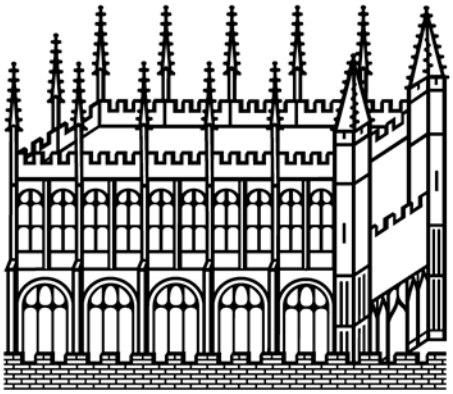

Ellen Merton

INSCRIBED

TO

The Little Owlet.

ELLEN MERTON;

OR,

THE PIC-NIC.

BY MRS. STONE,
AUTHOR OF
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ELLEN MERTON;

OR,

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CHAPTER I.

I DARE say my young readers abhor an untruth, think it shameful and degrading to tell a falsehood, and consider a lie wicked before God, and mean and cowardly to man. It *is* a dire sin before God, He hateth the maker of a lie. Cowardly it certainly is—very; and moreover it is very injudicious, for ten to one whether it answers its purpose; it is generally found out, or if successful, almost always requires a great many others on the back of it to make it so.

It is full of inconveniences; it keeps the teller of it in perpetual danger of discovery by others, and perpetual fear of betrayal by himself. One thoughtless word will often render unavailing a long course of deceit. Yes, it is very imprudent.

It is likewise very mean; the highest insult one gentleman can offer to another is to say he is a liar, and this arises from the universal opinion that a liar is the lowest and meanest of all beings.

But above all and every other consideration a lie is wicked, for it is in express opposition to the will and law of Almighty GOD; and you will all probably remember that terrible incident recorded in the New Testament, of Ananias and his wife Sapphira, who were both struck dead for speaking an untruth. And the holy Apostle S. Peter said to Ananias, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the HOLY GHOST? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto GOD." And to Sapphira, "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the LORD?" (Acts v.)

I have no doubt that you fully agree in all this, but there is one point in which we may not so entirely coincide, and that is as to what constitutes an untruth.

Many think that nothing but a bold barefaced lie—what is called "a black lie"—is an untruth; and that evasions, collusions, prevarications, slight misrepresentations, though perhaps not altogether right, are still not faults of any great consequence.

They are quite mistaken.

Every species of evasion, how trifling soever

in itself, if spoken with a view to elude the rigid truth, or to deceive others, is a wilful falsehood in the sight of GOD.

Bear this in mind whilst you peruse the history of Ellen Merton.

"Mamma," said Ellen Merton, as she entered the parlour, where, with heated face and sleeves turned back, Mrs. Merton was carefully boiling some dainty preserves; "Mamma, just as I was at the door Mrs. Conway came up to call on you, but I told her you were not at home, as I thought you would not like to be caught such a figure."

"Yes, that was right," said Mrs. Merton, still attentively regarding her preserving pan.

"But, mamma, I think she wanted something particular."

"Oh no, that is not at all likely, and I should have been very sorry had she come in just now."

"Yes, I know that, and therefore I said at once that you were out; but do you know, mamma, I am almost afraid that Mrs. Conway found me out."

"Nay, Ellen, I trust not!" said her mother, turning for the first time her regards from the fruit, "for that would be very awkward."

"I am not sure of it, mamma, but I do think so; for Mrs. Conway said something about wishing to make a request for me, and that made me so anxious that I very nearly confessed that you were at home, but I remembered and stopped in time; only Mrs. Conway looked so earnestly at me, and I felt myself go so red, that I'm afraid, mamma, she suspects I told her a fib."

"Oh, it is only a white fib, child. People can't be in company order at all times; you must mind better another time. Did Mrs. Conway say when she would call again?"

"Yes, mamma; to-morrow."

On the morrow Mrs. Merton gave her dessert strawberries the last boil very early; they turned out beautifully. She poured them into jars, placed them in the store-room, adjusted her toilette, and was "in company order" to receive her friend Mrs. Conway who called at the usual visiting hour.

"I am sorry," said Mrs. Merton, after the first greetings were over, "that I was not at home when you did me the favour to call yesterday."

"I felt sorry, certainly," replied Mrs. Conway, glancing at Ellen Merton, who turned scarlet red. Her glance was probably merely accidental, but Ellen's sudden and extraordinary blush could not but attract her notice, as

it did that of Mrs. Merton, who darted on her daughter a quick reproving look.

"My call," continued Mrs. Conway, seeming not to notice this by-play, "had reference to my young friend, Miss Ellen. My daughter, Alice, is going to spend a few days with her Aunt Pridnett, who has kindly desired her to take a friend with her, and Alice is very anxious to have your daughter's company if you will allow her."

"Oh, pray do, Mrs. Merton," said Alice Conway, beseechingly.

Ellen, with beaming eyes and beating heart, looked very imploringly, but did not speak. Mrs. Merton, however, did not keep them in suspense.

"I can have no possible objection," she said, "if Ellen's father has not; and in this instance I think I may venture at once to say that he will not. You may thank your kind friends, Ellen, I am sure your father will be happy to allow you to visit Mrs. Pridnett."

Ellen's thanks were very earnest, and after some few arrangements had been made, the conversation turned on other things, and especially on a Fancy Fair which was about to be held in the neighbourhood for some charitable purpose.

"Ellen is to be much honoured on this occasion," said Mrs. Merton, with a kind of

deprecating tone which did but ill conceal her self-gratulation and pride in her daughter, "she is to stand with Mrs. Grantham at her stall."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Conway, with some surprise, "do not you think her too young?"

Mrs. Merton attributed this surprise to the *eclât* of the position, for Mrs. Grantham was considered the great personage of the neighbourhood; but Mrs. Conway's surprise was caused solely by the idea of placing so young a girl in so conspicuous a position.

"Ellen, my dear, show Mrs. Conway and Alice the trifles which you send to the Bazaar."

Ellen produced some pretty drawings and a piece of worsted-work, which were deservedly admired, the drawings more especially so.

"And what have you worked for this Fancy Fair, Miss Alice?" asked Mrs. Merton.

"Nothing, ma'am," said Alice, blushing a little.

"Nothing! do you not like then to ——"

"Oh yes," hastily interrupted Alice, "I wished it very much; but mamma ——" and here Alice stopped abruptly, feeling that she could not justify herself without appearing to cast on her mother what now seemed to be a very grave charge, viz., that of being insensible to the interests of the Bazaar.

Mrs. Conway smiled as she saw her daughter's dilemma.

"Alice is quite right," said she, "she was very anxious, naturally so, to work for the Fancy Fair, but resigned the idea of doing so at once, when she found it contrary to my wish."

"I am surprised that it is so," said Mrs. Merton, "being for charity. I think that young people cannot be too soon accustomed to help their poorer neighbours."

"In that I entirely agree with you; but I cannot think that a Fancy Fair is calculated to awaken a feeling of pure charity in the breast, or to tend to the exercise of practical benevolence."

"But surely the charity which this is intended to serve is an admirable one, and deserves support."

"Every support, every encouragement that can possibly be bestowed upon it, it *is* an excellent institution; and since, in the present state of public opinion, a larger sum can probably be obtained by a Fancy Fair than in any other way, I am not sorry that one is arranged. My objection is not to this Fancy Fair in particular, but to such meetings in general being held under the semblance of charity which is seldom real."

"You are severe, Mrs. Conway, and unjust."

"I think not unjust, my dear Mrs. Merton; consider the matter. Suppose a subscription were started for this very Institution, and persons properly appointed went from house to house throughout the parish, explaining fully the nature of the charity, its beneficent operation, its claims on the support of all who wished the welfare of their fellow creatures. What sum of money do you suppose would be collected?"

"I am sure I cannot tell."

"Think—endeavour to guess."

"I don't know. Perhaps two or three hundred pounds."

"That I believe would be the utmost. And what do you imagine the Bazaar will produce?"

"Oh, we hope to make a thousand pounds."

"I dare say you will. Now, my friend, do not call me invidious, but I cannot attribute the seven hundred pounds to the influence of that pure and self-denying benevolence, that true charity which 'vaunteth not itself.'"

"I never thought of it in this way before. But still you must allow that a very strong feeling of charity is excited."

"And with that I quarrel. Excitement is a prevailing evil of the day; nothing can be done without excitement. Bazaars are one effect of this false and prejudicial feeling, this

love of excitement. Excitement itself supposes something unnatural, at the very least, something unusual. Excitement in all cases is inevitably followed by a corresponding reaction, a more than usual degree of torpidity and inertness. Woe to that charity of which the well-doing is dependent on the excited feelings of its supporters. It was not the excited, zealous, and ardent Martha who obtained the commendation of our Holy and Blessed SAVIOUR, but the quiet Mary who sat in reverent humility at His feet. Nor is it by intermitting zeal, however zealous, but by '*patient continuance* in well doing' that we are to fulfil the great end of our existence.

"That true charity which we are especially enjoined to cultivate is of a very different character. It is unpretending, unshowy, seeks not publicity, depends not on excitement, has no ebbs and flows. It is a lasting habitual principle, pervades the whole life, and may be exhibited as effectually and as beneficially in a kindly courtesy at a domestic fireside as in a splendid donation to a vast institution. The habitually charitable mind may be likened to a meadow whose fresh and vivid green gives token of an everliving streamlet hidden underneath its verdure, whilst the gorgeous parterre fringed with exotics forced into premature bloom, and so soon to fade away, represents,

not inaptly, that charity which is excited by a Fancy Fair.

"I fancy it was a deep sense of the importance of this undemonstrative, but *continuing abiding*, charity on *our own* hearts and lives which led in our earlier Church to the Weekly Offertory, now disused. The alms so obtained might not be more in amount than if collected at more distant intervals, but the *principle* of charity was kept in fresh and constant exercise. And we may incidentally draw the same lesson from the circumstance recorded in Scripture that 'there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the *daily* ministration.' (Acts vi. 1)."

"Well, Mrs. Conway, this may be all very true, and I dare say it is so, but still Fancy Fairs will be held whether you and I think well of them or not; and as there is to be one, I cannot see that I need deny my daughter the amusement of going to it."

"Nor I either. You have now unintentionally placed it on the right footing—an amusement. As a relaxation, as an amusement, I am going to take my own Alice; indeed," continued the lady, looking smilingly at her now smiling daughter, "I believe she is to make some very important purchase there. But it is on this ground only we suffer

her to go, for we are most anxious to impress indelibly on her mind the inalienable connection between pure true charity and self-denial. They cannot exist asunder. And self-denial there can be none in a young lady amusing her leisure hours with a piece of fancy work, taking it to a fashionable crowd, and seeing it sold for three times its value, having at the same time a very confused idea—it may chance to be none at all—of the charitable object for which the money thus obtained is ultimately to be appropriated."

"This is all new to me, and I really can't say I quite understand it."

"And I am sure, my good friend, I had no idea, when I came, of troubling you with such a discussion. But I confess that I feel the subject of much importance, and shall be glad to speak with you again on it hereafter, when this Fancy Fair is quite over; at which, Ellen, my dear," continued Mrs. Conway, turning to the young lady, "I wish you much gratification. Alice and I shall probably see you there."

So saying she took leave.

"Ellen," said Mrs. Merton, as soon as the door was fairly closed after her visitors, "I wish you could get over that foolish trick of blushing so vehemently; when I expressed my regret to Mrs. Conway for being out yesterday you went quite scarlet."

"I know I did, mamma, I felt it. But I really could not help it."

"You must endeavour to help it; resolution will do a great deal. And it places one so awkwardly. I could see that Mrs. Conway doubted my words, and that was all owing to your blushing so. Do try to get over it."

Ellen promised that she would, and then ran into the nursery to tell her younger sisters of the pleasure which was in store for her.

"No, Elly, oo not go, oo not go leave poor Freddy," exclaimed a voice from a little bed.

"Oh, you little darling, I thought you were asleep," said Ellen, going to the bed, and gently raising a little boy who appeared to be a great invalid. It was her only brother, (for Mrs. Merton had lost two sons,) who was recovering from a dangerous attack of influenza.

"I thought you were asleep; but I must go away for a little while, and when I come home I will bring something pretty for Freddy."

"Well, mind oo not fordet, Elly, or else Freddy not love oo."

So saying the little boy turned over in bed, and Ellen, kissing him, left him to talk again with her sisters.

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Conway and her daughter had likewise some conversation as they returned home on the subject of Ellen Merton's blushes.

"Dear, ingenuous girl," said Mrs. Conway, "her countenance *could* not tell an untruth. How it grieves one to see her naturally truthful disposition perverted by careless training."

"Do you call Mrs. Merton 'careless,' mamma? I thought she was considered a very affectionate and careful mother."

"I correct myself, my dear. Careless, my friend certainly is not. I should have said injudicious; or rather, being unhappily herself without sufficient reverence for truth, and consequently not sufficiently aware of its importance, she is running the risk of letting her dearly-loved daughter grow up a liar."

"A liar! Dear mother, what a strong word."

"I know not a gentler one that will fully express my meaning."

"But indeed, mamma, I think it is too strong. I think poor Ellen herself would be dreadfully hurt and shocked to hear you."

"I have no doubt of it, love; and so I am sure would Ellen's mother. Neither do I mean to say, Alice, that Ellen is now guilty of

wilful or intentional falsehood; but that I fear the habit of careless speaking in which she is allowed, will imperceptibly cloud her ideas of rigid accuracy, and so will tend to produce a habit of conversation in which strict truth will not be a prevailing principle."

"You allude, mamma, to her saying that Mrs. Merton was out, when it is quite evident she was at home?"

"I remarked that circumstance, certainly, amongst others."

"But surely she was not to blame for that; it must have been by her mother's wish; indeed, Mrs. Merton said the same herself."

"She did; and you will remember that I have been lamenting Mrs. Merton's laxity of principle on this point."

"But it is very usual for ladies to say they are not at home when they are so."

"Usual—not therefore right."

"But I thought it was what you call a conventional phrase, and was understood to mean that it was not convenient to receive visitors; and not literally that people were not at home."

"It may, or may not, be so understood; but at best it is an equivocation which, in a scale of pure morality and religion, ranks precisely with a palpable untruth."

"Then you would have visitors admitted at all times."

"By no means. Nobody can be so circumstanced as at every possible moment to receive visitors. In the middle ranks of life, especially, a woman's first duties lead her to domestic occupations often of a nature to make the presence of a visitor exceedingly inconvenient, nor can the most precise and accurate housekeeper so manage that these duties shall *never* encroach on visiting hours—but how easy to avoid all error and all inconvenience by keeping to the simple truth, and saying, '*engaged,*' instead of the dubious, '*not at home.*'"

"Yet, mamma, have you forgotten how piqued and offended Miss Murray was because when she called on Mrs. Kenley, she was not admitted, but told that Mrs. Kenley was 'engaged with her music master?'"

"Yes, I remember the circumstance well, and was sorry that Miss Murray considered it in so wrong a light. This misapprehension will, at times, occur, until at least the reform which I advocate, and which I am happy to say is fast gaining ground, be universally adopted."

"But, dear mamma, after all it is a very trifling matter, and puts me somewhat in mind —but you will be displeased—."

"Speak out, Alice."

"I couldn't help it. I just thought of the mountain and the mouse."

"My dear Alice, do not permit yourself to consider anything a trifling matter which involves a point of religion or morality. But I have not expressed myself to you with sufficient clearness. I am contending for *a principle*, not for a mere form. In the Holy Bible a liar is placed in the same category with a murderer and a parricide; and no exception is made there for conventional forms of words which imply falsehood, though they may not absolutely express it. Moreover, we are distinctly told to abstain from all appearance of evil."

"Then I suppose it is not right in any case to depart from the rigid truth?"

"I think in none."

"Yet, surely, mamma, it would be very awkward to speak the truth at all times. Remember Madame de Genlis's 'Castle of Truth.'"

"I do, my dear. But you seem to forget that the people in her amusing and instructive tale were always talking, in season, and out of season; and were uttering their secret thoughts at the most untimely moments, and when there was no sort of necessity for them to speak at all. In real life this will not happen. The only safe rule is always to speak the truth. When circumstances render it peculiarly unpropitious to do so, the remedy is silence—but not compromise."

"I don't understand you, mamma."

"When silence would lead to an inference opposed to your meaning, then even silence itself amounts to an equivocation—an untruth —and should be broken; with all gentleness, indeed, of manner, but with uncompromising clearness."

"Mamma, is it easy to attain this perfectly truthful habit?"

"No, it is not; no exalted virtue is of easy attainment. You know why, Alice, do you not?"

"Yes, mother, I suppose you mean that we are naturally inclined to sin."

"It is so, Alice; I have told you this, as it was my duty to do, frequently, before you could comprehend me; but you are now old enough to experience and understand in some degree the truth of what I have told you. Do you naturally, and without thought or trouble, do what is right from morning to night?"

"Oh no, mother; I don't think I ever do quite right the whole day from morning to night."

"Not even when you take pains?"

"No, mamma; for when I take the most pains, I forget sometimes."

"And when you *forget*—is it that you do wrong?"

"Ah, *now*, mamma, I do see what you mean. When I forget—when I am off my guard—

then I do wrong, and that shows I am naturally sinful, or else I should do right even when I am not thinking about it."

"You have explained yourself quite accurately, my good girl. I have told you often that the Church teaches, and has ever taught, from the time of our blessed SAVIOUR and His holy Apostles, that the Christian life is a constant warfare from the cradle to the grave, a perpetual struggle with evil thoughts and evil inclinations, or in other words, 'a wrestle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world,' (Eph. vi. 12), and that it is our first duty, as it is indeed our only hope, to guard ourselves not merely from the commission of great sins, but from the adoption of any slight or trifling habits which may have a tendency to produce them."

"Well, mamma?"

