not see my way to bringing my dear young lady to meet other people besides deaf old Mrs. Nairn and myself, for she would never go with me into the town, and no one but the postman ever came near our cottage. But I knew a way would be found for me, if I couldn't find one for myself, and I did not have long to wait, as you will see.

I have only just mentioned Mrs. Nairn by name, but there's not much to tell you about her. She was quite old and very deaf, but not so feeble as you might suppose. She had come to live in the cottage with us on the understanding that, while we paid the rent and fed her, she did our washing and house-cleaning. It answered very well. But she was so silent—speaking, when she did say anything, with a croak like a raven—that we hardly got to know much about her; and she was so deaf, that I believe she knew very little about us, except that 'the puir bit lassie was unco' sad and whisht,' as she expressed it. She was a rare walker, as I hear so many of the Scotch women are, and she was generally the one to go into D—— to do our week's shopping and post our letters.

Upon the day about which I am writing, she had wrapped her head and shoulders in her large shawl, and gone off directly after breakfast, with her market basket on her arm and her hands busily knitting while she walked.

She was always knitting, if she was not scrubbing or sleeping. Her hands moved like a sort of machine, and were hardly ever still.

I did not expect her home until sunset, as she intended to go and see a sick daughter-in-law.

So I spent a happy morning over my baking. I managed, too, to turn off a successful pile of Scotch girdle-cakes, such as Mrs. Nairn had just been teaching me to make, on the round plate which hung close down over the fire. Then I took a turn at tidying and setting straight, which is, to my mind, one of the pleasantest kinds of work that is given to us to do. Do you know, there seems to me to be a sort of beauty in this 'setting to rights.' I hope I am saying it with all reverence, but it seems to me as if it were an humble following in our Saviour's footsteps, who is the God of order.

But that day, as I dusted and re-arranged the kitchen crockery on the little old dresser, and shook out the bit of carpet before the fire, I found myself giving more than one sigh for the pretty, airy nursery at the Hall, with its bright furniture and cosy red curtains; or for the well-filled still-room, and the pleasant chats that I used to have there with dear Mrs. Samper. But there! that was a

selfish sort of a feeling, and I found it best to change it.

When I got to the mantel-piece, and to dusting the china dogs that never would stand steady, I was quite taken a-back to see that the clock was pointing to half-past two! My natural thought was that Miss Elsie had taken me at my word, and was really making her walk 'a very long one.' So I felt no uneasiness, but sat down to have a bit of dinner by myself, and then to write a letter to Chris. Dear, dear! how long the months seemed since we had seen each other!

As I wrote, my thoughts travelled faster than my pen; but suddenly I was drawn back to the little cottage and the quiet valley by hearing a quick, eager, hard-breathing voice calling from the garden:

'Hannah! Hannah!'

I hurried out of the house.

Miss Elsie was standing on the other side of the low stone wall which ran round the cottage garden. Her tired arms were holding a large bundle; but I hardly noticed this at first, for I was so struck by the change in her face that I could see nothing else. Her eyes were shining brightly and keenly, her pale face was flushed and eager, and her hat had slipped to the back of her head, letting her white hair fall loosely over her temples. But, best of all, she looked as if a new happiness had come to her, which was big enough to hide the old sadness, for a time, at any rate.

'Hannah!' she cried again. 'Do come and help me, there's a dear! I'm afraid to leave go, and I can't manage to undo the gate. And oh! my arms *do* ache so.'

'What have you got? What have you found?' and my astonishment grew greater still as I saw the long thin leg of a little child slip from among the folds of her cloak, and dangle helplessly against the stone wall!

As I took the child into my arms, Miss Elsie said:

'I found him down by the burn-side, a good two miles away from here, I am sure; and it was the greatest mercy that he wasn't drowned. He was fast asleep, with his little head resting on one of the large mossy stones close to the water, and one leg actually lying in the stream! He looked as if he had fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion.'

I carried the child into the kitchen, and we undid Miss Elsie's cloak, which she had twisted round him.

The flickering fire shone upon the still and unnaturally white face of a little boy about four years old. Two little grimy hands lay upon his knees, and his bare feet and legs were icily cold.

'The poor little lad is so sound asleep, Hannah. He only spoke once all the time I held him in my arms, and then it was just one sad little wail for "Mother." He did not seem to hear when I asked him where his mother was. He is very fast asleep, isn't he?'

And, indeed, if it was sleep, it was a very heavy one.

I got Miss Elsie to rub the little blue toes in her warm fingers, while I did the same to his hands. But he never moved. I suppose the anxiety that I began to feel showed in my face, for I saw the eager light dying out of my dear young lady's eyes, and a fear coming there instead.

'What are you afraid of?' she asked, in a low voice. 'Nurse, is this something worse than weariness? Tell me.'

'Perhaps his damp bed has given him a bit of a chill,' I answered, as lightly as I could. 'We'll try a hot bath, dear. Will you take him while I fetch the wash-tub in?'

'No, no! Go on with what you are doing. You can do that better than I should'; and Miss Elsie was on her feet and out of the back door before I could stop her. With wonderful quickness she had rolled the tub in from the yard and placed it before the fire, and, as soon as I had taken off the little stranger-child's clothes, a steaming bath was ready for him.

'That looks a bit too hot for a child,' I said, as I came nearer with the little one wrapped round in my apron.

'But it feels only comfortably hot,' my young lady answered, stirring her small hand round and round in the water.

'Tuck up your sleeve and feel it with your elbow,

Miss Elsie. You'll tell better then if it's all right.'

And the quick way in which she drew her pink arm back as she dipped it in showed us both that another jug-full of cold water was needed still.

Then, unwrapping the limp little figure, I plunged him into the bath.

There came a little sobbing catch of the breath, a quivering of the arms and legs, and the child opened a pair of pale blue eyes. Fixing them upon me with an unknowing, dreamy look, he said, feebly :

'It's no' bed-time, mither.'

'Bed-time! Indeed, it *is* bed-time for little ones that are wet and cold, my poor baby,' I answered. But I suppose he missed the Scotch accent that his ears were accustomed to, for his white lips began to pucker sadly, and he turned, with more understanding in his eyes, and looked at Miss Elsie.

It was quite wonderful how she had been forgetting herself all this time, and how eagerly she had watched every movement of this little waif. She did not look like the same young lady. Now she said, cleverly using the Scotch accent in a way which surprised and delighted me :

'Dinna be greetin', my bonnie bairn!'

Her smile, as her eyes met mine, was full of enjoyment at the success of this speech, for the

little fellow's face unpuckered itself at once. He watched what I was doing with drowsy interest, and was no longer afraid of us.

When he was dressed again, I fetched a pillow from my bed and put it on the rug near the fire. Here, after he had swallowed some nice hot bread and milk, his fair little head found a comfortable resting-place, and he was soon sound asleep once more.

We stood looking down upon the sleeping child, and Miss Elsie told me again how she had found him lying by the stream.

'I called aloud at the top of my voice several times, hoping that his mother might be within earshot; but no one answered, and I could think of nothing else but to bring him to you. Besides, the child looked so very white and helpless that I was afraid he might faint if I left him to fetch you first. But, ah! I don't think I shall ever forget how heavy he was to carry.'

'Miss Elsie, dear,' I answered, 'there's one thought that you may carry with you always; and it's a good thought, too—one to make your heart full of thankfulness: you saved that little lad's life to-day. If I don't mistake, he was very near gone when you put him into my arms just now. I expect the poor little lamb has been wandering about for many hours, and perhaps all last night too.'

Miss Elsie's face, which had been turned to

mine all the time I was speaking, became suddenly lighted up with a glad look.

'Saved the little lad's life to-day?' she repeated, wonderingly, more than once.

Next, she walked to the window and looked out; but I don't think she was really taking any notice, even of the soft mountain rain that was covering the panes with little sparkling drops.

Her eyes were dimmed with another kind of rain when she came and stood by me again—that kind of rain which heals an aching heart.

'Hannah!' she whispered, as she rested her head against my shoulder, and I put my arms round her. 'Dear old nurse! If God has allowed me to save this little life to-day, He must have forgiven the past. Don't you think so?'

And, though my heart felt too full for words, I could answer:

'Ay! never doubt it again, dearie.'

CHAPTER VII.

Sufferings there are from Nature sprung,
Ear hath not heard, nor poet's tongue
May venture to declare;
But this as Holy Writ is sure,
The griefs she bids us here endure,
She can herself repair!

WILSON.

WE were obliged to put up our shutters and bolt the house door that evening without seeing anything of Mrs. Nairn. But we guessed, and rightly too, as we found out afterwards, that the storm of wind and rain which came suddenly upon us at sunset, shaking the cottage and beating the smoke down the chimney, and which lasted several hours during the night, had kept her from trying to cross the moor that afternoon.

Our little visitor was drowsy and heavy all the evening, and I put him early to bed in the funny little recess in my own room which served me as a bedstead.

Have you ever seen one of these old-fashioned contrivances? It struck me as very strange when I first went to Scotland; and I puzzled Christopher rarely in one of my letters by writing: 'We have no bedsteads in the cottage, and yet we manage to sleep as comfortably as if we had the very best.'

You see, the room upstairs had slanting sides, made by the shape of the roof, and the end farthest from the little window was partly boarded over, partly fitted with a low wide shelf in thin laths, and hung with curtains. This made a cosy place to creep into on cold, windy nights, and we soon learnt to avoid the projecting beams above our heads, which were the one drawback to these immovable bedsteads, and which obliged us to choose the outer side of the bed to sit up in. One thing I *will* say: I never knew a more difficult kind of bed to make!

What was it that awoke me that night with a sudden start? Some noise, hard and sharp enough to pierce my sleepy brain, and to set my heart beating with fear. It was a sound that I had never heard before, but which even I could not mistake.

That gasping, choking cry—croup!

The first dim light of the spring morning was shining in through my uncurtained window. I could see the poor child, half-sitting up in bed, and struggling for breath. I lifted him nearer the edge of the bed, and put a pillow to his back. Then—

almost quicker than it takes me to write it—I had got into my dress and was carrying him down to the kitchen, calling out to Miss Elsie, as I passed her door, to come and help me.

Now, indeed, I learnt the blessing of our smouldering peat fire and of the great sooty kettle which always hung from its hook in the smoke above it. After that night I never grumbled at it again, nor called it a 'dirty thing'!

Before Miss Elsie could get to me the poor little fellow was in the bath once more.

This seemed only to give him slight relief. His small face, which looked so white the evening before, was now flushed with the difficulty he had in breathing; and the blue veins at his temples stood out in a way that frightened me.

'What can I do to help you, Hannah?'

Miss Elsie spoke quietly, but she was pale and trembling; and I don't wonder, for she had never seen anything of sudden or serious illness.

'Fetch my medicine-box, dearie.' And then, as she was by my side with it in a moment: 'Thank you! Now the ipecacuanha. Put twenty drops into a cup, and stir it up with a little water.'

Carefully my young lady followed my instructions, and we managed without much trouble to get the child to swallow the medicine.

'A blanket next, Miss Elsie,' I said; 'and make it as hot as you can at the fire.'

When she had done this and brought it to me,

I was ready with the little sufferer out of the bath it seemed to have done all the good it would. We wrapped him round and round in the warm blanket. I wanted to try a remedy that dear old Mrs. Kingston once mentioned to me, and which now flashed into my mind.

I got Miss Elsie to put my chair nearer the fire—near enough for the child to breathe the steam from the kettle. Then she fetched a sponge, and we constantly dipped it in very hot water and held it to his throat.

That was all I could think of to do. What would have been our case if Mrs. Kingston had not providentially told me about the one attack of croup she had had to nurse, I cannot bear to think. I am sure I should never have known what to do otherwise.

So we watched.

At last Miss Elsie broke the silence:

'I am almost sure his face looks better. Don't you think so too, Hannah?'

