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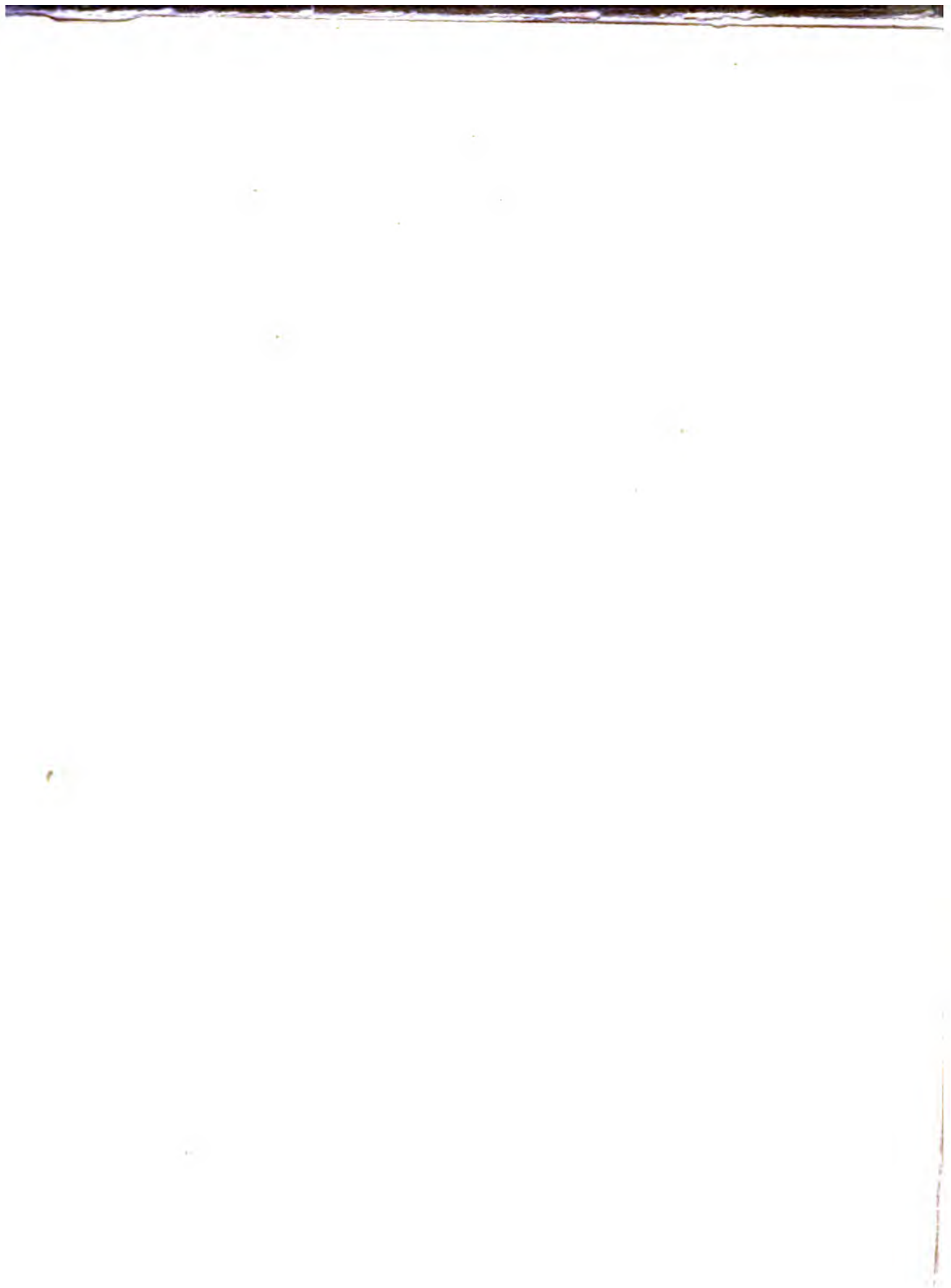
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AGATHOS.

AGATHOS,

AND OTHER

SUNDAY STORIES

BY SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, M.A.

ARCHDEACON OF SURREY.

"MY SPEECH SHALL DISTIL AS THE DEW, AS THE SMALL RAIN UPON
THE TENDER HERB."—DEUT. XXXII. 2.

"EVEN A CHILD IS KNOWN BY HIS DOINGS." PROV. XX. 11.

SEVENTH EDITION

PUBLISHED BY R. B. SEELEY AND W. BURNSIDE
AND SOLD BY L. AND G. SEELEY,
FLEET STREET, LONDON.
MDCCCXLII



LONDON :
RICHARD CLAY, PRINTER, BREAD STREET HILL.

PREFACE.

THE following allegories and stories have been actually related by the Author to his children on successive Sunday evenings. He began the practice with the earnest desire of combining some sort of occupation suitable to the Lord's day, with something which might amuse his little ones. Few parents can, he thinks, have failed to feel the want which he would here hope in some measure to supply.

On the one hand, if the conversations and employments of Sunday are not early marked as different from those of other days, how is it possible that our children can grow up with a deeply-rooted reverence for its holiness? On the other hand, if the day is one which they remember only for its dulness, how can children grow up in the love of this blessed season? "Everlasting droopings,"* their young hearts least of all will "bear." And if on other days they are used to amusing employments, if they love (and all children should be made to love them) the times of relaxation in which they see their parents as friends, and in some sort companions; what else can happen, if on this day all amusement be banished, and all interest removed, but that they will grow

* Herbert's Country Pastor, cxxvii.

insensibly to feel the Lord's day a weariness. But if the week-day's tale is changed for the Sunday story; and if the child is really interested in it; he learns, even unawares, to separate in his own mind the first day of the week from its common days; and that by a pleasurable separation.

Such has been, to a remarkable degree, the effect of the first telling of these stories in the Author's family; and such he cannot help hoping may be more widely their effect when they are given to the public. The questions at the close of each are designed as tracks, not as grooves; and they may easily be multiplied or reduced in number, according to the judgment of the parent, or the age and intelligence of the child. Some of them are the very answers he received from his children.

One word more should be said about

the plan of these narratives. The Author's greatest care has been, while interweaving in them as much instruction as he could about the Holy Scriptures, its allegories, and some of its most striking narratives, to keep as far as possible from all lowering down of holy things, or making the mysteries of the faith common and cheap to childish imaginations. Against this most dangerous evil, which appears to him to infest and poison many of the current religious books for children, he begs here most earnestly to protest, as against that which is laying unawares the foundation of untold evils, in accustoming the mind to look curiously, and with levity, on things which man must never approach but with humiliation and adoration. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy

ground." This should be from the first the temper carefully wrought into our children's minds, if we would have them approach God with acceptance.

To teach them to think boldly of mysteries, in the vain hope of explaining to their childish minds what, in the fulness of their highest understanding, they can never truly comprehend, may make them shrewd and forward questioners, but cannot make them meek and teachable disciples.

It only remains further to say, for what age these stories are intended. The author's children reach from five to nine years old, and are of ordinary powers of comprehension. Of these, the eldest has been fully interested by the simplest narratives, and the youngest has understood the most difficult. All the applications of the allegorical tales, they of course will

not understand at first; but in the author's judgment, this is the very excellence of allegorical instruction. The minds of children may be fatally dwarfed, by never having presented to them anything but that which they can understand without effort; whilst it is exceeding difficult to devise anything which shall at the same time attract their attention and stretch their faculties. It is exactly this want which allegory supplies: the story catches the attention of the youngest; glimpses of the under-meaning continually flash into their minds; and whilst it is difficult to say exactly how much they have fully understood, it is clear that it has been enough to give them interest, and arouse their faculties.

May God hereby bless some of the tender lambs of His fold.

ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

THE rapid sale of a numerous edition of this little work, not only proves the existence of the want which it is intended to supply, but it is also a gratifying mark of the kindness with which the attempt has been received.

On one point the author has been requested to say a single word in explanation of his plan. Some of the stories are gathered from Holy Scripture, and yet do not adhere in every particular to the letter of the Bible narrative; and he has been requested to explain the principle of such variations. They consist, then, he would

say, in every case, of the mere marking out of lines which the general sketch of Scripture appeared to him to contain:—the filling up for his young readers of the picture, which is set before them there in outline merely. Thus, for instance, in the ninth story, David is represented as slaying the lion and the bear in a time of snow, though this is not mentioned in the passage which records the fact. But in another chapter we find the slaying of a lion especially recorded, with the addition that it was “in the time of snow,” (2 Sam. xxiii. 20): and this seeming to point out the season of the year at which such beasts were wont to leave their more retired haunts, it is introduced to perfect the picture which the brief narrative of Scripture sketches only in outline.

No further liberty has been taken with the letter of God’s word; and this does not, the author trusts, exceed the just and necessary limits of exposition.

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SUNDAY STORIES.

I.

AGATHOS, OR THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD.

THERE was once a brave king whose country was visited by a very fierce and deadly Dragon. The king chose out therefore some of his best soldiers, and sent them into that part of the land where this dragon was doing so much mischief. Before they went, he said to them—‘ You all know that I have fought with this dragon and conquered and smote him, though he put forth all his rage and power against me. All my faithful followers must tread

in my footsteps ; they must overcome as I overcame, and then they shall sit upon the steps of my throne. Therefore I send you out to fight with this monster, and my strength shall go forth with you in the battle. Be therefore upon your guard. If you remember my words, and call upon my name in the time of danger ; and above all, if you take and use boldly all the armour I have provided for you ; then the dragon can never hurt you. But if he finds you unprepared—if he comes upon you without your armour, then he will certainly set upon you and slay you.'

The soldiers promised to be upon their guard, and set off in high spirits into the land where the evil beast lay. When first they came there, they kept their guard very diligently, and always wore their armour. They never all slept at once ; but some always watched whilst the others rested. It was a fine sight to see these brave men in their shining armour,

marching up and down the land, and all the people safe and happy because the king's army was keeping guard. It was a fine sight to see them early in the morning, when some one or two had long been watching whilst the others slept, and they were now about to change turns; it was a fine sight to see how the brave men would wake up refreshed by sleep, and put on carefully their armour, and try their swords to see that they were keen and sharp; and then kneel down and pray, and call upon the name of their prince, and then go out to keep their guard against the evil Dragon.

This was a noble sight to see, but alas it did not last: all the time they watched, they never saw the Dragon. All went on quietly round them. The farmers ploughed their lands, and the reapers were soon about to reap in the harvest; there were marriages, and feasts, and pleasures, and business; and the soldiers began to think

that perhaps after all it was but an empty tale that had been spoken of the Dragon, and to forget their master's word about watching and standing fast. The weather, too, grew very hot and sultry, and their arms seemed heavier than they had ever done before. 'What,' said one, 'can be the use of always wearing this heavy lumbering helmet? The sun heats it till it scorches me up: and no one ever sees this terrible Dragon. I shall leave my helmet in the tent: it will be time enough to run and fetch it when I see the Dragon coming.' So said another of his breastplate; and another found his shield so troublesome and cumbrous, that he laid it up in the tent; and the ground had grown so hot and sandy that they found their brazen sandals tire and burn their feet, so they cast them too away, and sauntered about, some here and some there; to this feast, and to that wedding; some without this part of their armour, and some without

that, until you could scarcely have known them, unless you looked very close to find the King's mark, to be the soldiers of the King, who had looked so bright and terrible, when their Prince sent them out with their armour and his warnings into the far battle-field.

One indeed there was of the troop, who would not give into their ways; Agathos was his name, and sorely was he grieved by the sight of his careless comrades. Often and often did he remind them of their Prince's caution, and tell them that the enemy was surely near, although as yet they saw him not; that their Prince could not be mistaken, for that he himself had fought with the Dragon, and knew how terrible he was. The rest also laughed and jeered at the brave man, and called him coward, and many other hard names, because he would not do as they did. But he meekly put up with it all; and neither their hard words, nor the hot sun by day,

making him often faint, nor the weary sands over which he had to march, nor the cold wet dews of the night, could make Agathos lay aside the armour which his Prince had bid him wear, or to take off the brazen sandals from his swollen feet, or cease watching carefully all the night through.

All this went on for some time longer, and the hard words of the idle soldiers grew harder and harder, as they became more and more sure that they should never see their enemy. But just when they thought themselves most safe the danger was at hand: For now there were fearful sights to be seen, if one could have been by to witness them. One of the soldiers was coming home about this time from a great feast, at which he had been. There had been mirth, and merriment, and songs, and dances, and the soldier had taken off his armour: and now he was walking lightly home to his tent, through

the pleasant summer evening air. He was thinking of the merry party which had just broken up, and what a happy life he was leading, and pitying Agathos whose fears and scruples kept him always pacing about the tent in his heavy armour. But just as these thoughts passed through his mind, he heard a strange rustling noise in a wood upon his right hand; and in an instant, as quick as lightning, the dreadful form of the fierce Dragon stood before him. His knees knocked together as he felt at his side for the keen sword his Prince had given him: but it was not there. The Dragon was making at him, and in his terror he called upon his king, but something seemed to tell him it was too late now; that he would not bear the burden of his armour, and therefore that there was no one to help him—and he turned to fly, but the place seemed all beset with piercing darts which the Dragon had cast upon the ground, and he had

thrown away the king's sandals of brass ; so his feet failed him and he fell upon the ground, and the evil beast devoured him. So it was with one and another, and their companions missed them ; and at first they wondered why they came not home ; then they looked sad and grave for a while, when they spoke of them, but soon they feasted, and ate, and drank just as merrily, and forgot their armour and their Prince's word, and knew not that danger was at hand.

But the Dragon, who had gained courage by all these victories over the soldiers of the Prince whom he feared, now thought he might attack the camp itself, and slay all his enemies at once.

Long time he lay hid in a wood bordering on the camp : for he saw Agathos walking up and down, and keeping guard as he had done always, and he saw his biting sword hanging at his side, and his huge shield, with a bright red cross upon

it, hung over his shoulder, and he remembered his battle with the Prince, and he feared.