"The application I wish you to make is this. You thought the errors in language on Mrs. Merton's part to which I referred, 'trifling matters;' now, Alice, if we are naturally so prone to evil, so forgetful of what is good and right, as we are told in the Bible we are, and as the recorded histories and experience of good and holy Churchmen ever since affirm, it is not difficult to see that if we accustom ourselves to a careless incorrect manner of speaking, we

may unintentionally, when off our guard, go far into error, even to the extent of absolute falsehood."

"But we cannot always study our words."

"Oh no; but when the *principle* which I have been advocating is fully impressed on the mind, the words will never be heedless. 'Out of the abundance of the *heart* the mouth speaketh;' it is to the regulation of that, Alice, that our earnest cares must be applied. Solomon, the wisest of men, said, 'Deceit is in the *heart* of them who imagine evil;' and the holy Psalmist says, that he who shall rest upon GOD's holy hill is one 'that speaketh the truth from his *heart*.' But on higher and holier authority, on the highest and holiest of all, we learn that 'out of the *heart* proceed evil thoughts.' (S. Matt. xv. 19.)

"Rely upon it, my child, that those who, with a humble and constant sense of their own weakness have a due reverence for truth, a just appreciation of its high and holy character; and who cherish it in their hearts as an attribute of the Godhead—such persons may indeed speak incorrectly from errors of judgment, but will rarely, if ever, be found even carelessly, far less wilfully, to compromise the truth even on those matters which are considered most trifling and unimportant."

CHAPTER III.

THE day of the Bazaar arrived, and neatly dressed in a plain straw bonnet, Alice Conway joyfully set out to accompany her mother thither. She had long coveted the possession of a small reticule bag or basket of a particular kind, and her Uncle Pridnett had kindly given her half a sovereign for the purchase. It was to be made to-day at the fancy fair.

To her surprise, however, Mrs. Conway turned away from the direct road into the town.

"Mamma!" said Alice, thinking she had done it in forgetfulness.

"I have a call to make in Guy's Lane, my dear, and we shall have abundant time afterwards for the bazaar."

"There was a poor man from Guy's Lane in the kitchen this morning."

"Yes; it is to his wife that I am going."

Alice felt disappointed; Guy's Lane was a long half mile from where they lived, and the town, and consequently the bazaar, were in just the opposite direction, and the delay and the suspense seemed great, more especially as she knew the poor woman had already had some gruel, and therefore the call on her *might* have been postponed. But these thoughts lasted only a few short moments. Alice *knew* better,

she recalled her better feelings, and blushing at her selfishness and impatience, although hidden within her own breast, she put her arm within that of her mother, and began to talk cheerily.

Arrived in Guy's Lane, with some difficulty they found the abode of Peter Draley. It was the upper room of a miserable cottage which seemed to be tottering over the heads of the inhabitants. Having ascended the dark and crazy staircase, Mrs. Conway and Alice entered a small room which was in a terribly dilapidated state. There were several stains on the wall showing where the rain came in, and several broken panes in the window were patched over with paper. Everything bore marks of the most squalid poverty, but not of dirty or untidy habits. The floor was clean, the room tolerably tidy; indeed, considering the situation of the inmates, very much so. For, in the poor and meagre bed, the only one which the room contained, lay a poor woman with two newly-born infants nestled at her side.

> "The dim light struggling o'er the room,
> Scarce reach'd that lowly bed,"

across the foot of which was a boy, somewhat more than a year old, sleeping soundly. A man, the husband of the poor woman, was seated on a three-legged stool, endeavouring

to mend a saucepan, two more children were about the room, and a woman, a neighbour, was warming some gruel.

Mrs. Conway found, in answer to her inquiries, that the poor woman's confinement had occurred sooner than she expected, and that consequently the scanty provision which she had hoped to make, was not obtained. As her husband had been for some weeks unable to work, in consequence of a hurt in his leg, they were much worse off than usual, and did not know how to provide for even the one baby that was expected, and now there were two. The man said something expressive of vexation, but the woman with

> "Her babies on her arm,
> And the strong love within her breast,
> That kept those infants warm,"

interrupted him.

"Nay Peter, man, nay; do not say that. They're bonny babbies, and I believe the good LORD has sent 'em to be a comfort to thee yet."

They were strong healthy infants, and slept, all unconscious of the anxiety their existence caused to their parents, who were utterly destitute of clothes for them.

Mrs. Conway having finished her inquiries, promised some little relief, and took her leave. Alice wondered her mother did not promise

them more, but did not take the liberty to say so. For some time she walked thoughtfully along, but as they entered the town which was all gaiety and sunshine, and saw group after group of gaily dressed ladies all hastening in one direction, Alice forgot everything but her anticipated pleasure, and eagerly pressed onwards. The entrance to the bazaar was so excessively crowded, that her patience was put to a severe test, especially as her mother, partly from lady-like feeling, partly from timidity, forbore to make the strenuous exertions to hasten her entrance which others did not hesitate to do. At length, borne along in the throng step by step, they reached the vestibule of the great room, where were refreshment stalls superintended by ladies in white kid gloves. But the crowd was so great that it was a long time before they could see anything with enjoyment. At last they were in a line with the stalls, and moving onward slowly had an excellent view as they passed of all the glittering array.

To the surprise of Alice, in the midst of the profusion of gay and gaudy trifles, and looking far more striking from contrast, was a stall appropriated solely to homely and useful articles. Nightcaps, muffatees, mitts, children's socks, comforters, flannel waistcoats, warm knitted stockings, &c. &c. But just as she

was passing this stall with a careless glance, her eye caught something which immediately fixed her attention. This was a set of baby clothes, pinned together, and ticketed: "Set complete, seven and six-pence." A sudden idea crossed her mind, and sent all the colour into her face. She looked up eagerly at her mother, who was, however, in close conversation with another lady and did not observe her. They soon passed onward, and Alice, of course, followed.

She had wondered that she saw nothing of her friend, Ellen Merton, and now with much surprise found that she was close to her, for Ellen looked so womanly from the style of her dress, that really at the first moment Alice did not know her. In lieu of the neat straw cottage, or white-drawn silk which Alice had hitherto seen her in, she wore a zephyr crape bonnet with artificial flowers, and a fashionably-made silk mantle. She looked quite womanly. But though placed as conspicuously as her heart could desire, and though evidently exulting with importance, and laying herself out for the notice and attentions of those who lounged about, Ellen looked heated and flustered; and Alice saw as she approached more closely, evident signs of vexation and mortification in her countenance. She was not long kept in suspense as to the cause; Ellen made

room for her close to herself, and instantly unfolded her catalogue of disasters.

"Oh, Alice, I am so mad; I could eat my very fingers with vexation."

"My dear Ellen, what?"

"Do you know," interrupted Ellen, "Lucy Somerset has sent Mrs. Grantham some drawings precisely like mine; here they are, at the very table, but so far better done that mine have no chance, and are put away for to-morrow."

"Well, dear Ellen, never mind. You could but do your best."

"*My* best!—dear Alice, how you talk; I only did the first shading of each, just to save a fib, as mamma said. Indeed this is what vexes me so much, for Mr. Pencil promised me faithfully to keep the secret."

"And has he not done so."

"I think not, when he has chosen just the same subjects for another, and done them far better too. I would not care so much for mine not selling, though that alone is provoking enough; but Lucy Somerset is so satirical, she will so quiz me."

"But she has done the same."

"Oh no; not just so; for she sent word to Mrs. Grantham that they were not her own doing."

"But your worsted work?"

"Worse and worse; that was so inferior to a great deal Mrs. Grantham had, that she sold it at an underprice to set trade agoing, as she said."

Alice felt very sorry for her friend who was really disappointed and mortified, yet her thoughts quickly recurred to what her mother had said only a few days before of the *impolicy* as well as the wickedness of prevarication. "A lying tongue," she had said, "is but for a moment," and it is seldom that prevarication answers its purpose, even in superficial and worldly matters. It had brought its own punishment immediately to Ellen Merton: vanity induced her to puff off the drawings which her master had touched up, as her own, and to forbid him to tell the circumstance. Had she not done so, he would of course have told Miss Somerset that the subjects she chose from his portfolio had been appropriated, she would have selected others, and Ellen would have been spared the mortification of seeing her master's complete drawings placed beside her own, and the apprehension of Lucy's future satire. Poor Ellen was indeed mortified.

Mrs. Merton, though equally vexed, had of course the policy to conceal her feelings, or at any rate to relieve them by merely general expressions of disapprobation. She affected to be "much disappointed by the whole affair,"

to consider it "a very poor thing—very flat indeed"—confessing that "altogether it had disappointed her expectations considerably."

She did not admit even to herself—the thought never struck her—that her disappointment was occasioned entirely by the mortification her daughter endured, and that this was caused solely by the departure from the truth, the tacit acquiescence in an equivocation which she had herself, if not suggested, at least not prohibited.

CHAPTER IV.

As soon as Mrs. Conway and her daughter parted from their friends, they continued to make the circuit of the room, it being so arranged that parties should enter at one door, and retire by another, so as to give each person a complete view of all the stalls in rotation. By and by Mrs. Conway stopped rather suddenly, there were reticules precisely such as Alice wanted to buy, and she drew close to the table in order that her daughter might have a full view of them. She examined them eagerly, one there was which the lady sales-

woman declared to be "a perfect love," and Alice was much of the same opinion herself. She appealed to her mother, who thought it very pretty, and not unreasonably high in price. Fortified by this opinion Alice was about to speak of purchase, when a sudden exclamation near her caused her to turn her head, and in so doing she caught a glimpse of a stall on the opposite side of the room, and of a certain lot of things hung somewhat conspicuously on a high peg. She recognized it instantly; it was the set of baby clothes which had tempted her soon after her entrance into the room, but which she had totally forgotten in the pleasureable excitement of the hour. All the scenes of the morning rushed on her memory; the poor destitute woman in Guy's Lane, her lame and sick husband, and her nearly naked babes; her heart beat, she hesitated, laid the reticule down, took it up again, glanced from it to her mother as if seeking counsel; but finding none, for Mrs. Conway appeared not to observe her, she again looked at the bag, again hesitated, and at length with desperate resolution put it down, drawing a long breath.

"Mamma," said she, "I won't buy it at present."

"As you please, Alice; but you know it cannot be retained for you—it may be sold."

"Mamma, may I whisper to you? Mamma, may I buy a set of baby clothes instead?"

She coloured violently, and you might almost hear her heart beat. Her mother looked at her and gently drew her onward. They had nearly completed the circuit of the stalls, and after a little hurrying and pushing at the door, soon found themselves in the street, and on the road homeward.

"I am pleased, my dear," said Mrs. Conway, "with your desire to spend your money in behalf of the poor woman; but I fear that afterwards you may perhaps regret that you did not purchase the reticule; you have been wishing for it a long time you know."

"Yes, mamma, I have; but then I did not know of the poor woman. Have you any objection, mamma, to my spending the money in this way?"

"No objection, Alice, certainly, if you are in earnest."

"Indeed, mamma, I am in earnest, I am quite sure I am in earnest."

"That you are so at this present moment I have no doubt; but I think perhaps that when the excitement of the hour is over, as the memory of the poor woman's trouble fades away, you will think that probably she might have obtained relief elsewhere, and you might have bought your reticule. In short, that you will repent."

"I do not know," said Alice, musingly; I cannot tell. Mamma, I wish you would advise me. What do *you* think: tell me what I had better do."

"No, my dear, you must judge for yourself. You have long wished to possess a reticule of this kind. The loss, if you forego it, will be yours, not mine."

"I am quite sure that I wish to help the poor woman, and if I bought the reticule perhaps I might think afterwards that I had done wrong, and then the possession of it would not give me pleasure."

"Consider about it: there is no occasion to decide immediately; the reticule is but a trifling satisfaction even at the best. At the same time, Alice, little permanent satisfaction is to be derived even from charity, if it be the effect of mere impulse. Such *may* be your wish now, though I hope it is not. If in addition to your kindly feeling to this poor woman you are moved by a sense of duty to deny yourself a personal gratification for her sake, you are doing rightly, and will have the reward of right doing in a peaceful and approving conscience. Consider this, my dear, until to-morrow: the poor woman will want nothing more before that time, and the Fancy Fair will be open, should you prefer ultimately to purchase a reticule. And now let us hasten

on, Alice, for your father will be waiting for us."

On the following day Alice and her mother again went to the Bazaar, which they perambulated in the same order as on the preceding day. There again were the little clothes, or at all events a set just like them, and Alice gently pinched her mother's arm as a token that she wished to stay. But Mrs. Conway did not notice it and hurried on. They stayed a few moments at Mrs. Grantham's table. Ellen Merton looked even more discomposed than on the preceding day, and Alice was at no loss to account for her evident chagrin when she saw her drawings (which from their ornamental bordering she immediately recognized) all unsold, and worse still, Lucy Somerset, who was also a young friend of Mrs. Grantham's, officiating at the stall, and absolutely in the act of displaying them to a purchaser. The drawings were not sold, however, but ultimately formed part of a raffle, in which all the unsold articles were disposed of.

When they reached the stall where the reticules had been, they found a fresh assortment even prettier than the former ones, which had all been sold. Mrs. Conway lingered here a considerable time, admiring one thing and another, and conversing with the ladies who

superintended the table. Alice admired them much, but did not waver at all: she even took one or two of the reticules in her hand, but without any intention, or even wish, to barter for them. At length it struck her that her mother was staying to try her resolution, and that idea would have restored her firmness even had it been wavering. But to do her justice, it had not.

As this idea crossed her mind she turned to Mrs. Conway with a smile,—

"Do not wait, dear mamma; my mind *is* made up indeed. I don't even wish for a reticule."

Her mother turned on her a look of affection which made the young girl's heart burn within her, and at that moment all the reticules on the table did indeed seem as nothing to her.

Mrs. Conway no longer delayed to gratify her daughter's wishes, but she explained to her that to make her money as serviceable as possible to the poor people, it would be much better to purchase at a plain shop than at the Fancy Fair, where, under the plea of charity, things are rated at very much more than their real worth. She therefore took Alice to a tradesman who dealt in coarse and homely matters, and so catered for her, that for the seven-and-sixpence which the ready-made set

at the Bazaar would have cost, she became possessed of *materials* for more than double the quantity of garments. Mrs. Conway also cut them out, and permitted Nurse and Janet to work at them: she also assisted herself in the sewing; and as for Alice, never had she plied her needle with such industry and such hearty good will. The clothes were soon finished, and a nice bundle they were.

Half-a-crown of the ten shillings was still remaining, and Mrs. Conway asked Alice whether she would not keep that herself; but Alice would not hear of it, it should all go to the poor woman. So by her mother's advice she paid for the two eldest children at an Infant School for the coming three months, which was an important relief to the poor overtasked mother.

When Alice retired to bed on the evening of her purchase, her mother fondly kissed her and said,—

"My dear, I do not praise you for your conduct to-day, for you have done only that which it was your duty to do. You must thank your heavenly FATHER whose holy Angels have put it into your heart to do thus: and you will carry to your pillow the reflection that you have given some comfort to a suffering fellow-creature, and that you have made your mother feel happy and thankful. Go

now, and say Good night to your father. He is in his study."

This was not an every-night commission, for Mr. Conway, though a kind and good father, was not a fond or familiar one. He did not identify himself with the passing trifling joys or sorrows of his children. They all loved him, but they were rather in awe of him also. Moreover, his evening hours were always solitary; he could not bear to be disturbed in his study. So though sanctioned, indeed desired to go, by her mother, it was not without some slight feeling of trepidation that Alice opened the study door, when in reply to her gentle knock, her father said, "Come in."

As she entered, he did not raise his head from his book, but held out his left hand towards her; his right was busy with the pen, and as he proceeded in his calculations, every second seemed to Alice lengthened to a minute. At length he laid down his pen, drew his daughter towards him, and held her closely to him for a moment, then kissing her, he said,—

"Good night, my dear; good night, my good child," and instantly resumed his occupation.

But this was a vast deal for him, and Alice hardly felt the ground beneath her feet as she passed to her bedroom. She lay down with her eyes full of tears, and remained long awake;

but I do not think there was another girl in the town so happy.

Ellen Merton I am sure was not. Her mortification at the Bazaar, the natural result of her prevarication, soured her temper to such a degree, that at length her mother—albeit usually most indulgent—was compelled to remonstrate; and her interference failing to produce a proper effect, Mr. Merton chid his daughter severely.

She retired to bed in a passion of indignant tears, and at variance with both her parents; and without a prayer breathed for mercy or protection, without thought of Almighty God or Guardian Angel, she cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER V.

But Ellen's annoyances did not end with this evening. For many days scarcely anything was talked of but the Fancy Fair, and she was perpetually exposed to questions and remarks which mortified her sadly. This would not have been the case if she had not before the Bazaar vaunted of her preparations in a way that would hardly have been justified even by the certainty of success. Her deepest

mortification—and a very deserved one it was —occurred at an evening party of young people. They were nearly all assembled when she arrived, and she found them conversing eagerly and earnestly of their various success at the Fancy Fair. They could not have displayed greater interest if their own livelihood, instead of the welfare of the County Hospital, had been dependant on the sale of their pincushions and nicknackeries. One young lady had made a hundred pincushions, and had "really wearied out all her friends by her importunities for bits of silk." Many of the pincushions were "invisible" ones, hardly larger than a shilling, and had "really taxed her eyesight severely; her papa had more than once threatened to stop the proceeding altogether, but she managed him."

"A hundred was a great many," said another young lady. "I only sent fifty, and twenty penwipers. What price did you put upon yours?"

"Why, considering it was for a Charity mamma said we might as well mark them half-a-crown a piece, but Mrs. Marriott, who took them, altered the marks to a shilling; she said there were thousands of pincushions in the room, and she was determined hers should be sold."

"And were they?"

"Yes, all of them; every one: and very much pleased she was. But other ladies who kept up the price of their's throughout the whole day sold very few in comparison. But here is Miss Merton."