And I could thankfully answer 'Yes.' The anxious look was gradually passing away from the hot little face that rested on my arm, and the breathing certainly came more easily.

He was wonderfully good, seeing he was among strangers, and seemed already to have taken quite a fancy to Miss Elsie, following her about with his wide-open blue eyes in a way that gratified her, I could see.

It was *her* good thought to warm him a cup of milk, which he drank, and with a funny little smile that reassured us both.

And how delightful it is to me to write of the real difference that this adventure had made in my dear young mistress! All the dull heaviness, and that oppressed look of one who carried a burden that was too heavy for her, seemed to have completely left her. How I hoped it might be for ever!

She bustled about, thinking of things of her own accord; helping me with the child so brightly, and with such a new look of gladness in her face—new, because it had not been there for so many months—that I felt indeed happy in watching her.

But other surprises were in store for me.

When we had breakfasted, I left Miss Elsie to hold the child on her knee near the fire, and went about the necessary house-work. We looked for Mrs. Nairn to return every minute, and I was anxious too that she should come, being still worried about the child. Though his cough came much less frequently, and he no longer breathed with such an effort, he was feverish and drowsy, and looked altogether unnatural.

Just then he was dozing, and Miss Elsie was sitting, quite motionless, in Mrs. Nairn's old wooden rocking-chair, with her hands clasped round him. She was watching his sleeping face with something very like a tear in her eye, while a happy smile played round her lips. I was not afraid that she would

weary of this new duty, though it was a 'sitting still' one.

My bedrooms finished, I went slowly down the steep little staircase, carrying my broom and pail.

Suddenly I stood still and listened.

Miss Elsie was singing!

The sound came very softly and sweetly through the open door, and with it the slow creaking of the old chair, as it rocked to and fro.

Lullaby! lullaby!

and then came these words. When and where had she sung them last, I wondered. Did she remember?

Life may be sad for us that wake,
Sleep, little bird, and dream not why;
Soon is the sleep but God can break,
When angels whisper lullaby.

By this time I was sitting down upon one of the steps, fearing even to let go of the pail or to stand down the broom. I wouldn't have interrupted the singing for anything. There was a sadness in it, it is true; but that she should sing again—and after all!

And was there not a sound of hope in her voice as she went on?—

Lullaby, lullaby, while the hours run,
Fair may the day be,
When night is done.

The soft lullabies gradually died away after this—the drowsy creaking of the rockers ceased; and very slowly I rose to my feet and entered the kitchen.

Miss Elsie turned a bright face to me.

'He's asleep again!' she said, softly. Then, as I came to her side, she added: 'Don't you think he looks very ill still, nursie? and does it sound well for him to make so much noise when he breathes?'

'No, you are right, dear. But what can we do more than we have done? If only we were nearer a town, and a doctor! If only——' I hesitated; and Miss Elsie's eyes seemed trying to read my thoughts.

'If only Mrs. Nairn would come back,' I went on; 'but then she would be far too tired to tear back over the moor again directly.' Again I stopped, puzzling over ways and means.

Then Miss Elsie said, 'Hannah! I have thought of a plan. No! I am not going to propose that you should go into D——. I think I should be afraid to be left here alone with this poor little fellow; I should not know what to do if he were to get worse again. But, *I* will go, if you like. Indeed I can do that; and perhaps I should go quicker than you would.'

'*You* go, Miss Elsie! *You!*' I cried, in my astonishment. But, checking myself, as I saw the deeper tinge of colour creeping into her cheeks, I allowed my feelings to find their vent in giving her a hearty kiss, and in saying only:

'Well, if you will do that, dearie, you will lift a load off my shoulders indeed. I can manage quite well while you're away, and Mrs. Nairn is safe to come soon. Very likely you might meet her as you go, and you might hurry her a bit.'

So Miss Elsie voluntarily went by herself into

the busy little town of D——, and she faced several strangers at the doctor's house. I cannot tell you how much she winced under the process, for I was not there to see. All I know is, that in less than two hours after I had said good-bye to her, there she was back again, driving up to the door in company with the kind old doctor. Her face was pale, it is true, but resolute and certainly happier.

Mrs. Nairn, who had returned about an hour before, and was now holding 'the sick bairn,' put some of my thoughts into words, when she croaked out:

'Eh! dearie me! It's an ill wind that blaws naebody ony gude. I'm dooting that this cauld blast, which has dreefted this puir bairn to death's door, has turned Miss Ailsie's boatie into the peacefu' waters ag'in.'

But 'death's door' did not open for the little stranger that day—nor will for many a long year, let's hope. With medicine, care, loving nursing, and, over all, God's mercy, he grew well and fairly strong. He had been very near a bad turn of inflammation of the lungs when Miss Elsie fetched the doctor.

Dr. McAndrew did his best to find out the child's friends, he advertised in the local papers; but I may as well tell you at once that we never heard anything, beyond what the little one would tell us himself.

And how much was that?

You shall hear.

That same day, in the afternoon, after the doctor's medicine had begun to tell upon the child, and he had slept quietly and naturally for some time, he woke up ever so much better and brighter.

Miss Elsie put him down on the rug and sat beside him. They were good friends already.

I was sitting with my needle-work at the table, but I laid it down to watch them. Miss Elsie took one of his little brown hands in hers and patted it.

'What's the wee bairnie's name?' she asked.

'Sandy,' he answered, readily.

'Yes! Sandy, for one name. Now tell me the other, dear!'

His funny little face twisted itself into puzzled wrinkles. He did not know what she meant. Miss Elsie tried again.

'What's *all* your name?' she asked.

'Just Sandy.'

My young mistress was quite baffled. But after a pause she tried another question:

'Where's mither, Sandy?'

'Mither!' he repeated, holding up his finger in the way children do when listening for something. 'Mither!' Then he looked earnestly into his new friend's face. 'Where *is* mither?' he asked in his turn. But he answered the question for himself, shaking his little head slowly from side to side: 'Mither's awa', mither's awa'!'

Yes! that was all Sandy knew, or at least could tell us, of that part of his life on the other side of his sleep by the burn. He understood the word 'father,' when I asked him if he had one, but only in its highest sense. It was a touching sight to see him fold his little thin hands together and shut his blue eyes tightly, when he heard my question. His small brain was trying to remember the prayer to Our Father in heaven which the Saviour Himself taught His children, of all ages and in all time, to use. From that moment we made no doubt that he was the child of a God-fearing woman.

But as to all the rest of our thoughts about him, they had to begin, every one, with 'perhaps,' or 'maybe.'

'Perhaps,' we said, 'his mother has died, and he has been left to the care of some relative, who was burdened by the responsibility and careless of the child's safety. Perhaps he has been stolen from his home, and has himself wandered away from his kidnappers. Maybe he has been intentionally deserted.' But this thought made us shudder; for it brought us to wondering what would have been the dear lamb's fate if Miss Elsie had not found him.

Do you say that it was chance which took her along the burn-side that morning? What is chance? This time, at least, it might be more properly called the staff of the Good Shepherd pointing out where His little wandering child was lying, deserted, perishing, and friendless.

So we had to be satisfied with the little—the very little—we knew about Sandy's history. And we gradually left off wondering what it was, for he became so thoroughly our little possession and delight, that we almost forgot he had ever been any one else's bairnie.

It was in the spring that God sent little Sandy to us to carry His message of new hope and forgiveness to my dear young lady.

When Sandy was well, the doctor drove out to the cottage one morning, bringing a note to invite Miss Elsie and the child to spend the day at his house, that his wife might see the little foundling.

Miss Elsie said a decided 'No' at first, and looked distressed at the proposal; but, after a minute or two, she thanked Dr. McAndrew quietly, and then asked me if 'I would be so kind as to get Sandy ready, while she put on her walking things.' The old doctor looked a bit surprised, but he said nothing, and never asked questions.

Mrs. McAndrew was a good friend for our young lady at this time. She was a great invalid, and had had many troubles; but nothing seemed to change her bright, cheerful spirit.

It soon became a regular thing for us to walk into D—— every Sunday, and, after church, to dine at the doctor's house before going home. Kind Mrs. McAndrew had made up her mind that distance was the reason why Miss Elsie had never been inside the little English church before. It was not

until Miss Elsie knew her very well, and one day lifted her reserve and showed her all the past, that she understood the real reason.

And then, about this time, I allowed myself to begin to think of the day when we might be going back to the Hall—to all my dear friends again—but above all, to Christopher.

Madam herself wrote very kindly to me about it. She requested me to talk it over with Miss Elsie, but advised us to complete the year in our little cottage, if she would consent. The day this letter came Miss Elsie sat down and wrote the answer herself. It was the first letter she had written since her illness, and it was very short. She asked me to read it and add anything more that I wished. But I sent it just as it was.

This is the letter:—

'MY KIND GUARDIAN,—

'I will do just as you wish about my movements. I feel I have much to make up to you, and that you have a very great deal to forgive. I hope to be able to show you, in a better way than words, when I return, how grateful I am to you for all your kindness, and how sorry I am for the past. Hannah is *very* good to me.

'I am always,

'Your loving

'ELSIE.'

The letter that madam wrote in reply was not

meant for any eyes, but my dear young lady's, and into them it brought tears that were like dew-drops with the sun shining upon them, for there was a smile mixed up with them too.

The summer came—a summer of unusual beauty, every one said. Indeed, it seemed so to me, for it was the happiest I had ever known; and so it seemed to my dear young lady too, after a bit.

We three—that is, Miss Elsie, Sandy and I—spent most of our days out of doors, and we learnt to love every stone and fern that bordered our favourite walk along the burn-side. And what with the thought of saying 'good-bye' to our 'green-house,' as we called it, and to Mrs. McAndrew, there was some amount of sadness mingled with the idea of getting back to the Hall once more. Not so much for me as for Miss Elsie, of course, for she dreaded the home-going perhaps more than she would let me see.

At the end of September we were to leave the cottage—so it was settled. But something took us home a week or two sooner, after all.

I have brought you, at last, to that part of Miss Elsie's story when a new friend can tell it better than I should, and indeed I am only too pleased to leave all the rest to her.

It is only here that the dear lady will allow me to say what I have been wanting to put in all along. It is this: There must be a great deal in my part of this story which is badly put together; there

must be a great deal which might have been told in a better way—things left out which ought to have been put in, and many things put in which might have been left out—but I hope you will excuse all this. I only promised to write down all I could remember about this part of Miss Elsie's story, because I felt my love for her had taught me, better than any one else, where the weight of her trouble lay heaviest.

And, should there be anything in the way in which I have told you this which has given you pleasure, you must be pleased to remember that all I am, and all I have learned, I owe, humanly speaking, to my three best friends—my good mother, Mrs. Samper, and my dear young lady.

PART III.

TOLD BY MISS MARY HAMILTON.

CHAPTER I.

There is a lesson in each flower,
A story in each stream and bower;
On every herb on which you tread,
Are written words which, rightly read,
Will lead you from earth's fragrant sod,
To hope, and holiness, and God.

CUNNINGHAM.

THE little town of D—— lies, in drowsy contentment, near the foot of one of our most beautiful Scotch mountains. It is out of the range of ordinary travellers, and is therefore very little known. To me, this quiet out-of-the-world-ness is one of its greatest charms; but it has many others. The whitewashed cottages and humbly decorated shops are the homes of kindly, simple and hospitable people, who live in unity with their neighbours, being presided over by the two genii of the place—the old 'meenister' and my kind friend Dr. McAndrew.

If you once chance upon D——, you will not be

satisfied until you can go again and give it more of your time and consideration. Apart from the historic interests which cling to certain old walls and gigantic earth-mounds, there is the greater delight of exploring the wonderful beauties that each fresh walk will show you; shady dells carpeted with the greenest, softest grass, and crowned with waving trees; silent caves with moss-grown sides and dark, unexplored depths of mysterious beauty; overhanging rocks, that hide under their heather-fringed brows a glory of unknown fern-growth, all damp and cool and delicious to the touch even on the hottest, sunniest day.