But when the next noon-day was come, and Agathos, who had watched long, had gone into his tent and laid down to get a little needful sleep, whilst his companions were all around the tent, then the Dragon thought that his time was come, and with a mighty yell he rushed forth from the cover of the wood, and fell, tooth and nail, upon the soldiers, tearing some with his cruel claws, fixing his iron teeth in others, and stinging many to death with his poisonous tail. Then was there a great cry all through the camp for the forgotten armour; and one seized a sword and made against the Dragon for a moment; but because he had no helmet, whilst he was aiming a blow, the Dragon darted his claws upon his head, and he fell down slain; and by this time another had rushed up with a helmet buckled on,

and a sword in his hand, and he fought longer, and gave the Dragon a wound, whereupon he cast forth his burning sting, which reached all around to his loins, and as there was no armour girded on them, he too fell down and died. Then started up another, and he seemed well nigh armed, but in his hurry he could not wait to seek for the shield which he had thrown carelessly aside; and so when he joined in battle with the Dragon and smote at him with his good sword, and had wounded him somewhat, and the Dragon could not seize upon his helmeted head, or sting his well-greaved loins; suddenly he saw the evil one cast fiery darts out of his wicked talons; and these his sword could not stop, and he had no shield on which to catch them, and so they lighted upon him and pierced through his armour, and he fell down slain; and the next was overcome, because in the hot fight when his shield was knocked aside for a moment,

his breast was without its breastplate, and so he was wounded to the death; and another fell through the broken darts with which the ground was strewn, because he had come forth from his tent without his sandals; and now the Dragon was triumphing in the greatness of his strength, and thinking soon to swallow up the Prince's army.

But the noise had woke Agathos from a sweet holy dream which had been cheering his sleep. He thought he saw his Prince standing near him just as he had been when he fought himself with the Dragon; blood dropped from his hands and his feet, but the Dragon was trodden under them; and he thought his master looked upon him with his own look of strength and kindness, and said, "Good and faithful servant," "thou shalt go upon the lion and adder, the young lion and the dragon shalt thou tread under thy feet; and fear not, for I am with thee."

Even with these words sounding in his ears he was roused by the cry of his companions, and the fierce voice of the Dragon. Then as he had always expected his attack, Agathos was not startled or hurried; but springing from the ground he girded his bright sword upon his thigh, and his breast-plate, and his greaves, and his sandals were all bound upon him in their places, for even in sleep he would not cast them off; and he fitted his helmet on his head, and drew his arm through the handle of his shield; and then he knelt down upon the ground, and called upon the Lord, and thought upon his Prince, and rushed out into the battle. When the enemy saw him coming, he left trampling on the slain, and moved on to meet him. Then was there a dreadful battle between that good soldier of his Lord and the fierce enemy. More than once was Agathos beaten on his knees, and could but just keep up the good shield of Faith

against the storm of blows and shower of fiery darts which the evil one poured forth: yet even as he touched the ground it seemed as if new strength came into him, and he lifted up the feeble knees and smote with a mightier strength against the accursed destroyer. The battle still was raging when the sun went down; and the good soldier was well nigh sinking, when he gathered all his might into one strong blow, and calling out aloud upon the name of his Prince, he smote the Dragon so fiercely that he uttered a piercing cry and fled quite away, and left him to himself. Then was Agathos right glad, and he kneeled down and prayed, and gave thanks; and over the battle-field he could see the form of his master coming to him amongst the dews of the evening; and he heard his voice, and he saw his countenance, and his happy dream was more than true, and he dwelled for ever in the presence of his Prince.

FATHER. My dear children, can you tell me what passage of God's words this is meant to explain to you?

CHILD. Yes; I think it must be those verses which I learned the other day from the sixth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness. And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit."

F. Yes; it is meant to explain this: and can you tell me who the Prince is,

who had fought himself with the enemy, and now sends out his soldiers to fight ?

C. Jesus Christ our Saviour, who once fought with Satan for us ; and now sends out his people to resist him.

F. Who are his soldiers ?

C. All those who are members of his church.

F. Can you remember what the Baptismal Service says about this ?

C. When the minister makes the sign of the cross upon the child's forehead, he says that he does it "in token that he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, but manfully to fight under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end."

F. What does the Catechism call Satan against whom you are to strive ?

C. "My ghostly enemy."

F. Who are safe against him ?

C. Those who live in prayer and watchfulness, and keep on all the christian armour.

F. Who are tempted to lay aside these?

C. We all are; for we are all apt to grow weary in watching and prayer.

F. What will happen to us if we do grow weary, and cease to watch?

C. We shall be overtaken by the devil, and become his prey.

F. If we watch are we safe?

C. Yes, for Christ our master will then keep us.

F. What has he promised us about this in his word?

C. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." James iv. 7.

II.

THE RAVENS IN THE FAMINE.

THE spring time was come ; and the birds had all built their nests ; and sat upon their smooth round eggs till they had hatched them ; and now they were busy flying here and there, and running along the ground, some picking up seeds, and some catching flies, and some seizing every worm which put his head above the damp ground ; and all carrying them off as fast as possible to feed their young ones, as they were taught to do by the instinct which God Almighty had given them. It was a busy happy scene. Cheerful too it was to the ear as well as to the eye ; for sometimes they stopped from their labour

to sing a song of praise to the good God who has made this happy world.

Amongst these birds there were two great black ones called Ravens. These flew to a town a long way off, and there they lighted by a great shop, where a man was busy selling bread and meat to the people who came to buy. The man threw them each a lump of bread and piece of meat for the sport of the people round : and the birds took them in their strong beaks, and flew straight away with them ; and the people clapped their hands and shouted. But they were all surprised when just at night the same birds came again to the same place and seemed to ask for more ; and then flew away with what was given them, just as they had done in the morning. The next day they came again as soon as the shop was open, and when they had got what they wanted, away they flew with it, and were seen no more till night ; and then again they only

stayed till some bread and meat was given them ; and then nobody saw more of them. Many persons tried to watch them ; they must have, it was thought, some great nest near, and they took all this with them to feed their nestlings.

But perhaps these people were quite wrong ; for God, who has taught birds in general to feed their young ones, has before now taught them a different lesson. So it was at that time of which we read in the Bible, when he taught Ravens to feed one of the Prophets. If any one could have flown with them and seen all their doings, it would have been a strange sight. How they got the meat we do not know ; but we know that any one who could have flown with them, would have seen that as soon as they got it they flew straight away with it to another country. Then they passed over a land where every thing was dry and burnt up for want of rain. It had not rained for a whole year, and all

the brooks were dry. The little streams which had leaped from stone to stone were drunk in by the thirsty ground, and their murmuring voice was no more heard; the corn was parched up and would not grow; the grass was dried and withered; the cattle had eaten it quite close down to the dusty earth, and then had grown thinner and thinner till they had died. Men's faces had grown thin and sharp, and their eyes looked hungrily out of their sunk cheeks; and their tongues were dry, and swelled with thirst; and they walked about, here and there, looking for food, and for water, and they could not find any.

CHILD. There was a great famine in that land.

FATHER. Yes, there was a great famine. The people of the land had sinned against God, and he had bid "the clouds that they should rain no rain upon it." And if you could have flown with those Ravens you would have heard a great voice of sadness,

and sighing, and sorrow, rising from all that land as they flew over it.

But where do you think the Ravens were flying to? They flew over all that land till they came to a cave in the side of a high sandy hill; and if you could have looked into that cave you would have seen, not a nest of young Ravens, but one man sitting, or standing, or kneeling by the side of a little brook that rose high up in the cave, and sunk just below in the thirsty land, so that no one else knew of it.

Perhaps you might have seen this good man kneeling down and lifting up his hands towards the sky, and saying, O Lord God, who has kept me hitherto, and ordered the wild ravens to feed me, take thou care of me this day, for Thou art my God, and I am Thy servant.

And then the mouth of the cave was darkened for a moment; it was by the wings of the great ravens, as they flew in

and laid down the meat and the bread before the good man's feet; and he would rise and gather a few dry sticks to dress the meat at the cave's mouth, and drink some of the clear spring water, and then kneel down again to thank his God who had taught the Ravens to fly all over the starving country to bring it to him in this lonely cave.

F. Can you tell me where this story comes from?

C. Yes, we may read it in the xviiith chapter of the 1st book of Kings.

F. Who was it that was thus fed by ravens?

C. The prophet Elijah, by the brook Cherith.

F. Why did God thus take care of him?

C. Because he was his faithful servant.

F. Yes, my child, and so it shall always be. He will never leave nor forsake those

who trust in him and serve him truly. He will feel and care for a child that prays to Him. "The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they who trust in the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good."

III.

THE MAN IN THE DUNGEON.

THERE was a deep dungeon—its walls were all green and stained with the damp which had long hung on them; its floor was made of cold rough stones. It had one small window, across which were thick iron bars, and it was so narrow and so high up, that hardly any light came from it to the floor. It was night, and all was quite still and silent there: even in the day, no cheerful sound came into that sad place; not even a bird's song was ever heard there; scarcely even a fly could ever be seen in it; but now it was night, and dark, and silent, except when now and then the moving of chains was heard on that dungeon's floor. For a man was

lying there chained, by chains which went round his wrists. But his chains made no noise now, for he was lying still : he was asleep ; sleeping as quietly, and breathing as gently as if he were a child. How could he be sleeping so gently ? Did he know where he was ? Yes, he well knew : and he knew too, that when the sun rose the next morning, and woke so many persons all around him to their daily work, or to their daily pleasures, that it would see him led out of that prison to be put to a cruel death : for that the very next morning he was to be killed. Then surely he must have been some very wicked man ; for why else should he be in that dungeon, and why else should he be about to be killed. You would the more have thought so if you could have seen all ; for you would have seen that he was chained to two soldiers, who lay on each side of him, with their weapons ready to slay him if he were to move. Fierce

evil-looking men they were, of dark and savage faces; they were asleep, but even in their sleep they looked angry and cruel. The gate of the dungeon too was barred and locked, and there were four other soldiers asleep outside it; and beyond them again was a great iron gate fast closed, so that surely he must be a very wicked and desperate man whom they are guarding with this strength and care. And yet, if you could look into his face, you would see him sleeping quietly and calmly. A little child upon the knees of his mother, could hardly sleep more gently. And could he sleep so if he were indeed a wicked man? Could his conscience be asleep when he was thus deep in the dungeon, and death coming so near to him? No doubt he could not: no doubt that his sleep could not have been what it was, unless God had been with him there: for he was a holy man, one who did indeed love God, one who had

followed Jesus Christ when He lived upon this earth, and whom with eleven others Jesus Christ had trusted to govern His church, now that He had ascended into heaven. He had been thrown into that dungeon, because he loved Jesus Christ, and believed in Him, and would speak about Him among people who hated Him; and so their wicked king had laid hold on him, and cast him into this dungeon, and was about to put him to death the very next day. He seemed now given over, for no one else was to be seen in that dungeon, but the poor man in chains, and the fierce soldiers to whom he was bound. But there was another there; there was one who watched over him; who kept him from all harm; who gave him that sweet sleep; who heard when he prayed, and was ever ready to help him,—Jesus Christ was there.

There was in that town another room, not a very large one, and yet there were

many persons in it. It was now late at night, but still they stayed there. There were some men and some women,—what are they doing? They are praying to God, calling on the name of Jesus Christ, begging Him to save his servant Peter, and not to let him, like St. James, be put to death by Herod. They prayed very earnestly, and no doubt their prayers were heard. Perhaps it is as an answer to their prayers, that the chained prisoner sleeps so peacefully; for he looks as if some happy vision or dream came to him as he slept. Perhaps he is dreaming of the time when he was a boy, and went with his father upon the lake of Geneseret as a fisherman.

Perhaps he dreams of the first time he went; how pleased he was to go; how the bright moon shone, and the little waves rippled round the boat, as it shot with its dark shadow through the moonlight, and left a troubled path on the

waters where it had passed. Is that his father's voice calling him? Is that the moonlight round him? See, he starts in his sleep and opens his eyes; he looks like a man who hardly knows whether he is well awake, or still in a dream. What is the light around him? there was never moonlight in the dungeon, and he is there, and not by the sea of Galilee. And what is this light, brighter, and yet softer far than any moonlight. It is so clear, that he can see every corner of the dungeon, and yet so mild that it does not dazzle his eyes, which had been so long in the darkness? And what is that voice which says to him, "Arise up, quickly," as kind as his father's in his dream, and yet a real sounding voice. The soldiers too beside him, why do they sleep on? He looks up, and he sees a form he knows not. Is it one of God's angels? the light seems to beam from him: either he must be a holy angel, or all this is a beautiful

dream. But he does as the voice bids him; he rises up, and the chains fall off from his hands; they clanked and rung as they fell upon the ground, but the soldiers did not stir: the hands of one of them was upon the hilt of his sword; in a moment surely it would be drawn, and Peter slain: but no, the fierce man slept on, and Peter bound on his sandals, and followed the angel. He passed the first gate, for it opened for them; the keepers lay around it, but no man stirred, and it shut again behind them. They came to the second; it too is left behind. Surely it must be a dream. But now they stand before the iron gate; its heavy weight hangs always stiffly on its rusty hinges; and many men can only just slowly and scarcely force it open with a great creaking and noise. It too opens of its own accord, and they pass through it into the open air. It was a very pleasant feeling; that first breath of the open summer night-

breeze upon Peter's forehead, which had grown damp and cold in the dark wet dungeon. Surely it must be more than a dream. He looked round for the angel who brought him forth, but he was gone. Gone as he came, unseen and unknown by man, save when God would have him seen. Perhaps he stood near him still, though he could be seen no longer. Peter stands doubtful for a moment. Then all the truth comes surely on his mind, and he knew that "the Lord had sent his angel, and delivered him out of the hands of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews." And he went to that room where the servants of the Lord were together praying, and they would scarcely believe when they heard that Peter was there. But he went in and told them what great things the Lord had done for him; and he and they feared the Lord together, and trusted in him more and more.

IV.

THE CHILDREN AND THE LION.

THERE was once a Father who had two children whom he loved exceedingly. They were a little girl and boy, and they were good and obedient children. For many years, ever since they were born, they had lived in the middle of a great town, and had never seen the open fields and the beautiful flowers, and birds, and woods, except sometimes when their father took them out in a carriage with him for an hour or two; and those were happy times. One day when the little girl was seven, and the boy nine years old, their father called them to him, and said to

them, My dear children, I am going to take you away from this house in which you have been used to live, and to take you into another house where you will have a beautiful garden, in which you can play about amongst the flowers, and hear the birds sing all day long, and see the bright butterflies which you have seen when I have taken you out in the carriage.

CHILD. How pleased the little boy and girl must have been to go to such a beautiful house, from the midst of the dark town where they had lived before.