After Ellen had been kindly greeted by her friends, Miss Holdaway, the young lady who had made a hundred pincushions, turned to her:

"We were comparing notes, Ellen, of our success at the Bazaar; pray how did they treat you?"

"Oh, very well," said Ellen, carelessly.

"But you sent some beautiful things, Miss Merton," said another. "Were not those six drawings of Tintern Abbey yours?"

"Yes," replied Ellen.

"Ah! those *were* beautiful, and were sold directly; for I saw a lady carrying them away from Mrs. Grantham's stall."

Ellen knew these were not *her* drawings, but Lucy Somerset's. She did not speak however; she had not said *these* were her's, and she thought there was no occasion to expose herself. She tried to change the conversation; began to talk of other things, but in vain; her young friends were not tired of the Bazaar, and they quickly returned to the subject.

"There were two sets of drawings of Tintern Abbey," said Miss Robert.

"Yes," replied Miss Holdaway; "but one set was vastly inferior to the other, and could only be got rid of in the raffle at the close of the second day."

"How mortified the person must be who sent them; don't you think so, Miss Merton?"

"Yes," faltered Ellen.

"I should think so, indeed," said Miss Holdaway; "I should be ashamed to show my face—I should hide myself."

Just then Miss Somerset was announced, Ellen wished herself at home again.

"Ha! how do you do, Ellen? I have not seen you since the Fancy Fair, to condole with you."

"Condole with her! what for?" asked two or three.

"Why at her mortification in having her pretty drawings put into the raffle."

"*Her* drawings in the raffle!" exclaimed Miss Holdaway, looking at Ellen, who blushed scarlet.

"Well, perhaps not exactly her's; her's and Mr. Pencil's, for I know he finished them: and that makes it more extraordinary. They must have deserved a better fate."

We will not pursue the conversation further. Nothing could be more unamiable and ill-natured than Lucy Somerset's conduct in thus

unnecessarily exposing Ellen's disappointment. It was malicious and most unkind, and in total opposition to the Christian precepts to consider and spare the feelings of others, to be gentle and clement to their faults; in short, to "do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you."

But what I wish you particularly to remark here is, how Ellen's own conduct sharpened the sting of Miss Somerset's satire. Had she truthfully and honourably said at once that the drawings sold so early were *not* her's, her friends in all probability would have made no allusion to those sold in the raffle; they would have guessed her feelings, and spared them, and Lucy Somerset's remark would have passed unnoticed, or at least have been noticed only as a token of her own illnature.

Ellen was thankful when the evening was at an end, and she could hide her vexation on her pillow. But she did not lay the blame where it was most justly due—on herself. She blamed Lucy Somerset, but it never struck her that her own departure from truth, at least her own acquiescence in an untruth, which was the same thing, was a far heavier fault than Miss Somerset's illnature.

"I said," she repeated to herself, "I said the set of drawings of Tintern Abbey was mine, and so it was; I was not obliged to ex-

plain which set. It was only a WHITE FIB after all."

Yet how much bitter mortification this white fib had immediately caused her.

The day came when our two young friends were to pay their visit to the country, as mentioned in our first chapter; and thither they accordingly went, under the protection of Mr. Pridnett's faithful old servant James, who having occasion to visit town on business for his master, was desired to take charge of the young ladies on his return. Mr. and Mrs. Pridnett were very much attached to Mrs. Conway, who was Mr. Pridnett's sister; Alice also was their godchild, and was in the habit of visiting them once every year, and it was with a view to enhance her usual pleasure on this visit that she had been requested to bring her friend Ellen Merton with her.

Fanny and Harriet Pridnett were at the gate waiting to receive them. Having heard the carriage wheels whilst at work in their garden, they ran to the gate which opened from the lane, to be the first to welcome their cousin, and to gain a peep at the stranger. They were, however, rather shy, and were evidently pleased when Ellen frankly shook hands with them, for she had been made acquainted with them by Alice's description during their journey.

"And here are Aunt Pridnett and dear Mary," said Alice, springing forward, as her aunt and eldest cousin appeared on the Hall steps.

"I am very glad to see you, Alice, indeed," said Mrs. Pridnett, kissing her niece affectionately; "and you also, my dear," continued she, turning to Ellen, and most kindly greeting her; "my young people have talked much of the pleasure they should have in seeing you with their cousin; I trust you will enjoy yourself."

So saying Mrs. Pridnett led the way to the parlour, and was followed by the young people; Fanny and Harriet appearing full of some important information which they could not too soon communicate to their cousin. Mary, however, who was a good deal older, begged them at least to wait until Alice had taken her bonnet off.

"Oh no, Mary," said Alice, "let them tell me now. What is it, Harriet, dear?"

"Why, we are to have a picnic in Dunweyne Park; papa has promised it: and we are to have all sorts of things taken in a basket, and be there all day."

"In the basket?"

"Nonsense, Charlie; you're always at that," said Harriet, turning to her brother, who had that moment entered the room.

"Always at what? always at being in a basket all day?"

"How tiresome you are, Charles; but you never *will* mend; and you quite forget that Miss Merton is here."

"Nothing of the kind, for I came here because Miss Merton's here, and I bet Frank a wager I would see her first."

"That's very rude of you; but I hope you don't mind him, Miss Merton."

"Oh no, not at all," said Ellen, hardly knowing what to say.

"Well, then, that's very cruel, Miss Merton," rejoined Charles, "for I intend to mind you very much indeed."

Ellen coloured and laughed.

Just then Frank Pridnett ran in out of breath. "Ah, Charlie, my boy, you've managed it, I see; but I'll be even with you yet."

"And is that the most courteous salutation you have to offer to our Cousin Alice, and our new friend?" asked Mary.

"Ten thousand pardons, Alice dear, I'm right glad to see you; for I know you will have brought a good stock of good nature with you, and we're precious short of it in this house, I can tell you;" with a sly glance at his sisters, which one of them repaid by a box on the ear, which might possibly have hurt a mouse.

"Oh!" roared Frank, "you're killing me. Miss Merton, do take my part."

"I think you're able to defend yourself."

"Ah! you little know what I have to endure," said he, holding a handkerchief to his ear, and assuming such a doleful expression of countenance that all the party burst into laughter.

Alice and Ellen were taken up stairs to remove their things, and prepare for dinner. The little girls accompanied them, and they were all very soon on most intimate terms, and Ellen Merton quite forgot that she was a stranger.

"And what is this about the pic-nic?" asked Alice.

"Don't you remember, Alice," said Mary, "long ago, when we were both quite children, going with us to Dunweyne Park?"

"I think I do remember something about it."

"Well, you know, Alice, the Park has been shut up many years, because the late earl said the people did mischief; but the new earl allows persons to go by permission asked, and papa has promised to procure tickets and take us all. We should have gone two or three weeks ago, but he said it would be better to wait until you were with us."

"It was very kind of my uncle, I'm sure. Ellen, dear, have you ever seen Dunweyne Park?"

"No, never."

"And were you ever at a picnic, Ellen?" asked one of the little ones.

"No, never."

"Fanny," said Harriet, "you should not call Miss Merton 'Ellen.' Perhaps she won't like it."

"Must I not call you Ellen?" said Fanny.

"Oh, yes, certainly; if you wish it," said Ellen. But she said it rather coldly, for the fact was she was rather fond of being called *Miss Merton*, but she did not like to say so. Her young hostesses, however, did not observe the tone, the words were enough for them. They were accustomed to literal truth, and did not look for more than met the ear.

When they returned to the parlour they found Mr. Pridnett there, who received Ellen kindly, and his niece affectionately; and near him was a youth about sixteen, who attracted Miss Merton's notice at once, for he was evidently of a very different *caste* from Frank and Charles Pridnett, who were two good-hearted, generous boys, but somewhat she thought too frank and unceremonious in manner. Henry Selwyn was older in years than they were, and a vast deal indeed older in manners and appearance. He was a very handsome youth, Byronish, and combed his rich dark hair in very poetical style. He was nephew to Mr.

Pridnett, and was about to be articled to a solicitor; but his genius was, or he thought it was, decidedly poetical. At any rate he cultivated the muses at all probable and improbable times, and seemed indeed determined

> "his father's views to cross,
> To pen a stanza when he should engross."

He quoted Shelley, but idolized Byron, and was exceedingly well read in the sentimental literature of the day; an especial object of his admiration was Bulwer, whose early romances, with all their delicious poison, he cherished in his heart of hearts.

We need hardly add that Henry Selwyn was often absent and abstracted, and wrote verses by moonlight.

He was spending a week or two with his uncle, and had looked forward to the visit with much pleasure, in the hope of making a great impression on Mr. Pridnett's family. And he did so, but in a rather less flattering manner than he had anticipated. The girls evidently did not understand him, and his sublimity was thrown away on them; and the boys were even worse, for far from treating him with the respect due to his seniority, (a year or two,) and his mental qualifications, they quizzed him in all possible ways. And he had not even the

comfort of retiring within himself and shrouding his vexation in *hauteur*, for his uncle's satirical eye and sarcastic smile were unbearable, more especially as without interfering in the least ostensibly, his quizzical countenance would say as plain as face could speak, "Go it, boys."

Therefore Henry Selwyn was beginning to tire of his uncle's house very exceedingly, and was even meditating how he might cut short his visit when his hopes were revived by hearing of the arrival of two young ladies. He saw at a glance, for it is astonishing how quick in its perceptions genius is, that Alice Conway was of the same mental calibre as his cousins; a commonplace person, no sensibility, the common earthenware of the world as compared with the children of genius, who, like himself, were all porcelain. But of Ellen Merton he judged differently, and with reason. Though only of the same age as Alice Conway and Mary Pridnett, her dress was so much more womanly as to make her appear much older, and her manners had not the simplicity so becoming to a young girl. She darted a quick look round the room as she entered, and in a moment her glance fixed on Henry Selwyn. He felt that it did so, and, thought he, "*that* girl has some soul."

CHAPTER VI.

After dinner the young folks took a long ramble in the fields, and came home quite tired and weary; but tea refreshed them so much, that they forgot their fatigue, and wanted to go out again. This, however, Mrs. Pridnett did not think prudent for any of them, as the dews were falling heavily; but more especially for Alice Conway and Ellen Merton, who, residing in town, were not accustomed to such freedom and exposure to the open air at all hours as the Pridnetts enjoyed: Charles Pridnett proposed a dance, and to this all readily agreed.

"Miss Merton, you will be my partner I hope," whispered Henry Selwyn, who indeed had scarcely spoken to any one else the whole day.

"And if mamma will be so good as to play for us, we shall be just eight for a quadrille," said Fanny.

"Mamma can't play, I know," replied Mary, "because she has sprained her wrist; but I will try to play, and one of you little ones can take two places."

"I will do that," said Harriet.

So Mary played some quadrilles very tolerably: she wanted confidence, and she wanted practice, but her audience were not very criti-

cal, and they got on charmingly. Then Alice Conway played, and still they had not danced enough; and they asked Ellen Merton if she would be kind enough to play. She readily assented, and sat down with the air of a proficient, colouring with pleasure to see that Henry Selwyn immediately took a place at her side.

"Nay, nay, Harry," said his cousins, "you're not going to turn idle."

"I am tired, my good fellow," said Henry conceitedly.

"Nonsense! what stuff: why here are four girls to two boys, and do you think we are going to let you off. Come and dance with Cousin Alice."

"Alice must really excuse me: I'm quite tired."

The party looked rather blank at first: they had not so much minded the quadrille being one short, but two made it awkward. At last Charles exclaimed,

"Never mind, never mind; he only does it to make himself of consequence. Fanny, come you and dance with me, and we'll dance both first and second couples; we may manage it very well, all but a little bit here and there."

Fanny was quite willing: Mary and Harriet Pridnett danced together, and Frank Pridnett and Alice Conway. Now and then they got

into a puzzle, but they laughed and danced out of it; very merry they were indeed, and Ellen Merton really played so well! she had a stylish manner and a light finger, and had no sort of timidity. She was loudly applauded.

She afterwards played some waltzes very well indeed; and Henry Selwyn, who had quite recovered from his fatigue, asked her if she would waltz with him. To this she readily assented if any one else would play: but to their great surprise Mrs. Pridnett interposed, and said, "she would prefer that they did not waltz: she did not permit her own daughters to waltz."

"But, dear Aunt, why not?" asked Henry Selwyn in great surprise: "everybody waltzes now."

"Not quite everybody, Henry, I fancy."

"Everybody that is anybody, he means, mamma," said Charlie.

Mrs. Pridnett shook her head goodnaturedly, yet reprovingly, at her saucy son, and said,

"Your Uncle and I, Henry, prefer that your cousins shall not waltz, and it is sufficient for them that we do not wish it."

"But you must have some reason, Aunt."

"Undoubtedly: we do not think it decorous; we do not think it modest or becoming."

"Oh, my dear Aunt, those notions are as old as Methuselah. Nobody is so fastidious now."

"Yes, Henry, I think many people are."

"Well, Aunt, though you won't allow my cousins to waltz, you will not hinder Miss Merton from doing so, will you?"

"No."

But Ellen at once declined to do so. She was accustomed to waltz, but she had good sense enough to feel that it would be very unbecoming in her to do so at this moment, after hearing Mrs. Pridnett's remarks.

The next morning the young party looked very blank at each other, for the day was wet, very, very wet; the rain came down quite drearily; the heavy horizon was not cheered by one streak of light. Mrs. Pridnett had detained her younger girls from the early service in consequence of the wet, and there seemed no prospect of the weather brightening.

"Only think," said Charles, "if it should be like this on the Pic-nic Day."

"Oh, Charlie, don't talk so," said Fanny.

"Don't talk how?"

"Why don't put such miserable ideas into our heads."

"Why is it not quite possible that it may rain on the Pic-nic Day?"

"Yes, it is possible certainly; but you need not talk about it."

"Or if it does," suggested Frank, "we

can put it off till another day: the tickets will keep, won't they, father?"

"Yes, the tickets will keep, but I don't know whether your mother's pies and puddings will."

"Mamma, you will provide lots of good things, won't you?"

"Pray do, mamma; for they will be the best things to console us at home, if it should be wet."

"I wish you would not talk about its being wet, Frank; I really wish you wouldn't," remonstrated Fanny; "it makes me quite unhappy to think of it."

"My dear little girl," said her mother, "I think you hardly mean what you say."

"Why not, mamma?"

"Think a little, my dear: do you really mean that the idea of a wet day makes you *miserable,* as you said a few minutes since; or that the having a pleasurable excursion postponed from one day to another *makes you quite unhappy,* as you remarked now?"

"Dear mamma, I should be exceedingly disappointed."

"No doubt you would be so, it is quite natural that you should," replied her mother. "It is to be expected that you would be much disappointed, but surely not that you would be *quite unhappy* and *miserable.*"

"No, I didn't mean that."

"Why did you say it then, my dear?"

"Mamma, I didn't think what I was saying."

"And so told an untruth."

"Mamma!" and the little girl's eyes filled with tears, and her sisters looked very pained for her.

Her mother took her hand and clasped it in her own, holding it there.

"Not an intentional untruth, I know: I quite entirely acquit my little girl of that; but you see what a habit of thoughtless speaking will lead you to. I have often cautioned you before. Carelessness on this point has now led you to saying that which you confess you did not mean. It has led you, in fact, to speak untruly."

"Surely, mamma," said Frank, whose heart had warmed to his sister the moment he saw her in trouble; "surely, mamma, little Fan ought not to be blamed for an untruth, if she did not mean one."

"If you attended to my words, Frank, you would find that I did not blame Fanny for the unintentional falsehood, but for the careless habit of speaking which led to it."

"I know, mamma, you mean very kindly, and that you know a great deal better than we do what is right and proper; but I really can't

see what harm a little bit of a fib like Fanny's, and which she really did not mean, can do."

"My dear boy, it gives me more satisfaction to see your affection for your sister than it would do to have you *yet* a clear and accurate thinker. You are both very young. But Frank, bear this in mind through life. All exaggeration is wrong; it is wrong, in itself, intrinsically, because it is not an accurate picture of the thoughts it would represent; because it is not a truthful exemplar of the real feelings of the heart. You heard in the Lesson this morning that 'Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are His delight.' And I cannot conceive how any one can be said to 'deal truly' who is in the habit of speaking words which do not accurately express his thoughts. Mind, I do not refer to an accidental mistake or lapse, but to a *habit* of exaggeration or untruth. A person indulging in such habit never believes fully what another says. The spirit of disbelief which thus becomes habitual, is in itself a sad drawback to the happiness of every one; but only consider how persons who really do conscientiously keep to the truth, are liable to be misunderstood and misrepresented by those who are not so truthful as themselves. Your father and I consider it of the utmost

importance to the welfare of our children, both here and hereafter, that they should be habituated to speak only the *literal* truth.

"And now, my dears," concluded Mrs. Pridnett, rising to leave the room, "occupy yourselves for a little while, and then Mr. Pridnett will be glad to see you in his study, where perhaps he can find you amusement for this wet day."

"Is your mamma always so strict with you?" whispered Ellen Merton to Mary Pridnett, whom she followed to a window.

"Mamma strict! we don't think her so at all; she's always very, very kind."

"She appeared to me very hard on poor little Fanny. I am sure I have said I was wretched and miserable a hundred times about trifling things, and my mother never found fault with me."

"Perhaps she thinks differently from mamma."

"Yes, I rather think she does. But now tell the truth, Mary, don't you think your mamma makes a little too much of it?"

Mary coloured violently and seemed about to reply hastily, but checked herself, and said,

"Wait till you know my mother better, and then I am sure you will love her and everything she does."

At this moment Henry Selwyn came up with a small book in his hand.

"Do you like poetry, Ellen?"

"O dearly I do."

"I thought so," he said, his eyes sparkling. "I thought we should feel alike. Do you know this?" and he held up a small pocket volume of Shelley's poems.

"No, I do not."

