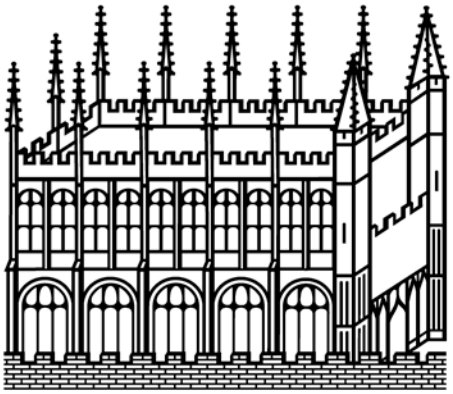

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"When Alice arrived at the parsonage she found her friend in the garden, with one of her little brothers. They had been gathering flowers; but Margaret looked cross and unhappy, and seemed almost ready to cry."—SEE PAGE 11.

THE

CROSSES OF CHILDHOOD

OR

ALICE AND HER FRIENDS.

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THE

CROSSES OF CHILDHOOD;

OR,

ALICE AND HER FRIENDS.

CHAPTER I.

A MOTHER'S LESSON; OR, THE TEACHINGS OF SCRIPTURE.

"'He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me,'" read a little girl about nine years old, from the 10th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel. "What does this mean, mamma?" she said, looking up from her book to her mother, at whose feet she was sitting.

"First tell me, dear child, the meaning of the word cross," replied her mamma.

"Cross, mamma," said the little girl, thoughtfully; "I don't think I know what it means there, mamma, because it can't be a cross of wood. People couldn't go about the world carrying wooden crosses on their shoulders."

Her mamma smiled at this idea as she answered, "But why are two pieces of wood placed thus (and she laid two of her fingers across each other) called a cross?"

"Because they cross each other, mamma, I suppose."

"Right, my dear; now tell me if you know what you mean when you say people are cross? What do they do that makes them seem cross?"

"They won't do what I want them, mamma," replied the child; "but do something I don't like."

"Then their will crosses yours, dear, instead of going with it; does it not?"

"I never thought of that before, mamma; so that is why we say cross," and the child looked very thoughtful for a few moments, and then continued, "Perhaps the cross in this verse means something of that kind, as it can't mean the wooden cross."

"I must ask you one or two more questions, my dear child, and I think you will then find out its meaning for yourself. What kind of things do we like best to do—good or bad?"

"I am afraid I often like to do naughty things best, mamma; but, then, big people don't, do they?"

"We are all naturally inclined to do wrong, my child; only 'big people,' as you call them, don't do the same naughty things as little children. Well, now, one more question: What kind of things does Jesus Christ wish us to do?"

"Good things, mamma, and difficult things too, I am sure; for it is so hard to be good sometimes."

"And because it is so hard to be good, and so many difficulties in our way—"

"It is called a cross," cried the child, interrupting her eagerly; "now I understand. All the good difficult things we have to do, are the crosses we must carry."

"Yes, my dear," replied her mother, "such is the general meaning of this verse. All that Jesus Christ wishes us to do is opposed to our natural inclinations, and may, therefore, be fitly spoken of as cross to them, or as a cross. But this verse refers more particularly to the besetting sin which must be fought against, or to the peculiar trial or trouble of each individual. Every one has something of this kind, which may be called their chief cross; and which they must take up daily, if they really wish to follow Jesus. Little children's crosses are not like big people's crosses; but still each little child has some little cross, meeting it daily, and which must be taken up and carried patiently, if it wishes to follow Jesus."

Alice sat silent for a few minutes, after her mother had done speaking; but presently she asked, "Have little children ever really big crosses to carry, dear mamma?"

"I knew one little child once, my dear," replied her mother, "who had a very heavy cross to bear."

"Oh! what was it?" said Alice, eagerly.