F. Yes, they were greatly pleased ; and when the next day they came to this new house, and looked out of its windows, and saw the green grass looking fresh and bright, and gay butterflies flying over it up and down, and the painted feathers of all sorts of birds which flew in and out of the bushes, or stayed to warble in the thickets : they longed to run straight out

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of doors and sing too, they were so happy; and thought that they should never tire of gathering the flowers, and playing with the bright yellow gourds which they could see growing here and there in the beds, and watching the birds and butterflies. But just as they were running out, their father called them to him with a very grave face, so grave as to be almost sad, and said to them, My dearest children, before you go into that beautiful garden, listen well to what I am going to tell you. In that garden there is a fierce and hungry lion, who is always walking up and down it, to find some one to devour. There are reasons which you cannot understand, why I cannot turn this lion out; and why, much as I love you, I have yet brought you to live in this garden, near such a savage beast; but if you will remember my words, he can never hurt you. What you must do is this; keep in mind that he is ever near you; that he is waiting to spring on you,



THE CHILDREN AND THE LION.



and when the sun is the brightest, and the birds the gayest, and all is most beautiful around you, and you are the happiest yourselves, then think that he is near you, and watch carefully, lest he should spring on you unseen: for if, when you see him, you call on me to help you, you will find me always near you, and he will fly away from you. Do not stay to think how I can hear you when you do not see me, but call at once on me, and I shall be always by your side, and you will be safe. But if in your play you cease to watch for the lion, and so are not ready to call on me, he will creep close to you when you least expect it, and spring on you and devour you.

The children looked very grave and thoughtful; each took the other's hand, and they walked quite sadly down into the garden; trembling and afraid, as though thinking that at every turn the great lion would spring out upon them.

But they saw nothing of him ; and as the birds hopped round them, and the gay butterflies floated up and down in the air, and the sun sparkled in the stream that ran amongst the flowers, they began to forget that there was such a thing as a lion in the world ; and soon they were playing and laughing as merrily and loud as if they had never heard that he was near them. But just when they were the gayest, they heard their father's voice, saying, sadly and seriously, '*Remember!*' They started and looked round, but they could not see him : the voice seemed to come from the air ; but the little girl thought directly of the lion ; and as she looked into the bushes, which were quite white with their bright blossoms, she saw something creeping softly towards her ; and in a moment her eyes were fixed on the fierce fiery eyes of the savage lion. She had hardly breath left to call upon her father, but at the first call he stood by

her side ; and she could see the lion turn from her, and spring away and hide himself in the thicket. Her father took her in his arms, and told her not to fear, for that she was quite safe in his keeping ; and he bid her remember, that if she had not watched, and seen the lion, and called on His name, the evil beast would have sprung upon her, and she would have been his prey.

Day after day passed away, and the children became more and more watchful, and even in their sport and play, they were sober and mindful of the lion ; and when he was stealing near to them, they called always on their father, and he ever stood beside them, and saved them from his fangs.

Now do you remember any thing like this in the Bible ?

Yes, I remember the text which says, " Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil goeth about as a roar-

ing lion, seeking whom he may devour." I suppose that he is the lion.

F. Yes, my dear children, he is; and who is the kind father who is ever near to hear when they call?

C. Is not that God, whom we are taught to call our heavenly Father?

F. Yes, it is God, and Jesus Christ our Saviour, who are ever near those who trust in them, and who will hear as soon as ever they call, and who will help and deliver them from the devil and his snares.

So that you see, my dear children, how you must watch; if you would be kept safe from this great enemy. You must "watch and pray:" watch that you may pray, and pray that you may be safe.

V.

THE STORM AT SEA.

A LARGE ship lay near the shore; she was waiting for the wind; for all her cargo was on board. The sea, which had been long as calm as a great looking-glass, began to be ruffled over here and there as the flaws of wind fell upon it, and little waves began to rise upon it, looking very bright where the sun fell upon their sparkling tops, and quite black and dark where they curled away from his shining; and as they followed one another on to the pier, they broke against and ran up it, throwing up a little salt spray, through which the sun shone in many colours like a rainbow.

When the wind began to rise, every one was busy on board the ship. The sailors were running about, pulling the ropes, and shaking out the sails, and drawing up the anchor; and the captain was walking here and there, and seeming to think that they could never work hard enough, or get the ship quick enough ready to sail out to sea whilst the pleasant breeze lasted. However, the sailors laboured, and all was just ready, when a man came down to the sea-shore and jumped into a boat which lay there, and called to the sailors near to row him out to the ship, before she should sail away. He had but just time to reach her: he got along-side just as she began to cut the water with her keel, and he begged the captain to take him on board, and he would pay for his passage. After a few words it was settled between them; the boat pulled back to the shore, and the stranger was standing on the deck of the

vessel, watching the windows and the people and the houses, as they grew less and less every moment, until they could scarcely be seen the one from the other.

There were many things to do as the ship sailed on, and the captain and the sailors had not much time to look about them, or they would have wondered whom they had got on board. He was dressed in rough hairy clothes, and did not look like a merchant, or a sailor, or a soldier. He did not seem a rich or great man; and yet if you looked near into his face, there was something in it which made you look again and again. He seemed very full of thoughts; and these many thoughts had made many deep furrows in his face, and when he was pleased, as he was when he found that he had caught the ship, his face was lighted up with a very great joyfulness. But altogether he seemed very sad now. He hardly spoke to any one, and he looked often out into the air

and the sky, as if he saw strange things there, which were seen by no one beside. When any one spoke suddenly near him, he gave a great start, and seemed half ready to answer, as if he were expecting some one to call him. However, he was not much noticed, for every one was busy except himself, and had little time for looking at him. The sailors indeed would shrug their shoulders sometimes, and whisper to one another when he was amongst them: but for the most part he went on his way, and they on theirs, and they said little to each other.

For the first day, the breeze favoured them, and they were getting well on with their voyage. The sun rose clear the next day, and the pleasant breeze held up. The anxious face of the captain grew smoother, and he had a friendly word for the sailors when they came near him. Every one was busy in their work. You might see him walking as sailors do,

up and down the deck, talking to the chief of his crew under him. Perhaps they were talking about the cargo he had got on board; and what would be the state of the market at Tarshish, and how much he should make by the wheat and the fine cloth he had got on board; and whether he should find plenty of "gold and silver, and ivory and apes," (1 Kings x. 22.) at Tarshish, which he could bring back again in his ship to Joppa. Perhaps they talked about the strange man who had come on board, and what could be his business. 'He paid his fare, but he does not seem like a merchant; and he eats little and speaks to no one; and all last night the sailors say he never slept, but seemed like a man in whom some spirit dwelt.' So perhaps they talked, as the ship cut gaily through the waters, bounding like a spirited horse over the tossing waves.

But when the sun was past the middle

of the sky, and he began to sink towards the sea, a belt of thick clouds might be seen stretching along to the eastward. If a man watched them closely, he might see that they were creeping up the sky. You might see that they would soon be up with you,—those sky-travellers. And so they were; another hour spread them all over the heaven, and now the sun was getting near the sea; and the light was growing dim and grey.

‘We shall have but an ugly night of it, from the look of the sea and sky,’ was the captain’s judgment, and nobody thought him wrong. Already the wind was sighing over the sea, and whistling among the cords; and hark! what crack of the sail was that: ‘we shall not long be able to carry any sail at all.’ They were right; the wind grew into a storm: the storm grew into a hurricane: it was a fearful night: black and rough and roaring was the sea, and the poor ship strained

and tossed as she drove along before the wind like a bubble on the wave-top. At last the grey light of the morning began to give a leaden colour to the sky and the waves, but no help came with it. The wind only got higher and higher, and the waves tossed more and more fearfully, till they thought the ship would be broken by their force.

Then the captain bid the sailors bring up the costly merchandise of which he had hoped to make so good a sale, and threw it into the sea to lighten the ship, for 'we had better lose it,' he said, 'than be all sunk together.' So they brought it up, beautiful ears of wheat from Judæa, and bales of fine cloth of blue from Tyre, and they threw them into the sea, and the wild waves tossed them up as if they were playing with them, and then yawned, opened, and sucked them in, and they saw them no more. But still the storm did not abate, and they thought that soon the ship must go to pieces.

Now the captain and his men were heathen people, and did not know the true God : so they said in their heathen way, that they wondered which of the gods had sent this storm ; for they thought that there were many gods : and they began to pray every man to the god whom they most fancied. Then said one of the sailors, ‘ Where is the strange passenger in the rough garments, and why is not he praying with us ? ’ So they sought for him, and they found him down below fast asleep ; so worn out by watching, that he had fallen asleep at last, and slept all through that fierce night-storm which had kept all the rest so busy and so full of fear.

It was a strange sight to see how the man awoke : how he started and looked around him, and seemed more moved than any, as soon as he was woke from that sound sleep. Then they all prayed unto their gods, and the stranger prayed by

himself. No one heard his prayers, but it seemed that he was very earnest. Yet still the storm ceased not, but it tossed and roared worse and worse.

The captain's voice was then heard, and he said, "We must cast lots and see for whose sake this dreadful storm has come upon us." So they made lots, and began to cast them as best they could, in such a troubled state. And now all men marked the stranger, for his knees smote together, and his face was pale, and his eyes were fixed in the air, as if there sat always before them some terrible thing which no one else beheld. Soon the lots were given out, and the strange man was taken. Then said the captain to him, "Tell us who thou art, from what country, and of what business, and what doing of thine has brought this trouble upon us?"

Then was it wonderful to look upon that man, for he who had been so terrified, and like a man haunted by fearful

sights, became all at once quite calm, and he said in a deep strong voice which all the people could hear even over the roaring of the sea, "I am an Hebrew, and I serve the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land." Then he told them too why he had come with them, that he was a prophet of this true and only God; and that God had sent him on a work which he was not willing to do; and that he had been so mad as to think that he could fly from God, by crossing over the sea; but that he had found he never could fly from God: that in the calm, God had been with him, by night in the ship's sides; by day on the deep. When the sun rose red in the morning, when it burned bright at noon, when it set in the sullen sea at night; ever God was with him, and he could not fly from His presence, and now that He had sent this storm, he doubted not, as His messenger of wrath.

Then the men looked at him with fear: and they asked him how he could have brought this trouble on them by his sin, and what they were to do with him.

Then he spoke again as calmly and as quietly as before, and he told them to take him up and cast him into the boiling sea. The sailors looked at him and trembled; and they did not dare to do it; so they rowed with great oars, and tried to guide and save the ship; but it could not be. The waves only grew larger and larger, and the wind higher and higher; and still the strange prophet said to them, "If you would have the sea become calm, cast me into its floods." Then at last the men thought they must do according to his word. So they prayed to God not to hold them guilty of this stranger's blood, if according to his own command they cast him forth into the sea.

Then they laid hold on him. It was strange to see him, who while he was

flying from God was frightened at the very air, and started at every sound ; now calm, and quiet, and fearless, though he was about to be cast into that terrible boiling sea. But now he was not afraid, because he dared look up again to his God.

So they cast him into the sea, and its great waves closed over him, and they saw him no more ; and the sea became calm, and the vessel righted and went on her way peacefully.

But God had prepared a great fish which swam under those fearful waves, and when the prophet sunk under the waters, the fish swallowed him down. There was the prophet alive within the fish, who dived down to the bottom of the great sea and swam through all its storms, diving down lower than the roots of the mountains, amongst thick forests of seaweeds, green, and red, and blue, which man's eyes never saw or shall see.

Then the prophet prayed unto his God.

It was a strange place for prayer to come from; but faithful prayer can pass to God from any where; and from the fish's belly at the bottom of the deep sea, Jonah's prayer rose up to God on high. Then God commanded the fish, and he swam towards the shore of Jonah's country, and cast Jonah upon the shore. Strange and wonderful must have been his feelings when he stood once more upon the land; felt it firm under his feet, and looked out upon trees, and rocks, and houses, and faces which he had known before; for he was like a man who had come back to them from the grave and death. But one lesson surely he had learned, and that was, that man could not fly from God; for that earth, and sea, and air were full of Him, and did His bidding alway.

VI.

THE TWO ROADS. A DREAM.

I HAD been reading in the New Testament before I fell asleep, and the words I had read came back again to me in a dream.

I thought I stood upon the edge of a wide common, and that from every side people were crossing the common by many different paths, to a place where they all met just by my right hand. There were already a great number of people there when I first looked, and more and more kept coming there continually. They were of all sorts and ages, rich and poor, young and old, sickly and strong ;

and I wondered in my dream, what it was that brought them all together.

Then I thought that I walked into the middle of the crowd, to see what they were about, and then I soon found what they were doing. I found that all the paths in which they had been walking, ended here in two different gates, and they were all doubting into which of these two gates they should enter;—so I looked at the gates with the rest, and cast my eyes down the paths which lay beyond them.

A great many people were going in at the first gate at which I looked, and I could not wonder that they were. It stood wide open, and seemed to bid all who chose to pass through it. And then the path upon which it opened looked as gay and pleasant as a path could look. There was a bright gravel walk for those who liked it, running between beds of beautiful flowers; and a little on one side

there was a smooth grass walk which ran amongst fine spreading trees, from whose green branches I thought every bird of the air was singing. There were benches placed here and there under those trees, where every one could sit when he was tired, and rich ripe fruits seemed to grow close by for them to eat, and cool streams of water ran sparkling by, so that no one need be thirsty who could stoop down and drink. Then every one at first sight looked so cheerful and happy along the way. There were men and women singing and dancing, and there were children gathering flowers, and bright birds with silver feathers and golden eyes flew round and round; and the trees were all in flower, so that the air was quite scented with their smell, and bees hummed amongst the flowers, and the sun shone, and the rivulets danced, and all seemed alive and happy. I could not wonder for a moment that so many turned down this way.

Then I looked at the other gate, it was as narrow as the other was wide. It seemed indeed hardly wide enough to let any one pass, and so many found it. For I saw several who walked boldly up to it, and began to push in at it, but it caught the clothes of one, and the flesh of another, and the bundle of a third, and they could not get through. I saw too, sometimes a mother with a child in her arms, and it seemed she could not get through because of this child; and sometimes a father would hold a son's hand so fast, that neither could get in. What made this the stranger, was, that in spite of its narrowness, every one was able to push in, who tried with all their might. There were some very large people who pressed in, whilst others who were only half their size were kept out. Sometimes a mother, after much study, would be willing to let go her child, rather than be kept without, and then it seemed to widen for them both,

and they got in together. In a word it seemed wide enough to let the largest in with a struggle, and too narrow to let any in without; though children got in the easiest, and those who had fewest things to carry with them. Few bundles indeed were got in at all.

Nor were the troubles over when they had got by: the path was almost as narrow as the gate.

Instead of the smooth walks, and gay flowers, and bright sunshine of the other road, here the way was rough, and the tearing thorns grew very close to each side of the path; and there were many places in which it seemed to get altogether dark, so that no one would be able to keep clear of the thorns on one side or the other.

When I saw all this, I wondered that any should try to enter into it, instead of all hurrying together down the gay and easy road.