"Ah! then you have indeed a treat to come. Let me beg you to study it; the volume is mine, I will lend it to you."

"Thank you," said Ellen, hesitatingly, "I am much obliged to you, but ——"

"But what?"

"Mamma said one day it was a book she did not wish me to read."

"Has your mamma read it herself?"

"No; I don't think she has."

"I thought as much. In your mamma's young days Shelley had not written, and it seems to me to be the main object of papas and mammas of the present generation to limit the attainments of their children within the narrow bound which encircled their own. Why, I ask," said he, tossing his head, elevating his chest, and stretching forth his hand quite *à l'orateur*, "why should we be deprived of the enlightening influences of the age because circumstances denied our parents similar advantages?"

"I don't know, indeed," said Ellen simply and wonderingly, and looking with great admiration on the handsome youth who stood before her.

"What's that, Orator,—what's that?" said Charles, bounding across the room: "encore; let's have that again, will you? Quite a touch of the sublime that, I think."

Selwyn cast on the speaker a look of vexation not unmingled with contempt, and turning to Ellen said in a low voice,—

"Take this book, dear Miss Merton, it will delight you. *I* have read every word of it, therefore you need feel no hesitation about it."

And Ellen took it. "If," thought she, "he has read it, and mamma has not, he must surely be the best judge."

Silly girl!

At this moment the young people were summoned into Mr. Pridnett's study, where he had arranged a chemical apparatus, by which he showed them some very amusing experiments. Afterwards he displayed to them some books of travels, illustrated by numerous cuts and engravings; and as he had not only read largely but had travelled a good deal, he was able to give them *viva voce* explanations, which greatly enhanced their pleasure, and added to their information.

It was surprising how fast the day wore through, wet as it was. Ellen could scarcely find a moment to peep into her book. And in the evening again they had music and dancing.

CHAPTER VII.

Several days passed cheerfully away, as they generally will with young people who are good tempered and obliging. The Pridnetts were particularly so, they were a very united and affectionate family, and had been taught and habituated from infancy to give way to each other. Alice Conway had been brought up in the same way, and was quite one with her cousins. Ellen Merton had not had the advantage of such careful training, but as she was a very good natured girl, and was now amongst those who were all anxious to please her, it would have been strange indeed if she had caused any interruption to the general harmony. She thought Frank and Charles rather rough and unmannerly, but they were generous, good-hearted, and obliging, and made her laugh in spite of herself. The girls in her

opinion would have been charming girls if they had not had such a precise father and mother, for really she considered Mr. and Mrs. Pridnett were quite too particular. And moreover, she fancied these young people were almost too young for her companions, and she felt somewhat mortified that whenever company chanced to arrive, Mrs. Pridnett should always so quietly yet effectually class her with, and place her with, the juveniles in the back drawing-room, when from her dress, and (as *she* thought) her manners also, she was so fully qualified to appear with the senior party in the front one. Her own mother never treated her so absolutely like a child. This was the more annoying to her as Henry Selwyn had passed that important boundary line which divided the children from the grown up people, and even by his uncle (who did not hesitate to treat him as a boy in private) was encouraged and drawn forward in the presence of strangers. That *he* should see her treated like a mere child annoyed her more than anything else, but there was no help for it.

Do you not think her a very silly girl? You have not forgotten how she was mortified at the Bazaar in consequence of assuming a false character; and now her attempt to put herself more forward than was suitable to her age caused her vexation which she would never

have felt had she been simple and unassuming like her friends Mary and Alice.

But these were after all trifling annoyances, and she enjoyed the various amusements in which they passed the time, but especially the long walks, for then Henry Selwyn generally walked with her, and recited poetry, sometimes his own, about which he would earnestly inquire her opinion, which, I need hardly say, was usually very favourable. She had likewise very carefully read the book he lent her, having risen very early for that purpose; and some of the pieces which he had marked as his especial favourites she had learned by heart. She was now reading some of Lord Byron's poems with which he had supplied her.

One morning, a few days before that fixed upon for the pic-nic, Mrs. Pridnett, as the family assembled at breakfast, after the eight o'clock service, desired her daughters to lose no time, after the meal was concluded, in bringing their poor-baskets as usual.

"My dears," she said, turning to Ellen and Alice, "my daughters are accustomed to employ a portion of one day in the week to sewing for their poorer neighbours. It is all which at present they *can* do, and it serves as a remembrance to themselves of their superior comforts and the blessings they enjoy. It is likewise a well-meant, if not a very important

help, to the wife of our excellentRect or in her parish ministrations, as these garments form a portion of the Clothing Fund distributed at Christmas."

"And do they do this regularly, every week the year round?" asked Ellen.

"Oh yes; the practice gives way, of course, to indisposition, or at times to a more pressing or immediate duty, but never to pleasure."

"But, dear aunt," said Alice, "do you make the clothes for the people? In our district materials merely are distributed."

"Such, I believe is usually the case. But Mrs. Maitland has an accurate list of the more infirm, helpless, and laborious of her husband's parishioners, and she is pleased to enhance the value of their savings by having garments made up, of which the more deserving are allowed—to the full value of their claims—the choice. I am happy to be permitted to be a labourer in the same vineyard; I am thankful to have the privilege of thus, week by week, practically engrafting on my children's minds the principle of *untiring* charity.

"But I have no wish, Alice, to tie you and your friend. There are the books, the piano, the garden, amuse yourselves as you please, only excuse your cousins for three or four hours."

"I should like to assist, if you will allow me, aunt," said Alice.

"Certainly we will allow you, and thank you too," replied Mrs. Pridnett, turning over the work with which her daughters had by this time covered the table. "What will you choose to try your hand at? here's a baby's cap—a little frock—or will you prefer the plain straightforward sewing?"

"I can manage the cap, aunt, I think, if you will be so good as just direct me at first."

And Alice's heart warmed with pleasure at being *able* thus to assist her cousins; for in working for the poor woman in Guy's Lane, the caps had been assigned to her to make.

Having provided her niece with occupation, her daughters being already busily sewing, Mrs. Pridnett turned to Ellen, and asked her whether she would like a little needlework, begging kindly that she would just please herself.

"I fear, ma'am, I could not help you much; we are not allowed to do plain work at our school."

"I regret to hear that, though I fear it is now a very usual custom; but no doubt, my dear, your mamma makes up that deficiency by instructing you in it at home."

"Oh no, ma'am; mamma says she does not mind it, if I get on with my music and drawing, and those things that are of more importance. Besides I am doing a great deal of

tapestry work; and I am very anxious, and so is mamma, that my ottomans should be finished before Christmas; so my frame is often sent home for me, and I do the filling up in an evening when I have time."

"Of course, if your mamma is satisfied, no one has, or can have any right to interfere, or to offer advice. But do you not think, Ellen, it would be a pleasure to yourself to help your mother? In her large family there must be a great deal of plain work."

"Oh dear no, we keep people to do it."

"Yet you told me, Ellen," said Alice, "when I was tying your petticoat, that your mamma had worked night and day to get the new set ready for you to wear here."

Ellen blushed scarlet, she had forgotten that.

Mrs. Pridnett looked at her very gravely.

"My dear," she said, "you are not aware that I know perfectly well that your mother is a most industrious housewife, and does a great deal of the plain sewing of her family. I know it well, and I respect her for it, as every right thinking person must do."

Ellen became more confused.

"I am sorry," continued Mrs. Pridnett, "I grieve to see in you a disposition which is sure, if not restrained, to lead you ultimately into serious error—a habit of misrepresentation—of——"

"It is no misrepresentation, ma'am," interrupted Ellen, warmly, "we *do* keep a person almost entirely to sew."

"I do not doubt that in the least; your mother requires, and doubtless has regular assistance; but still, I repeat, Ellen, that what you said was *intended* to mislead us; you wished us to suppose that your mother was too high, too elevated, to stoop to do the plain sewing of her family. Was it not so, Ellen?" said Mrs. Pridnett, looking keenly at her.

Ellen coloured and pouted, but did not speak.

"This, my dear, is in fact an equivocation, a *wilful* equivocation or falsehood; the worst fault which a young person can commit."

Ellen burst into a passion of tears.

"It is too bad—too bad, Mrs. Pridnett," sobbed she, "to talk to me in this way, just as if I had told a black lie, when the very *very* worst you can make of it, is only a *white fib*."

"And what is a white fib, Ellen?"

"Why—I don't know—it's just a trifling thing that nobody minds."

"My dear child, that is a very sad and fatal error, and I much regret that you should have been suffered to imbibe it. There is no such thing as a 'white fib,' there is no such thing as a harmless falsehood. An equivocation is as much a sin in reality as a downright pal-

pable untruth, or what you call a 'black lie.' We are told in the Holy Scriptures that he who 'will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they *speak no guile*:' not, tell no black lies—not, tell no palpable falsehoods—but, '*speak no guile*.' This means most surely, deceive in no way, do not prevaricate, do not equivocate—as you have been doing."

"I'm sure I did not think of doing wrong."

"That I fully believe; and as my guest, and as a kind and a good girl too, I should not have distressed you by alluding to any fault of less vital consequence to your future welfare than I feel this to be. But it is impossible that I can speak too strongly on this point; a truthful spirit is so absolutely necessary not only to your own eternal welfare, but to the comfort of all around you as you pass through life, that I would impress it on you, my dear Ellen, with the utmost earnestness. You heard me chide my own Fanny the other day for a remark which had no intentional deceit in it, which was merely thoughtless, but which I feared, if not checked, might lead to a habit of incorrect, untrue speaking."

"I don't think it is possible for any body to talk so very particularly and formally as you would have them, Mrs. Pridnett."

"Indeed it is quite possible, and, in time,

very easy, and not formal either. Does your friend Alice seem very formal, or does my daughter Mary appear so?"

"No; at least I never noticed it."

"Well, my dear, I think, and I am happy and thankful so to think, that they have such a reverence for truth, that far from telling a wilful falsehood, they would shun anything which looked like equivocation, or garbling, or concealing the truth in any way. For this, without speech, the concealing something that ought to be known, is likewise a species of falsehood.

"Alice and Mary have had much pains taken with them, and have become accustomed to watch themselves closely. This it is their duty to do, but they have likewise their present reward and happiness in it, for their parents can trust them as friends, and their younger brothers and sisters are taught to look up to them as examples. I will not tire you more at present, Ellen, but I hope you will think seriously and often on what I have been saying."

Mrs. Pridnett then talked to her daughters about indifferent matters in order to give Ellen time to recover herself. She sat sullen and silent for some time, quite unmoved by the anxious endeavours of the girls, who had felt for her discomfiture, to amuse and relieve her.

At length however she cheered up and began to talk freely about her school, and school occupations in answer to the curious questioning of her companions. Neither the Pridnetts, it must be observed, nor Alice Conway had ever been to school.

"I thought," said little Fanny, "scholars sat in rows, on hard forms, with their toes very much turned out in the first position on the cold floor, and very often with backboards on."

"Oh dear no; even at my first school the forms had soft cushions, and the floor was thickly carpeted."

"That is more than mamma allows in our schoolroom," said Harriet; "we have no cushions on the form, and vastly little carpet on the floor; isn't there, mamma?"

"Quite sufficient, love, for a healthy little girl. But what is the difference between that and your present school, Ellen?"

"Oh! ma'am, we've no schoolroom at all, now."

"No schoolroom at all!" exclaimed all the girls.

"Oh dear no; that is quite exploded in modern finishing schools."

"Where then do you learn your lessons?"

"Oh! we don't learn regular lessons."

"What do you do, then, my dear?" asked Mrs. Pridnett, smiling.

"Why, ma'am, we have our music lessons regularly, and we generally attend Signor Squallini in the back drawing room; Don Riccardini, too, the Spanish patriot, who gives instruction in Italian and Spanish, attends likewise in the back drawing room. We read German with Madame Mirabel herself; she always occupies the front drawing room, and when we wish to read to her we seek her there."

"When you *wish* to read to her; do you please yourselves then?"

"Yes, generally; occasionally Madame sends for us, but she says emulation is the best teacher."

"But where do you learn your other lessons —your common lessons? and to whom do you say them?"

"Oh! we don't learn common lessons; Madame Mirabel considers her pupils beyond that."

"But you don't sit in the drawing room, surely."

"No; not exactly that: we have a large parlour, suitably furnished, where we usually pass our time with Miss Medley, the teacher."

"You have a teacher at last, then," said Fanny, clapping her hands as if she had made a discovery.

"Not exactly; Miss Medley is chiefly occupied in preparing and superintending the fancy

work and tapestry, of which we do a great deal."[1]

How long this catechising might have lasted it is impossible to say, for Mrs. Pridnett was much amused, the girls wonderfully surprised and interested, and Ellen (having quite forgotten

[1] I can hardly forbear to give a little commentary on this conversation.

Madame Mirabel's finishing school, as described by Ellen, is painted by me from a representation given to me by a young relative a few years since, and I do think not much exaggerated.

Little Fanny's description of a school exactly applies to the one where my early training was perfected, except that I had the additional—and I hope unusual—discomfort of a large schoolroom detached from the dwelling house, and over a waste empty barn; doors at each end, windows at both sides, a smoking chimney, and an impenetrable iron guard in front of the grate.

To go back yet another generation. I remember well to have seen in my childhood the backboard which my mother wore at school in her youth. In addition to the back iron and shoulder and waist straps, it had a stiff collar, edged with prickly points, to strap round the throat and keep the head in one position.

"Never," I remember my mother to have said, "never shall daughter of mine be tortured as I have been."

Southey, in one of his letters, expresses in emphatic terms his resolution, that his son's schooldays shall never be made so miserable as his own.

Probably in every respect we have now gone too far the other way. "Learning made (too) easy" will never be deep or durable; and schooling made mere recreation quite does away with the first object of schooling—that is the acquiring habits of application, industry, and perseverance.

her recent mortification) was enjoying her assumed superiority, when she caught a glimpse of Henry Selwyn's figure in the garden. Almost immediately she made some excuse to leave the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

ELLEN hurried up stairs, and putting on her bonnet as quickly as possible, slipped stealthily down the back way, and made her way to a secluded path in which she had frequently walked with Henry Selwyn. Here she opened a small edition of Byron's Parisina, the last book he had lent to her, and was reading it when he met her.

"Ah, Ellen," he said, "I see what you are reading; I need not ask you whether you like it?"

"It is beautiful," said she, "beautiful!"

"Yes, is it not? I consider it a magnificent poem; how full of feeling and pathos it is. Man as I am, I could almost weep for Parisina. And Hugo too—what a magnificent fellow he is, and how nobly he dies—and how paltry that Azo appears with his tyranny—and has not spirit to die, but lives to be a pul-

ing old man. Oh, it's a glorious poem; don't you think so?"

"I like it very much; but I didn't think about it in the way you do."

"Why, how then? how else could you think of it?"

"Oh, I mean, I did not examine the characters in the way you have done. I thought Parisina's a sweet one, and the poetry so beautiful! I was learning all off by heart that referred to her."

"You can't do better. And is not the commencement beautiful—"

> "It is the hour when from the boughs
> The nightingale's high note is heard;
> It is the hour when lover's vows
> Seem sweet in every whisper'd word;
> And gentle winds, and waters near,
> Make music to the lonely ear."

"Oh, it is beautiful, beautiful," murmured Ellen; "but do you know I have never heard a nightingale."

"Nor I either; but what does that signify? People of real genius understand things by intuition. They don't require to study everything, as my father would make me believe."

"Is your father harsh with you, Henry?"

"No, no; I can't say that he is; he's a decent old gentleman, in his way; but he's one of the old school, you understand."

"Yes," said Ellen, though she by no means *did* understand.

"He tells me to study law and leave poetry alone, as if both could not very well be combined; or as if I could not pick up enough from old musty parchments in my five years without drudging at them night and day, to the exclusion of everything really enlightened. Then he proses about, Shelley this and Byron the other, just as if an author should not be encouraged unless he were a saint upon earth; or as if one could not read a fellow's poetry without copying all his whims."

"But I have heard mamma say that Byron was a very dangerous person."

"Oh, all handsome men are dangerous persons in the eyes of mammas."

"Yes—but his poetry."

"My dear girl, have *you* found anything bad in it?"

"Oh, dear no."

"Well then—there it is; nor I either; and I say we are of an age to judge for ourselves, and not be frightened at bugbears, like children."

It must be allowed to Ellen that she did not feel quite satisfied; something within told her that Henry was wrong, and that she was wrong in listening to him. But she could not detect his sophistry, nor exactly see in what her own error lay.

Her first error was in listening to the advice of any person in opposition to that of her mother, moreover, when that person was an inexperienced youth little older than herself. Henry Selwyn had no intention to mislead her, but he was a conceited vain young man, puffed up with the idea of his own talent, and not at all disposed to defer to the opinion of any one, how much older or wiser soever. Ellen was taken with his rhapsodies, and he was proud of her evident admiration, and that was the whole secret of the attention he paid to her.

But this was not Ellen Merton's worst error. Her mother had, more than once, explicitly forbidden her to read either Shelley's poem's or Lord Byron's; and on one occasion, when some of the latter had been lent to her by a schoolfellow, Mrs. Merton herself had returned them, and repeated her injunction to Ellen, not to read them. Yet now, because Henry Selwyn had said that *he* found nothing faulty in them, she had disobeyed her mother's injunction; had accepted, and read, and even learnt them by heart.

Her mother would have told her that this very poem—Parisina—has excited the reprobation of all good and right-judging people; that Lord Byron has, most sadly and culpably, perverted and misused the splendid talents with which he was endowed; and that the

heroine of the poem, whose character Ellen thought "a sweet one," is recorded only as a woman who sacrificed her most sacred duties in life to the indulgence of criminal passion.

But not one word of this just and true criticism did she hear, nor one truthful or useful warning did she receive from Henry Selwyn.

"I don't think Mrs. Pridnett approves of these books," said Ellen, at length, timidly. "Indeed, Mary told me, that they were never allowed to take Lord Byron's works down without leave, as they may almost any other book; and that then they were never permitted to read any parts but those their father and mother point out."