"When she was about seven years old, she fell down one day, and injured her back so much, that the doctors said they feared she would never be able to run about again. Just think, my dear, how sad this was for this little child. She had brothers and sisters, well and happy, playing about all day long, while she had to lie on her little bed, and could not join in any of their sports. And to make it still harder for her, she was naturally very lively and active, and had never cared for reading, or quiet occupations. But this little child had heard of

Jesus, and she loved Him, and wished to be like Him; so when they told her it was His will that she should suffer so much, she tried to take up her heavy cross, and be quiet and patient."

"And was she able to, mamma?" said Alice.

"She was, my dear. She knew where to go for help in this time of trial. She prayed to Jesus, and He helped His little follower to take up the cross, which would have been heavy for any one—much more so for this active little child. She became so patient and gentle, that a murmuring thought never even seemed to come into her mind."

"Did she soon die, or did she ever get well?" asked Alice.

"Contrary to every one's expectations she recovered, after spending several years of her life on that bed of suffering. But she never forgot, my dear, that heavy cross of her childhood. She often said, that, compared to it, all the troubles and trials of her after life were as nothing. She had conquered through Christ then, and victory was easier ever afterwards. So it always is. If we are always trying, with God's help, to do right, He will always assist us. He has said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' Heb. xiii. 5; and His 'word abideth for ever.'"

"I hope He will help me to be good," said Alice gravely; "I like to think, dear mamma, that even a little girl can have a cross, and follow Jesus; because," she added, "if we are able to carry the cross, we may hope to have the crown some day, may we not, mamma?"

"Yes, my child," replied her mother, as she stooped to kiss her. "And I trust you and I, and all of us, may be found worthy of it, 'through Christ who strengtheneth us.' Let us only try to follow, and be like Him, and all will be well with us, both in time and for eternity."

CHAPTER II.

LITTLE ALICE'S CROSS; OR, THE LOST DARLINGS.

Little Alice Seymour was an only child, and the darling of her parents. The lot had fallen to her in a "goodly place," for everything that could give pleasure to a little child was at her command. Her parents were wealthy, and loved to give their Alice all she could want or wish. But the child's chief blessing was her loving and much-loved mother.

Mrs. Seymour was indeed a real Christian. Calm, gentle, with a heart full of God's charity, she brought peace and happiness wherever she went. The servants, the villagers, the friends of her own rank, all united in loving and commending her.

Alice was now getting old enough to have something more than a mere childish love for her dear mother. Though naturally of a very vivacious and playful disposition, the fact of her association chiefly with grown-up people (like most only children) had greatly developed her intellectual and reasoning faculties. She did not fail to see how much her mother was beloved, and the wish

to be like her, "so good," and "so much loved," was springing up in her heart.

Mrs. Seymour was at present herself giving Alice such instruction as the little girl required, and the reading of some portion of God's holy Word generally brought the morning's lesson to a conclusion. It was during one of these daily readings that the conversation in the preceding chapter took place.

Alice went to her play that morning with a heart full of big thoughts,—the uppermost one, "Had she a real cross?" She walked slowly up stairs, and opened the nursery door. Nurse was sitting at her work, and looked up with a pleased smile to welcome her darling. Although Alice hardly needed her services as nurse now, Mrs. Seymour still retained the faithful servant who had watched over the little girl from her cradle. Besides this, twice since Alice was born, a sweet little baby had lain for a few hours in the little crib, and been hushed on that loving breast. But each little baby, the brother and the sister, had soon been recalled by their heavenly Father, leaving the nursery desolate, and nurse the mere nominal employment of looking after her first nurseling.

Alice walked gravely to her usual seat on the ledge of the deep bay window, where her toys lay scattered about in tempting profusion. She took up her favourite doll, and began nursing it. But her heart was not in her play; it was wandering with her eyes over the beautiful view which was seen from that nursery window.

The rich pastures of her father's park, verdant in summer beauty, stretched far away into the distance,

where, amongst the trees, nestled the village, to which Alice often went with her mother on her errands of love and mercy. Nearer still, with its group too of sheltering trees, stood the parish church; and Alice, from her seat, could see some of the white tombstones in its quiet graveyard. Her eyes settled upon these at last, and her thoughts upon the baby brother and sister she well remembered, and who, she knew, lay there side by side.