But as I cast up my eyes, in my sur-

prise I saw that there was a motto written over each, and I hastened to read them. That over the gate I was looking at, said thus:—

The narrow gate and thorny way,
Leads pilgrims to eternal day.

and then casting my eyes upon the other, I read—

This flowery way which men desire,
Must end in everlasting fire.

Now when I had read these two mottos, as I knew that the KING who had put them up was truth itself, I began to wonder how any could dare to go along the broad and easy way, though it did look so tempting; and I stopped to watch how it was that any dared to do so.

The first I saw was a fine high-spirited young lad; who, when I first looked at him, was still holding his father's hand. The old man looked somewhat sad, and I could see that he was struggling

hard to get himself and his son up to the narrow gate. Just then there came by a party of merry young people, and they stretched out their gay hands to the poor boy, and looked into his face with their laughing eyes, and he slipped away from his father, and made with them towards the broad way. Just before he turned in, he looked round and said to his father, ' I shall only go a little way with them, just to see what it is like, and then I shall turn back and follow you : ' and then he passed into the green walk, and I could see him for a long way laughing and merry, but he never seemed to turn round again, and I never saw him come back.

And as I looked, I saw many more turning in the same way ; some because they could not get a bag of money through the narrow way, and could not bear to leave it ; some because they were afraid of tearing their fine clothes in squeezing through ; some because it looked so dreary

all down the narrow way; and they longed to gather the flowers and the fruits with which the broad way was full: some from mere thoughtlessness, and some because those who were round them, began to jeer at them as soon as they turned their eyes towards the narrow gate. Some too I saw, who went in at the broad gate, because after walking a little way in the narrow road, they had got torn by the thorns which grew beside it. These seemed the saddest of any: but they were always persuading every one to go in at the wide gate. 'Trust us,' they would say, showing the scratches upon their hands and cheeks, 'trust us and be warned, for the path gets narrower and narrower, and darker and darker, and if you are fools enough to enter, you will soon wish yourselves out as we did.'

Now hearing this said by one and another, made me look a little closer at this narrow way. Then I saw that those who

set out on it, found mostly a few paces of easy walking just when they had squeezed through, and then that the path did get very narrow.

I heard one and another groan when the thorns tore his flesh, and there was hardly any one whom they did not tear sometimes. Those who got in young, as they passed the most easily through the gate, so they seemed to be getting on the best now they were in, and generally I could see that they who pressed on most earnestly found the way the easiest, and got the fewest rubs. But if any one began to loiter or to look back, he was in the thorns in a moment : and once in, no one could tell when they would get clear ; for first they were torn on this side, and then on that ; and even when they did get clear, they always seemed to enter on one of those dark places of the road through which they went sighing, and groaning, and stumbling, like men in a sore trouble and distress.

Many were so frightened by all this, that they turned straight back, and fled towards the narrow wicket, which then opened wide, and led them out too easily.

Now I had a great curiosity to see how these roads went on: and as I watched the walkers in the narrow road, I saw first that those who got on quickly, were often looking down to a book which they held in their hands, and then again looking up, as if to the heaven over their head. When first I saw one of them look down, I thought he would surely miss the track, and be in a moment in the thorns: but instead of this, it seemed as if he thus kept on straighter and quicker than ever. While I was musing upon this, I heard one of them read out of his book, "Thy word is a light unto my feet, and a lamp unto my paths." And another seemed to answer him at the moment by reading out—"Through thy commandments I get understanding, therefore I hate every evil way."

I saw too that instead of the way getting narrower, and more rough and thorny, it grew always easier, and smoother, and broader. To those who had come in young, it was very soon plain and pleasant; and though to the others it was longer rough, and they came here and there to a fresh set of thorns, yet it was plain that they got along much more easily than they had done. Some who had been always in the thorns on the one side or the other, were now walking steadily along: and some seemed almost flying, they moved so quickly by, and so easily. Flowers too began to blossom round them: the thorns turned often into sweet bunches of roses and woodbine: clusters, too, of ripe grapes, of which they eat just enough to refresh their lips, hung here and there in their way: and the birds began to sing sweetly to them.

No one now talked of turning back, but busy as they seemed in pressing on, I

thought they looked already happy: some indeed were joyous, and all were cheerful; and I overheard one and another sing cheerily, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

And now I could see but a little way before them, a bright and cheerful light which shone upon their road. As one and another entered into it, I lost sight of them: but I could hear by their last words which reached me, that they were then happier than ever. Some were singing holy songs, as if to the sound of harps and music of all kinds: some were nearly silent, but the little they did sing came from hearts full of joy; and I doubted not that what I could not see beyond, was even happier and better than that I had seen.

I could scarcely bear to turn away my eyes from these happy people, to look at those who had chosen the other path:

and when I did so I was soon full of sorrow. For when I came to look more closely, I saw that even at the first, where they looked the merriest, there was hardly one amongst them who was thoroughly happy. The mirth, too, which they had, died away as they went further. If one stooped to gather the fruit or the flowers, they faded away as soon as he had them in his hand, or turned into dust and ashes as soon as they reached his lips. The saddest of all were those who had once set out along the other road; they were ever turning round as if something affrighted them, or else pushing on madly as if they were running away from thought; and I could see, on looking closely, that the thorns still stuck in them and festered, and pricked them afresh at almost every turn. But though these were the saddest, yet as they went on, all grew sad. Gloom and darkness came over those faces which had been the merriest. They

were also ever falling out with one another, and so making matters worse.

When I saw them all so sad, I wondered that none thought of turning back and trying the other road. I soon found out a cause for this: for just as I was looking, I saw one try to turn; and lo, though he had been walking well and easily the other way, now I saw that he could scarcely stand. His feet slipped, his knees trembled, and he seemed all at once as weak as a young child: soon he slipped quite down; and as he lay bruised and groaning on the ground, those around him mocked and jeered at him! and I thought he would have risen no more—when, lifting his eyes up to heaven, he seemed to call for help, and then just scrambling up on his hands and knees, he got a few steps further, only to fall again, and groan again for help. At last however his feet steadied, and I saw him after many hard struggles reach the gate and push through it in spite of the

crowd of people, who were thronging in and would scarce let him pass ; and he fled to the narrow gate and pressed through it, and went on along the path, though its thorns seemed to tear him at every step, and the way was darker than I had ever seen it yet ; but still he pressed on like a man flying for his life ; and I never took my eyes off him till at last he got into the easier and lightsome stage of his new journey.

But for the rest who did not turn, it was a heart-breaking thing to look at them. For sooner or later they all got into a thick black darkness, which was now spread all over what had once been their gay and cheerful road ; and then I could see that they were parted from their friends, though they were most afraid of being alone ; and then I knew that some worse thing befel them ; for though I saw them not, I heard their cries and screams. They were exceeding loud and bitter, but

they brought them no help, for they cried when there was none to hear; but they were so loud and bitter that I thought I could not bear to hear them; and so in my trouble I woke, and behold it was a dream.

1. What text does this dream bring into your mind?

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life: and few there be that find it.”
Matt. vii. 13, 14.

2. What makes the way so narrow to us?

Our sins, which we must deny and fight against.

3. What are the thorns along the way?

The trials and difficulties of living as a Christian.

4. To whom is the way easiest?

To those who enter on it in youth and childhood.

5. What does it get to those who go on in it?

Easy and pleasant.

“ Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” Prov. iii. 17.

6. What does it end in?

Everlasting joys.

7. What are the flowers along the broad way?

“ The pleasures of sin.”

8. Why do they fade?

Because they are but “ for a season.” Heb. x. 25.

9. What are the thorns which fester and prick those who have left the narrow way?

The reproofs of conscience.

10. What is the joy of sinners like?

“ The crackling of thorns under the pot.” Eccles. vii. 6.

11. What is the end of the broad way?

Everlasting burnings.

VII.

THE SPRING MORNING.

IN a fresh and beautiful garden, full of every gay and sweet-smelling flower, I saw a merry party happily at play. Four boys made up the group: they were all of nearly the same size and age; and their light hearts laughed in their glad eyes, as they ran here and there in their sports and frolics. The very birds in the trees over them scarcely seemed happier than they—now chasing one another amongst the shrubs—now following some gay butterfly which floated by them on its blue and golden wings—now sitting by a murmuring stream which ran through the bottom of the garden, or refreshing them-

selves with the wood strawberries, whose ripe red berries shone upon its banks.

Whilst I was watching their sports, delighted with their gaiety, I saw the figure of a man coming to them from amongst the trees which bordered the garden. He went and sat down in the shade, called the boys round him, and began to speak to them. There was something most kind and tender in this man's face and voice, grave though it was; and as he spoke I could see that one or two of the boys looked very steadily at him, as if they wanted to catch every word that he said. None of them seemed careless, but one looked as if his spirit would come out through his eyes, so did he fix them on that grave kind face.

Then I thought that I drew near to the group; for they were not disturbed by my coming, and I listened to the words which were spoken to the boys.

'This,' I heard the man saying as I

came near, ' This is the garden I have told you of. It is, as you see, a very gay pretty place, and one that you boys can be very happy in for a few hours' play. But it is not a place that you can stay in. All its pleasant sights would soon turn into terrors. The flowers would wither round you : one by one the birds would cease to sing. Your happy spirits would go—you would try to keep up your play, but it would grow into a business—all the sweet fruits would become bitter to your taste—the water of the stream would lose its freshness—you would alter too—and then, as you lost your pleasure in play, you would begin to teaze one another and be unhappy : and then, worst of all, when the sun began to set, you would hear the roaring of many wild beasts all around you ; as it grew darker you would see their fierce eyes glaring out of the bushes, from which now the sweet birds sing to you ; and whilst you were trembling with

fear some of them would spring upon you and devour you.

‘ So that though this is a beautiful garden for an hour’s play in the morning, it is not your home, and you must not try to make it so. Your home, as I have told you, is not very far before you. Between this garden and it there lies a waste and dreary-looking space ; with some steep hills to climb ; some hot places to pass ; some slippery ways to walk over ; but there is nothing to harm you if you will follow my directions, I have myself passed over it, and you may trace my footmarks all along the way,—the deepest always and the plainest where there is any trouble or danger : and when you have passed this plain and reached your home, then you may indeed be happy. For there are gardens sweeter far than this : there the birds make a never-ceasing music : there darkness never puts out the light ; there are no evil beasts to harm you : there none



THE SPRING MORNING.

are ever tired : but you shall be always happy ; for all that are there love one another, and have all given to them that their hearts can desire.'

Then I saw that the eyes of the little boy who was listening so eagerly, sparkled brighter than ever, and a sweet smile came over his countenance, as he thought of that happy place. Then a happy grave look followed the smile, and I heard him say to the man, as tears filled his eyes, 'And shall I see in that beautiful garden, my father, and my mother, and my sister, who are gone before me?' 'Yes,' said the man, looking kindly into the child's face, 'if you reach that garden safely, there you will see them again, and nothing can ever part you more.'

'But now,' he went on, 'hear how you are to reach it: First, take care and lose no time in setting out for it. Though this garden is beautiful and sweet, and the way you have to go is barren and steep ;

yet do not stay here ; but set out at once. It is much easier to pass that road in the early morning. Even if you wait to the middle of the day it will grow harder, for then the sun will be hot, and the fresh dew will have dried off the green grass, and the hills will seem steeper to climb, and then perhaps you will grow weary, and halt till evening, and then it is dangerous; and the storms may gather, and the brooks you have to cross may swell; and if night should overtake you, you are lost. Then you would surely lose the foot-track, and either the miry places would swallow you up, or the fierce beasts that haunt that country would break out upon you, and you would certainly be devoured by some of them.

‘ This, then, is my first direction—Set out at once, for the road is surest and safest in the morning; and for the next, here are two gifts to help you on your journey. Here is a reed-flute; it is a

small thing to look at, but do not despise it, for it will be a great help to you. If you see any of the wild beasts of the plain prowling about, and sometimes they will venture out even in the day, play a few notes upon it, and they will surely leave you ; or if you doubt about your way, play upon it, and the foot-track will come out again clear before your eyes ; or if you are so weary that you are ready to forget the beautiful garden and rest at the end, play upon this, and the thought of the end will come fresh again upon your mind, and make you able to bear the toil.' So he gave each one of them a little reed-flute, which he called " Prayer," and showed them how to play upon it. Now they were common-looking flutes, but when they were touched by the breath, methought the music they sent forth was most sweet and piercing. When the little Agapè especially (for that was the name of the boy who had asked whether

he should see his father and his mother in the garden) when Agapè put his to his lips, it sent out notes sweeter than the nightingale's. Then the man gave them each a small bottle full of what looked like the clearest water, and he said, 'If you are at any time greatly weary with the way, take out this bottle and drink a few drops of its living water, and you will again be fresh and hearty. And now,' he said, 'farewell: I shall meet again in the happy garden all those who get there safely;' and so saying, he rose up, and walked slowly away from them until he was lost among the shadows of the trees from which he had come out.

Then I saw the little boys sit still for a while, as if they were thinking over the words that he had spoken: their echo seemed still to be speaking to them in the silence, and no one liked to be the first to disturb it. At last one of them, named Edonè, began: 'Well, what do you

say? of course we must all get away from this place before long, but I should like to have a little more play in it first.'

'So should I,' said Argia, 'and to sit a little longer on this hill, and eat a few more of these refreshing strawberries before we set out on the long tiring journey. What say you, Astathes?'

'I hardly know what to say; you see we were so much advised to set out directly.' 'Yes,' added Edonè; 'I do not mean to be late, but there can be no use in being in such a great hurry. It is quite morning now; if we were to play for another hour, and then rest a little, we should still be early; and I do not believe the sun will be any hotter then, and perhaps it will cloud over, or the wind will get up, and then, you know, it will be cooler instead of hotter.'

'So it may, indeed,' replied Astathes, 'and I do not know why we should be in a hurry; but what do you say, Agapè?'

That I mean to set out directly; and so I hope you will too. Think how happy we should be to get to that beautiful home early: and then, remember how we were told, more than once, that the earlier we set out, the easier it would be to us to travel; and I should have no pleasure in playing here, for thinking that the time was getting on, and that I had all my journey to go.'

'I believe you are right,' said Astathes; 'so if you are for setting out directly, I think I shall go with you.'

'Well then,' said the other, 'let us be off directly, for every minute seems long to me now.' So he took his reed-flute, and hung his clear bottle at his side, and set out, and Astathes with him, for the side of the garden towards the plain. Then Edonè and Argia began to laugh at them, and say, 'What a hurry you are in; we shall be there as soon as you, and have all the pleasure of playing here too.'