"And they really abide by these rules—do they?"

"Oh, yes, I have no doubt they do, for Mary says so."

"Yes, I dare say; for they *are* such pieces of propriety."

"Well, indeed, Henry, they are; they are very kind to me, and I am very fond of them —indeed, I am; but yet, I don't know how it is—their ways and their thoughts appear so different from mine."

"To be sure they are: you have genius, and spirit, and a soul for poetry. Now, Ellen, you will hardly believe it—you hardly can—and yet, I assure you it is literally true. I recited

a composition of my own to Mary the other day; nothing very elaborate; a poetical effusion that rose spontaneously to my pen after hearing Montgomery preach—a sort of *beau-ideal* of a clergyman—a sketchy thing you know; well, would you believe it? she absolutely told me that she did not think it so pretty as Goldsmith's Country Clergyman."

"Did she?" said Ellen.

"Yes; she absolutely did. The idea," and he laughed heartily—"the idea of any body, in these days, quoting Goldsmith. It is really too good."

Ellen did not understand how. She knew the whole of "The Deserted Village" by heart, and thought it very pretty. And she thought truly; and the older people grow, the more they will like that beautiful poem. But now that Henry Selwyn had ridiculed it, though she knew not why, she would not for the world have owned that she admired it.

"But, Ellen," continued he, "what is the matter with you? I am sure you are not in your usual spirits. Have you been crying? I do think—I'm sure you have."

"It was very silly of me; I could not help crying."

"What about, dear Ellen?"

"Oh, nothing; it was really nothing. I said something or other about some trifling

matter, meaning nothing wrong, I am sure; and your Aunt Pridnett took me to task as if I had been telling a fib."

"Ay, that's just her way; that's just like her; but you do not mind it, Ellen, surely?"

"I don't mind it so much now, but I did just at the time."

"The more silly you. The only way to manage such people is just to let what they say go in at one ear and out at the other. To tell you the truth," he continued, speaking very gravely and confidentially, "that's the way I'm obliged to do, or I could not get on with them at all. My uncle's a good fellow in his way, and my aunt, in her way, as kind-hearted a lady as ever breathed; but they know nothing of the world—nothing."

"Then you really think, Henry, there is no necessity to be so very precise in one's talk."

"Not the least in the world—not the least. You never find it in real life. Why, if all people were to bind themselves by my aunt's rules, the world would be at a standstill. Now, to name only one point out of a hundred, what, for instance, would become of literature in general, if nothing but the plain, bare, rigid, unadorned truth were written. Nay, to lay aside generalities, to take only any one point, what would become of poetry?"

"I don't know," said Ellen.

"No, my dear girl, I dare say you do not; but I will tell you—it would be lost, dead, annihilated, and with it the regenerating power of the human race would become extinct."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Ellen.

"Yes, indeed," rejoined he. "It is the spirit of poesy which exalts man's heart, which excites his latent powers, which rouses all that is lofty and noble, and chivalrous within him. And how could that be done, Ellen, by merely telling you that that's a house, and that a tree?"

Ellen didn't know indeed.

"Never! it could never be done. Imagination was this revivifying power, and imagination was poetry, and poetry was imagination, and they were both incompatible with the matter of fact, yea and nay, of this work-a-day world."

Ellen didn't quite understand all this; but she thought, of course, that it must be right. After musing a few minutes without at all becoming enlightened by the operation she ventured to say,

"You do not think then, Mr. Henry, that there is any necessity always to study what one says."

"Of course there is no need; there would be an end of all conversation if we did."

"And"—(Ellen coloured and stammered a

good deal)—"and do you think a little white fib is quite a great sin?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Henry; "now the murder is out. I see now what all this has been about; and if you told my excellent aunt the very smallest white fib in the world, she would make it look black directly. Did she not then?"

"She did indeed. You don't think it so bad then?"

"Oh, dear no. Don't mistake me, Ellen; I scorn a lie; I think it so dishonourable. But rely upon it we were never meant to be such rigid puritans as my aunt would have us. We should lose all the pleasure of life. The best people in the world finesse a little at times, and think nothing of it."

"What do you mean by finesse?"

"Why, I mean, that though you must not tell a falsehood, you need not always tell all the truth; or that—"

"Why, that's just it," interrupted Ellen; "I merely said my mother kept a person to do plain sewing, and did not say that mamma helped her to do it, and so I was taken to task."

(Now, if my readers will refer to page 62, they will find that again Ellen is not telling the literal truth.)

"Very likely; nothing more likely."

"But I feel a great deal happier now I have

seen you, for somehow Mrs. Pridnett did make me feel quite unhappy."

"Never distress yourself about such trifles if you are wise. But let us talk of something else."

"The Pic-nic," suggested Ellen.

"Ay, the Pic-nic—not that I care for the vulgar pic-nic part of it, in the least; but its *entourage* interests me much. You never were in Dunweyne Park, Ellen?"

"No, never."

"Nor have ever been much amongst fine romantic scenery?"

"No, never."

"I promise myself much pleasure in introducing you to the beauties of the park scenery, and watching the effect on you. Some of the sequestered glades, near the lake, where the weeping willow bends its flexile branch even to the water's edge, seeking, as one might fancy, sympathy with its own depression; the red light of sunset crimsoning the waters and glancing on the irradiated boles and boughs of the majestic lords of the forest; the distant vistas, bathed in radiance, breaking from time to time on the rapt vision, are beautiful; indeed, they almost realize some of the exquisite descriptions in Byron."

"Indeed!"

"O yes. One would fancy oneself roving

amid the shady groves with one loved and tried friend (Ellen's heart began to flutter) whose feelings were all in unison with one's own, and forgetting in the delicious present, the wide world and all its future cares."

Ellen sighed.

"I was in the park a day or two since, and committed a few of these passing fancies to paper; but the doggrel is not worth your perusal," said he—drawing out a paper, nevertheless.

"Oh, yes indeed," said Ellen; "pray let me read it."

"Indeed, I am ashamed; it is so utterly unfinished," said he, with affected reluctance.

Ellen, however, secured the paper and read—

"Dunweyne! when thy sweet aspect o'er my spirit,
Sheds its rich effluence of peace and love,
Meseems I taste that bliss which those inherit
(Their glorious appanage)—the saints above;—
For nothing else of earthly good, I ween,
Can vie with thine effulgent grace, Dunweyne!

"Whether the glorious god of day appearing,
Disguise in radiant haze thy leafy bowers;
Or in the glowing west his orb careering,
Define in crimson flame thy antique towers;
Whether at morn or evening thou art seen,
Enshrined in nature's loveliness—Dunweyne.

"When my vexed spirit's chafed with earth's dull dreaming
—(The carking cares of petty sordid clay—)

Imagination paints thy lofty seeming
Till all things paltry pass from it away.
Of beauty's host thou art the very queen,
And queen'st thou it right royally—Dunweyne!

"Preening her snowy wings the swan majestic,
On thy bright lake wafts diamond gems around;
While myriad tones of nature's voices plastic,—
And coos of ring-doves—through the groves resound,
All nature revels in the glorious sheen
Of thy sweet bowers, and tufted heights—Dunweyne.

"Making the ambient air one melody
Thy——"

"Mamma's love and begs to know whether you are disposed to have any dinner to-day, or would rather it were put off until to-morrow," shouted Charlie, hastening towards them. "Harry, my lad, your poetry is more substantial than I thought, if it enables Miss Merton to go without her dinner."

"We are coming," said Selwyn, in some confusion, for he could not parry the fun of his cousins; "we did not know it was so late."

"Of course you did not; that is very evident. Yet I always thought poetizing made people hungry; all your poets are scarecrows: but perhaps you are not of the true breed; only a 'poetaster,' or 'versifier,' as the spelling book says of beginners."

Henry wisely held his tongue, though he bit his lip. Ellen had run into the house, bearing with her, in spite of Selwyn's feigned reluctance, the copy of verses.

CHAPTER IX.

ELLEN thought the verses which Henry Selwyn had given her so very beautiful, that as soon as she could steal away unobserved after dinner, she retired to the breakfast-room, which at that time she knew would be quite empty, in order to learn them by heart, before she returned him the copy. In order to facilitate her progress she read them aloud, as she could always learn more quickly by that means; and, fully engrossed by her task, forgot everything else, when she was roused by a suppressed titter behind her. She started and turned, and there was Charlie Pridnett; but surely he could not have been laughing, for he now looked as grave as a judge.

"Dear Ellen, are those the verses that Henry gave you?"

"Yes, they are; but how long have you been here, Charlie?"

"Oh, some time; I've heard you read them again and again."

"Oh, you tiresome boy! and I knew nothing about it."

"Well, never mind; but now, Ellen, you must do me a favour."

"What is that?"

"You must lend me those verses."

"I can't indeed, Charlie."

"Yes, you can, and I am sure you will, for you *are* goodnatured; mamma says so, and everybody. I won't keep them long."

"What will you do with them?"

"Copy them."

"And return them to me quite safe?"

"Quite safe."

"And soon?"

"Directly almost."

"On your word?"

"Honour bright," said Charlie, laying his hand on his breast.

So away he ran with the paper, and Ellen sate down to try how much she could remember without the copy, and before she was tired of her occupation, Charles, true to his word, brought the manuscript to her, thanking her at the same time. She rejoiced to have the verses restored so soon, and eager to complete her task, asked Charlie no questions about the purpose for which he wanted them, but sedulously applied herself to a reperusal. She had just conquered the last verse, when Alice Conway and Mary Pridnett came to seek her.

"Dear Ellen, what are you about here all alone?"

"Nothing," said Ellen, hiding the verses, "nothing at all."

"Surely, dear Ellen," said Mary Pridnett,

somewhat timidly, "surely you are not vexed with mamma? she only spoke for your own good."

"Oh dear no," replied Ellen, rather haughtily, "of course Mrs. Pridnett has a right to do as she pleases in her own house."

"Don't speak in that tone, dear Ellen, don't," said Mary, her eyes filling with tears, "you do not know, for you cannot know, how good mamma is."

"Ellen didn't mean it, I am sure," said Alice; "she has not been brought up as we have. But Ellen, we want to consult you about our dress for the Pic-nic party; you know it is close at hand. What do you mean to put on?"

"I hardly know yet," said Ellen, affectedly, "perhaps my lilac silk dress."

"Your very best frock, Ellen? what if it should be spoiled."

"I hope it will not be spoiled, and I have nothing else suitable."

"Ellen, what nonsense; and you with such a many clothes. But my Cousins are going to wear white frocks, and my Aunt advises me to do the same, because then she says if it is wet, or dirty, or we have any mishaps, a little soap and water sets all right; and you know we can never answer for weather or accidents on a Pic-nic party."

"Oh dear no," said Frank; "accidents are half the fun: it would never do to be without them."

"What sort of accidents are fun?" asked little Fanny.

"Why such as that you saw in one of Seymour's Sketches, when the cow put her foot right in the middle of the pie which was for dinner."

"Oh! that *was* funny. But do cows always do so at Pic-nics?"

Frank was desperately tempted to say "yes, always;" but truthful habits prevailed, and he said "No, you silly child," and turned away with a laugh.

"And papa desires we will all wear thick shoes," said Mary, resuming the original subject; "because though the weather has been fine lately, we may probably find damp grass in particular spots."

Ellen vowed internally that she would not put on thick shoes. All her original curiosity about the style, and manner, and customs, and amusements of Pic-nicking had merged in the one sole desire of making herself so attractive to Henry Selwyn, as to be chosen by him to accompany him along the green vistas and romantic glades, of which he had discoursed so eloquently, of seeing the weeping willows dipping their branches in the waters, the light

glister between the leaves and sparkle on the silver waves, &c. &c., and so, though lending a courteous and apparently an acquiescing ear to all that was said, Ellen had inwardly resolved to go in her lilac silk frock, her Cardinal lace tippet, and her thin shoes and silk stockings.

"I begin to think the Pic-nic is really coming at last," said Harriet as she ran into the room; "for mamma's busy in the store-room with Cook, and it is very seldom indeed that she gives orders at this time. And we are going to have such lots of things."

"What, Harriet? tell us what," called out both the boys.

"Oh, veal pies, and tarts, and tongue, and gingerbread, and chicken, and I don't know what else."

"And is the veal-pie to be a large one?"

"No, quite little: Mamma said, 'raised crust, Cook, and small, so as not to need dividing; what the young people (that's us you know) may take in their hand."

"Then at any rate the cow's foot can't go into it," said Fanny.

"The what, Fanny? What do you mean?"

"Why, you know, Harriet, in Seymour's Sketches, the cow put her foot in the pie at the Pic-nic; and Frank says there's no fun in a Pic-nic without accidents."

"But there are no cows in Dunweyne Park; only deer."

"Then I fear we can have no accidents," said Frank, with a very grave face.

"Oh yes, Frank, I hope we shall," said little Fanny quite earnestly.

They all laughed at her, and agreed in hoping that they might have no accidents with the dinner itself: all but Ellen seemed to consider that a very important and interesting part of the Pic-nic.

They were then, as usual, arranging for a dance, and Ellen wondering what had become of Henry Selwyn, and sadly afraid of having to dance with somebody else, when the footman came in with a note.

"For Miss Merton," he said, approaching her.

Ellen took it, and saw the superscription was her mamma's, and opened it directly. It was very short, but it seemed to turn her giddy at the moment with surprise and disappointment, and she ran to her own room in order to think it over by herself.

CHAPTER X.

THE moment Ellen reached her own room she bolted the door, and read her letter through. It was very short.

"My dear Ellen,

"I write in extreme haste to say that Joe will be at Mr. Pridnett's between three and four o'clock on Thursday to bring you home. I am very sorry to disappoint you, but *you must not on any account go to the Pic-nic.* Mrs. Pridnett will at once excuse you if you say that it is my wish.

"I will write to her to-morrow, with my grateful acknowledgments; but it is now post time, and I dare not delay a moment lest this should not reach you in time.

"Believe me, my dear Ellen,

"Your affectionate Mother,

"ANNE MERTON."

The letter fell from Ellen's hand, and she sank on a chair, panting and breathless; for a moment her eyesight seemed to go, and the room to turn round with her. NOT GO TO THE PIC-NIC! Poor girl! Her heart ached painfully, and she pressed her hand tight on her side, and her breath seemed to come short.

But in a few seconds she burst into tears, and that relieved her.

Ellen soon dried her tears, however, and took up her mother's letter to read again. She did read it again and again, but could not in any wise make it different from what it had appeared on the first perusal. There it was in plain black and white that she was not to go to the pic-nic; and, moreover, that she was to return home on the very day that this long talked-of entertainment was to take place. Of course there was nothing for her but obedience, painful and disappointing as it was, and she was about to go at once to Mrs. Pridnett with the letter when she thought there was no need to be in such a hurry about it; she would keep it until morning, and think it over again.

Let me caution you against imitating Ellen Merton's conduct in this matter. When you feel that it is your duty to do a certain thing *do it at once:* never put it off lest you should be tempted not to do it at all. Ellen Merton knew it was her duty to tell Mrs. Pridnett at once of the letter and commands she had received from her mother, but she fancied it could not make much difference if she put it off till morning. What she did in the morning you shall hear.

Now, she carefully put the letter away in her drawer, washed her eyes, that it might not

be seen that she had been crying, smoothed her hair, and went down stairs to her friends.

They were endeavouring to perform a new dance, but Alice Conway blundered sadly over the tune, and Mary Pridnett did not even know the notes. They all exclaimed with pleasure when Ellen entered:

"Dear Ellen," said Frank, "what a time you have been reading your mother's letter; we can't manage this tune at all."

"I'll play it," said Ellen.

And she did play it charmingly, many times over, and they learnt the dance quite perfectly.

"Do you know, Ellen," said Charlie, who was a very good-natured boy, "I think if you would take the least little bit of pains with me, I could soon learn this tune on my flageolet, and then I could play for you in the Park, at the pic-nic, and you might all dance."

"Oh yes! do, Charlie, do, do," said little Fanny, clapping her hands.

"It would be very nice," said Alice Conway.

"Oh yes! to dance on the soft turf. Did you ever dance on the grass, Ellen?" asked Frank.

"No, never."

"Then you shall dance with me, and I'll teach you how nice it is."

"Nay, nay, Frank," said his sister Mary, "we must not separate Ellen and our Cousin

Henry, for they do dance beautifully together, mamma says so."

"Well then, I won't; and that's very generous of me, Miss Merton, I can tell you; for I don't see why Master Henry should have you all to himself, just because he poetizes."

"It isn't because he poetizes, but because he dances so much better than you," said Mary.

"Ah! I don't know, I don't know, Sister Mary;" and Charles shook his head very gravely; "none but poets have any chance with young ladies now-a-days: have they, Ellen?" His comical glance made her blush, for she knew he was alluding to the verses he had overheard her reading.

Just then Henry Selwyn came in.

"Ah, Henry, we've such a nice plan," said Harriet; "Charlie is going to learn this new tune on his flageolet, and play it for us in the Park, that we may all dance; and you are to dance with Ellen Merton."

"Yes, I hope indeed, if we do dance, that I shall have Miss Merton for my partner; but not, Ellen," continued he, whispering to her, "not until I have rambled quietly with you through the sequestered glades, and lovely scenery of the Park, and pointed out the exquisite associations it awakens. You would not give up this for dancing, surely?"

"Oh no, no!" said Ellen.

"These children have as yet the souls of children merely, and do not understand our feelings. But say nothing about it and I'll manage it all; and we can have a dance afterwards to satisfy them."

"Yes," faltered Ellen, for the remembrance of her mother's letter came across her; during the eager planning of the last quarter of an hour she had forgotten it.

"When you have done whispering, good people," said Charlie, with a low bow and a flourish of his flageolet, "perhaps I may presume to offer my humble petition."

"Charlie is always so comical," laughed Fanny.