The child sighed as she thought of them. It was only two years since the baby sister had come and gone. Alice recollected the joy in the house when she born; how she had lain on nurse's lap in that very room, how soft and pretty she was, and how small. And then Alice thought of the sad time that came, when they told her the dear baby was dead. Her mother's grief and nurse's tears were all still fresh in her mind. And last of all came the thought—stronger and stronger, as she still thought on till the tears fell fast and warm—"I wish my little sister had lived; I have no one to play with now."

Nurse had been watching her child for some time.

"What is the mattter, my dear?" she exclaimed, when she saw the fast-falling tears; "come and tell old nurse all about it."

Alice burst into a passionate fit of crying, and nurse got up in great alarm, and went over to comfort her.

"Oh! nurse, nurse," sobbed Alice at last, "why did God take away my little sister? I am tired of always playing alone. Other little children have brothers and sisters to play with, and I have none."

"Oh! Miss Alice, Miss Alice," said nurse, reprovingly, though with tears in her own eyes; "sure it's sinful of ye to greet this way for the sweet babes. It's in heaven, and happy the darlings are now. The Lord knows what was best for them and for us."

"Yes, indeed, nurse," continued a gentle voice, and looking up, Alice saw her mother standing beside nurse. She had entered the room unperceived, while the child was crying, and had heard all that was said. Her eyes were full of tears as she kissed her little girl, and said, "I have often wished, for your sake, my child, that the dear babies had lived. It is a trial for you to have always to play alone. But, listen to this, dear Alice," and taking up nurse's Bible from the table, Mrs. Seymour opened it at their morning lesson, and read softly, "He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me," Matt. x. 38.

Alice started. She remembered the thought of her heart when she came up stairs to play, Have I a real cross? Her mother saw that these words had made an impression, and kissing her again, she left her once more alone.

Alice still sat on in the window, but her tears ceased to flow, and a smile was on her lips. She was busy thinking again, but in a different spirit now. This, then, was what her mother meant that morning, when she said all children had crosses to bear. Alice remembered how often she must have grieved that dear mother; for this was not the first time the little girl had repined at her solitary lot, and thought it unkind

"'Listen to this, dear Alice,' and Mrs. Seymour read softly, 'He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.'"—PAGE 10.

of God to have taken away her brother and sister. But now Alice did not feel angry any more. She would try not to mind being alone; and she lifted up her heart in prayer to God to help her, a feeble, sinful little child, to take up this cross, and follow Jesus.

CHAPTER III.

A DAY AT THE PARSONAGE.

A FEW days after these incidents, Alice was asked to spend a day at the parsonage. The clergyman, Mr. Conway, had a family of four children. Margaret, the eldest, was just Alice's age; her sister Julia was only four years old, and John and James, twins, were two. Margaret was a precocious child, fond of reading and quiet pursuits, and she and Alice were fast friends.

When Alice arrived at the parsonage she found her friend in the garden, with one of her little brothers. They had been gathering flowers; but Margaret looked cross and unhappy, and seemed almost ready to cry.

"What's the matter, Margaret dear?" said Alice; "are you not glad to see me?"

"Oh! I'm very glad, indeed, to see you, Alice," was the reply, "but all the pleasure of our day is spoilt, and I feel so cross."

"How so, Margaret?"

"Why, Betsey, the nursemaid, has a bad sick head-

ache this morning, and mamma says I must look after those tiresome children all day."

Just then two other rosy, healthy little ones came trooping out of the house, and surrounded Alice with shouts of joy and delight.

"We may stay with you and Margaret all day," cried Julia.

"Ally will take care of me!" shouted John, clinging to her dress on one side.

"And she loves me too," lisped little James, seizing hold of her other hand.

"It's our birthday!" cried both together.

Alice stooped down to kiss them all. She loved all little children, and the twins in particular. They were just the age her own sweet little sister would have been had she lived.