Then Astathes halted a little, and seemed ready to sit down again ; but Agapè took him by the hand, and away they began to walk. But Edonè grew angry at their going, and changed from laughing to scolding ; and then seeing they minded not that either, he took up stones, and began to throw at them. Astathes was for stopping again to speak with him ; but Agapè took his hand again, and said, ‘ See, the sun is getting high over the hills, even now ; let us push on, soon we shall be out of the reach of his stones.’ But seeing Astathes still frightened, he said, ‘ Let us try if the flute will help us ;’ so he played two or three notes of sweet music, and it seemed that directly they had got out of reach of the stones, and heard no more of the bad language which had troubled them.

So they walked on together, and began talking as little boys might talk. ‘ Oh Agapè,’ said Astathes, ‘ I wonder how

long the journey will take us, I long to get safely to its end.'

'I hardly dare think yet of its end,' said the other, 'for we have only just set out, but I too long to get to the end.'

'What a fine place that garden must be.'

'Yes, and there I shall see again my father and mother, and the kind sister who used to nurse me when I was little; and there we shall see the king of the country, who is kind to children, and loves to have them come and live with him.'

So they talked; and now they had come nearly to the waste, and first looked out into it.

'It looks very dreary and rough, Agapè,' said he.

'Oh! never mind its looking rough, I can see already a pathway through the thorns which frighten you.'

'Well, if you were not with me, I think even now I should turn back.'

'Never speak of turning back,' said

Agapè, and just then he reached the last stile which parted the garden from the waste. Lightly he sprung over it, and was setting out on the waste without thinking of looking behind, when he heard the voice of Astathes, who had not yet crossed the stile.

‘Wait a minute, Agapè, I want to gather some of this fruit to take with us, we shall have none, I can see, on the waste.’

‘No, no, dear Astathes, do not stop for the fruit, we shall find what we want on the way.’

‘But it looks so very barren.’

‘See, here is a good path, do not stop any longer, or I must go without you.’

‘Well, I will only gather a few more bunches of this fruit, and then I shall overtake you.’

Agapè walked on a little, and then hearing Astathes call, he stopped again to speak to him.

‘Why how fast you get on, I am afraid I shall never keep up with you. I think

I shall just stop behind, and come after you with Argia and Edonè; you know they are only staying a little behind.'

Once more Agapè begged him to come, and once he almost persuaded him; he climbed half up the stile, but then he let himself down again the wrong side, and then he stood leaning against it, and gazing at Agapè, who was already almost out of sight over the first hill. So he stood for a time, and then when he could see no more of Agapè, and could hear nothing of the others, the stillness of the place began to frighten him; and so after a while he stole back again to Edonè and Argia, who were still sitting on the pleasant bank, eating strawberries.

'So, here is one coming back again!' cried Edonè, who was the first to see him; and he began to laugh at him for the hurry in which he set off. Soon however they were good friends again: only As-tathes would not join in laughing at

Agapè, for in his heart he wished now that he had held on with him.

Then they thought that they would begin again to play together for a while, as they had done at first ; but whether it was that the sun had got higher, and the air was too hot for play, or whether it was that the going away of Agapè had made them all dull, I know not, but they never were able to play as they had done. They were loud, but they were not merry ; and as the sun rose higher and higher, they grew more and more tired of play and of one another. Then they sat down upon the bank to refresh themselves with the strawberries, but they had got hot too, and there was no refreshment in them : and Astathes began to think of what the kind grave man had said to them, and to wish in his heart more and more that he had gone with Agapè. So as these thoughts passed through his mind, he said to his two companions, ‘ Had we not better

be thinking about setting off;' he spoke as if he was half afraid to say it, and Argia sleepily answered, 'Why! the sun is just at the hottest now, surely you would not think of going now, we shall all be burned up with its heat.' But Edonè looked angry, and said quite crossly, 'I wish you had taken yourself off with that fool Agapè, and not stayed here to teaze us about going.'

'I am sure I wish I had,' he answered sadly enough, at which Edonè got quite into a passion, and declared he should not stay with them any longer, for that he spoiled all their pleasure: so they drove him away, and he wandered very sadly along the path in which he had set out with Agapè, till he came to the stile leading to the waste. Over this he looked out, and it seemed more barren and thorny than ever: the sun was very hot, and there was not a breath of wind; and all up the hill-side there was nothing to give him

the least shelter; and the pathway by which Agapè had gone in the morning, seemed narrower than ever: so that sometimes he could not see it at all, but all looked like a wall of thorns, through which he never could make his way; and as he looked out, he wept, for his heart sunk down within him.

But where, all this time, was Agapè? He had felt lonely enough when first Astathes had stayed behind; and as he climbed the first hill, he felt its steep steps heavy travelling: he felt too that he was quite alone, and that he was but a weak child after all: so finding his heart beginning to faint, he pulled out his sweet-voiced flute to help his flagging steps, and played some sweet music upon it: and as he played, it seemed as if heavenly words went along with the music, and they said, "In the waste howling wilderness he compassed him about." (Deut. xxxii. 10.) Then he thought of the king, and his heart was lifted up, and

straightway he was at the top of the hill. Now his path lay for a while down hill ; and he stepped on cheerfully and easily, until he came into a low green bottom ; here a stream ran across his path : he could see that sometimes after rain it was swelled very high, and there were marks put, to show the traveller who should come by at such seasons, how he might pass without being swept away. But it was low now, and there was no danger, so Agapè stepped easily over the stones that were laid in it, and gained the other side. Now as he pushed on, the sun grew higher and higher in the heavens, and Agapè began to feel faint and weary ; then he saw a soft green bank, and two or three bushes threw a pleasant shade upon it, and he was tempted to sit down upon it, and sleep awhile. But as he drew near it, looking carefully, he saw a snake lying in the grass, which startled him : so then he remembered himself, and he saw that the

deep footsteps of his guide had passed that bank by, and he thought, 'Perhaps, if I had fallen asleep there, I had never waked again. No, I will push on to my journey's end:—rest, rest, in the beautiful garden.' But as the sun still scorched him, he thought of the bottle, and drawing it out, he took two or three drops from it, and as he drunk, his ears seemed to be filled with these kind words, "The sun shall not smite thee by day, neither the moon by night." (Psalm cxxi. 6.) So he looked up, and saw just before him a grove of tall trees, and that his road lay under them. Right glad was he of their shelter, and of the breeze which blew gently through them, waving their high tops, and fanning his hot brow with its fresh breath. Now he made way easily, and swiftly: and as he walked along, he could look around him into the wood, and as he looked, he saw that on all sides of his path there were snares, and gins, and

pitfalls, and sometimes the ground was all tumbled and torn by the mouth of the pitfalls, as if some one had fallen in and struggled mightily at the mouth to save himself; and once or twice he saw in the gins and snares, what looked like the whitened bones of travellers who had been caught in them. Then was he more thankful than ever, that he had passed through this wood before it was night-fall, for 'How,' he said to himself, 'if it was but twilight,—how should I possibly escape these dangers?' With such thoughts he passed along; and now when he was nearly out of the wood, he saw something creeping on towards him from the left hand of the path. He kept his eyes watchfully fixed upon it, for fear of any evil, for he was a watchful child. Soon he saw that it was indeed a very fearful beast, and in another moment he knew that it was a great lion; already he could see that the lion's eye was upon him, and his long

white teeth were gnashing, and he was just ready to spring upon him. Then for a moment the boy's heart sunk quite low, and he was ready to give all over for lost, when the thought of his flute came into his mind, and taking it quickly out of his bosom, he played a few earnest notes upon it. As soon as the notes of the flute were heard, the lion turned round and dashed away into the thicket; and Agapè saw him no more, but instead of his loud angry growl, it seemed as if the refreshing breeze in the tree-tops formed itself into words, and it said to him, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." "Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you."

Then Agapè passed out of the wood; and as he came out of it, he could see before him in the distance, for the first time, the gate of the beautiful gardens, golden and shining; and within he thought he could see some heavenly figures, and he

fancied that perhaps they were his sister, and his father, and his mother, looking out upon his weary steps as he journeyed over the waste. His heart yearned after them, but his feet were weary, and the sun smote upon his head, and it seemed the hotter for the pleasant shade which he had left. Then, as he was tempted to turn back again to the wood, he saw plainly marked upon the road the beloved foot-prints—and forthwith taking courage, he drew out his flute and played, and so pressed more cheerfully along the road. He had not travelled far, when he saw by the road-side a pleasant arbour; and though the footsteps had passed it by, he saw it written up in the writing of the king, that here it was lawful for weary travellers to rest awhile. So being foot-sore and worn, here he sat him down and drew out his bottle, and refreshed himself with its living water. Then as he sat, the heavens clouded over, and a mighty

storm swept by; the rain fell in torrents, and he could hear the wild beasts in the wood that he had left, roar and moan, but they came not near him; and after awhile, the storm passed over, the sky cleared again over head, and he set out on his way. The sun was now passed its mid-height, and there was a pleasant air beating on his brow. So Agapè moved on speedily, and by the rate at which he was going, it would not be long before he reached the golden gates of the happy gardens.

But where, all this while, was Astathes, whom we left looking over the stile into the waste that lay towards the garden? Long did he stand there bewailing his folly, that he had not gone with Agapè, until at last, looking up into the sky, he saw that the sun was past mid-day; and he thought how soon it would hasten to set; and therefore that he must at once begin his journey, unless he would give up

all hopes. So, gathering all his courage he sprang over the stile. But he had almost turned back again as soon as he had set out, so sorely was he pricked by the thorns. Either the way was really narrower than it had been in the morning, or he did not tread so steadily as Agapè: for where he had almost run, Astathes could now scarcely creep. A little, however, he did get on, though with many a rub and tear, and his feet and ancles were bleeding and wounded. Now, too, the path began to rise up the steep, and the sun was striking so hot upon his back, that he was ready to faint. Then he thought of his bottle, and he drew it out; but it had been corked so long, that the cork had got fixed so firmly in, it was long before he could stir it, or get the least drop from it. At last, however, he did, and "Afterwards he repented and went," seemed to come with a promise of acceptance upon his spirit. And now he had not yet reached

the top of the hill, when the storm that overtook Agapè safe in the king's arbour, fell upon him on the bare hill-side. Heavily did it beat upon him, as the rain fell in torrents, and the fierce gusts of the whirlwind swept by him, and the pealing thunder-clouds seemed to come quite down all around him. The ground, too, under his feet, became miry with the rain, so that he fell back almost as much as he gained, and often slipped quite down into the dirt, bruising and wounding himself sorely. At last, however, he reached the top, and down the other side of the slope he got on something better; though here, too, he slipped about, and got more than one shrewd fall. But when he came to the bottom of the slope, sorely was he put to it. The stream over which Agapè had passed so easily in the morning, was now swelled into a roaring torrent, and it dashed along, foaming and boiling and eddying, carrying all along in its course.

Poor Astathes! What shall he do? either he must venture into the stream, or he must give up for ever the rest of the happy garden. Just then he spied the posts which were set to guard travellers in the time of floods. So plucking up a little courage, he began to creep along by them. First, the water was ankle-deep, then it got knee-deep, then it rushed by his waist, and still the boy kept on, holding by the posts: another step, and it covered his shoulders, and lifted his feet from the ground. Firmly he held on to the post, or he had been quite swept away by the stream, and carried down with it and drowned. When at last he gained his feet again, he knew not what to do. He was not nearly through the stream, and what if the next step he took, he should lose footing of the bottom altogether, and the waters should pass over him, and he should perish? Then, first, he thought of his flute, and he said within himself,

‘Perchance this may help me.’ With sore trouble he drew it out, and tried to make some music upon it; but not a note could he sound. Then he saw that either in his many falls as he came along, or else whilst he was playing idly in the garden, the earth had got into his flute and almost stopped up its small holes, so that no sound could pass. Here, however, the waters helped him, and by the time that he was almost benumbed, he had got the flute clear enough to be able to waken on it a few poor notes—and so soon as its sound was heard, the waters began to sink, and the child thought that he heard a sweet voice amongst their roaring. He could hardly hear what it said, but he thought it was this: “When thou passest through the floods they shall not overflow thee.” Then did he dare put forth his foot again to try another step, and he found that he was already at the deepest part; so clinging close to the posts, and

much fearing still, lest there should be any ugly holes before him into which he might fall and be lost, but still saying over to himself the words that he had heard, he crept through and climbed, faint and weary, up the other side. When he reached it, he sunk down upon the grass ; so cold and numbed and tired was he ; and there he might have laid till he died, if he had not thought upon his precious bottle, which soon so far revived him, that again he girded up his strength, and passed on towards the wood.

Just at this very time Agapè was reaching the golden gates ; the sun had not quite set, but it hung just over the top of the far hills, and shot a red golden brightness over every thing. Rich and beautiful did those gates shine out before the glad eyes of happy Agapè. Now he could see plainly, multitudes of heavenly creatures passing about within ; wearing light as a garment, and crowns that looked like

living fire. At times too, he could hear bursts of ravishing music, which the garden seemed always to be sending up on high, and some few notes of which strayed out even into the path-way of the plain.

And now he stood before the gate ; full was his heart of hope and fear : a pleasant happy fear, as if too much joy lay close before him. Now all the troubles of the way were over ; and as he looked back, it seemed but a little moment since he had left the beautiful, but deceiving garden in the morning, and all his troubles seemed light. The scorching of the sun he remembered no more—the weary hill-side, the gin-set forest, and the lion's paws : all these seemed little now ; and he only thought of them to thank the king who had brought him so safely through all. As he lifted up his eyes to do so, they lighted upon a golden writing which was hung over the gate. So he read the writing, and it was, “ Knock, and it shall

be opened." Then did he indeed draw in a deep breath, as one does before doing some great thing, and knocked with all his force: and so as soon as he knocked, the golden door began to open, and the happy boy entered the garden.

What awaited him there, it is not given me to tell; but from the blessed sounds which fell upon my ear as the gate rolled back, I may not doubt that he was entirely happy; for it was as if the sound of a sea of heavenly voices suddenly swept by me.