"Now, dear Ellen, if you'll just play the tune over, and tell me the flats and sharps."

"I don't know, Charlie," said Ellen, slowly, trying to gather courage to name her mother's prohibition.

"Oh! Ellen,"—"dear Ellen,"—"Charlie is so quick,"—and "it won't be much trouble," resounded from all sides, for they mistook the cause of her hesitation and thought she was afraid of the trouble of teaching Charles.

The colour kept rising and deepening on Ellen's face until it was quite scarlet, with the struggle within herself whether to tell or not; but at last she thought, "there is no need

to tell this minute, or at any rate it *can* do no harm to teach Charlie the tune;" so drawing a deep breath as if she had quite relieved herself by this decision, she called out "Now, Charlie," and dashed away merrily at the keys.

Charles had a very quick ear, as his sisters had said, and he very soon mastered the notes of the tune; of course it wanted practice; and he practised hard, Ellen kindly and readily assisting him, until supper time. They all applauded his progress, and thanked Ellen again and again; and his mother was summoned to hear him, and said she doubted not that with practice on the morrow, and a little of Ellen's assistance, he would be able to play it very nicely on Thursday, at least well enough for them to dance.

Mrs. Pridnett then drew Ellen's arm through her's on one side, and Alice's on the other, and they all went together to supper. For at the earnest request of the visitors, joined by the elder Pridnetts, Harriet and Fanny were allowed to sit up to supper during their young friends' visit.

Ellen's heart felt very heavy, and she was very nearly telling Mrs. Pridnett all then, and entreating her to intercede with her mother. But from not having said a word to her companions in the playroom, she fancied it would look awkward now. So she was silent.

"It is too late, now," thought she, "to-night; and it can't signify putting it off till morning."

But they saw at supper that she was out of spirits, and asked her why? and as she could not make up her mind to tell the truth she said she had a headache. On this Mrs. Pridnett, who knew she had a little cold, and thought she was over fatigued, insisted on giving her a little wine and water, which in fact helped to make her head ache. But though she disliked it Ellen drank it, sooner than tell Mrs. Pridnett the truth then.

"I will tell her all in the morning," thought she.

CHAPTER XI.

It was long that night before Ellen fell asleep, and she awoke in the morning with a heaviness and weight on her spirits which she had never felt in her life, except the morning after the fancy fair, when she slowly recollected her disasters and mortifications of the day before. So it was now. Something seemed to weigh on her, and make her unhappy when she awoke, though she could not at all tell what it was. Slowly, however, she recalled all the

circumstances of the preceding day, and last of all, like a flash of light, the remembrance came over her of her mother's letter. This was the cause of her unhappiness; this accounted for all; and she turned on her pillow to think it over and over.

She did think it over and over; and with a deep sigh she got up and took the letter from her dressing case, and sitting down at the edge of the bed, she read it two or three times before she began to dress.

Now, if my readers remember the letter (and if they do not, they will perhaps look at page 87, and read it again,) they will wonder what there was in it to require that it should be perused so often. It appears plain enough, clear enough; there seems to be little difficulty in understanding it. What then does Ellen read it again and again for, and meditate so deeply upon it?

I will tell you.

Ellen's first impulse on reading her mother's letter was to go at once to Mrs. Pridnett, and give it to her; and if Ellen had done so, she would have done right, she would have acted truthfully, she would have saved herself and her mother a great deal of unhappiness, and she would have secured the approbation of her friends. But she did not do so; she deferred to do what she knew was right, and the de-

ferring it made it harder and harder to her. She began to think whether she might not escape it altogether; and this it was which made her deliberate so long on her mother's letter.

It seemed to her to be a dreadful trial to give up the Pic-nic, and certainly it would be a great disappointment to any girl; but Ellen's mamma was so extremely indulgent to her at all times, that she must have been quite sure that some peremptory reason caused her present conduct; but this, Ellen did not stop to think upon, nor her own plain duty, nor anything but the pleasure of the moment. What disappointed her most was the idea of being separated so suddenly from Henry Selwyn, and missing the walk in the grove with him, and the poetry he promised her. She could not bear to think of it.

Could it be managed any way? could she get Mrs. Pridnett to petition for her? There was yet time, if that lady would send a man and horse to town on purpose; and she was so very kind and indulgent that Ellen thought she would.

So she decided to do this, and hastened to dress herself, feeling quite certain of Mrs. Pridnett's kind interference; but just as she was leaving her room the thought struck her that perhaps Mrs. Pridnett might not choose

"My dear," said Mrs. Pridnett; "I fear that you are more poorly than I was aware; you should not have risen; you must lie down again directly."

"No, ma'am," sobbed Ellen, "it is not that, I am not ill; but—but—mamma says I must go home to-morrow."

"Go home to-morrow! what, the very day of the Pic-nic!" exclaimed two or three.

"How is this, my dear? when did you hear from your mamma; and what does she say?"

"I had a letter last night, ma'am; it was that which made me look unwilling to teach Charlie the tune. Mamma says she wishes me to go home positively on Thursday—to-morrow; and she says she will write to you immediately."

"Did your mother know it was the Pic-nic day?" asked Mr. Pridnett.

"Oh yes, sir, quite well."

"And what does she say about Dunweyne Park, my dear?" asked Mrs. Pridnett.

Ellen started and almost gasped.

"Not a word, ma'am."

"Not a word! not a word about the park!" exclaimed two or three.

"Not one word," said Ellen; going red and pale by turns, and feeling that she did so.

Mr. and Mrs. Pridnett saw it too, but suspecting no collusion, they attributed it to her

natural disappointment at losing the promised treat.

"I am very sorry James is obliged to go away to-day, or we would have sent him to town to Mrs. Merton; there is not time for an exchange of letters, is there, my dear?" asked Mrs. Pridnett of her husband.

"No; nothing like it; we ought to be off in the morning three or four hours before the post comes in."

"Oh, Ellen, we can never do without you," said Frank, looking really grave.

"No, indeed; and who will Henry Selwyn have to dance with too, and Charlie learning the tune for nothing."

"Oh, never mind that, if that were all," said Charlie.

"But it isn't all," said Harriet; "we shall want her all day for everything. Poor Ellen!"

Ellen was ready to cry again, certainly.

"Mamma, can't it be managed?" whispered Mary.

Mrs. Pridnett shook her head doubtfully.

"Tell me exactly what your mamma says, Ellen. This seems very sudden and unexpected."

"The note is exceedingly short, ma'am, for mamma says she had not a moment to spare. She says she is sorry to interrupt my enjoyment, but that I must go home on Thursday."

"And you say, Ellen," said Mr. Pridnett, "that your mamma knew the Pic-nic day?"

"Yes, sir, she did know it before, but —."

"But might not happen to remember it when she wrote," suggested Henry Selwyn.

(Ellen looked delighted; this suggestion had risen to her lips, but something within prevented her from giving utterance to it. Henry Selwyn said it naturally enough as it occurred to him. Ellen knew it to be false, but forgot, or would not allow herself to think, that by tacitly consenting to the falsehood she made it her own.)

"I was just thinking so, Henry," said Mr. Pridnett, in reply to his nephew's observation; "and Mrs. Merton does not even name the park, you say."

"Not a word, sir," said Ellen, now quite firmly; it almost seemed like fatality that nobody said "Pic-nic," in referring to her mother's letter; they all said "Park," and her mother had not even named the park. Had Mr. Pridnett said *Pic-nic* in speaking of her mother's letter, she would have been sadly puzzled; but his saying *park* made it quite easy to her; it was at worst only a *white fib*, and she hardly thought it amounted even to that.

"I really think, my dear," said Mr. Pridnett, "we might almost venture to retain our

young friend another day, if you wrote to Mrs. Merton to that effect. What say you?"

"I think not, Mr. Pridnett; as Ellen was to stay with us as long as our own niece did, I feel assured that her mother must have some sufficient reason for wishing her sudden return. I should not like to interfere with Mrs. Merton's arrangements."

"You are right, quite right; I was wrong. But I was sorry to lose Ellen. Does your mother wish us to send you by the coach, my dear?"

"Oh no, sir; Joe is to be here between three and four o'clock, with the Sociable."

"Not till three or four o'clock! Oh, then I think we can manage it. Mamma, (turning to Mrs. Pridnett,) what say you? Suppose we make all these children happy, take Ellen with us, for four or five hours, and then send her with James in the chaise in time to meet her mother's servant here. All who second my motion, hold up a hand," shouted Mr. Pridnett; and directly everybody held up a hand; and little Fanny held up both, and clapped them over her head.

Ellen's good nature had won over everybody in the house, and old James, who was removing the breakfast things, looked as pleased as anybody.

"And if you please, sir," said he, "I know

that for a word from me, the steward would let us drive for once in a way past the house, and that would shorten the road just by one half; and then Miss Ellen might stay with you till nearly two o'clock, and I'll warrant to have her here by three."

"Very well, James, let it be so; that matter is settled then."

And very well pleased all the party were that it was so settled. Ellen alone had misgivings, for Ellen alone had done wrong. But she stifled all the reproaches of her conscience, and suffered herself to think of nothing but the pleasure she anticipated. She practised the tune with Charlie, and all seemed to go merry and well.

But one deceit led to another. Mary and Alice helped her to pack up her clothes, and she insisted, against their advice, to have her best dress and lace tippet, and crape bonnet, left out for the morrow. She wished also to have a plain one to go home in, but Mary and Alice both exclaimed, that if her best dress would not be hurt by roving in the park, and amongst the trees, and sitting on the grass, it surely could not be hurt by her wearing it two or three hours in a covered carriage. Ellen blushed and acquiesced.

But as soon as they were gone, and she was left alone for the night, she unpacked her

trunk, took out a common dress, and laid it on the top to be in readiness. She knew if she went home in her best dress, her mamma would ask her why she had worn it. There was, to be sure, the risk of Joe seeing her in it, if he happened to be waiting for her when she arrived from the park, but she knew she could easily persuade him to silence.

So does one deceit inevitably bring on another.

That morning when she rose, her perplexity and anxiety about the letter had caused her entirely to forget her prayers. Now she knelt down before getting into bed. She was repeating them as usual, when just as she got to that part which besought her heavenly FATHER to make her obedient to her earthly parents, something rose within her which seemed to stop her utterance.

Had Ellen listened to the voice of conscience which her guardian angel now awakened within her, it would have told her that she was a disobedient daughter, a deceiver, and a liar; and she might even then have atoned for her error.

But alas! she repelled this good angel; she turned a deaf ear to this heavenly voice; she rejected this holy warning. She rose hastily from her knees, (for she *could* not say her prayers) sprang into bed, forced herself to think of other things, and soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER XII.

THE morning came, the day of the Pic-nic; that Thursday which many a time within the last week little Fanny had begun to fear "never, never would come." The sun never shone on a finer day: the morning haze gradually melted away, leaving a sky one wide-spreading, unbroken, deep blue. The dew drops glittered on the leaves like diamonds, the birds chirped on every spray, the bees were abroad revelling in the flowers, the butterflies and brilliant dragon-flies sparkled in the sun as they flitted past, the very grass appeared animated with the golden beetles and scarlet ladybirds. Every living thing seemed to rejoice in the bright and beautiful day.

Little Fanny, with the loving and quick instinct natural to a happy child, said so to her mamma, as they returned from Church.

"And are not you, too, happy and merry?"

"Oh, yes, mamma; so happy, so very, very happy."

"And who makes you so, Fanny?"

"You, mamma; you, and my papa, with taking me to the Pic-nic."

"It is quite right, my child, that you should feel grateful and obliged to your good father and to me, who do all in our power to make

you happy; but *we* have not the power to make this fine day, or give you health to enjoy it."

"No, no, mamma; I know quite well what you mean; and I did say my little prayer quite properly this morning, for I asked Mary to hear me say it for fear I should be careless this happy day. Didn't I, Mary?"

"Yes, love; you did."

"That was my good child," said her mother, "but if you always remember, as you should endeavour to do, Fanny, *to whom* you pray, you will not need your sister Mary's presence to make you attentive. If you remember that your FATHER in heaven hears every word you speak, and that when you are careless or inattentive HE sees you—if you bear this in mind, love, you will be as careful and as attentive when you are alone as when your sister is with you."

Ellen Merton overheard this. She had not said her prayers that morning, (for indeed she had not been taught to consider a "little" private prayer requisite when she attended early service,) and that morning she had overslept herself; and then her smart dress took so much more fixing and arranging than a common one, that she was quite in a bustle lest she should not be at church in time. She had never even thought of her prayers, and

now to her astonishment she heard that little Fanny had not only remembered her's, but had of her own accord been more particular over them, *because* it was a day of pleasure. Ellen had never been thus carefully taught, and therefore she was not to be altogether blamed for her errors; still something within her told her now that she was in the wrong, and well might take pattern by little Fanny. And again a quick keen thought of her own duplicity respecting this excursion shot across her mind; but she said to herself (as she had done twenty times before)—

"It is but a *white fib;* it can do no harm;" and determined to think no more about it, she turned to talk to Charlie.

But again and again uncomfortable thoughts came over her during the drive to the park, but she would not yield to them; still thinking to herself, "It was no lie, no lie; Henry Selwyn himself says that a white fib is nothing."

It was about a two hours' drive to Dunweyne Park along the outskirts of the entrance on the further and secluded side to which visitors were admitted as being most distant from the hall. This way lay along retired winding lanes seldom traversed but by farmers, and in many parts as green as the meadows themselves, showing how little they were frequented. The hedge-rows were thickly covered

with honeysuckles and wild roses which scented the air around; the larks, singing loudly, kept rising from the grass, and ascending higher and higher into the sunshine, and their notes were still heard

"As thrilling with music
They melted in light."

Every now and then a startled hare darted across the park; a pheasant strutted to one side, or a timid partridge flitted beneath the fern; and as they approached nearer to the plantation which skirted the park, the cooing of the wood-pigeons was incessant. All the party were delighted; Harriet and Fanny could not control their raptures; their father frequently told them they would have no spirits left for the Pic-nic itself; little Fanny could not sit still; she was jumping up every moment to ask her papa what this was, or her mamma what that was, or to point out something to her brothers, who were also in high spirits. Mary was much quieter, but then she was much older; her cousin, Alice Conway, was more quiet still, but she was enjoying everything deeply; all the sights and sounds of the country were enjoyment to her.

And what, you will ask, did Ellen Merton think of the drive? I will tell you. She was most anxious it should be over; for in

the first place Henry Selwyn was in the other carriage, so she could have no conversation with him: and in the next place, though some of the lanes were grass grown, many were not, but were filled with deep ruts, which in wet weather were muddy and splashy, but now were exceedingly dusty. Ellen was shocked to see the dust lying in all the creases of her best lilac silk dress, and though she hastily shook it off, it gathered there again directly. But this was not the worst. The sun was intensely hot, and she put up her parasol to protect her pink crape bonnet, which she knew would be spoiled directly, but little Fanny, quite unaware of this, said,

"Please, Ellen, put down your parasol, for it quite hinders me from looking about me."

So Ellen, ashamed to confess the truth, was obliged to close her parasol, and let her bonnet take its chance: and as she knew very well that her mother did not intend to buy her another that summer, she was very uncomfortable indeed. Her young friends never suspected her trouble, for as they all wore muslin frocks and plain straw bonnets, which could take no harm, they never thought about their dress. So instead of enjoying the drive, Ellen only wished that it was at an end, that she might shake the dust from her silk frock, and cover her bonnet with her parasol.

It came to an end, however, soon; and the carriages stopped close by a farm gate, opening into a distant and secluded corner of the park. Round this gate was a nest of small cottages, in which lived some of the under labourers employed by Lord Dunweyne's bailiff. They were accustomed to take care of the horses and carriages of people who came to spend a few hours in the park, and two or three of the women,—the men were all at work,—now ran out to offer their services, and to see what was wanted. Mr. Pridnett left his servant to arrange these matters, only directing him to lay out the pic-nic on the grass near the water, at a place about a stone's throw from the cottages, and full in view. The children thought that was hardly far enough in the park, but Mr. Pridnett considered it desirable to be near the carriages and the cottages, in case anything was wanted; and their sitting down to eat in one particular spot was no hindrance to their rambling elsewhere.

So off they set for a ramble over the turfy sward, beneath the shadowing trees and along the margin of the gleaming lake, which was indeed altogether as beautiful as Selwyn said it would be. But how was this? Instead of singling out Ellen, as she expected he would, and beguiling her into the most romantic and sequestered retreats, and making the air melo-

dious with music and poetry—instead of all this, Henry Selwyn had, almost as soon as they alighted from the carriage, whispered to his uncle, who directly took his arm, and walked with him apart from the rest. There they were, Ellen could see them quite plainly between the trees, walking along in earnest and animated conversation, forgetful seemingly of Park, Pic-nic, or anything but themselves. And now Henry takes a letter out of his pocket, and opening it, gives it to Mr. Pridnett, who stands still while he reads it, and having finished the perusal he shakes his nephew's hand warmly; and again they link arm in arm, and walk away, talking more earnestly than before.

And was this what Ellen had come to the Park for? what she had expended so much thought and so much pains upon? what she had run the risk of spoiling her best clothes for? what, above all, she had forgotten her duty to her mother for? what she had stained herself with falsehood for?

She had breathed a deep sigh, but suddenly checked it; of course she would not have other people guess how silly she had been, how disappointed she was; yet she felt her eyes full of tears, and now all her anxiety was not to show them. She was comparatively alone, though none of the party were many

yards distant. Mrs. Pridnett and her daughter and niece were trying to draw a water-lily root from the border of the lake with the curved handles of their parasols; Charlie and Frank were running a race; Harriet and Fanny, poor little girls, were trying with all their might to catch a squirrel. And she alone was unoccupied and unhappy.