No wonder that the very next summer after my sister and I had lighted upon D——, during a long-to-be-remembered driving tour, I made my way there again. Alas! not with the same bright companion, but this time accompanied only by my maid Jane—a respectable, unimpeachable servant, who consented to bear with the discomforts of travelling, both for the sake of her genuine regard for my comfort, and in return for the liberal wages that she received.

We settled into our small but scrupulously clean lodgings towards the end of July, and I took an early opportunity of calling upon my old friend and school-fellow, Mrs. McAndrew.

Her cheery voice greeted me from the sofa as I was shown into her cool, shady drawing-room.

'Mary, at last! I have been watching for you all the morning. We heard of your arrival last night. Do not look surprised! Such an unusual luxury as a holiday visitor is too great a marvel to be kept quiet in sleepy old D——.'

I found a seat on the low chair beside her couch. A warm welcome, giving us the feeling that our coming is a real delight; how pleasant a thing it is!

We were quickly chatting over affairs, past, present, and future: referring to our three days' intercourse last year; gloating over the quiet hours together that we might promise ourselves during my two months' holiday this year; and speaking hopefully of possible meetings with those dear ones, just now so far from us, on the other side of the world.

'And now about yourself,' I asked, presently; 'how have you been since you last wrote? Does the heat try you as much as ever?'

'No, indeed,' she answered, brightly. 'Even Henry, dear old croaker as he is where my health is concerned, will tell you that I am much stronger. I have made several strides towards recovery lately. One move in the right direction is, that I get out for a drive every now and then. Once I achieved a five-mile journey, which was a great undertaking, and not to be often attempted. Talking of that drive reminds me that I have a new friend for you to see—a young girl with a story attached. That will please you, I am sure. Now, which will you have first—the story or the heroine?'

I laughed as I answered, 'You know my propensity for character-reading. I will hear the story *after* I have seen your friend. Is she a new schoolmistress, or some G.F.S. protégée?'

As I asked this question, the door-bell rang, and Mrs. McAndrew turned to me with a comical expression of anxiety: 'If this is Elsie Perry herself come to call, I shall be wearing a very conscious look when she comes in!'

The little housemaid knocked at the door.

'It will be just Mrs. Hannah, mem!' she said.

'Ask her to walk in, Kitty. Show her in here.'

I moved my seat to the bow-window, and then the door opened again to admit a middle-aged woman.

You have already had a description of Hannah Carlin; but that was as she looked nearly twenty years before.

What effect has time, care, and some amount of weighty responsibility had upon her?

I will tell you the impression she gave me as she stood that afternoon, after her old-fashioned curtsey to us both, and respectfully talked with the doctor's wife.

I was first attracted by the lovableness of her kindly brown eyes and the gentleness of her expression; yet I saw at once that there were those lines about her mouth which denote the firmness of purpose and the brave steadfastness of a strong character. Her pale, eager face and her brown

hair were both touched by the finger of Time, but lightly as yet, for the wrinkles were few, and the grey hairs easily numbered.

She wore a dark lilac print gown, such as our servants of to-day are apt to call old-fashioned, and despise in consequence; not seeing the neatness and respectableness that lie in its good washing qualities, and in the perfect simplicity of its cut. As the day was warm, a pretty close-fitting bonnet, trimmed with grey and white ribbons, and a square handkerchief folded over her shoulders, completed her dress.

Having from this superficial glance at our visitor satisfied myself that I saw before me one of the 'little and good' who still walk this old world, I began to listen with interest to the conversation.

Mrs. McAndrew was taking a delicate fern from a small tin box, and exclaiming:

'You must thank Miss Elsie very much, Hannah. What a perfect specimen it is, and the first I have ever seen! It will be one of the rarest in my fernery, if it only chooses to be happy in its new home.'

'Miss Elsie will be glad to hear that you are pleased with it, ma'am.'

'Indeed I am; and do you know where she found it?'

'Yes, ma'am. I was to be sure and tell you that, too. Miss Elsie said it would make the fern still more interesting to you, when you knew that she

discovered it close to the spot where she first saw our little Sandy. That is about two miles up the burn-side from our cottage, and a little bit this side of the waterfall, if you remember, ma'am.'

'Yes, I think I know the place; I was there some years ago. And now, when I look at this fragile fern, I shall connect it not only with your young mistress, but with Sandy too. It will help to remind me of you all when you go South again—a day that I am not looking forward to with the least feeling of pleasure.'

'And we shall all be sad, ma'am, too, when the time for saying "good-bye" comes; Miss Elsie most of all, I think.'

'Yes, I expect she dreads leaving her quiet nest; but her strong will is working in the right direction now, and there will be no fear of her sense of duty failing when the time comes. What a happiness it must be to you, Hannah, to see her so entirely herself again!'

'Indeed, ma'am, it seems almost too good to talk about even yet. Things have worked round for good in a wonderful way.'

'And are you never puzzled to think *why* God thought it wise to lay this trouble—such a heavy one, too—upon your young mistress?'

Mrs. McAndrew's visitor had evidently forgotten my presence, and had been speaking her thoughts unrestrainedly, as she would in the freedom of a *tête-à-tête*. So now her pale face flushed a little, as

she answered readily, and with a smile of glad conviction in the truth of what she was saying:

'I used to wonder sorely, at first, ma'am. But, though I don't understand it all, or nearly all even yet, I know for certain that it is His loving hand leading my dear young lady; and that is enough for me.'

'You are right—very right. That is a thought to make us brave, whatever happens.'

After a pause, Mrs. McAndrew continued:

'I have several times wanted to ask you, Hannah, whether the hope that Mr. Guy Sulden may have been picked up by a passing vessel has been proved a vain one? Have you never heard any tidings of the ship since she sank?'

'None, ma'am, none indeed;' and I noticed that the woman's lip quivered sensitively. 'The most hopeful have given up hope long ago. Nowadays news travels so fast that we must have heard if Mr. Guy had survived.' Then she looked earnestly at Mrs. McAndrew, and asked, hesitatingly, 'You're not meaning, ma'am, that you've heard anything of the Albatross?'

'Was that the name of the vessel? No, Hannah. If I had, do you think I could have kept it to myself while we have been chatting? As you say, a year is a long time for silence nowadays, and it would be foolish to indulge in even the faintest hope.'

After a little further conversation, Hannah Carlin

went away, to have a cup of tea in the kitchen, and my friend turned to me, saying:

'There goes one whose life is regulated by

> The faithful love,
> Through constant watching wise,
> A heart at leisure from itself
> To soothe and sympathise.

And I answered:

'Then take that as the quotation with which to head your story, and proceed at once to tell me all you can about this wise Hannah and her young mistress.' For by this time I had altered my decision, and, instead of waiting to see Miss Elsie, I wished now to be introduced to her story first. The scattered threads which I had gathered during Hannah's visit had greatly excited my curiosity; and Mrs. McAndrew was quite ready to tell me all she knew of Elsie Perry's past.

Two days later, and armed with my small luncheon-basket, a book, and my indispensable pencil and paper, I sallied forth for a long ramble.

After nearly an hour's walking, during the last mile of which my path lay beside the course of the burn, up towards its source, I settled myself, with a sense of loneliness which was almost overpowered by my delight in these beautiful surroundings, beside the wooden bridge that spanned the water near the foot of the falls.

'The sound of many waters' rang in my ears.

It was the glad cry of the river as it rushed on to the distant sea. It was the 'never-pausing never-ending story' that the stream was telling to the moss-laden stones and the graceful waving ferns.

A clear pool lay at my feet, and in its depths a saucy fish darted in and out among the round stones with which it was paved; then took a merry leap upwards—out into the air and sunshine —making fairy rings and ripples as it splashed to its home again.

The rocks all around me were lavishly supplied with Nature's daintiest treasures—those hundred varieties of ferns that cling lovingly to their sides, laying their fresh green leaves against the cold brown rocks, beautifying ugly rents and fissures, and crowning unwieldy crags.

The surface of the pool was suddenly flecked with a few rain-drops. Splash! splash! they fell through the summer air. Dame Nature must have been shedding tears of joy!

How happy and 'at home' everything looked! Everything, except the 'busy, whispering, not unfriendly, pleasantly companionable river,' which hurried on, to lose its individuality in that vast ocean that some one has called 'the wide cemetery which buries all things in its tomb of liquid crystal.'

Down the gully whirled the river—rushing among the round and polished slabs, and then falling over the boulders with a cloud of dazzling

spray that kissed the leaves of the overhanging trees as they reached down from the rocks above, waving a kind farewell to the impetuous traveller with their long green arms.

Here, on a moss-covered stone, and with another leaning one for my back, I sat in a state of drowsy enjoyment, taking in, with dreamy delight, all the little touches of the picture before me—pondering over Lamartine's words, 'Details are the little morsels out of which God makes the whole,' and applying my thoughts to 'men and things.'

Presently my eyes were attracted by a piece of paper which lay half-hidden under one of the stones to my left. I took it up. It was an unfinished effort to turn the song of the falling waters into rhyme, and was written with pencil in a pretty, girlish handwriting.

As you will see, it was the work of an inexperienced hand; but the thoughts attracted and pleased me, and I read them through more than once.

This is what I read:—

'THE ROMAN, THE BURN AND I.'

I.—*The Roman.*

'An' where ha' ye come frae, wee bit burn,
Rushin' an' greetin' sae sairly?
Willna' ye bide in this bonnie glen?
Ay! an' I'll welcome ye fairly!'

II.—*The Burn.*

"I'm oop an' awa'," cried the noisy stream,
"I maun gang the gait o' the ithers!

I canna' but greet, as I wander sae fleet,
Thoo' the warld bids us gae fra' our mithers.

An' gin I maun gang, bid me get me awa',"
"Awa!" cried the water-kissed Roman.
"Full fine is the sea, life is wider an' free;
Coom thy ways fra' the bit ferns an' gowan."

III.—*And I.*

So the swift, bustling burn hurried on to the sea,
And grew stronger and purer in going.
But I fancied that oft 'neath its sparkling smiles
I could catch a sad sound in its flowing.

A sigh of regret for the still, sheltered pool,
With its bright, blushing fringes of heather—
A quivering sob, as the clouds, frowning low,
Spoke, with chilled breath, of life's stormy weather.

And I thought of the tears that our sad hearts have shed.
When the sea called our dear ——'

I put the paper between the leaves of my book, and looked about for the author—fruitlessly, of course, for I was quite alone.

My book absorbed me for the next hour, and the discovered manuscript was forgotten.

But, after a while, my studies were interrupted, and my ears attracted by the sound of happy laughter. Looking down the stream, I saw a little below me, and partly hidden by a huge projecting boulder, a young girl and a little child. They were seated close to the water's edge, and a glance was sufficient to tell me their names—Elsie Perry and Sandy.