Just as Agapè reached the golden door, Astathes was entering on the wood. As he turned into it he saw the sun sink below the far-off hills. Twilight came fast on, and he soon found it very hard to trace out the path. So thick were the branches over head, and so faint and feeble the remaining light. More than once he was on the very brink of a deep pit-fall, and only saved himself from falling in, by catching at the bushes which grew

round its mouth. More than once too, did he get his foot entangled in those gins and snares wherewith the side of the path was full, and only escaped from them grazed and hurt by the sharp teeth of the biting traps. On all sides of him, too, wild beasts were roaring. Now had that come true, of which in the morning he had been warned—that out of every bush, instead of the liquid notes of sweet singing birds, there should gleam forth upon him the fiery eyes of savage monsters thirsting for his blood. As he heard their deep roars, or, more near to him, the savage snapping of their sharp teeth; as he saw their fiery eyes, and almost felt the brushing of their soft or wiry hides, he felt more than ever before, how foolish he had been in losing the morning hours, and not passing through the wood whilst the sun was high. His escaping all these dangers was a wonder above the power of man. But as he went into the wood, he had

taken his flute out of his bosom, and though he could not draw from it such music as came from the breath of Agapè on his, yet now, by care and trouble, it was much freed from its earthly hindrances, and made a low clear music. All the wood through did Astathes keep playing on the flute ; never was it from his lips ; and though he woke from it no sounds of pleasure, or of triumph, yet it doubtless saved him from the fierce jaws which on every side were gaping for him ; and he passed out of the wood in safety. But when he entered on the plains beyond, no such clear sight of the golden gates, or the happy gardens gladdened his eyes as Agapè had seen. Perchance in the twilight there was a little brightness thereabouts, but it was dull and uncertain ; and after his frights in the wood, the boy's heart would have fainted wholly within him, if it had not been for the precious bottle with which he moistened his parched

lips. "He shall make thy darkness to be light;" the waving boughs of the trees then seemed to murmur to him, as he walked from under their shelter; and this raised his spirits, so that he again set forth. Now was he by the arbour, but the twilight was too far advanced for him to see it, or to rest therein. So, weary and distressed, he pressed forward, until at length a "light rose upon his darkness;" for he too, as he drew nearer to the golden gates, was soothed with some soft sounds of mercy, until with a beating heart, and a straining eye, he seized the golden knocker, and oh, joy of joys! the gate opened for his entrance, and Astathes, poor wavering Astathes himself, of the king's bounteous goodness, entered the heavenly garden.

But what, all this day through, were Edonè and Argia doing?

After they had driven Astathes from them, they sat for a while longer on the same grassy bank, dreamily doing nothing.

Then as the sun grew hotter and hotter, Argia fell asleep, and Edonè strolled some way from him to gather the rich-looking ripe fruit which hung from a tree a little further on ; there he sat for hours eating the fruit, and throwing the stones playfully from him ; whilst Argia still slept on in the pleasant shade, until the sun was beginning to set. Just at that moment Edonè saw a fierce beast coming nigh to Argia. He thought it very shocking to see his friend eaten up by the beast, but he was much more afraid for himself, and he thought that if he called to wake up Argia, the beast might perhaps turn upon him instead. So he tried, without making any noise, to steal away into the wood. The beast came up to Argia, who slept so soundly that he seemed to be dead ; when just at that moment Edonè shook the bushes as he fled away. The evil beast looked up, and seeing Edonè, he sprung like lightning after him, and Argia was

first woke up, by hearing the dreadful shrieks of Edonè, as the beast seized him in his claws, and doubtless tore him in pieces. It was a sad hearing for Argia. He started up and ran he knew not whither; then he thought of his flute, and felt for it in his bosom, but it had fallen out whilst he slept, and he hardly dared steal back to look for it. At last, however, he did: but when he found it, it was so bent and bruised in his sleep, that it seemed as if it never again would make any music. However, having found it, he started off as fast as his feet would carry him; and as it happened, he ran straight to the stile over which Agapè and Astathes had passed. In his sore fear he sprung over the stile, and began to hurry up the hill in spite of the thorns and the steepness. But there he was lost from my eyes in the gathering darkness of the night; and I know not how it fared with him further. Whether he was drowned

in the swollen stream, or lost in the pitfalls, or snared in the gins, or devoured by beasts, or whether he did straighten and tune his marred flute, and with the help of its music just reached the golden gates, I cannot say; but I greatly fear for Argia, for I know who it is that hath said, "The night cometh when no man can work."

Q. What was the pleasant garden, and who were these boys in it?

A. The garden is this world and its pleasures; and the boys are the children of Christian people.

Q. Who bade them set out early, and gave them "prayer" and "promise" to help them?

A. Jesus Christ our Saviour gave them these in His Church, into which they had been received at baptism.

Q. Who set out directly?

A. Agapè, or 'Love,' who longed to reach the better country.

Q. Who set out with him, but turned back at the stile ?

A. Astathes, or ' the waverer.'

Q. What was the stile that turned him back ?

A. The first difficulties of self-denial in the service of Christ.

Q. Why was the journey of Agapè easy ?

A. Because he set out early, and religion is easiest to those who do so.

Q. What is meant by the beautiful music of his flute ?

A. That his prayers were heavenly, and that he had much communion with God.

Q. What did this save him from ?

A. All the dangers of the way.

Q. When Astathes went back from the stile, whom did he join ?

A. His worldly companions, who would not set out yet in Christ's service.

Q. Was he truly happy with them ?

A. No : for there is no true friendship or happiness without God.

Q. Was this unhappiness of use to him?

A. Yes, it led him to set out in earnest for a better country.

Q. Was his journey as easy as that of Agapè?

A. No; all his difficulties and dangers were greater; it was much harder to begin to serve God.

Q. What is meant by his flute being choked with mud?

A. That prayer cannot rise from an earthly heart.

Q. What is meant by the water in which he was almost lost, making it easier for him to play on it?

A. That affliction often teaches men to pray in earnest.

Q. Did his troubles last?

A. Yes; almost all through his journey, he had more difficulty and less comfort than Agapè.

Q. Tell me in the language of scripture why this was?

A. Because he did not “Remember his Creator in the days of his youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, wherein,” he said, “I have no pleasure in them.”

Q. Was he received at last?

A. Yes; of God’s mercy he did reach the heavenly place.

Q. Did Edonè or ‘pleasure?’

A. No; whilst he was selfishly trying to escape, by leaving his friend to be destroyed, he was overtaken by destruction.

Q. What is meant by the flute of Argia being bent and broken in his sleep?

A. That a life of worldliness and indolence robs a man of the power of prayer.

Q. What is meant by his getting so easily over the stile?

A. That in the terror of punishment, men whose hearts are not truly turned to God, often make great efforts to escape when it is too late.

Q. Did Argia, or 'indolence,' who waited till eventide, escape ?

A. We know not: for some are received at the eleventh hour: but we greatly fear that he perished.



VIII.

THE RUNNERS.

I DREAMED that I was walking through a foreign country far away from this land : and I thought I came to a wide grassy plain, sprinkled over here and there with shrubs and trees, between which lay an open space, looking as green, and smooth, and fresh, as a newly-mown lawn ; and as I was casting my eyes over it, and wondering why it was kept so smooth, I saw a number of persons all crowded together at one end of it ; so I walked on till I joined them, that I might learn what was going on. There I saw several of the group dressed all alike, and could soon see that

they were ready to run a race. They had cast off all those clothes which could hinder them in running, and they seemed to be all ready to set out as soon as the signal should be given. While I was looking at them, a herald of the king of the land came out of his tent, and began to read to them the rules of the race. He told them that the king would give crowns to all who strove earnestly in that race. That these crowns would be brighter than any crowns of this earth; and that he would take every one who won a crown, to receive him into his family, and treat him as his own son; and that such should never suffer more, or want any thing; but that they should dwell for ever in the king's palace, and be as happy as heart could wish. He told them, too, that all who halted in the race, or did not run earnestly, would lose these crowns, and that they would be as surely punished, as the rest would be rewarded; that they

would be cast into a dark and dreary country, where they would work ever under hard taskmasters, and groan for their stripes and misery, without help and without hope.

When I heard these rules, I looked more earnestly than before upon the men who were about to run ; and to my surprise I saw that there were many more than I had seen at first. There were many whom I had thought mere bystanders or lookers-on, but who I now saw were indeed amongst the runners. Yet I could scarcely believe it. For they were not dressed like the others ; they had taken no care to gird up their loins ; some of them had long flowing clothes, which must get in their way as soon as they began to run ; some were eating and drinking, forgetting that they had a hard struggle before them, and would need to be as light and as active as possible when they got into the race ; and yet all seemed

to think that they should do very well, and made no doubt at all that there were crowns for them as well as for the rest.

Even amongst those who were better prepared, I could see, on looking closer, a great difference between some and others. Some were strong and active, and looked as if they could not fail of getting the first crown, and living for ever in the happy palace of the king; whilst others were pale and faint, as if they had hardly any strength to walk, and must fall short as soon as they began to run. Some seemed too old to do any thing but hobble, and some so young that they could scarcely do more than crawl.

Whilst I was looking them over and over, and waiting eagerly to see the end, I heard a trumpet sound, and all who were to run got ready for the start. Soon another trumpet sounded, and away they set. For a few paces all went on together, but only for a few. First I saw that those

who had been carelessly eating and drinking, and never thinking of the race they had to run, began to flag and faint. One after another they halted, and as the rest ran on, they were soon left altogether behind. Then I saw that one and another of those who would not put on the runner's dress, began to stumble and fall, as their long clothes caught the wind, and entangled their feet. So they too were left behind. Only one or two of them began to strive to cast off their long garments, and to gird up their loins like the better runners. But whilst they stopped for this, the rest passed on, and they were left quite behind: all but one, who, though he was a good way behind, yet seemed determined not to lose the crown, and so laboured mightily to regain the ground that he had lost, and I could see him still following, though far behind, and looking very weary and distressed, but still pressing on as one who would not give up the struggle.

And now their number was sadly thinned, and I could look all the closer at those who still followed on. One brave runner there was who took the lead of all; he was made for speed and strength, and though he was at the head of the race, he did not seem to labour so much as many that got on less quickly, for he often looked round to see how others fared, and had a jest ready when this one fell off, and a joke when another stumbled. As they turned a corner in the course, I heard one of the king's heralds speak to this man in a grave sad voice as he went by, and he seemed to say to him, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." 1 Cor. x. 12.

Then there followed another, and he too was a brave runner; he set his feet firmly on the ground, and drew his breath so evenly, it seemed as if nothing would weary him. But as I watched his running, I saw that he hardly ever

looked on to the end of the course. He had his eyes sometimes on the ground, sometimes on those near him; and if a bird did but fly out of a bush with gayer feathers than the rest, or if the air was scented with sweet-smelling flowers, he would make a half stop, as if he must stay for them, before he could go on with the race. A little way behind him came another, and he too, methought, promised well for a crown, for he too had a strong step, and an active body; but his eyes too were wandering, and once or twice I thought, as he passed near the fruit-trees of that land, on which grew fruit of gold and silver, that I saw him catch at the beautiful boughs, as if he wished to fill his hands even whilst he ran the race. I heard one of the heralds speak to these two also: and to the first he said, in a chiding tone, and yet full of kindness, "I press toward the mark" (Phil. iii. 14); and to the other, "Laying

aside every weight," (Heb. xii. 1); but it did not seem to me that his words sunk much into their hearts. For a little while indeed they ran more steadily, but soon I could mark their eyes wandering, and their hands stretched out, just as they were before the warning.

Some way after these there came another. He was not so strong as those who had gone before, but there was a great firmness in his face, and his eyes seemed set straight on, as if he looked at something in the air before him. Then I strove more earnestly to see on what his eyes were set, and I could see far before him the end of the course, and there the judge's chair was set, and the judge himself was seated in it. He was a grave and comely person, and a crown was on his head; and at his right hand there were shining crowns stored up for those who prospered in the race; and I thought as I looked, that his eyes were on the steady runner,

and that he looked at him with kindness and love.

Then came another, and he was nimble and light of foot, though he was now so far behind,—a little while before, and he had been the front of all; and then he had stopped to take breath, as though he were confident that at any time he could regain the ground that he had lost: and so now he was far behind, and there came a warning to him from one of the heralds, and it was this, “Be not weary in well doing,” and when he heard it he started forward, and got nearly to the head of all; but then he grew slothful, and began to pause again, as if the race was nothing more than sport, and its bright crown no better than a jest. While he was thus loitering, I noticed one come up, whom I had marked at first, as very lame and aged. He had soon been left behind: yet still there was a great earnestness in his countenance. Many times when

I thought he must have given in, I heard him call upon the name of the king, as if he would not be left behind; and then strength came unto his weakness, and he got on nobly in the course. Lame, too, as he was, I saw him often lend a hand to a poor feeble-looking runner, who was pressing on behind him. He too was in earnest, but he was very weak, and often his steps tottered, and he caught at the hand of the lame man, or he must have fallen: and so it was, that whenever the lame man helped him on, instead of being delayed by his kindness, he seemed to help himself too; and the crown looked brighter at the end of the course, and the judge's chair and the goal seemed to come nearer to him.

Now behind them came a fair child, beautiful to look upon, and almost with the face of an angel; but how its little feet could bear the road, or what could put into its young heart to run the race, I could

scarcely think, till I saw that a hand was guiding it I had not seen at first: and there was written upon it in letters of gold, "He shall gather the lambs in his arms." So then I knew that the little child was safe, and I fancied that I could see the judge holding out the crown which was to adorn that infant head.

But as I gazed, I heard a cry as of one in distress, and I looked round, and I saw the foremost runner fallen all along upon the ground. Alas, he had not minded the warning of the herald: he had not fixed his eyes upon the crowns and the goal: and so as he was looking idly round to see how others fared, he stumbled and fell, and now he lay all along upon the ground, and he could not regain his footing. The ground where he had fallen was all miry and unsound, and the more he struggled the more he sunk into it. I heard him cry out, and a sharp sad cry it was, but I never heard him call

upon the king, and so he lay struggling and labouring, until all had passed him by, and he was left behind.

The others passed on: but the careless runner, I grieved to see, was still running carelessly, and looking no more towards the end of the race, nor pressing more towards the mark than when I saw him last. I feared for him too: and even as I looked, a beautiful bird of the rarest feathers fluttered out of a bush by the side, and almost within his reach. I saw his eyes sparkle, and he turned a little on one side, it was only a little, and he did not wholly cease from his running, but that little cost the poor man his crown: for there were secret spikes set amongst that grass which lay out of the road, and as he hurried on after the gay bird which fluttered just before him, he trod amongst the spikes and fell; and as I looked, I saw that it was written up, just where he had left the smooth grass of the

course, "The way of transgressors is hard."

He who had been warned at the same time by the king's faithful herald, was just by when his companion turned aside out of the way; and when he saw the other fall, for a time methought it made his countenance graver, and he raised his eyes and looked off from the trees of gold to the far end of the course. And then there fell a light upon his face, which I had never seen on it before. But soon it died away; and a film gathered over his eyes, and the crowns and the end were hidden from them; and just then a golden bough stretched quite out into the road, and its fruit of silver and of gold almost touched his hands. He looked at it, and I feared that he was lost. He stopped to handle it. He gathered some of its rich fruit, and began to load himself with it. Just then came up the slower runner, whose eyes had ever been fixed upon the end.