Meanwhile Margaret looked on sullenly; and when Julia went up to take her hand, she pushed her away, exclaiming, "Get away, you tiresome child!" Alice was so engrossed with the prattle of the dear little boys, that she did not perceive her friend's ill-temper.

"Look at my pretty new shoes," said little James, holding out his small foot for her to see. "Mamma said I might wear them, 'cause oo' were coming, Ally, and 'cause it's our birthday."

"Has John got a pair too?" asked Alice of the other little fellow, and his new shoes were looked at and admired. And then came a whole budget of news—about the flowers in the garden, the last new toys, the birthday presents, and, lastly, of the sweet little

kittens puss had brought in, one day. "Ally" must come and see them, and choose one for herself.

So off they all scampered to the yard, where puss and her kittens were found, comfortably purring on a bed of nice soft hay, in one of the outhouses. There were five little kittens—one for each little Conway, and the fifth for Alice. She was to have the first choice, and Margaret the second; so said Master John most decidedly. Alice chose one all white, and said she would call it "Snowflake;" but when they looked round for Margaret to make her choice, they found she had not come with them.

Alice could not leave the little ones alone, so, persuading them to wait, and settle about the rest of the kittens another time, she took a twin in each hand, and bidding Julia follow and try to catch them, she ran back to the garden to look for Margaret. They raced all round the ground without finding her, and then turned into the house, Julia just succeeding in catching them up, as they got to the door.

Breathless with the exercise, and rosy with health and happiness, they burst into the breakfast parlour, where they usually played when in the house. Here, at last, they found Margaret, sitting gloomily in the window, with a book in her hand.

The first thing that the little boys caught sight of, as they came into the room, was a splendid new rocking-horse. The saddle of it was so arranged that both little boys could ride on it at once; and so secure, that even such little fellows could not fall out of it.

This was Mrs. Seymour's birthday present to her little godsons.

What shouts of delight there were! Even to Alice it was a pleasant surprise, for her mother had not said what her present was to be. But Margaret looked on with a listless, dissatisfied expression; she left Alice to lift the children into their seats and fix them securely, and then gently set the horse in motion, that the little fellows might get gradually accustomed to the new exercise before starting on a quicker ride.

It was not till then that Margaret chose to get up, or take any interest in her brothers' joy.

"Can't they ride by themselves, Alice?" she said, rather crossly, after looking at the horse and its nicely contrived saddle. "I'm sure they can't fall out. What a comfort to have something to amuse them, and keep them from teazing us. Now, if we could only find something for Julia to do, we might have a little peace."

Mrs. Seymour had not forgotten Julia; a very pretty doll had been sent for her, of which Alice had made some of the clothes. The little girl was soon engrossed with her new baby, and the novel difficulties of dressing and undressing it.

Alice and Margaret stood together at the window. They were a striking contrast,—the one, with light brown hair, rosy and fair, her face reflecting the happiness of her heart; the other dark and pale, and the long indulged ill-temper still casting a gloom over her otherwise pleasant face.

"How tiresome of Betsey to be ill to-day," said

Margaret at last, as she leaned against the window, and looked back at her friend; "I had arranged such a pleasant day for us both."

"But why can't it be pleasant still?" asked Alice.

"Oh! there's no use sitting down to anything when the children are here," replied Margaret. "You don't know what little plagues they are, Alice. If you took my place for a week, you'd soon find it out. But just look here at what I had meant us to have done to-day."

Margaret opened a drawer, and took out some pretty paper furniture. She had all that was required for furnishing a large doll's house. A friend of Margaret's, who was interested in her persevering habits, and love of employment, had given it to her a few days before, with everything necessary for making it up neatly; and had promised that the doll's house should be forthcoming, as soon as all the furniture was ready. Margaret had already made up a table and some chairs very nicely, and had looked forward to Alice's visit and assistance to get through a great deal of it. But, as she said, "there was no use beginning with the children in the room."

This seemed only too true, for no sooner did little Julia see the pretty furniture displayed, than down went her doll on the floor, and she was standing on tip-toe, trying to reach the table in her sister's hand.