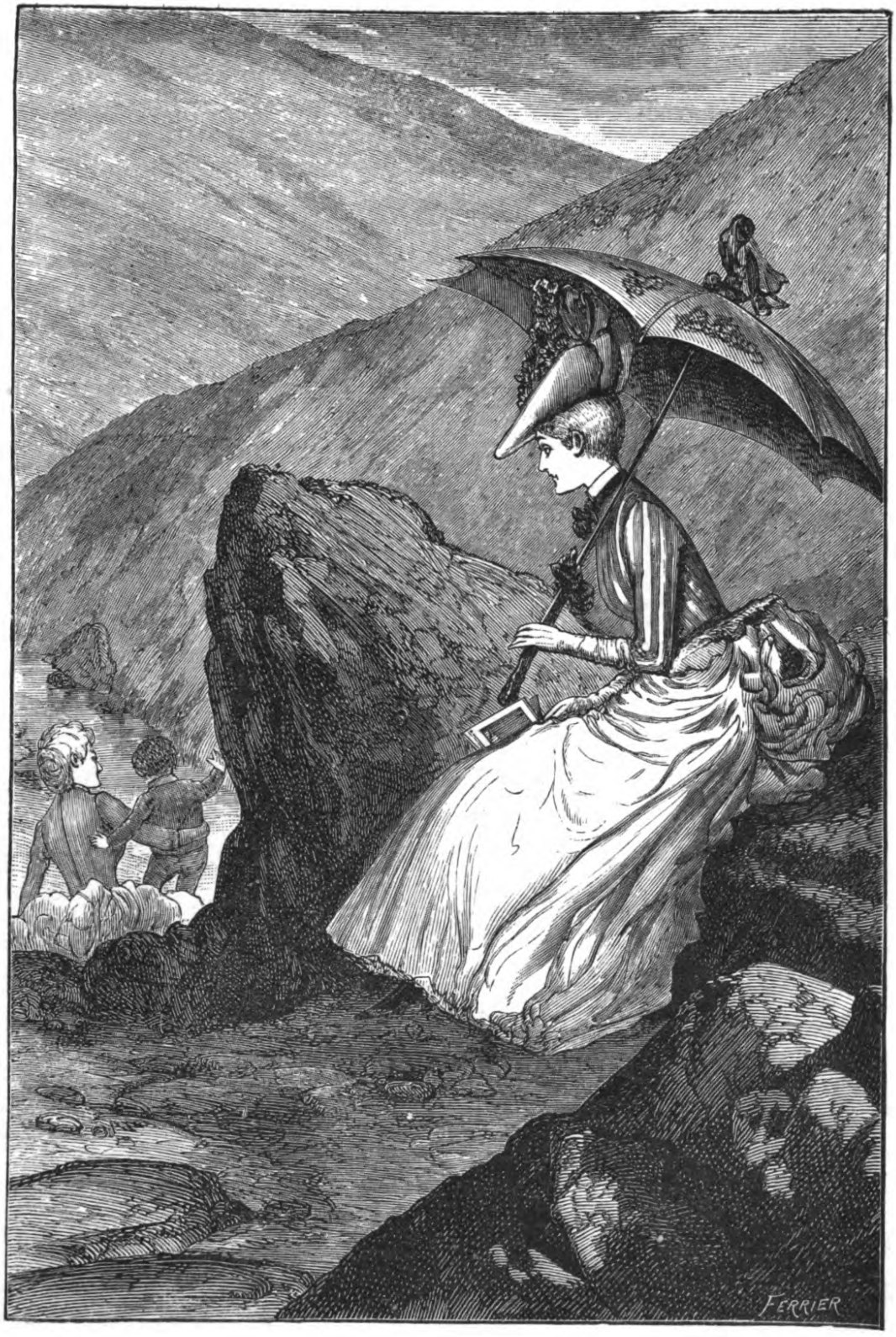
The former had taken off her hat, and her white hair, looking so strangely incongruous against the childish roundness and the healthy freshness of her face, reminded me of Chaucer's quaint simile of the locks 'as white as the daisy.' Yet something about the stoop of the shoulders—a certain want of erectness—helped me to remember the miserable face that we had seen at the cottage window a year ago, though peace and trust were now the expressions which had taken the place of that look of despair.

Elsie was throwing pebbles into the stream with one little ungloved hand, while the other held firmly to Sandy's belt. The child's delight at the splashing water and widening circles was pretty to see. He clapped his hands, and laughed aloud—often turning his saucy face to look at his companion, as if asking her to laugh with him. And when a larger stone than usual slipped from her hand, and fell into the water at their feet, flinging sparkling drops into their faces, she too laughed as merrily as he.

I shut up my book and watched them, wondering when they would find out that a third person was enjoying the fun. It was little fair-haired Sandy who first discovered me.

'Miss Ailsie!' I heard him exclaim. 'Miss Ailsie! bonnie leddie.'

Then our eyes met, and with a heightened colour—whether of embarrassment or pleasure,


FERRIER

I could not be sure, probably the former—she got up and came towards me, still holding the child by the back of his striped blouse.

'You are Miss Perry, are you not?' I said. 'And I am Mary Hamilton, Mrs. McAndrew's old schoolfellow.'

She smiled brightly as she took my offered hand.

'Hannah told me that Mrs. McAndrew had a visitor the other day, and that is rather unusual in this quiet corner of the world, you know.'

'Well, now that we are introduced so comfortably,' I continued, 'we will take each other on trust, and be friends, shall we? Sandy, too, must get to know me better. I am a famous pedestrian, and shall be over here constantly; for I have fallen a victim to the charms of this beautiful burn-side.'

'Ah! then yours is love at first sight. As for me, it was only bit by bit that I learnt to care for the stream, or to understand anything of the beautiful language it speaks.'

By this time Elsie had found a seat on the grass beside me, while Sandy was happily employed, at my feet, in burying two rows of little teeth in one of the sweet oatmeal buns from my basket.

In this way my friendship for Hannah's Miss Elsie began.

It led to a very frequent intercourse, from which I derived much pleasant companionship during what I had expected to be a rather lonely holiday.

A friendship also grew between my maid Jane and Hannah, which, as they have much in common, promises to wear well.

It was some days before I thought of asking Elsie Perry whether the little effusion I had found could have been the creation of her brain. When I questioned her she blushed a little.

'Yes,' she said; 'I scribbled it down one day, when I fancied I was in a poetic frame of mind. I thought the burn had carried the lines away long ago. Please tear them up or burn them. What rubbish you must have thought them! But I suppose most people have a notion, at some time in their life, that they can write poetry. As for me, living among these beautiful surroundings has taught me one thing: I have learnt that I cannot, and never shall be able to, do more than string a few rhymes together for Sandy's amusement. How could I ever translate the language of the singing river?'

I was not quite sure that Elsie *did* lack the power of reading Nature's story; but I remembered that we have been told 'those are the happiest whose lives are too busy to allow them to be tagging rhymed common-places together,' and I waited to know more of my new young friend before combating her depreciating estimate of her own powers.

CHAPTER II.

Eh! there's trouble in this world, and there's things as we can never make out the rights on. And all as we've got to do is to trusten, Master Marner.

GEORGE ELIOT.

'MISS HAMILTON! Miss Hamilton!'

The voice of peremptory summons, and a no less decisive tap on the glass, drew me quickly to my sitting-room window.

There sat the good old doctor in his gig before the house-door. He was waving aloft the long handle of his whip, with which he had emphasised his summons; and he looked smiling, but very warm. For the morning was one of the hottest we had yet known this summer—so sultry, in fact, that I had reluctantly given up my plan of going over the moor to my 'green-room,' by the burn-side, and had betaken myself to a morning of letter-writing instead.

'Ah, Miss Hamilton! We've got summer

weather at last. Phew! I'm o'er hot already, and what shall I be when my drive's done, no' to mention my pure auld Bess?' (this was his horse.) 'But there! the gude wife said you would be hungering for the cool air by yonder burn, and as I must cross the moor this morning—for I'm bound for the town of H——, which is a matter of twelve miles away—here is the auld gig that will take you fairly on your way.'

'But will not an extra passenger be too much for Bess?' I asked.

'Noo, noo! We'll take her gently. Gentle's aye the best.'

I smiled at the quaint phrase which might have been the motto upon which his life was moulded.

'Then I'll be ready in a minute,' I said, 'and thank you for the kind thought.'

As I turned from the window I heard him say, 'It's no me, but just the gude wife.'

In less than five minutes I had climbed to the seat by his side, and we were rattling over the 'kidney' stones of the High Street—with a blue cloudless sky above us—the noble 'fir-crowned mountain rising grim and grand behind—and in front the wide-spreading moor, with its bright alternating patches of heather and gorse, and with its surface broken here and there by clumps or belts of trees, marking the course of the little river D——.

The pleasant conversational powers of Dr.

McAndrew made the drive seem unusually short and, in spite of the heat and general sleepy sultriness of the atmosphere, I felt almost regretful as he drew up near one of those tree-lines and helped me to struggle down from my lofty perch.

'I shall be driving back about three o'clock,' he said, 'and if you have not wearied o' that noisy burn long before then, Bess and I will be pleased to escort you home again.'

Having settled that if he did not find me on the look-out at the appointed time he should not wait, and pooh-poohing the thanks I offered him for his full measure of kindness, he roused sleepy old Bess with that click of the tongue supposed to be peculiarly adapted to a horse's understanding, and they continued their journey.

But before I had achieved the difficult process of climbing the old stile which protected the entrance to the glen, and while I was in a position very embarrassing to the dignity of an old maid, I heard Dr. McAndrew's hearty voice calling to me from the distance :

'Miss Hamilton! I've let something slip my mind. Should you see any of the cottage folk, the gude wife wants you to find out if they ever see the daily papers.'

In spite of my confusion at the awkwardness of my undignified situation, I managed to make my old friend hear the 'Very well' which I called out in answer.

He nodded, and then shouted back, 'I'll explain why she would wish to find this out when I see you. Find it out deeplomatically.'

Then he went on his way, and I continued my struggle with the stile, and puzzled my brain with trying to guess what this commission might mean.

Seated in my special nook, I gave myself up to the enjoyment of the hour, and—shall I confess it? —dozed a little after my drive in the hot sun.

And presently up the glen came little Sandy and Mrs. Hannah, as she was generally called; the 'Mrs.' being a small title of dignity which her respectability and faithfulness seemed naturally to call for.

I had now known the 'cottage folk,' as Dr. McAndrew had called them, for more than three weeks—three weeks of pretty close intercourse. Two days never passed without our meeting either here, by the talkative little river, or in Mrs. McAndrew's pleasant drawing-room. My friendship had, in fact, reached that depth when my eyes could read, and interpret tolerably correctly the changes of expression in their faces. You see that I include dear Mrs. Hannah in my friendship, for I own I feel privileged to have become intimate with this worthy and true-hearted woman; nor could I help admiring her unselfish and untiring devotion to her young mistress.

Now, as she came nearer, I saw at once that something had ruffled her motherly feathers. Her

kind eyes looked anxious, and though Sandy's boyish pranks brought the ready smile to her lips, it died away much quicker than usual, leaving an expression of sadness in its place.

'Good morning, Mrs. Hannah. Where is Miss Elsie to-day?'

'Good morning to you, ma'am;' and then came the invariable curtsey. 'Miss Elsie, ma'am, has gone for a longish walk. She begged me to say that she would come presently to see if you were here. She is rather sadly to-day, ma'am, and I thought the walk might do her good.'

'Sit down, Mrs. Hannah,' I said. 'Here,' and I moved my luncheon-basket from the smooth stone at my side to make room for her. Then, as Sandy trudged off to play with some pebbles and moss, at a safe distance from the water, and when she was seated, I continued: 'Something is worrying you, is it not? Can you tell me what it is? or mustn't I ask?'

Mrs. Hannah smiled. 'You are very kind to me, ma'am, and if it is not troubling you, it *would* ease me to tell you the two things that have made me a bit anxious to-day.'

'You know that it never troubles me to hear about anything that concerns you or Miss Elsie. What are these two anxieties? Not bad ones, I hope.'

'I hope not, ma'am. Indeed, one does trouble me less to-day, and the other, I expect, troubles me

chiefly because I don't understand it. The first thing is that yesterday was the anniversary of the day that my dear young lady heard the bad news about poor Mr. Guy. I hoped she might not remember the date; but she found it out easily enough, and she was terribly down all day. She looked so white and heavy-eyed, and her hands were so hot and dry, that I made sure she was going to be ill again.'

'But how did she find out the day of the month?' I interposed. 'You do not see the daily papers, do you?' This was a golden opportunity to ask Mrs. McAndrew's question, and, if I was to be 'deeplomatic,' I must not let it slip.

'No, ma'am, never; unless Madam Geary happens to send one when she sends a parcel of books. It was when we began to read the Psalms for the day, as we always do. That was how she remembered it.'

'And how is she to-day?'