And why? It was altogether her own fault. She had gone there entirely from the wish to talk to Henry Selwyn, and listen to his poetry. And because for some reason or other he did not devote himself to her, she seemed like a silly girl to fancy there was nothing else worth doing. The beautiful day, the warm sunshine, the magnificent scenery, the pleasant walks, the bright flowers, the cheerful lake, were all lost on her. At first each of her friends wished to engage her attention. Charlie and Frank wanted her to go with them to a famous nutting covert; Mary wished her to help them to look for some violet roots which they desired to take home; Mrs. Pridnett called her attention to the water plants skirting the lake; but she did not attend to any of them. And now she felt as if she were deserted and neglected.

When people go on a pleasure excursion, ten to one they will be disappointed unless they go with a determination to give pleasure, as

well as to receive it, and to be satisfied with everything. Pleasure never proves so delightful as has been anticipated: but if people go to seek it in an *unselfish* spirit, determined to do as much as they can for the satisfaction of others, they are sure to be pleased themselves. Ellen went, thinking only of herself, and because she was disappointed in one thing, she enjoyed nothing. The Pridnetts and Alice Conway enjoyed everything.

Just as Ellen was beginning to feel very uncomfortable indeed, little Fanny ran up to her.

"Ellen, please Ellen, please *dear* Ellen, just come this way: there's a squirrel quite low down in the branches, and I think we could catch it if you would help us. Harriet is staying to watch that it does not leap away. Please come."

"I'll come, love; but I'm sure we can't catch it."

"Oh yes, we can: perhaps we can: do, do come," said Fanny, clasping Ellen's hand, and drawing her onwards.

So Ellen went on with her, and there sure enough was Harriet watching the tree, but the squirrel was gone.

"I couldn't help it, Fanny, but it went *that* way."

So they went deeper into the wood, "after

it," as Fanny said, who still grasped Ellen's hand and pulled her on. The grass became thick and rank and very wet, for the foliage was here so thick, that the sun's rays scarcely penetrated till mid-day. Ellen felt the wet penetrate her thin shoe and silk stocking, but she was, as we have often said, very good-natured, and she could not resist the children's entreaties of "just a yard further—just a yard, dear Ellen; it can't be above a step off now."

So on she went, regardless of her wet feet; and at last, to be sure, they all exclaimed, for there, right before them, was a beautiful little squirrel, with its dark bright eye, intently regarding them. Its soft thick bushy tail seemed to lie almost within Ellen's grasp. Forgetful, at the moment, of everything else, she darted forward, but before she had taken one step, the squirrel had jumped from one tree to another, and was now many yards off, playing with its own tail. But Ellen had darted forward with such earnestness, that before she could stop herself, she had sunk over shoe-top in a soft spongy bog, and in her haste grasping at a tree to extricate herself, she caught the bow of her bonnet in one of the branches, and almost tore it off. Nor was this the worst, for the hem of her delicate silk frock had dipped into the bog, and though she

hoped it would not be muddy, as the grass was so deep and thick, still she did not know whether the wet alone might not spoil it. She positively refused to hunt the squirrel any further, and indeed Mr. and Mrs. Pridnett's voices were now heard, calling on them to appear.

So they made their way out of the wood, but by quite a different way from that by which they had entered, and found themselves close by the cottages at the gate. Ellen thought she would just run into one of them, and ascertain the damage done to her dress, and rectify it as far as possible; for besides the apprehension of her mother's anger, she could not bear that Charlie and Frank should see her with her tattered trimmings; they would quiz her and laugh at her, and Henry Selwyn would hear them. So pointing out to Harriet and Fanny their papa and mamma walking by the side of the lake, at some distance, but fully in sight, she desired the children to hasten to them, saying she would join them directly.

So Harriet and Fanny did as they were directed, and Ellen slipped through the gate, and in at the nearest cottage door, and found herself in a small kitchen, but no one was there. The door of another room was half open, and Ellen ventured in, thinking that she might probably find a looking-glass there. There was no one

in this room either; the bed appeared to be all in a heap—unmade; but Ellen hardly glanced at it, for right opposite was a bit of looking-glass nailed against the wall, and she hastened to it. She was thankful to see at a glance that the damage done to her bonnet was not so great as she apprehended, and she took it off, and sat down at the corner of the bed to re-arrange the ribbon. She had scarcely done so when she felt something move in the bed, and heard a faint cry of pain. She started up in affright, but directly felt that she was a silly girl for her terror, when she saw the hand of a young child thrust out of the bed. The moan was repeated, and she laid down her bonnet, and partly uncovered the child, for it seemed almost smothered in the bedclothes. It was four or five years old; its face and neck were perfectly scarlet, and covered with eruption, and its little hands burned like fire.

"Mammy," it wailed; "Mammy, let me drink, let me drink."

Ellen looked about, and saw a cup with toast-and-water on a little round table. She took the cup, and raising the child in her arms she put the cup to his lips, and he took a sip or two, and in a moment his head sank on her neck as if he had fallen asleep again. Ellen was a very affectionate kind girl, and as

the poor child thus lay with his head on her bosom, she thought of her own little brother at home, who was just about the same size. She wished to lay the child down on the bed again, but hardly knew how to manage it, for he had got his little arm fast round her neck, and she was hampered with the cup which she held in her other hand. So she was bending down close over him, trying to disentangle her arm when a woman came in and hurried towards the bed. She relieved Ellen in a moment.

"I took the liberty," said Ellen, "to come in to mend my bonnet, and the child cried for water, so I gave him some."

"I give you many thanks for your kindness, Miss: I'd only just run to the Hall for some physic for him, and thought he maybe wouldn't miss me."

"What is the matter with him?" said Ellen.

"Oh, it's the measles, Miss; and vast bad he is; he's quite blind with 'em."

Ellen turned sick at heart: she knew her mother had a horror of the measles.

"Let me do that for you, Miss," said the woman, seeing Ellen's hand tremble.

Ellen gave the bonnet into her hand, and the woman re-arranged it directly; no one could have told it had been torn. She then saw the stains on Ellen's dress, and told her if

she would allow her to use a little clean water to them before they were dry, she thought no stains would remain. She did so accordingly; and Ellen in her joy at the restoration of her dress, quite forgot her previous fright. The woman would have dried her shoes and stockings for her, but Ellen said she did not care for them.

So with many thanks, and the offer of a small gratuity which the woman would not take, Ellen left the cottage, and ran into the park to rejoin her friends.

CHAPTER XIII.

As Ellen re-entered the Park gate, she saw nearly all the young folks coming to look for her. Henry Selwyn reached her first.

"Ellen," said he, "where have you been? I had so much to tell you after I parted from my uncle, and lo! you were no where to be found."

"Tell me now, Henry," said she, all her previous mortifications forgotten.

"Oh no; it will keep," said he; "besides, luncheon is waiting."

"Pic-nic, sir," said Frank; "please to call

things by their proper names. Come, Ellen," drawing her arm through his, "make haste; what a truant you have been."

"Do you know, Ellen," said little Fanny, pushing in without ceremony between her and Selwyn, and taking her disengaged hand, "do you know I *do* think we should have caught the squirrel at last, if you would only have gone a yard or two further."

"Ellen, Ellen, what do you think," called out Harriet, as she ran towards them, "the rats have been at our pic-nic."

"Nay, nay."

"Yes, but they have though; they kept running up out of the lake, and Stephen dared not leave it for a moment."

"And guess, Ellen," said Mary, who with Alice now joined them, "guess what we have forgotten!"

"Nothing, Mary," replied Ellen; "I am sure we forgot nothing."

"Don't be too sure, for we really have."

"I can't think what."

"Why—plates. We brought neither plates, knives, nor forks."

"No, really—I don't think we have."

"Ah, but we're sure we haven't," said Alice; "My aunt says we have quite lost all credit with her as good managers; and my uncle stood to guard the dinner—for Harriet's quite

right about the rats—while Stephen went to the cottages to borrow things."

"And did he get them?"

"Oh yes; at the farm-house, there. The people seemed quite used to it, and quite prepared; and said the gentry who come generally forget something."

"Come, come, young folks," called out Mr. Pridnett, "our dinner will be cold."

"Why, papa, it is cold—all cold," said Fanny, laughing, "but you are always so funny."

"Now, sit down, choose your chairs, young ladies," said he; at which Fanny laughed again, for, as she very truly said, there were no chairs.

But in another minute all the girls were seated on the grass round the table-cloth which was spread there, all the girls I should say with the exception of Ellen Merton, who was afraid of staining her dress, and therefore preferred sitting by Mrs. Pridnett on a wooden bench beneath the tree. But it was very uncomfortable, for the bench was too high for her, and her plate was so sloping on her knee that she was obliged to hold it with one hand, and cut as well as she could with the other alone. Frank saw her perplexity, and good-naturedly cut her chicken into small pieces for her; but still it was very awkward.

The party on the ground were awkward too at first, but they were exceedingly merry. First, Harriet put her plate on her knee, but it did not seem steady there, and she placed it on the ground at her side, and Fanny did the same, but in a moment or two Fanny was tired of the sideway position, and starting up, she said,—

"I'll tell you, Harriet, what will be the best way," and placing her plate before her, she knelt down on the grass, and went on with her dinner in that way; Frank almost choked himself with laughing at her.

But one way or another they all managed extremely well, and ham sandwiches, and beef sandwiches, and tongue, and chicken, and veal pie, and tart, and biscuits, and gingerbread disappeared with marvellous rapidity.

Fanny said it was "delightful—quite, quite delightful; but still she wished it had been a proper pic-nic."

"And why is it not a proper pic-nic?" asked her father.

"Because, papa, Frank says, it's never a proper pic-nic without accidents."

"The rats! the rats!" shouted Frank.

Every body started, but Fanny jumped up, and down on to the ham sandwiches went the glass of currant wine which her father had just placed in her hand.

"Now, Fanny, love, we've had an accident," said Frank with the utmost gravity.

His father looked grave too for a moment, but he soon laughed merrily with the rest, for he loved a joke.

But to poor Fanny it was no joke, for she had lost her wine, and she looked very blank indeed at her empty glass. Harriet offered her half of her's, and the next moment Frank had pushed his own full glass across to her. But Mrs. Pridnett requested papa to refill Fanny's glass, and desired Frank to risk only his own property by his extemporized accidents.

"Thank you, mamma, thank you, dear mamma," said Fanny; "but I hope we shall have no more accidents. I don't like accidents at pic-nics, mamma."

Every body laughed now louder than before. They were a very merry party indeed; a very merry party.

As soon as they had satisfied their hunger Harriet and Fanny begged each some biscuits to feed the deer, and set off very eagerly on this quest; but the remainder of the party lingered round the relics of the feast apparently too happy to wish to move.

"This is a beautiful scene, father, is it not?" said Charlie.

"It certainly is, Charles," replied his father, somewhat surprised, too, at the remark.

"I don't wonder at its making any one poetical. Do you, father?"

"I really can't tell, Charles; have you been rhapsodizing?"

"I, sir! oh dear no; but it *is* an inspiring scene," and he gave a quizzical look at Ellen, and she blushed scarlet, for she knew instantly that he alluded to the poetry he had heard her read.

Mr. Pridnett saw Ellen's confusion, and wondered. "What are you about, Charlie? What has Ellen been doing?"

"Nothing, sir, but an act of kindness to me in allowing me to copy some exquisite verses, author unknown, which exactly paint the scene before us. Shall I read them to you?"

"If you please."

"No—no—no," exclaimed Selwyn.

"What!" said Charles, with well acted astonishment, "are they yours, Henry? That enhances their beauty tenfold," and Charlie drew from his pocket a sheet of writing.

"Charlie, don't be silly, they are not worth hearing," said Selwyn, with apparent reluctance.

"You are too modest, my good fellow, too diffident a great deal," laughed Charlie, as he cleared his throat, drew a step or two back, and standing very upright, read in a loud, clear voice, as follows:—

"Dunweyne! when thy wet rank grass through my spirit
(Spite of my woollen socks) spreads damp and fog,
Meseems I'm like those wretches who inherit
The privilege to go the ugliest hog;
And ugly verily that beast, I ween,
That treads the miry sloughs of foul Dunweyne.

"Whether November's god of day non peering,
Disguise in pea-soup atmosphere thy bowers,
Or late in helter-skelter rain careering,
Does make a myth of all thy antique towers;
Whether 'tis morn or evening—thou art seen
Enveloped in mugginess, Dunweyne!

"When my vex'd spirit's chafed with earth's dull dreaming,
And indigestion's havoc on my clay—
Imagination says—(so to my seeming)—
'Take some magnesia—it will pass away;
For snobs they are of very verdant green,
Who seek a healthful respite in Dunweyne!'

"Preening their little fatty wings—majestic
Tom-tits and sparrows hop the groves around;
While myriad tones of nature's voices plastic,
Of beetles, frogs, and grasshoppers abound;
Newts, snakes, and lizards give us all the spleen,
Who walk in thy damp bowers and dusky heights, Dunweyne!

"Making of discord one vast melody,
They ——"

All were laughing, and Selwyn could stand it no longer, he started up and collared Charlie, and vowed he would shake his life out of him; but Charlie was a tough customer, and at last, panting with his fruitless exertion, Henry leaned back against a tree, and burst into an

irresistible fit of laughter. He shook his fist at Charlie still, and declared he would have his revenge some day. But the merriment caused by this circumstance had scarcely subsided, and order been in part restored, when questions were put as to what was to be done next, but James, the steady old servant, was seen entering the park gate and coming towards them. James was as steady, as the saying is, as "Old Time," and every body knew that his coming was the signal for Ellen to depart. They were all sorry, for they all loved her; she had been uniformly so kind and good-natured. The girls quite hung about her, and Mrs. Pridnett, kissing her affectionately, told her she hoped to see her another summer with her niece. Ellen could not help crying, but Alice tried to cheer her.

"You know, Ellen," she said, "I am to go home in two or three days, which will soon pass, and then we can see each other every day, and talk over our happiness here."

Mr. Pridnett himself placed her in the chaise, telling James to be very, very careful how he drove; and shaking her hand most kindly, he said,

"My dear, we should have been most pleased to keep you with us a few days longer, but your mother's wishes are paramount, and must be obeyed implicitly."

A conscious pang shot across Ellen's heart at these words, but she forgot it in the grief of saying farewell to Henry Selwyn, who, with the boys, pressed to the carriage door, again to say Good-bye. He shook hands with her very kindly, but Ellen could not but see that he did not care more, if as much, about parting with her as Charlie and Frank. And not one line of poetry had he recited to her the whole day. Altogether it had been to her a day of bitter disappointment.

They arrived safely at Mr. Pridnett's house, and Ellen had changed her clothes, and put all her finery in her trunk, and locked it carefully before Joe arrived. So far all was well she thought. And when he did come, there being nothing at all to delay her, she set off with him directly, and was taken home.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE hall door was scarcely opened on Ellen's arrival at home before little Frederick bounded to it, and caught her round the neck.

"Dear, dear Elly, oo are tum home at last; and what have oo brought for Feddy?" (for he could not speak plain.)

"I have brought you a little horse, love; with such a beautiful bridle; but are you quite well, Freddy?"

"Oh, yes; Feddy pite well now; but where is my horse?"

"You shall have it directly, darling," said Ellen, stopping to kiss her sisters; then hugging the little boy in her arms, who still looked very pale and delicate, she carried him towards the parlour, from which her mother was just coming to welcome her. Very, very kindly was she greeted; her mother was delighted to see her; so was her father; and her little brother would not quit her lap for an instant. So happy was Ellen, that for a long time she never once thought of Henry Selwyn or his poetry.

But she was soon called to the recollection of all that had passed, part of which she would gladly have forgotten; for in answer to some question asked by her mamma, she was on the point of replying—

"At the Pic-nic to-day"—the words were on her lips, when she remembered that she was betraying her disobedience. She stopped short, just in time, and felt herself go hot and red; but her mother was closely occupied with some needlework, and fortunately, as Ellen thought, did not observe her hesitation. But this circumstance showed Ellen the necessity

for so much watchfulness, and threw such a constraint on all which she said, that she felt it quite a relief when bed-time came.

This is always the case with deception; people who have been guilty of it are in constant terror of betraying themselves, and often do betray themselves from over anxiety to avoid it.

As she was lighting her candle to go to bed her mother said:

"You have been a very good girl about the Pic-nic, Ellen, and I am much pleased with you; you have never once alluded to it, nor expressed any regrets, which I am sure you must have felt. I feel very much gratified."

Ellen did not speak; her eyes were full of tears, and her mother saw that they were.

"Nay, Ellen, my dear, don't be foolish now, when all is over; after being so good at the time."

Ellen could refrain no longer; she put her head tremblingly on her mother's neck; she was on the very point of confessing all.

But her mother, drawing her closely to her bosom, continued—

"You would feel, I am sure, my love, that I had some very important reason for depriving you of this innocent gratification. I believe visitors at Dunweyne Park always go in at the east gate, through a cluster of cottages there,

and I learnt, accidentally, or providentially, that measles of a very virulent description are raging there. You know, my child, that I have already lost three children in measles; and though your younger sisters have had them, you never have, nor little Fred; and I should fearfully dread his taking them in his present weak and reduced state. I thought some chance—a shower—or other accidental circumstance might lead your party into these cottages, and I felt it was much better to avoid any possible risk of infection, though the disappointment to you, I knew, would be great.

"Good night, my love," concluded her mother, kissing her cheek.

Ellen got out of the room, how—she could hardly tell, and to her own bedroom, and there she cried as if her heart would break. What should she, what could she do now? She was utterly miserable.

At one moment she thought she would go to her mother and confess all; and this indeed would have been right, and the only atonement she could make for her folly. But as she opened the door for this purpose she heard her mother's voice in conversation with her father, and her courage failed her, and she closed the door gently, and crept back into her room.

She knelt down by the side of the bed to say her prayers, but she had not repeated many

words ere she rose again, for she felt that it was a sinful mockery to pray for her SAVIOUR'S mediation at the very moment that she was behaving so deceitfully towards her kind mother. She sat down again on the side of the bed, very miserable, but still without courage to do what she now fully felt *ought* to be done —go to her mother and confess her fault.