Margaret kept it above her head, exclaiming, "Go away, Julia; we don't want you here. Go to your doll."

"But I want to see the little table," said Julia, just ready to cry; and she caught hold of her sister's sleeve, and tried to pull down her arm.

Margaret laughed maliciously, and kept raising the table higher and higher, changing it from one hand to the other, till Julia fairly burst into tears.

"Oh, Margaret," said Alice, "why do you make her cry; how unkind you are. If you let her look at the table she will be good, and go back to her doll; won't you, Julia dear?" and she stooped down and wiped the tears from the little rosy cheeks.

Margaret looked rather ashamed of herself, and allowed Alice to show Julia some of the toys. Soothed and satisfied, the little girl soon went back to her doll.

But now there was a loud outcry from the boys. The little fellows, who had sat side by side, wanted both to hold the reins and have the whip at the same time; and the little eyes looked angrily at each other, when the girls interfered. Margaret wanted to punish them by taking them off the horse at once; but Alice brought matters to a pleasanter and more peaceful conclusion, for by kind and playful persuasion she got them to agree, that one should hold the whip and the other the reins, for a time, and that then there should be an exchange.

"I'm afraid there is no use our trying to do anything nice to-day," said Margaret, dejectedly; "those children won't be quiet for five minutes alone. But I do so much want to get my furniture made up."

"Oh, let us try some of it," said Alice, entreatingly; "I'm sure the children will be good for a little while. Surely we can keep them happy and out of mischief, and yet amuse ourselves."

"That's just what I hate doing," replied Margaret.

"It is disagreeable to be constantly interrupted. However, we will try what we can do."

The things were all carried to the table in the window, and the little girls were soon at work. I do not know if my readers have seen or made this paper furniture; but it is interesting and engrossing work for little people. It was the first time that Alice had tried her hand at anything of the kind, and she begged Margaret to give her only the easier parts to do. So it was settled that Alice should cut out with the nice sharp-pointed scissors, and that Margaret should take the far more difficult task of setting up the pieces as they were cut.

All went on very well for a few minutes. Margaret was just putting the finishing touch to a chair, when a little voice at her elbow said, "Please, Margaret, will you tie these strings? I can't."

"Don't come teazing me, Julia," answered her sister impatiently. "I can't attend to you; you must wait."

Julia stood quietly beside the table, watching Margaret finish the chair. It was put down at last; but Margaret had forgotten all about the patient little child waiting to be helped, and was soon engrossed setting up a footstool.

Little Julia seeing her sister still engaged, and greatly attracted by the chair she had just completed, laid her doll down, and took it up unperceived by her sister. After fiddling with it for some she put it again on the table, but found to her surprise that it would not stand properly. "Look, Margaret," she exclaimed, "the chair won't stand now, what's the matter with it?"

Her sister looked up hastily. The chair had all come

asunder again, as, of course, the gum was not dry when Julia took it up. "You naughty child," cried Margaret, throwing down her work, "how dare you touch my chair; you tiresome, meddlesome thing."

"It's your own fault, Margaret," she said; "when you have to mind us, why don't you do it properly? I shall go and tell mamma that you are doing your furniture, and won't attend to us." And the naughty little child darted out of the room, followed by Margaret, who went to tell her own side of the story to her mother.

In a few minutes she returned to her friend, flushed and in anger. "These things are all to be put away," she said rudely, and hastily gathering them all up, she thrust them into the drawer. "Mamma says I had no business to take them out to-day. Those tiresome children—they are always interfering and getting me into trouble;" and Margaret could not help crying with disappointment and vexation.

"Don't cry, dear," said Alice, kindly; "it is a pity we can't go on to-day. But never mind, I'll ask mamma to let you spend a day with me, and if you bring the furniture with you, we can work at it all the time."

Margaret dried her eyes, and brightened up at this proposal. A long day with Alice at the park was a great treat to her. "That will be delightful," she exclaimed. "I hope it will be very soon. It is so vexatious not to be able to get it done. Isn't it nice work?"