'I am almost certain she is better, ma'am. And if so, it must be all along of Sandy, dear little man. He couldn't understand why Miss Elsie did not play with him as usual, and he tried in such funny ways to make her laugh. It did amuse me, in spite of my worrying, to see him run out of the room and come in again, after a minute, with a crochet antimacassar over his head and another round his shoulders, and his bright eyes twinkling through the holes. He walked up to Miss Elsie,

strutting along with his head in the air. 'Sandy's a braw leddie,' he cried. Then, when she paid no attention to him, he added, '*Tak*' a look at wee Sandy, Miss Ailsie,' in such a pleading voice that she could not resist him, but took him up on her knee and kissed him. That was only one of the many ways in which he tried to get her to share his play. He has succeeded better this morning, and she played with him after breakfast, and seems to be getting more like herself again.'

'Then we will hope that anxiety number one is passing you by. And now about number two?' I asked.

'It's mostly to do with these two letters that I got this morning, ma'am, just before we came out;' and Hannah held two envelopes towards me.

'Do you wish me to read them?'

'If you would be so good, ma'am.'

So I opened the first, and read a short letter written by Mrs. Samper, the old housekeeper of the Hall. It simply told Hannah that her brother was coming up to Scotland, by Madam Geary's wish, to spend a few days—a well-earned holiday—with her. He would arrive on the day following the receipt of the letter. The only part of the note which I did not quite understand was the postscript, which ran thus:

'Christopher is the only person that can be sent. Madam had thought of coming herself, but she is really unfit for so long a journey.'

I looked at Hannah.

'How happy it will make you to see your brother again!' I ventured. 'You have been parted nearly ten months, have you not? And this is a letter from him, I suppose?' and I took the other note and read:

'DEAR HANNAH,

'Madam as kindly wished me to com and see you for a few days. The jurny is onexpected. But my mistress says news is better told than ritten. i shall be at D—— on the 28th—that is two days from this. Hoping I shall find you and Miss Elsie wel and happy, as it leves me at present. i conclude myself

'Your loveing brother,

'CHRISTOPHER CARLIN.'

Again I looked at Hannah. Even the delightful prospect of seeing her dear brother so soon, and after such a long separation, could not conquer the real anxiety with which these letters had filled her mind.

I saw at once that she was dreading some new trouble—some new burden of grief—for her young mistress.

'Miss Elsie does not know of these letters?' I asked.

'Not a syllable, ma'am! She was gone for her walk when they came. I'll tell her that Chris

is coming for a holiday; but I'd burn the letters sooner than she should see either of them.' Hannah paused, and then said suddenly: 'Do you believe in dreams, ma'am? Because, if so, it's ill news that Chris has to tell us.'

'I cannot answer your question with a decided "yes" or "no," Mrs. Hannah; for I do, and I don't, which is as unsatisfactory an answer as you can wish. But let me ask *you* a question, which may serve the same end: How long is it since any one gave you a scolding?'

It was quite ludicrous to see the puzzled expression on the good woman's face as she replied:

'Why, ma'am, not since I left the Hall, for sure, and not for some time longer than that, I expect.'

'Then a thorough scolding you will assuredly have from me if you let any dreams or forebodings shake your faith and trust in the loving Father who overrules all for our good, and—though you seem for a moment to have forgotten this—may be preparing a great blessing both for you and Miss Elsie, even while you are meeting imaginary troubles more than half-way.'

I saw tears in Hannah's eyes, as, laying my hand on her arm, I continued:

'I think you are feeling overdone with the strain of your long spell of care and anxious watching; and then, perhaps, your alarm about your young mistress yesterday has made you look at everything

through green spectacles. What the news is I cannot guess; but I feel sure that, if it had been sad, one of these letters, at least, would have given you a hint to that effect. One thing more I see. Your brother says, "Well and happy, as it leaves me at present." Would you suspect him of *happiness* if he were coming to bring a troubled message? Come, Mrs. Hannah! Where is the brave heart "that will not be afraid of any evil tidings"?'

My words had gained their end.

'You've made me feel really ashamed of myself, ma'am; and thank you kindly. I'll believe the best until I am told the worst, and I won't worry until I'm certain. And there's Miss Elsie coming at last. She's looking better already; don't you think so, ma'am?'

So Elsie joined us, and, though she certainly looked tired and was very quiet, talking little, and sitting with her hands in her lap and her eyes watching the clear rushing waters with a wistful look in their blue depths, I was surprised to see her as much like herself after the gloomy forebodings I had just heard. I took an opportunity of telling Mrs. Hannah what I thought, and we all parted that afternoon with tolerably cheerful faces. Perhaps I should have lingered longer in our shady green-room if I had known that it was the last we were all to spend there together.

You will think I am telling you very little about

Master Sandy. Do not think it is for want of anything to tell about him; but he has appeared upon the scenes rather late in my story, and has been working his small mission very quietly and unobtrusively, though none the less satisfactorily. Yes; he deserves to be better known, and some day we may meet him again and become better acquainted.

That same evening I was sitting in the doctor's drawing-room with my pince-nez carefully poised upon the bridge of my nose, while I read and re-read the following newspaper paragraph:—

'Lloyd's agents have at last been able to furnish us with news of the tragic end of the ill-fated s.s. Albatross, which was last summer correctly reported to have sunk in the Pacific Ocean, with all on board. A Mr. Guy Sellon has just returned to England, after passing through a series of adventures which would fully warrant the phrase "stranger than fiction." Tied to a plank, and in a state of insensibility, he was picked up by a Chinese fishing vessel, after nearly two days' immersion. Serious reverses attended them before they could reach Hong Kong; and the unfortunate English traveller fell from the rigging just before they landed, incurring such severe injuries that he lay for weeks in a state of semi-consciousness, from which he passed into a long and tedious illness. As soon as he could be moved, and never suspecting that he was the sole survivor of the wreck, he made his way

to England. These facts have reached us, but we shall anxiously look for his detailed account of the terrible fate of the Albatross and its ill-starred passengers and crew,' etc., etc.

Mrs. McAndrew had been silently watching my face, hoping to guess my thoughts, and when I laid the newspaper down and looked across at her, she asked, eagerly, 'Well, Mary?'

'My dear,' I exclaimed, 'it *must* be the same! The alteration in the surname would be such a natural mistake. Moreover, I have heard to-day that Christopher Carlin, Mrs. Hannah's brother, is coming here at once with news of some sort, and I cannot doubt that this explains what he has to tell. Ah! me. How will that poor Elsie bear the shock of this sudden happiness after the suffering of the past months? And upon whom will fall the anxious task of telling her?'

'Everyone will be ready to shrink from undertaking it; but I feel certain that my good-hearted Henry would perform the task far better than anyone else. At least, I know by sad experience how wisely he can break ill news. But we must wait with what patience we can to see what to-morrow brings.'

CHAPTER III.

A change came o'er the spirit of my dream :
The wanderer was returned.

BYRON.

IT seemed that someone else besides his loving little wife believed in Dr. McAndrew's wise capability for telling good or evil tidings; for the following morning, before he was ready to start on his rounds, a tall, broad-shouldered stranger presented himself at the surgery door, enquiring if the doctor was at home.

He was shown into the library, where the doctor usually saw his patients. After a respectful tap on his forehead with his fore-finger, he stood in shy confusion near the door, turning his soft felt hat round and round in his big hands, fixing his eyes on the carpet, and looking the picture of embarrassment.

The doctor did not at once guess who this visitor might be, but he addressed him kindly, asking :

'And what can I do for you?'

Recalled to the importance of his errand, the man began to forget his nervousness.

'May I be speaking to Dr. McAndrew?' he asked.

'Ay! man.'

'Then, please, sir, I take it as you are the kind friend of our young mistress, Miss Elsie?'

'And you will be Christopher Carlin! Is it not so?' asked the doctor in his turn.

'If you please, sir. And I am sent to you by my mistress with this note; I was to wait while you read it, sir, and then do just as you thought wise to direct.'

Dr. McAndrew opened and read the letter which Christopher produced from the depths of a huge coat pocket. He read it with many ejaculations of 'So!' and 'Eh! eh!'—then sat and looked at it in silent thought for several minutes.

'It's a wonderfu' tale indeed!' he said, musingly, at last, 'and we must tell it to Miss Elsie with unco' care. Eh! but it's no' so purely glad as we were hoping. Puir lassie! I'm fearing it will always be the bitter wi' the sweet while this crooked auld world goes round. Sit down, man, sit down!' he went on, turning to Christopher. 'I must show this letter to my wife. But in a few minutes we will drive to the cottage, and I will think how best to convey these tidings to your young mistress.'

And thus the good old man accepted, with his

usual unselfishness, the difficult task assigned to him by a complete stranger.

He bustled out of the room; but, prompted by the kindness that was the growth of sixty years' thoughtfulness for others, immediately looked in again to ask his visitor whether he had walked from W——, their nearest station, and nine miles away.

Christopher rose to his feet, rather stiffly, as he answered:

'Yes, sir. There was no cart coming this way till noon—none as I could discover, at least.'

'Good! Then rest there until I come back;' and Dr. McAndrew went off to find his prime meenister, as he playfully called his clear-headed little wife.

Five minutes later, and the tired traveller was enjoying a cup of broth such as the Scotch know so well how to produce, and making havoc among a toothsome pile of buttered scones; and soon afterwards, with his body refreshed, and his slowly-working tongue considerably loosened by this unexpected kindness, Christopher Carlin took his seat in the doctor's gig.

Having taken counsel with his better-half, the kind old doctor had made his simple plans, which he now proceeded to communicate to his companion. They were, he said, to go together to the cottage, and when the first excitement of his arrival was over, Christopher was to come out of the cottage to hold the horse, and bring Hannah out with him, thus leaving the coast clear for the doctor to talk

to Miss Elsie, and to tell her everything in his own way, at his own time, and without interruption.

As for the doctor's other patients, they got little attention that day. There was old Mrs. Carnegie, laid by with a 'twirr-r-ling in her side.' She always expected, as her daily due, ten minutes, at least, of the doctor's valuable time, and the same liberal measure of his unfailing sympathy in her mournful list of 'seemtoms.' But that day, for the first and only time, he failed her. There were no serious cases of illness in the little town, and probably the doctor's neglect of the few mild ailments for just twenty-four hours did not do the sufferers more harm than good. Do not think that I am depreciating the doctor's skill as a physician. I am guilty of no such treachery. I am only suspecting the inhabitants of D—— of failing in a full appreciation of the blessing he is to them.

Now the gig draws up at the cottage, and Hannah, already on the look-out, is at once almost lost in the embrace of her great brother. It was a glad meeting—delightful to both; but in Hannah's eyes there was a questioning restlessness, which Dr. McAndrew was quick to see. Miss Elsie, after a few words of kindly greeting to her old friend—the Big Boy of long ago—had gone into the little sitting-room to look for Sandy. Thither the doctor followed her.

And shall we go too? Or shall we listen to what the brother and sister are saying, as they stand

together near old Bess—Chris, with one hand on the bridle and the other resting upon his sister's shoulder; Hannah looking up at him with a face full of eager, anxious questioning?

We will stay out here in the August sunshine, and, with implicit trust in the wisdom with which Dr. McAndrew will tell all to Miss Elsie, we will hear the story from Christopher Carlin's lips.

'It's good news we've brought, Hannah, girl,' he was saying. 'There! don't begin to shake now. You're thinking of the "wee missie," I'll be bound. But yon good gentleman's telling her everything a deal better nor either of us could.'

'Oh! Chris, tell me quickly—is it—can it be news of—of Mr. Guy?'

'Ay, lass, in course it is! The sea's given back its dead—only he never died, after all. And he's back home now, at the Vicarage this very minute! If only Miss Elsie can bear to travel so soon, we'll go right off to-morrow. For it's natural as he should be craving to have her back as soon as may be.'