How long she sate there she did not know, but she was startled by the sound of Mrs. Merton's voice on the stairs. In terror now she began to throw off her dress, thinking that perhaps she might contrive to get into bed before her mother left the nursery, which she always visited on retiring for the night; and she had just huddled into bed, and covered herself over head with the bed-clothes, when Mrs. Merton opened the door. She came to the bed, and gently, so gently! removed the clothes from her daughter's face, arranged them tidily, and after looking at her for a moment or two (for Ellen *felt* that she did so, though she closed her eyes pretending to be asleep) glided from the room. Ellen shook with agitation.

The moment her mother was gone, she repented, bitterly repented, that she had not thrown herself on that ever kind heart and confessed all. But now the time was past: to do it now she thought would be impossible;

her mamma would know from its coming so late that terror, not contrition, had prompted the disclosure, and instead of forgiveness she must expect a severe reprimand. No; the time for confession was now, she thought, past; all she could do now was to conceal the occurrence effectually.

She never considered that it might not be in her power to do this.

I need not tell you how long she lay awake, how tears kept trickling from her eyes in spite of herself, and how earnestly she wished that she had not yielded to temptation and disobeyed her mother. On the evening before she had quieted her conscience by thinking it was only a *white fib* she had told, and could be of no consequence. Now, she felt that very bitter consequences might ensue, and she had no consolation at all in remembering that it was *only* a white fib. At length she fell into a heavy sleep, and awoke late the next morning unrefreshed, and with a very bad headache.

Mrs. Merton observed how weary she looked, and asked her the reason.

"I did not sleep well, mamma."

"Indeed, love; how was that? You were fast asleep when I visited your room."

Ellen hung down her head, and pretended to be occupied with little Fred, who had already established himself on her knee.

She could scarcely swallow any breakfast.

"How's this, my dear?" asked her mother kindly, and rather anxiously.

"Oh, Anna, my dear," said Mr. Merton, looking up from his newspaper, "don't fidget yourself about the child; she's a little over-excited and fatigued with her pleasuring, that is all; she will be well enough to-morrow."

So that passed over; and though Ellen felt really very poorly, she endeavoured to make the very best of it. She passed a good portion of the day in her own room, under pretence of putting her wardrobe in order; but this was a mere excuse to get away from her mother: for already two or three times she had almost said something about the Pic-nic without being aware of it, and she now dreaded it more than anything.

Thus, she was not only kept in a state of constant agitation and alarm, but she was led on to practise one deceit after another in order to support appearances, and prevent the disclosure of the first falsehood.

She passed some time in the nursery with her sisters and her little brother; for she could answer their eager inquiries without running any risk, and she could also hold her aching head with her hand without exciting their notice, as it would have done that of her mother.

But towards evening she became still more poorly; her eyes watered, she was feverish, and had every symptom of a heavy cold.

"Ellen, my dear," said Mrs. Merton, "you have, I fear, a sad cold. How have you taken it?"

"I don't know, mamma; unless with getting my feet wet yesterday."

"And how did you manage that, Ellen? It has been fine weather, and you have strong shoes."

"Yes, mamma; but the grass was very thick, and long, and wet in the—(park, she had almost said, but she checked herself in time)—in the—in the place where we were playing, and I got into a kind of bog; and, and, I fear, mamma, you will think me very silly, but I had on my thin shoes and silk stockings."

"It was silly, my dear, certainly, and careless; but I am glad this cold is so fully accounted for; and it will teach you, I hope, by experience, not to be so thoughtless in future."

So her mother had her feet placed in a warm bath, made her drink some wine whey, and putting her to bed herself, kissed her fondly, saying, she hoped to find her much better in the morning.

And all this time Ellen was deceiving this kind and good mother, and felt now as if she

was compelled to continue the deceit. To all this she had been led by *a white fib,* which she considered harmless.

CHAPTER XV.

THE next morning Ellen was much worse; her cold was very bad indeed, and she was almost overpowered with sick headache. Her mother chided her lovingly for rising to breakfast, but Ellen said she would rather be down stairs; and then Mrs. Merton sent for pillows, and had the sofa drawn towards the fire, and laid Ellen on it, and sent all the children away into the nursery.

An hour or two afterwards she quitted the room and returned with Mr. Merton, who looked at his daughter's countenance and felt her hand.

"What think you?" said Mrs. Merton; "shall I send for Leckerby?"

(Mr. Leckerby was their medical adviser and friend.)

Mr. Merton replied:

"Yes, perhaps so: it is safest. And keep the children away."

Ellen was surprised, and could not imagine

why her mother should be apprehensive, or why Mr. Leckerby should be mentioned. She had had colds as severe as this many a time, of which her mother had not taken half so much notice.

After a while she grew tired of the sofa, and sat down on a low ottoman by the fire. She felt very sick, and her head,—which ached, oh, how badly! she rested on her hands which lay on a chair before her.

Just then a servant entered:

"A man from Mr. Pridnett's, ma'am, with a parcel for Miss Ellen."

Mrs. Merton took the parcel; Ellen did not raise her head.

"Shall I open it for you, love?"

"Yes, please, mamma."

"Here is a letter: shall I read that?"

"Yes," faltered Ellen, scarcely conscious that she spoke at all. She was quite prostrated by sickliness and headache.

It was from Mary Pridnett:

"My dear Ellen,—

"Mamma desires her very kind love, and hopes you got home safely. It was a sad disappointment to us all that you were obliged to leave us so soon: we enjoyed ourselves very much indeed, and the pic-nic ended as well as it began.

"Cousin Henry is gone home again; he told papa he meant quite to give up poetry, and papa commended him very much. But that letter he received the day of the pic-nic was to say that his father had obtained a clerkship for him into the very office for which they had been so anxious, but had hardly hoped to obtain; and Henry is so delighted that he says he'll devote himself entirely to his profession. Papa says it's a fine opening for him; and this is what they were talking about all day when we thought they had forgotten us.

"Dear Ellen, mamma begs her kind compliments to your mamma, and trusts she will permit you to come again next summer; and we all hope so too—every one of us; and Cousin Alice sends a kiss to your little brother, Fred, and hopes he is quite recovered from the influenza.

"Mamma has been kind enough to send James with this to-day, fearing if you have missed your locket, you will be uneasy about it. By a lucky chance he saw something glitter in the grass, just where you sat at the pic-nic——"

Ellen screamed, started up, and caught at the letter, but her mother held it firm, and with no very gentle hand, pushed her daughter away. Ellen sank, feeble and terrified, on the ottoman.

Mrs. Merton finished the letter:

"Just where you sat at the pic-nic after we had finished dinner, when Charlie read those provoking verses. We stayed two or three hours after you left us, but we all missed you very much. Henry Selwyn said he did particularly, and I am sure little Fanny did when she wanted to catch another squirrel, for none of us were good-natured enough to rove all over the park with her as you had done.

"Believe me, dear Ellen,

"Yours affectionately,

"MARY PRIDNETT."

When Mrs. Merton had read the letter entirely through, she sat pale, still, and silent, with her eyes fixed on her daughter. Ellen felt that they were so, but sinking as she was with sickness, shame, and remorse, she dared not even to cast a glance towards her. The moments seemed like hours.

The door suddenly burst open, Frederick darted in, and in one moment was clinging round Ellen's neck.

"Dear Elly, poor Elly, Feddy sorry oo so poorly."

But the next instant his mother tore him away, and shrieking "My boy, my precious child," she carried him out of the room. Ellen sank down, almost unconsciously, from

the stool on which she was seated, on to the ground, and lying there she cried and sobbed as if her very heart was breaking.

How long it was she knew not; but she still lay there, exhausted, but faintly sobbing, when she heard a voice speaking kindly to her, and felt a hand gently raising her up.

"Ellen, my dear Ellen, what is the meaning of all this?"

It was Mrs. Conway, Alice Conway's mother. At first Ellen hardly knew her, but as the lady soothed and supported her, she recovered her self-possession.

She then knelt on the ground before Mrs. Conway, and clasping her hands on that lady's lap, implored her to intercede for her mother's forgiveness.

"But what is all this about, Ellen, my dear, —what does it mean? I have not seen your mamma. But why is all this dreadful agitation? You seem ill too, and very feverish."

"Oh, I am very ill, very ill; but I don't care for that now, I deserve it all."

"What have you been doing, Ellen?"

"I went to the Pic-nic, and mamma told me not to go."

"I know she did, and for a sufficient reason. I wonder Mrs. Pridnett took you."

"Mrs. Pridnett did not know, ma'am, indeed; she asked me if mamma said I must

not go *to the Park*, and mamma said not go *to the Pic-nic*, so I thought I could escape that way: it was only *a white fib:* but I'm very sorry now."

"I don't know what you mean by a white fib, Ellen. What does it mean?

"Something not of much consequence, ma'am."

"And has it proved of not much consequence?"

Ellen was silent.

"My dear Ellen, let what I now say to you be impressed on your mind. There is no such thing as a white fib: every species of wilful deceit, how trifling soever its object, is perverse and sinful lying in the eye of GOD, and will be punished as such. Your '*white fib*' was a bad lie, Ellen, for it was meant to deceive others, and did deceive others, and led yourself into further sin. Do you know what I mean, Ellen?"

"No, ma'am."

"Repeat the fifth commandment."

"Honour thy father and mother," began Ellen, but she could not go on; she burst into tears afresh.

"I grieve to distress you, Ellen, especially as I see you are suffering; but this is a subject on which I cannot trifle, and it appears to me also a time at which I must not trifle. You

have confessed, my dear, the sin of falsehood; do you not see that you have also wilfully broken the fifth commandment in disobeying your mother's commands?"

"Yes, I see; but indeed, Mrs. Conway, if you will believe me, I did not think of it in that way; I do love mamma indeed."

"I know you do; and well does she merit that you should; and yet, Ellen, you have been guilty of a great, a very serious fault against her."

"Oh, Mrs. Conway, will she not forgive me? will you not intreat for me?"

"Before I can promise anything, you must first tell me truly all that you have done—but, my dear, you are exhausted I see. Wait a few moments."

Mrs. Conway laid Ellen on the sofa, made her drink of some lemonade which was on the table, bathed her temples and her hands with vinegar and water; and, when she saw her somewhat refreshed and rested, said to her:

"Now, my dear, tell me all the circumstances; conceal nothing; tell me the *whole* truth, and I will be a friend to you."

And Ellen, keenly awakened to a sense of her error, did tell the whole truth without disguise, from the moment of receiving her mother's letter, to that in which she returned home. Her folly about her dress, her man-

œuvring to change it before returning home, her tearing her ribbons, and consequent visit to the cottage, and her assisting the little boy who was ill in the measles—she told everything.

Mrs. Conway listened attentively, but could not resist an exclamation of sorrow and surprise on hearing of the visit to the cottage and the intercourse with the sick child. But as Ellen was reiterating her intreaties for Mrs. Conway's intercession with her mother, that lady entered the room accompanied by Mr. Leckerby. Ellen saw at a glance that her mother had been crying, and it was with difficulty she restrained herself from again bursting into tears.

"So, Miss Ellen, this is bad management, very bad management; so you are not to be trusted a week from home," said Mr. Leckerby, taking her hand to feel her pulse, and looking keenly in her face; "to go away on a visit of pleasure, and come home ill, is what I call very bad management indeed. We must punish you, I think, with a few pills and bitter draughts to teach you better in future."

But Ellen's head had sunk down on the sofa; the moment the excitement which had upheld her in talking to Mrs. Conway was removed, her sickness had returned with overpowering force. She hardly heard what the doctor said.

"You had better get her to bed, Mrs. Merton, directly."

"Yes, I will do so; but what is the matter? Is it measles, do you think?"

"Not unlike, I should say; but it is impossible yet to ascertain. She has strong fever on her. Get her to bed, and I will send you something for her in the course of half-an-hour."

Mrs. Merton immediately put Ellen to bed, and told nurse to sit with her whilst she went down to speak to Mrs. Conway, who waited for the purpose.

"I waited, my dear Mrs. Merton, to ask whether it will not be a relief to your feelings if I take little Frederick home with me, in case this illness should prove to be measles."

"I shall be very thankful to you, Mrs. Conway. You know what terrible cause I have to dread that complaint; and poor Fred is now so sadly reduced by influenza, that he would hardly have a chance in struggling with it."

"Then tell nurse to put on his hat, and he shall go with me now; you can send his clothes any time in the course of the day. And now, I have a petition to offer on poor Ellen's part."

Tears gushed into Mrs. Merton's eyes.

"I cherish no anger against my child in her

present state; but you know not, Mrs. Conway, how she has deceived me."

"Yes, I do know all: more, I think, than you are aware of yourself. Without wishing to extenuate Ellen's faults—for she has been much to blame—her full and true confession pleased me so much, that I promised to intercede with you for forgiveness."

"I gave it to her just now, fully, freely, unlimitedly, before I quitted her bedside. I have it not in me to add to her present suffering even by my just displeasure. But she has deceived me cruelly, and I dread to think of what *may* be the result."

"Hope for the best, my dear friend. But now I will go to the nursery for Freddy, and take him home with me."

CHAPTER XVI.

ELLEN rapidly grew worse, and soon became very, very ill. But her mother watched her, nursed her, held the fevered small hand closely clasped in hers, and for some time the happiness of this complete reconciliation made Ellen bear the pain of her illness with comparative

indifference. But she became prostrated by it, and the fever increased so rapidly that she was almost, if not totally, unconscious of all that was passing around. For some days she was in this state, and when she was somewhat better, and her consciousness in some degree restored, she became aware that her mother was not with her, but that she was attended entirely by nurse. She had not the power to ask questions, and she supposed her mother would soon come. But when hours passed, and she did not, as nurse raised her head to give her some medicine, she feebly asked for her mamma. Nurse soothed her, told her that mamma would come very shortly, and laid her down gently on the pillow again. She soon fell asleep, and the next morning was considerably better. She now hoped to see her mother, but she did not, and nurse always put off her inquiries. When her father came to see her, which he did frequently every day, and she asked him; he told her that her mamma was very well, and sent her kindest love, but could not come to her just at present.

Ellen thought it very strange, but she was feeble and drowsy, and relapsed into a feverish slumber.

When she again awoke it was evening, and by the faint light of the lamp she saw Nanny working in the room, and no one else there.

She spoke to her; and Nanny was at her side in an instant to attend to her.

"Is that you, Nanny?"

"Yes, miss; Nurse is below getting her supper; what can I do for you, miss?"

"Where's mamma, Nanny?"

"Oh, mistress, miss;" said Nanny hesitatingly, "mistress is below in the parlour."

"Why does she not come to see me, Nanny?"

"Oh, miss, she com'd when you was asleep."

"Well, Nanny, go and tell her I'm awake; and ask her to come now."

"She's engaged, miss," stammered Nanny; "she can't come now."

"Why not, Nanny? I'm sure she would come for a moment if you would ask her."

"Well, miss; but she's out."

"Out! Where?"

"At Mrs. Conway's."

"What is she doing there?"

"Nothing, miss, particular, as I know of."

"Oh, Nanny, it must be something particular to make her stay there when I'm so ill. Tell me, Nanny; do tell me, dear Nanny."

"La! miss; I durstn't."

"Dare not! Nanny, why not?"

"I'se be scolded, miss."

"No, Nanny, you will not; for who will

well with him, my child; go to

did fall asleep almost directly, and
gently replaced her head on the
placed the clothes smoothly over
hen crept out of the room to weep
ffin of her little boy. Frederick

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So time passed.

At length she heard a voice whisper, "She'll do now;" and another respond in soft whispering tones—

"Thank God; oh, thank God."

Ellen knew not how she was, or where she was, but that voice went to her very heart.

She seemed half dreaming—half awake—but she lay very, very still. Soon a gentle hand was laid on her forehead, and the same soft voice said—

"She's quite cool now."

Ellen became more and more conscious; still she seemed not to have power to move, or even to open her eyes. But she murmured, almost without knowing it—

"Mamma."

"My darling child!"

And in a moment fond clasping arms were encircling her, and her head was on her mother's breast.

She felt warm tears falling like gentle rain on her face, and she nestled closer, and more closely, to her mother. She felt that forgiveness, pardon, love—unabated love—all were there.

Still there was something weighing on her heart, and at length she whispered:

"Mamma—dear Fred?"

Her mother gasped suddenly, but in a moment answered with apparent calmness—

"All is well with him, my child; go to sleep."

And she did fall asleep almost directly, and her mother gently replaced her head on the pillow, and placed the clothes smoothly over her; and then crept out of the room to weep over the coffin of her little boy. Frederick was dead.

But many days passed before they told Ellen, and when they did, deep indeed was her grief, her repentance, her contrition. Many and bitter were the tears she shed. Her conscience indeed was her own severest punishment, for her mother never breathed one word of reproach. But Mrs. Merton became most sedulous in correcting in her younger children, the errors which Ellen had been permitted to imbibe.

Mrs. Pridnett very kindly invited Ellen to her house as soon as she was sufficiently well to be removed, in the hope that country air might fully renovate her; and Ellen begged to accept the invitation.

When arrived at that lady's house, who welcomed her most kindly, hoping soon, she said, to make her well, Ellen, with some timidity, said—

"Mrs. Pridnett, I intreated mamma, earnestly, to allow me to come here. But not for pleasure—not even for the sake of getting well

—but to beg you to teach me and instruct me as you do Mary. I was wicked and ungrateful before—I know; but try me now, dear Mrs. Pridnett—*dear* Mrs. Pridnett."

Mrs. Pridnett drew the young girl closely to her, and lovingly kissed her forehead.

You will be pleased to hear that the hard lesson Ellen had learnt by her little brother's death was never forgotten. She attempted to make up in some degree to her mother for the trouble and grief she had caused her, by the most unwearying and affectionate attention and duty; and from this period she never again was known to tell A WHITE FIB.

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