To him he offered some of the spoil, if he would stay and help to gather it : but the man could not take his eyes off from the end ; and so he looked not round upon the baits with which the other strove to tempt him, but saying, " I press toward the mark," he was for passing on his way. The sound of those words which he had heard of old from the herald, startled the other somewhat, and he let the bough go. Then there came, as from the air, a voice which said, " They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare ;" and again, " But thou, O man of God, flee these things." When he heard these words, the faithful runner hastened on his way ; and even the tarrying runner trembled and set out again upon his course. But he could not bring himself to cast away the fruit that he had gathered ; and it grew heavier and heavier, as he strove to carry it, until first he halted, and then he fell by the way-side, pierced through with many sorrows.

Then there passed by one running bravely, with his face towards the goal, and his steps nimble; and I was glad when I saw the man so earnest, for I could see that it was the same who had fallen back before, from loving to take his ease; and now I had good hopes for him, that he would hold on to the end. Yet even as he ran, my heart misgave me for him; and I looked round with more confidence on the lame man and his fainting friend, who were striving to reach the end. Close by them too was the fair child, who seemed to glide along the way, so easy was his running. I could not take my eyes from them, though I could hear still further back the voice of one calling on the king for aid, and I thought by the sound, that it grew somewhat nearer. But as I listened to it, I heard a sound of the sweetest music, and I saw, on looking up, that it came from golden harps on which men clothed in white were playing round

the judge's chair; and now they touched their harps because one had reached the end. Then I drew near to see who was the happy man: it was not the man who had just before passed me so nimbly, but it was the slower runner whose face had been set so steadily to the end of the race. And I saw that as he drew near, the king smiled upon him with a loving smile; and he spake the word, and a crown was brought to him, and he set it on his servant's head. It was bright to look upon, like the diamond and the topaz, and on it there was written in letters of fire which flashed out on every side—"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life."

Then the golden doors of the king's palace were rolled back, and beautiful lights and sounds were seen and heard from within—and I saw the crowned runner walk towards the door, and he passed within, and the happy crowd within

thronged about him, and gave him a glad welcome; and though I could but just see his face, I saw that joy sat upon it; that the struggle of his hard race was over, and that sorrow and sighing had fled far away. Much did I long to go in with him into the happy place, but it was only for the runners; and the golden gates shut soon upon him, and hid their joy from those who were without.

Whilst I was wishing to run in the race myself, I heard the harps of gold touched again, and give out their sweet music. Then I looked up, and three more of the runners drew near. The lame man, and the fainting runner, and the fair child stood before the judge's chair. The king looked on them with his mild love, and he called straightway for crowns, which he set upon their heads. Then I saw that on the crown of the lame man it was written, "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved:" and turning to him

who had so often almost fainted in the way, and who could even now scarcely believe that he was safely landed at the goal, I saw it written on his crown, "To him that hath no might, he increaseth strength:" whilst the fair child looked fairer and more beautiful than ever, and he bore upon his crown the writing, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Then these three walked together towards the golden doors, which opened for them of their own accord, to the sound of the sweetest music; and they too went in and were soon mingled with the happy people there.

Then I thought within myself of the man who had passed so nimbly by me, and promised so well for a crown, and yet who had not reached the end. So I walked slowly down the course to see if I could light upon him. I had gone but

a little way from the end when I saw a choice arbour; shady with flowery shrubs, and sweet with every scented flower; and there on the mossy seat within I saw the nimble runner stretched out at length, and fast asleep. So I tried to awaken him, but could not—he only turned in his sleep and slept the sounder. My heart was grieved for the man, but as I came out of the arbour, I saw he had not been unwarned; for it was written up over the door-way by which he had come in: “Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep.”

And as I came out, I heard the same voice of one calling on the king, which I had heard before, and looking round I saw the runner who had so late cast off his flowing robes, and girded himself for the race. He was toiling indeed with his eye fixed on the end, and yet only seeing its brightness at times; and when it was clouded over, I heard him call again upon

the king, like one who feared that all was lost.

But now his troubles were well nigh over, for soon he heard the welcoming music of those heavenly harps, and a crown was brought out for him which shone with these words: "Faint, yet pursuing;" and the golden door opened for him, and the scales fell altogether from his eyes, and all the labour of his race was forgotten in the fulness of the joy which flowed into his soul. So whilst I was thinking how I could myself begin to run in this race, I awoke, and behold it was a dream.

Q. Do you remember any passages of scripture which this may explain?

A. Yes: "So run that ye may obtain."
"I therefore so run, not as uncertainly,"
... "but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection. . . . They do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we

an incorruptible.” (1 Cor. ix. 24—27.)
“ Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” Heb. xii. 1.

Q. What then is the race ?

A. The Christian life.

Q. What is the crown ?

A. Everlasting life.

Q. Who is it that gives it ?

A. Our heavenly Father.

Q. Who are they who set out unprepared ?

A. Those who have been baptized, and are called Christians, but who will not strive to serve God.

Q. Who is he that ran so bravely, but fell whilst he was looking about him ?

A. One who set out well, but fell away through trusting in himself, and not in Christ.

Q. Who was he whom the gay bird lured away ?

A. One who follows "the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season."

Q. Who was it that stopped to gather the golden fruits?

A. One whom the love of riches and earthly pleasures tempted to forget heaven and Christ's promised crown.

Q. Who was it that was asleep in the harbour?

A. The slothful man, who wishes to get to heaven, but will not take the trouble of going on serving God.

Q. And who was he who did not promise much at first, but kept his eyes fixed on the end, and the soonest got the crown?

A. One who makes no noise about his religion, but looks steadily to Christ, and to the end, and so who serves God truly.

Q. And what do the three who came in together teach you?

A. That Christ will hold up the weak, and the lame, and children too, and carry

them safely to the end, if they will trust in him, and strive earnestly to serve him: and that God's service is easier to holy children than to any others.

Q. What is to be learned from him who came in last?

A. That they who begin to serve Christ late, have more difficulties than others; but that if they strive mightily and call in earnest on Him for help, he will at last carry them through in safety, and give them the crown of life.

IX.

THE YOUNG SHEPHERD.

IN a large upper room, just under the flat roof of the house, sat a family at breakfast. They were round a rude wooden table, and they lay along on benches which were placed round its sides.

A fine family they were to look on, that old venerable man and his eight sons. The three who were the nearest to their father looked like soldiers. They belonged to the king's own guard, and proud enough they were that they did so. There were no finer men in all the camp of Saul than these, when they went out after him in their shining armour, treading strongly on the ground, and making it rattle and

shake under their brazen greaves. Now they sat unarmed like the rest round the table, eating the loaves and parched corn and cheese and butter which their father had brought out of his stores; and the fresh honey in the honey-comb which their youngest brother had found in the wood.

The old man looked happily round upon his sons, and perhaps his eye rested with an especial love upon his youngest; for he was still a lad, not come to the height or strength of his brothers, and his long hair curled over his ruddy countenance, which looked fresh and clear as the dewy morning. A stranger would not much have noticed him amongst these strong fine men, his elder brothers: and they all despised him for his youth; and left him to take charge of their father's sheep. But there was ONE who did not despise him. There was ONE who looked on him with far more favour than on

those proud and haughty soldiers; and that ONE was God. For this young lad had sought and found the God of his fathers. He was a holy youth—he loved to hear of God—he knew all the wonderful histories of his people of old; how God had chosen Abraham, and blessed Isaac, and preserved Jacob. He loved to hear of the time when in the far wilderness, Jacob had laid his head upon a stone to sleep, and God had sent him the beautiful visions of his holy angels coming up and down as on a ladder from the earth to heaven; on all these things he would think and ponder as he sat watching the sheep in the waste; and sometimes you might see his hands clasped together in earnest prayer to this great God of Abraham; sometimes his eyes would fill with tears, which would run all down his cheeks as he thought of these deep things, and longed to know God more himself, and to see some of these wonderful and great

sights which holy men before now had seen. Sometimes you might hear him playing on a little harp, which he loved so well that he seldom went to the far folds without it; and then he would sing to its music, and pour out the most holy and heavenly praises and psalms. God was teaching this shepherd all these holy songs, in which his full pure heart ran over when he praised and gave thanks unto His name.

Once when he was thus praising and thanking his God, he did find in a wonderful way that God was near unto him. It was the winter time: the snow lay upon the high grounds: and the wind roared and howled through the woods, making the tops of the cedar-trees bow and murmur like the waves of the sea, or the whispering of some great army in a place of many echoes. He had pent up his flock in a sheltered place, under the lee of a high wood, and as he sat watching them,

and listening to the tossing trees, it seemed to him as if the voice of the wind and the murmur of the forest was a song of praise to the God of all. 'I will not be silent,' he said within himself, 'whilst all things are praising the Lord:' so he took up his harp, and began to sing to the wild notes which it flung forth as his hand swept over it. Perhaps he sung as he once did, "Praise the Lord upon earth; ye dragons and all deeps; fire and hail, snow and vapour, wind and storms, fulfilling his word: mountains and all hills; fruitful trees and all cedars; beasts and all cattle. . . . young men and maidens; old men and children; praise the name of the Lord, for his name only is excellent, and his praise above heaven and earth." Psa. cxlviii. 7—12.

Hardly had he finished the last words when he thought that he heard a roaring louder and nearer than that of the forest behind him, and looking up, he saw that

a great lion and a savage bear, whom cold and hunger had brought from the mountain-woods into the plain, were coming near the fold that he was keeping.

It was a fearful sight to see those savage beasts drawing near to him. The lion crouching along the ground; its long tail stretched straight out behind it; its eyes fixed; and looking ready to spring upon him in a moment; the bear too, with its heavy awkward trot, fierce red eyes and shaggy head; this was a fearful sight to a lonely shepherd boy on a far hill-side. He might call as loud as he would, and no man would hear him or help him.

But was he frightened? These thoughts you may be sure came fast into his mind as he looked at the fierce and evil beasts; but he was not frightened: for other thoughts came with them. It came into his mind, as if God had sent the thought, that though no man was there, yet that he

was not alone; that God was very nigh to him, and that never was he so little alone as when all men were afar off, and God was near him. So he lifted up his heart to God and said, 'O Lord God of Abraham, be nigh unto thy servant that prayeth,' and then with a great shout, he rushed upon the beasts with no more than his shepherd's staff. And God was with him of a truth, and so mightily was he strengthened, that he seized the beasts by the beard, and slew them in the strength of the God of all.

Then he blessed and praised the Lord. But he made no vaunt of what he had done: only he stored the thought of it up in his heart; and many times afterward, when danger threatened him, he said within himself, "The Lord which delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me."

X.

THE TENT ON THE PLAIN.

“And he was baptized, he and all his, straightway.”—Acts xvi. 33.

IN my visions, I saw a tent pitched upon a fair plain. It was a large tent, of the purest white cloth, so that it might be seen afar off; and when the sun shone brightly upon it, and the wind lifted up the folds of a great flag which hung from its top, it was indeed a noble sight. When the flag unfolded itself in the breeze, you might see upon it a blood-red cross, upon a ground of snow-white silk.

Many people were going in and out of the tent. Sometimes a single man would

go in silently and thoughtfully, with a heavy countenance, and he would come out again after a time, with a glow upon his face, and a firmer step than that with which he went in. Sometimes a husband and wife would go in together; sometimes a father and a mother, with their children; sometimes a child would lead in an old man; sometimes a mother would pass in, with an infant in her arms; some too would go in carelessly, and lightly, just because others did, and these seemed to come out pretty much as they went in; or if for a while they were graver, and seemed more earnest, it soon wore off again, and they were as light and thoughtless as ever.

While I was musing upon this strange sight, and wondering what it might mean, methought some one tapped lightly on my shoulder. I looked round, and there stood by me a comely person with a grave kind air, but with eyes in which there was such

a brightness, that when I looked into them I felt abashed, and fixed mine down upon the ground.

Whilst I cast about in my mind how I should speak to him, he first began, and said to me, in a mild voice which chased away my fears, 'You would see the inside of this tent, and know what is doing in it: then follow me, and I will show you.'

Thereupon he took me by the hand, and led me down to the tent door, which he lifted up, and we stood within. There were many people within, of all ages and countries, gathered round one who stood high above them all. He was clothed like the grave man who had brought me in, but was not so bright and terrible to look upon: his voice too was soft and winning, and when he turned to any, it was with a smile of kindness which drew their hearts after him; so that the very children in the tent came near, with-

out their little hearts failing them, as one by one he called them to him.

Then my guide led me nigh to this man, and placed me at his side, that I might see and hear all that passed between him and those that were with him in the tent. Just then there came to him a man of middle years, with a sad heavy countenance; his eyes were fixed on the ground, and I could see that salt tears were falling from them, and running over his hard manly cheeks. Kindly and tenderly spake the man in white to him, and bid him fear not, for that he was about to serve a gracious master. The words seemed by their very sound to open the poor man's heart, for he looked up, and almost smiled amongst his tears. He said too something about having 'fought long against the king, and served his enemies, and resisted his messages; and that he feared he should not now be received as a soldier.' Then the man in white bid him look up, and

whether it was a beautiful picture or a heavenly vision I know not, but he saw the forms of bright soldiers in golden arms, with crowns upon their heads, and happy faces, which seemed bathed in light, so gloriously did they shine: and one and another looked on the man kindly, and seemed to beckon him to join them, till his eyes began to sparkle, and his heart to beat high with hope.

Then the man in white bid him look in upon himself, and when he saw how unlike he was to them, his heart began again to die away, but the man raised him up by saying to him, "And such were some of them, yea, all of them like you were rebels once." Then he told him how the king had provided for those that undertook his service, that they should always be held up so long as they looked to him for help, and that he would himself ever be near them; that though they could not see him with their eyes, or feel him with

their hands, yet that he would be close by them, and that he would put strength into their arms, and cover them in the day of battle; that he himself would help them to be faithful to him, if they sought his help; and that then he would at last take them to dwell with him in his palace, where they would sit at his board, and hear his voice, and see his face for ever.

The poor man's eyes brightened at the sound of these brave words, and he said, 'This is what I want indeed, but are you sure that the king will receive, as his soldier, one who has so often rebelled against his will, and refused to serve him?'

'Of that I can make you sure,' said the man in white, 'here is the king's own hand and seal for what I do,' and with that he opened a book which was sealed with the king's seal, and he read to him from it, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel unto every creature; he

that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved ;” and again he showed him in another place, “ Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out ;” and again, to cheer his heart the more, he showed him this, “ Your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more.”