To describe Hannah's sensations at this sudden and, as she then thought, unmixed happiness for her dear young mistress would be no easy task. As you know, by this time she was not quick to show her deepest feelings; so now she only covered her face with her hands for a moment—probably to lift up her heart in almost overwhelming thankfulness and relief to 'Him who giveth all.' When she looked up her eyes were just a little dimmed by happy tears.

'Dear old Chris!' she said. 'How beautiful it is to think of their meeting after all!—and when we never thought they would see each other in this world. Eh, me! I wonder whether Mr. Guy is much altered, and if he will see much change in Miss Elsie—much besides her white hair, I mean, poor dear!'

'Mr. Guy is more changed than Miss Elsie, Hannah. He's gone through a mortal of trouble since he went away—shipwreck—fever—a fall on board one of they Chinese ships, which went very near killing him, and made him lie onconscious for weeks—so they say. But there! Mr. Guy 'll never notice the difference in Miss Elsie—no, not though her hair is as white as the snow that she nearly found her death in years back!'

'Chris! Chris! what do you mean? Is anything wrong with dear Mr. Guy?'

'Ay! lass. Something wrong indeed. He's stone blind!'

'Blind!'

Ten minutes went by—a quarter of an hour. Hannah began to strain her ears for sounds from the little sitting-room window which stood half open. She could hear nothing except the low murmur of the doctor's kindly voice. But presently that ceased, and there followed a silence.

The faithful nurse's motherly heart was going through a trying ordeal. She must stand aside

while another took her usual place. Hannah was very human, and for a minute or two she rebelled, and began to ask herself why *she* had not been allowed to tell her darling the glad news with its sad sequel. But a little reflection showed her how much more fitted the doctor was to do this delicate business, and she left off resisting her brother's determined efforts to keep her from going to her young mistress.

'Why, Hannah, woman, surely you can trust Dr. McAndrew to do what is right. Can't you be content to let well alone? He bid me tell you to bide here until he called you or came out to us, and here you'll have to bide. So you may just as well be patient!'

'That's very easy talking, but difficult doing,' said poor Hannah. However, she made up her mind to wait, swallowed her feelings of rebellion, told herself that she was best where she was, and even began to ask Christopher for news of her friends at the Hall.

'How's Mrs. Samper been lately, Chris?'

'Tolerable. But she's aging a deal. She bid me tell you that, once you come back, she'd never consent to your going away again. Mr. Forbes was by when she said that, and says he, "Tell Hannah from *me* that the house has never seemed properly furnished since she went away."'

Hannah laughed in spite of herself, as she answered:

'Well, that's rather like putting me on a level with the chairs and tables. But I'm pretty certain I want to get home a great deal more than they want to have me.'

And while they talked the doctor suddenly joined them.

'Mrs. Hannah,' he said, 'it's a' gone verra weel. A bit o' faintness, but no muckle o' that, and some tears. But there! You'll find it's a' verra weel. Noo! noo! good news willna kill. Coom awa' till her now. Let there be as little talking as may be until she's restit. I'm thinking you'll all be able to travel in the morning.'

Dr. McAndrew always indulged in his Scotch accent much more freely when he was excited or otherwise off his guard. Ordinarily, he prided himself on the purity of his English. Just now, having safely accomplished a decidedly difficult task, he had some excuse for relapsing into his native vernacular.

He sauntered about near the cottage for half an hour or so, let off some of his excitement in a merry romp with little Sandy, chattered with Christopher, and strolled into the little kitchen to give a friendly greeting and a few words of explanation to poor old Mrs. Nairn, who, in spite of her deafness, was fully alive to the fact that something very unusual was going forward, and who was being brought to the verge of a bad attack of temper while she brooded over Hannah's neglect to enlighten her.

Finally Dr. McAndrew walked into the sitting-room once more, to see how matters were progressing there. His light tread took him to the side of the old horse-hair sofa without disturbing either of the occupants of the room. There lay Elsie Perry, her white hair lying loosely over the pillow, her eyes closed in a restful sleep, while her hands still held Hannah's in a loving grasp.

'Verra good,' ejaculated the doctor beneath his breath, 'I'll wait'; and nodding cheerfully to Hannah, whose dear motherly face wore a look of perfect contentment, he crept softly out of the room.

Then a hush fell all around the cottage.

Old Bess was led away to eat her fill of the long grass which grew by the roadside; the doctor and Christopher walked up and down near the gig, talking of the necessary arrangements for an immediate return to the Hall; old Mrs. Nairn worked silently at her washing, wondering at the good news that had come for Miss Ailsie, and grieving not a little that her quiet time of sojourn in the cottage was at an end.

Poor little Sandy was the only one who seemed neglected. His mission as a little 'son of consolation' was over for the present, and no one thought about him just then.

He trudged about, looking very desolate, and trying to find in his baby mind a reason for this sudden strange stillness.

'Is Sandy a bad boy?' he asked himself. 'S'all me go to s'eep and wake up a better bairnie?'

Perhaps his wish was father to the thought. Certainly the blue eyes, which he struggled to keep open to their widest extent, were dim with drowsiness. So he looked about to find a suitable bed for his tired little limbs.

A sudden longing came over him for the resting-place that had always been ready for him on Miss Elsie's knee, and, pushing his way in through the half-closed door, his small legs had carried him well across the sitting-room before Hannah's finger, raised in anxious warning, arrested his progress.

'Sandy *is* so tired,' he said, shaking his fair head dolorously.

'Miss Elsie's tired too, Sandy,' whispered Hannah in return; 'but come *very* quietly, and you shall lie down on my gown. Don't make a *sound*, there's a dear little man, and you shall go right off to sleep, close to Hannah, just as Miss Elsie is doing.'

Nothing loth, the little one cuddled down on the floor, and was quickly in the land of dreams, curled up like a kitten by Hannah's side.

And what were the good woman's thoughts as she sat there, looking with loving eyes at her two 'children,' noticing, first, the half-smiling peace of her dear young mistress's face, and the signs of renewed health in the rounded cheek with its soft colouring, and the less-defined lines under the closed

eyes; and then turning to watch the gentle breathing of the little child, and to smile at the two fat fingers half lost between his red lips?

I think her thoughts were more in the future than in the past. Her fancy led her to dwell upon the day when Miss Elsie would change her guardian's home for another, and, she hoped, a happier. No doubt entered her mind that those two, so mercifully spared through many perils, would not henceforth live for each other. That poor Mr. Guy's affliction' might prove a barrier to their happiness she had too much sense to think for a moment. Her simple faith could believe that the past year of pain and separation, and the lasting mark that it had left upon both, were a wise discipline from the hand of One who, while 'chastening those He loves,' does all things well.

She wove her modest day-dreams for the future; and you may be sure that little Sandy took his place in them with sufficient conspicuousness. She felt that a purpose had, at last, been found for the little horde of money which had been laid by for 'mother' so long ago. It should be spent on the little motherless lad who had so strangely been given into their keeping.

And here I wish to close Miss Elsie's story.

I know there must still be a great deal which you would all like to hear about. But tell me, what did I undertake to give you? Was it not Miss Elsie's story?

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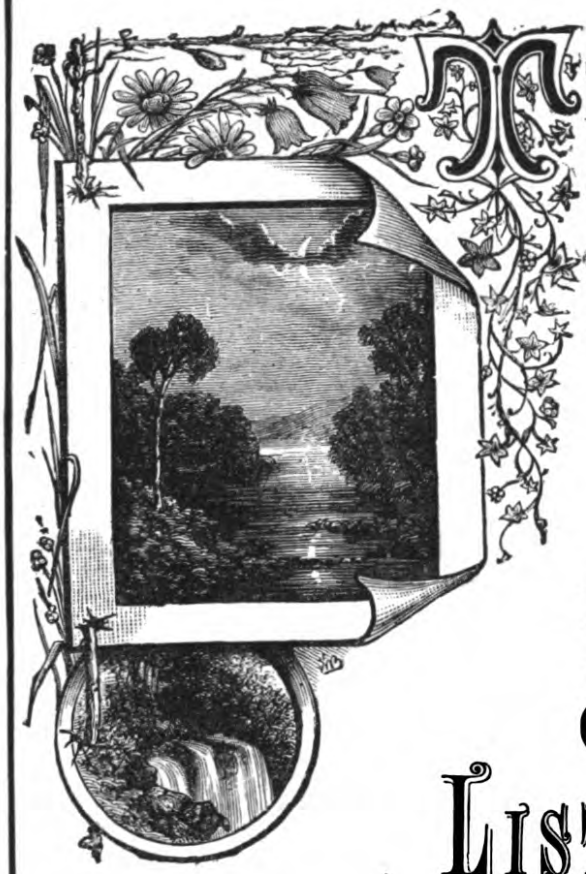

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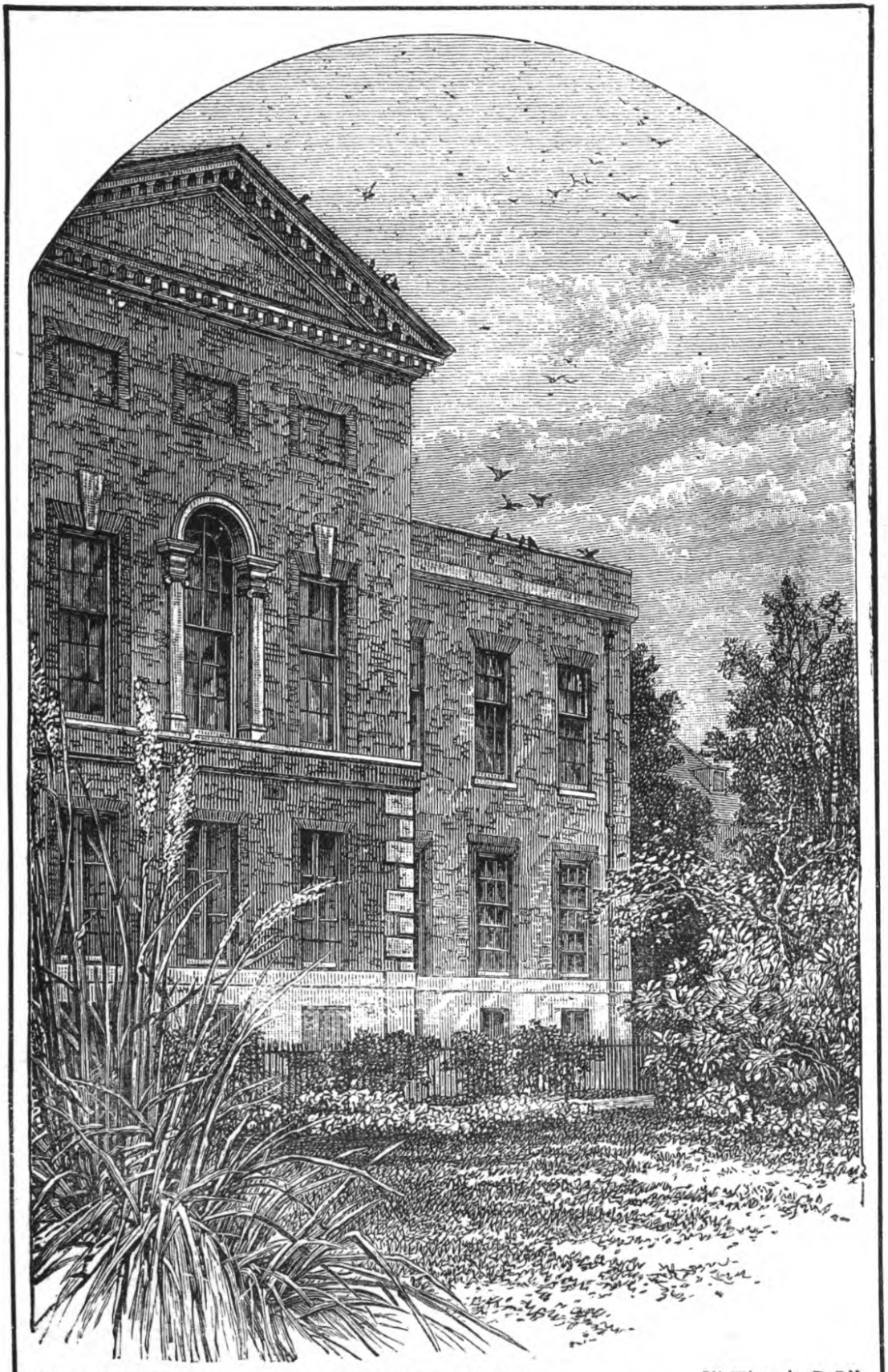

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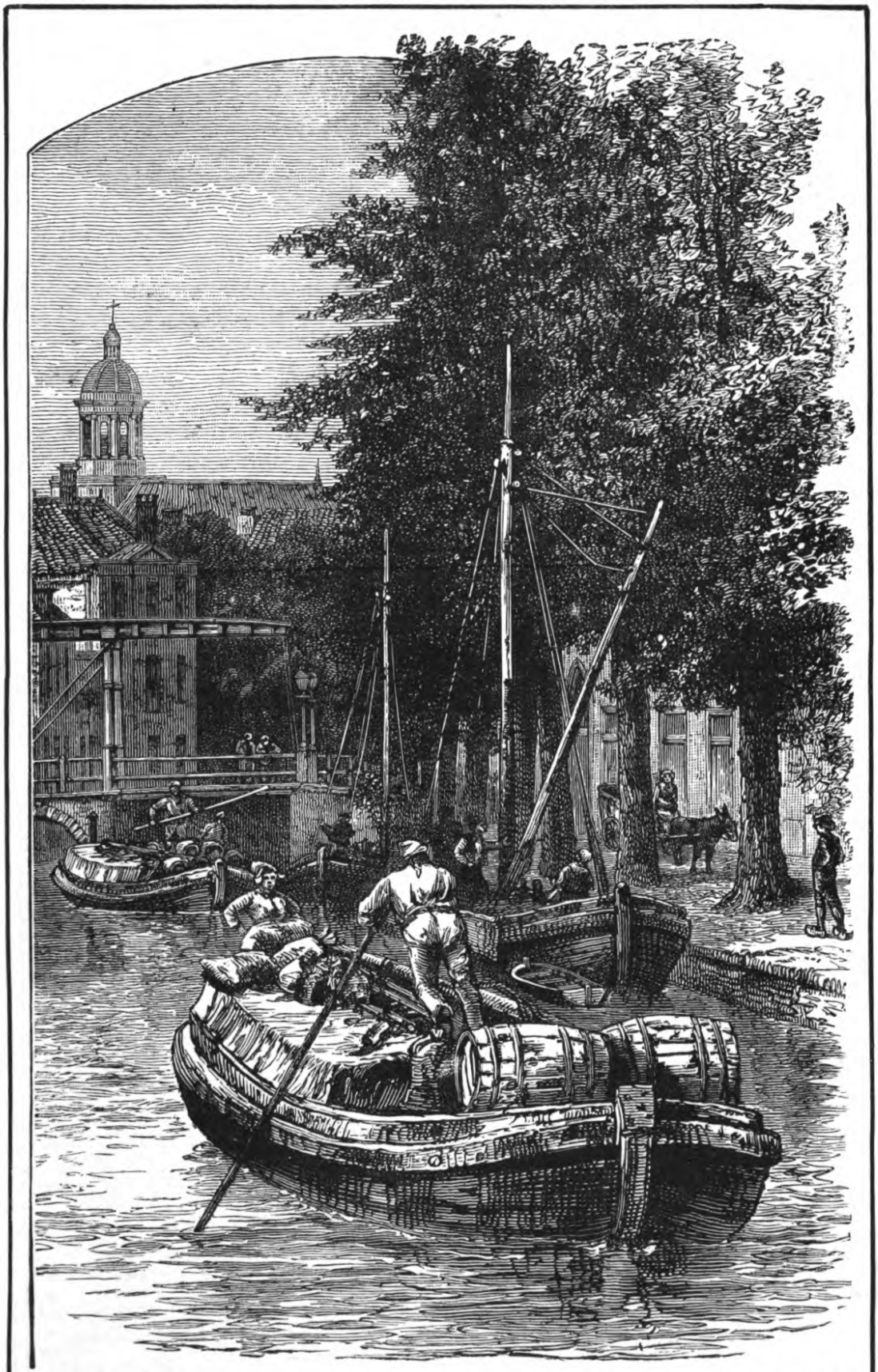

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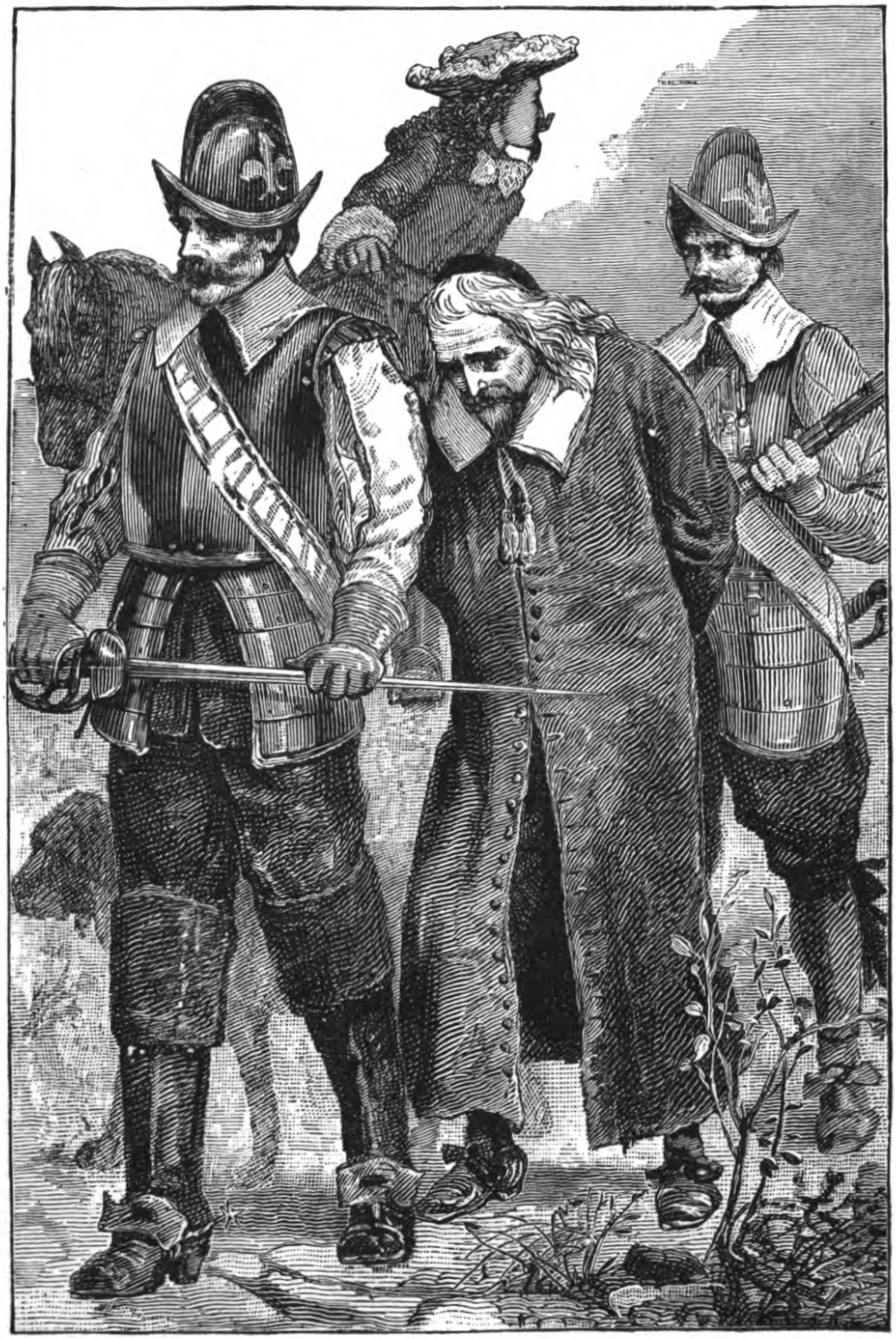

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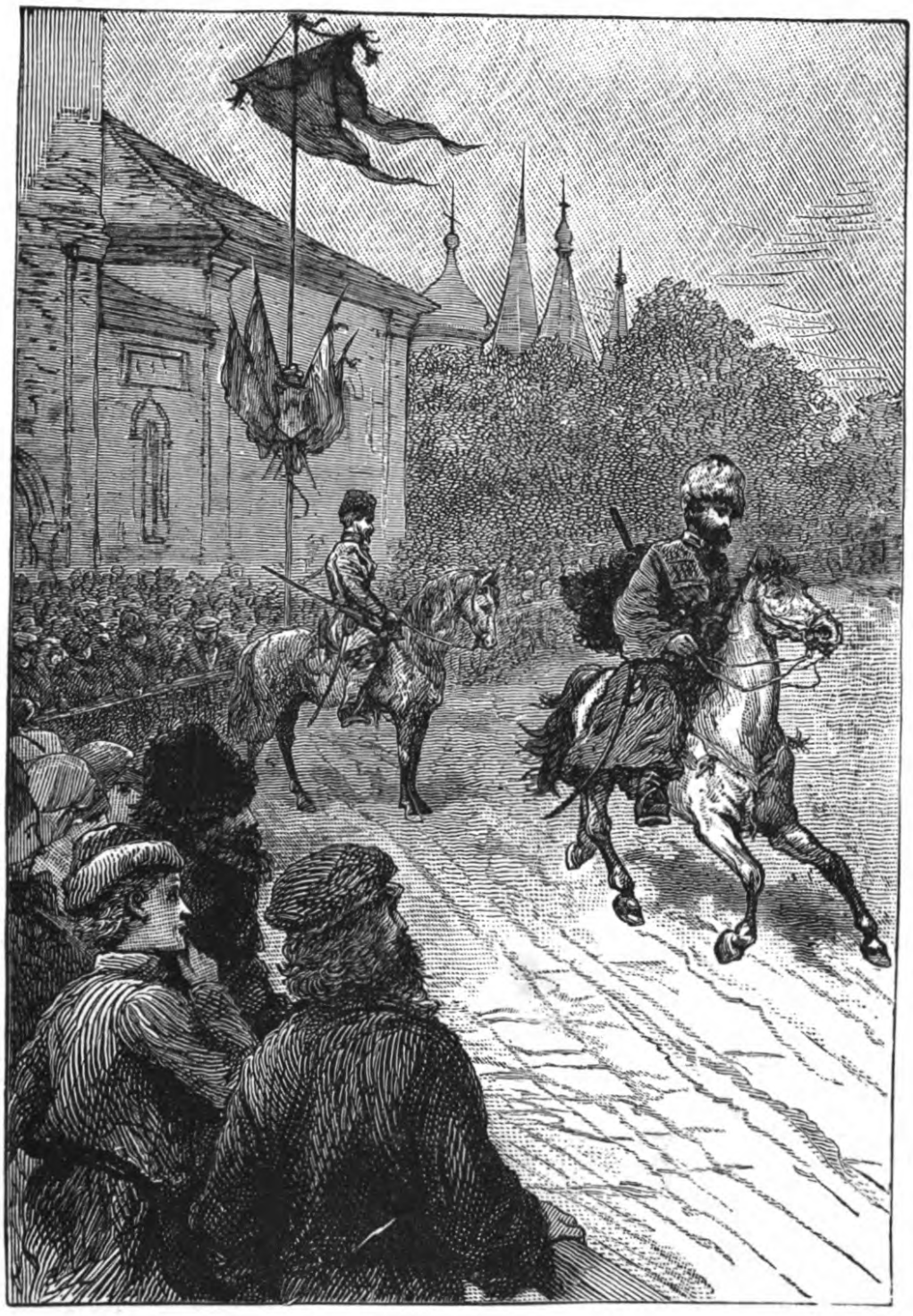