Then was the man’s heart glad indeed, and with a cheerful voice he said, ‘ Oh sir, let me enter quickly into the service of the king.’ Then the man in white questioned him once more, whether he did indeed believe the king’s word, and would fight his battles, and strive against his enemies ; and when he had heard his answer, firm and yet humble, he brought out a book, in which he wrote down his name as one of the king’s soldiers ; then he made upon his forehead the sign of the same cross which I had seen upon the banner, and told him that now he was one of the king’s men, and that he must bear him true love unto his life’s end. Then

he called him nigh unto himself, and he drew out from the king's treasures a bright and beautiful ring, which he put upon his finger, and called it the ring of adoption. There was in it one stone which burnt and sparkled like living fire, and round it was written as in flame—Faith. As he put it on his finger he said to him, 'Whilst this ring remains on thy finger, thou art safe; and whilst this stone burns and sparkles so brightly, nothing can draw it off; but if ever this grows dull, then look to the ring, for it will begin to grow loose upon thy finger, and if it once falls off, then thou art lost. And now go thy way, and God speed thee.' So I saw that the man went his way with a glad and cheerful countenance.

Then came another before him, and with him he dealt in like manner, and so did he with his wife, for she too was led to wish to do the king service; and I heard him say to her, that some of those whose



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crowns were brightest, had been once but as she was now—a weak woman and ready to fall.

So they were turning away, when the eyes of the man in white fell upon a child which she was leading by the hand, and a little infant whom she was shielding in her bosom; so he looked upon her again, and spoke and said, ‘And will you not give up those little ones, too, to do the king service?’

Then her eyes sparkled more brightly than ever; and she said, ‘Oh yes, sir, if I may,—but how can such little ones perform any service to our king?’

Then the man in white answered her again, ‘It is true, even the eldest of them can scarcely serve him yet, that you can see; but the king is full of love, and he would fain have such little ones given up to him, and he will put their names in his book, and give them the ring of adoption, if their parents will bring them unto

him, and promise in their names, that when they grow to years, they will serve their king: and then the king will trust them unto you, to bring them up for him. Look,' he said, 'here is the king's word for it.' So he opened the sealed book again, and read from it, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not;" and again, "The promise is unto you and to your children." Then were the hearts of the parents glad, and thankfully did they promise for their children that they should serve the king hereafter: and the sign of the cross was marked upon their foreheads, and their names were written down in the king's book, and the ring of adoption was put on their small fingers. Then the man made them observe, that there was such virtue in these rings, that though they fitted now the smallness of these infant fingers, they would fit them still hereafter, though they grew up to man's estate and size. He showed them,

too, the stone of faith, set in them: but in these little rings it sparkled not outwardly. 'Already,' saith he, 'is there in these stones some inward sparkling, though it cannot be seen outwardly, but as the children grow in reason, if they grow too in grace, the stones shall begin to sparkle outwardly. Be it your care to draw out this shining.' Then I saw that the mother believed, and so the stone in her own ring waxed brighter and brighter; but for a moment it seemed to me that the father doubted, and looking down upon his ring, I saw that the stone in it was cloudy; but even while I watched it, it was as when a cloud clears off from the sun, and the man looked up and thanked the king, who had taken his little ones so soon into his good and happy service. So they and their children passed on and left the tent.

And I stood and saw others come before the man; and some came as these had come, and some seemed to come with

lightness and no thought. Then I saw that the man looked very gravely upon such; and he told them that the king they wished to serve was one who "searched all hearts, and from whom no secrets were hid." Then he questioned them closely, and only if they still said that they desired to serve the king, he wrote down their name, and their children's, in the king's book of service, and put the rings upon their fingers; but this he did with a sorrowful face, and told them that if they were not faithful to the king, it would make him punish them more dreadfully than others; that they had thus been called his servants, and entered as soldiers under him.

For some time had I looked on this sight, and marked many coming in and going out, until I longed to know how it went with them after they had left the tent; how they fought, and who were faithful; and how the little ones grew up

who had been so early made soldiers of the king. And as these things were in my mind, methought my guide touched me again, and said, 'Thou wouldest see further the end of this matter: then follow me.' So I walked after him out of the tent. Then my vision was changed; for it was now the first dawning of a summer morning, and we were crossing a mountain side, until we stood over a pleasant valley, green with fields, and bright with many flowering trees, and gay flowers growing in little gardens, round thatched cottages, from the chimneys of one or two of which the grey-blue smoke was just rising, straight and still, into the clear morning air.

Then methought my guide cast on my shoulders a beautiful mantle, and straightway we stood within one of the cottages, unseen by those around us. We were in an upper room, which was clean and sweet; for the window was open in the

thatched roof, and honey-suckle and sweet roses hung in bunches by it. There were two beds in the room, and one little cradle; and the clothes on the bed were very coarse and rough, and mended, but all clean and neat and white. In the cradle slept a beautiful babe, and as its little hands were crossed over its breast, I could see that it wore such a tiny ring as had been put upon the children in the tent. In one of the beds lay a little child asleep, and his arm hung down from the bed, and I saw the ring upon his hand. On the side of the bed sat a woman; I thought I had seen her before, so I looked again all the closer, and I knew that it was the same that I had seen in the tent, offering up her two children with joy to be the servants of the king. Then I looked for her ring; it was safe upon her hand, and sparkling brighter than ever. By her stood a little boy, just cleanly washed and dressed, though his clothes were rough and poor.

I looked into the little one's face, and I saw it was the same child which had been led by the hand in the tent; but it seemed as if two or three years had passed by since then, for he was grown now into a boy. His mother was speaking to him. She told him that he was the king's servant, nay, his child. She told him that when he was little, she and his father had given him to serve the king: and she said how good it was of the king, to take such children to be His. Then she bade him ask the king's help that he might faithfully serve Him that very day.

So the little fellow looked up with a mild face, bent his bare knees, and raised his hands which he had folded together, while he spoke as his mother taught him. And as he put up his hands, I could see his ring. There it was, safe upon his finger, and it was just beginning to sparkle, so that any one could mark it.

Then methought my guide touched me again, and we stood in another cottage. It was something larger than the last, and the things that were in it were not so coarse as those I had just seen. But although they were finer, they did not please me as well, for they were dirty and all unmended.

There stood in the room we were in, a woman whose face I had seen before. I cast about, until I bethought me that she was one of the careless ones on whom the king's minister had looked very sadly, and to whom he had spoken words of warning, when she came with her husband and her children to be entered in the king's book. By her side stood a boy who had then been with her; bigger he was than the little one in the cottage we had just left, but there was no sparkling light on his ring; and alas! when I looked at it nearer, I could see that it was moved far from where it had been put upon his finger.

His mother had just taken him up, and was dressing him; and I heard her say that he was 'an idle boy,' and in a rough voice she bid him 'be quick;' and then she hurried him down stairs, and never asked help of the king herself, nor bid him ask for it either: and when she raised her hand to open the latch of the door, I saw that her ring was quite dull, and nearer off her finger than that of the poor boy.

My heart was very sad at such a sight, and whilst I was musing on it, my guide asked me, 'Wouldest thou see yet more?' When I said, 'Yes,' he led me forth, and lo! it was mid-day, and we stood upon the village green, and the boys of the village were playing around us: but they saw us not, because the invisible mantle was on me. Then I saw, amongst the rest, the two boys I had seen in the morning, but I marked no difference between them, for they sported and played about like the rest.

Then the man took from under his cloak a wonderful glass, and he bade me look through it at the boys as they played. Now the glass made hidden things plain. For as soon as I looked through it, I saw around the boys, that the air was full of ugly and venomous creatures, who were the king's enemies. As I looked at them through the glass, it seemed as if their names were written upon them, and I could read on one, 'bad thoughts,'—and on another, 'peevishness,'—and on another, 'anger,'—on another, 'bad words,'—and on another, 'deceit,'—and on another, 'greediness,'—and on the most hateful-looking of all, which had a long venomous tongue and a slimy nature, I could read the word 'lie.' Then I saw that these were very busy amongst the boys as they played. That they came near to them, and 'anger' would push one boy against another, to make them quarrel; and 'bad thoughts' would fly there directly, and

bring 'bad words' with them, and they would all hover about them, and help on the quarrel, without the boys seeing or knowing they were there. I saw 'greediness,' too, lead some of the boys near to fruit-trees, on which hung rich and ripe fruit, which they had been told not to touch, and then 'deceit' would whisper to them that nobody would know it, though they should take a little. Then I watched to see how the boys behaved, and I saw the little one whose ring was dull in the morning, take of the forbidden fruit, and eat, and then listen to the words of the wicked 'deceit;' and then the hateful 'lie' came close to him, and I saw it curl all round the little boy's heart, and his ring got deader and deader, and seemed ready to fall from his finger. Then I saw him offer some of the fruit to the other little one I had seen in the morning. But he shook his head, and drove 'greediness' away, and would not hear a word that 'deceit' wanted to whisper; for

he said, 'I must not tell a lie, and take what is forbidden me, for I am the king's child, and the king sees all I do.' I saw that as he named 'the king,' the hateful creatures fled away, and his ring seemed firmer than ever on his finger, and began to shine and sparkle the brighter. So then I knew how even little children could serve the king, and fight against his enemies.

Then again my guide touched me, and he said, 'Follow me : ' so I followed him forth, and we soon stood in the midst of a great city, and we passed along its crowded streets. Houses were on this side, and houses on that ; and the clear air was made thick with the smoke of chimneys, and the dust of the streets, but still my guide led me on and on. At last we came to a narrower and more dirty street. Tall old houses, which looked ready to fall, almost touched one another over the narrow road. Dirty children, who looked pale and wretched, screamed in many of the

rooms, or sat in a sad sort of half sorrowful play, on the dirty steps of the houses: and dirty men and women talked loud, and I heard many bad words as we walked along. By one of the dirtiest and worst of all the houses my guide stopped, and we stood within it. No one saw us, for the mantle was on me; and oh, what a sad sight did I see! There were many in the room, for a whole family lived in it, and they were wicked people: bad words came out of their mouths as often as they spoke, and they quarrelled and almost fought, and looked as if they hated one another. And now I saw that there was in one corner of this room near to a broken window, a sad-looking bed, in which lay a poor sick boy, who seemed about ten years old. He was very pale and very thin, and there was a bright red spot upon his cheek, and he coughed very often, and seemed in pain. His face was turned towards the window, and his eyes

were bent down upon the bed. As I leaned over to see what he looked at, I saw he was reading in a book, and heard him whisper to himself the words—"For-sake me not when my strength faileth me." (Psalm lxxi. 9.) Then I saw that it was in the king's book that he was reading, and I heard that he was speaking to the king, and asking HIM to keep him: and I saw that his ring was so bright and sparkling, it seemed like a little ball of living fire. Then my guide bade me look through the glass; and what a sight did I see! All round his bed, I could see beautiful forms of heavenly creatures, which the king had sent to watch over him. 'Promises' were there with kind eyes and soft voices whispering ever in his ears. 'Patience' held his aching head in her lap, and 'Hope' was holding a bright crown just over his head, and telling him how soon he would be able to wear it.

Oh, how sad was it to turn round from the happy bed of the dying child, to the rest of that sinful room! To look on the dark faces of evil men and women, and to hear their evil words, instead of looking at the mild glad faces of the angel friends of the little one, and catching the soft words with which they cheered his soul. But my guide bade me mark these people well; and I saw that all their rings were dull; dull as if they were dead—and well nigh off their fingers. More than one seemed to have lost their rings altogether, and one I heard boasting that he never had been happy till he had thrown his away: but when I looked at him through the glass, I saw ‘Misery,’ and ‘Sorrow,’ and ‘Hatred, sucking his heart’s blood, and the dreadful face of ‘Despair’ coming nigher and nigher to him every moment.

And now I thought within myself, how can the child of such parents have learned to serve the king faithfully? My guide

answered my thoughts, and he told me that 'once his ring too had seemed dead and well nigh taken from his finger: but it pleased the king to send a holy man to warn him, and he gave to him the book you have seen him read; and there came with it a sweet air from the king's presence, which "bloweth where it listeth," and the boy began to read in the book and love it; and as he read he learned to call to the king earnestly for help, and then his ring began to settle on his finger, and the shining of the stone to come out,—and now look at him again, and see his happiness in sorrow.'

Then I looked again through the glass, and more was showed me than before. But a little above his bed methought there was a golden door, not wholly closed. And I could see within it a light more beautiful than sunshine, which came from a throne whose lowest golden steps I could see, and on the top of which, as

I doubted not, sat the great king himself. Hundreds and thousands of beautiful and happy creatures were there. Some I took for angels, and some methought had once been men and women. But all wore shining crowns, and all were blessed and happy.

Then as I gazed, methought the door opened wider; and I saw the gentlest of all those heavenly beings fly down to the sick boy's bed; and 'Mercy' was written on her brow. She stretched out her hand, and he arose, and flew up with them to the golden door; and I could hear a burst of happy music, as they entered, and I saw a bright crown reached out. And the face of the dead boy, (for I looked into his bed, and he breathed no more,) shone with the bright light of that heavenly temple!

Then I awoke from my vision: but my thoughts still stayed with me, and I saw how good it was to be the soldier of the king, and to fight his battles faithfully.

Q. Who is the king who takes rebels as his soldiers ?

A. The Lord our God : who says, "Am not I a great king?"

Q. Who are these rebels ?

A. All mankind : for it is written, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Rom. iii. 23. And again : "We were by nature children of wrath, even as others." Eph. ii. 3.

Q. When does God receive us out of this state ?

A. At our baptism, "Wherein we are made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven."*

Q. What is the ring of adoption ?

A. Our being taken to be God's own children.

Q. What is the sparkling stone ?

A. The faith by which we must ourselves believe in Christ, if we would be saved.

* Catechism.

Q. What is the meaning of the stone becoming dull ?

A. A child of God growing up unfaithful, or forgetful of Him.

Q. Will baptism do such children any good ?

A. No, not if they continue unfaithful : for then at last they cast off the ring of adoption.

Q. What is baptism to such persons ?

A. A greater condemnation : as God says, Amos iii. 2.

Q. How soon may we begin to fight the good fight of faith ?

A. As soon as we know any thing.

Q. What are the dreadful forms which the glass showed ?

A. Temptations to sin.

Q. Then are little children tempted to sin ?

A. Yes ; that they are, very often.

Q. And how must they resist ?

A. By remembering whose children

they are ; and that God the Father sees them ; and that he for Christ's sake will help them if they pray, and so by asking always for His help.

Q. What are the good forms the glass showed ?

A. The helps God will give to those who pray to him.

Q. What are we to learn from the dying boy ?

A. That God will take holy children to dwell with Him for ever in His heavenly glory.

THE END.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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