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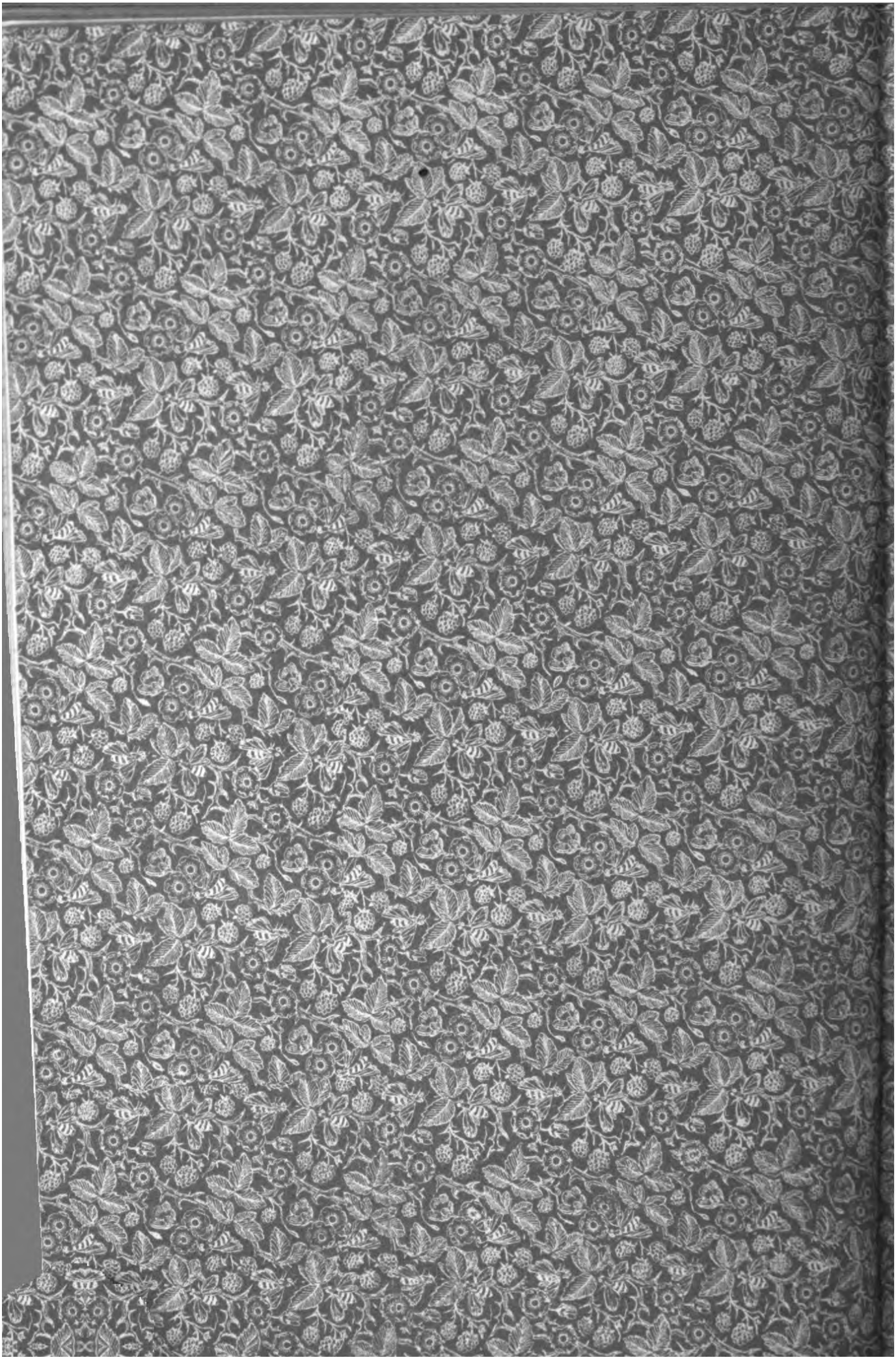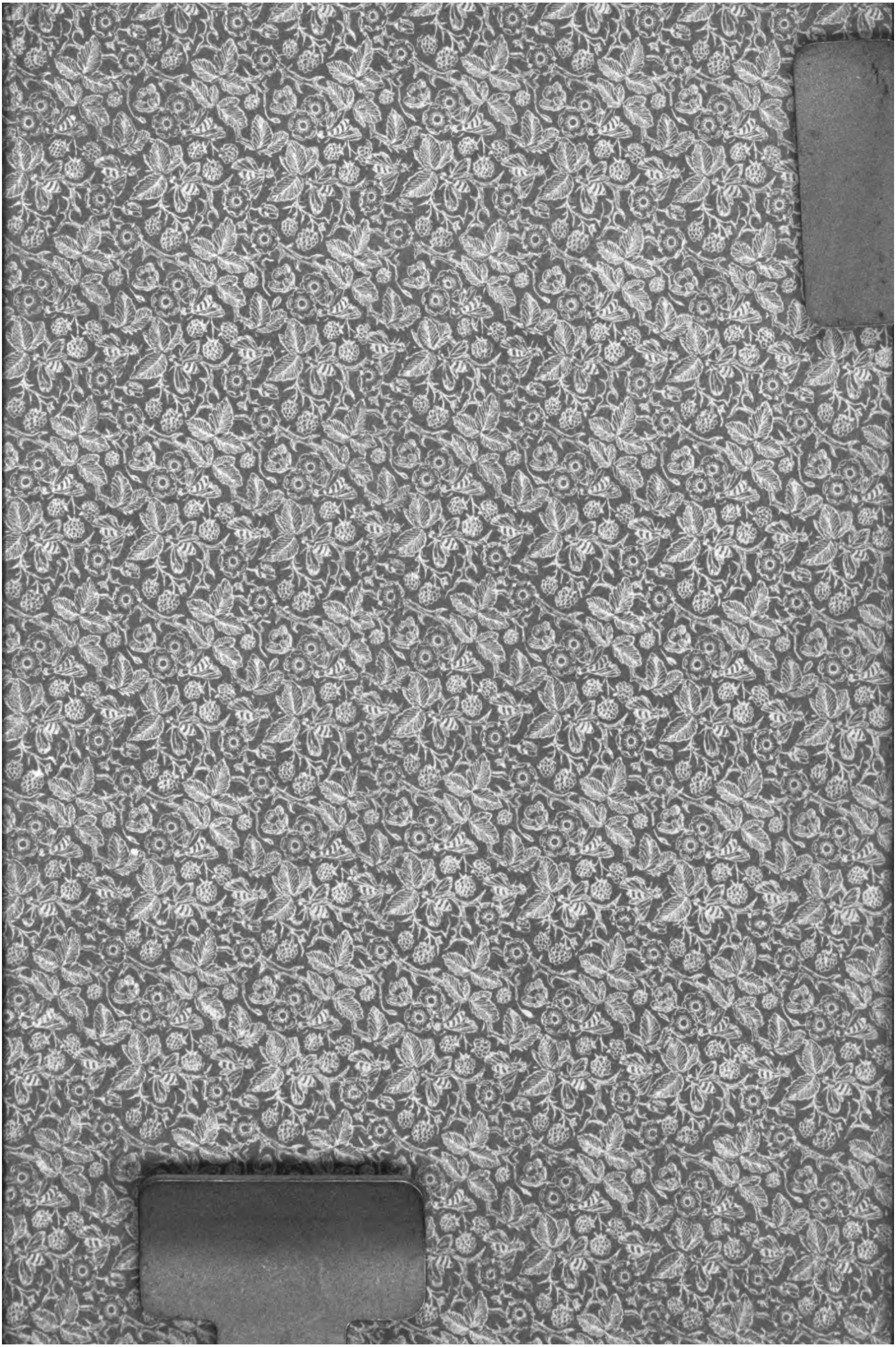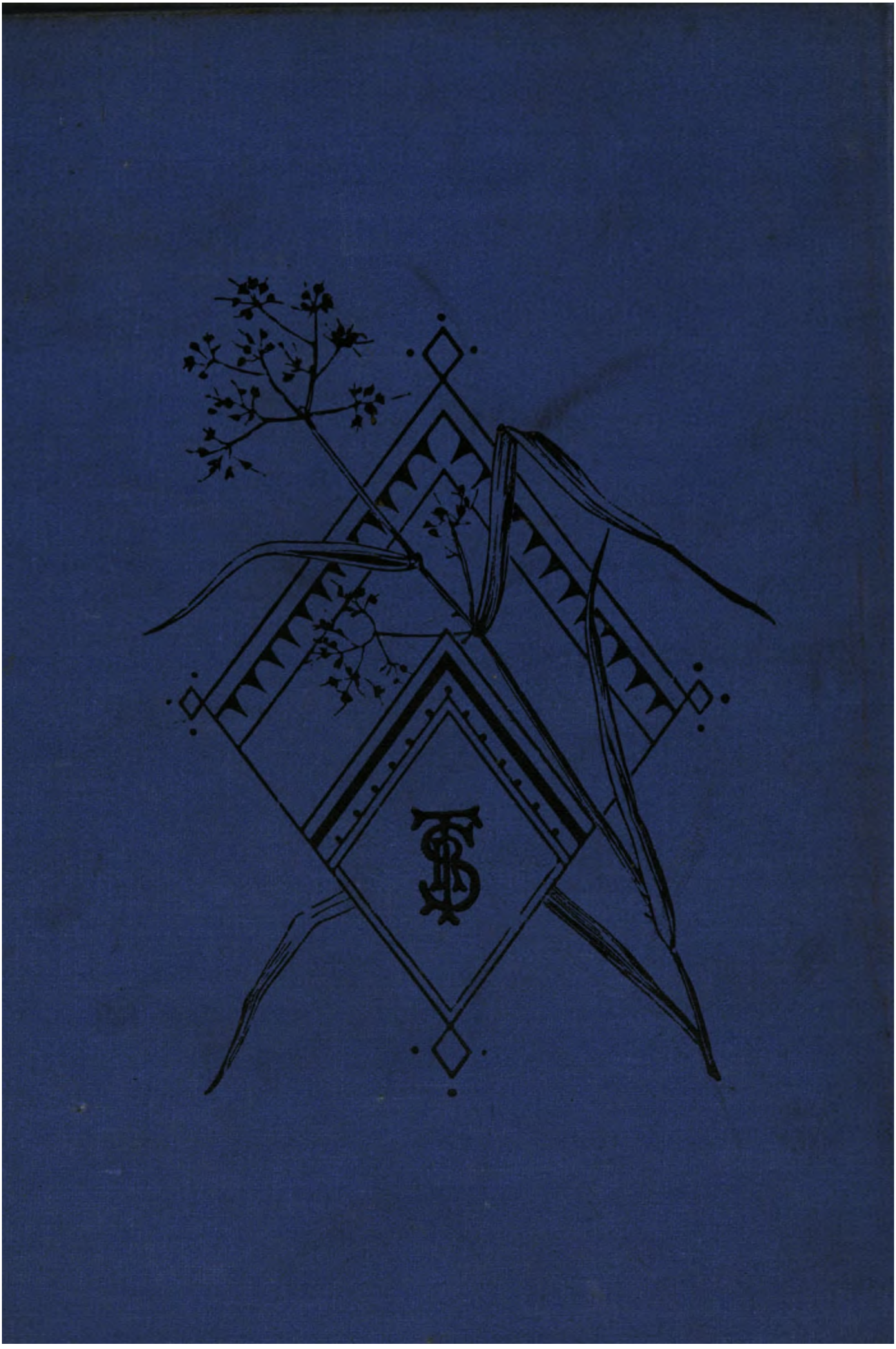
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