"Yes, very; but I declare we have forgotten all about the twins, Margaret;" and Alice, who had been

sitting facing the window, jumped up: "what can they be doing, they are so quiet?"

And well they might be so, for the dear little fellows had fallen fast asleep on their horse. It had come to the usual hour for their morning nap, but they were so comfortable in their box-like saddle, and so much soothed by the rocking of the horse, that they had gradually dropped off to sleep. James sat with his head thrown back, and John's chubby face was nestling on his brother's shoulder. It was a sweet picture; even Margaret's ill-temper vanished in the presence of such innocent helpless loveliness, and she whispered to Alice, "Let us take them down, and lay them on the sofa." A soft bed of cushions was prepared, and there they laid the sweet boys down side by side, and covered them with a shawl.

I am glad to say that Margaret's troubles for that day were now over. The twins did not awake till near dinner time; and, afterwards, Betsey's headache was so much better, that she was able to take charge of them for the rest of the day.

But, by her ill-temper and unkindness, Margaret had deprived herself of much pleasure. Had she been more gentle and considerate, she and Alice might have worked at the furniture without neglecting their little charges, who were good little things, if kindly and judiciously managed. But now, when there were no such drawbacks, Margaret was not allowed to take it out again. Still they contrived to have a very pleasant afternoon; and, in the evening, Mrs. Seymour called herself to

take Alice home. The little girl was delighted to see her, for now she was able to ask if Margaret might come and spend the next day with her. She had a particular reason for it, she whispered coaxingly to her mother. Mrs. Seymour gave the desired invitation, at her daughter's request, and it was joyfully accepted.

After tea, Alice and her mother had a pleasant walk home through the quiet peaceful park. The sun had not long set, and the west was still bright with his departing light; while the full moon was silvering all the east with her soft beams. Beasts, birds, and insects had all gone to rest; only the flowers seemed still awake to the calm beauty of the evening, filling the air with their sweet perfume. Even Alice was subdued into unusual silence, and put off, till the next day, the account she liked to give her mother of everything that happened when she spent a day from home. Like the lambs and little birds, happy and peaceful, she, too, was soon fast asleep in her little bed.

CHAPTER IV.

ALICE AND MARGARET.

THE following morning Alice had no opportunity of talking to her mamma till after Margaret had arrived, and she and Alice had established themselves with the toy furniture in Mrs. Seymour's sitting-room. In the course of the morning, Mrs. Seymour joined them there with her own work.

"Look, dear mamma, at all this sweet little furniture," said Alice, after her mother was comfortably settled, and she began showing it all, and praising Margaret's cleverness in making it up so neatly. "It was that she might have a whole day to work at it, that I wanted her to come to-day," she continued: "we were to have done it yesterday, only the children had to stay with us, as Betsey was not well."

"Then, I suppose, you were very happy, Alice," remarked Mrs. Seymour, after she had duly admired the toys; "I know you like playing with the little ones."

"Well, I don't think we had a very happy morning," said Alice, doubtfully. "What do you think, Margaret?"

"We never have when the children are with us," replied the other little girl: "at least, I have not. I think you were happy enough yesterday, Alice, in spite of all our troubles. I don't know how it is you like playing with the little ones so much. They always seem, too, so good with you. But I can't help thinking, if we changed places for a few days, that you would find out that they are only tiresome little plagues."

"But not always, surely?" asked Alice.

"Well, perhaps not; but very often you know I have to look after them, when Betsey is busy; and it generally happens to be at a time when I particularly want to work or read. You don't know how troublesome they are then."

Mrs. Seymour smiled; she was listening to the little girls' conversation. She encouraged them to talk freely

before her, and only interrupted them, if advice or correction were necessary. Mrs. Seymour possessed great influence with the child Margaret, and she never missed an opportunity of using it for her advantage. She now addressed Margaret, saying, "Did you never try to find out, my dear, if at these times you are not often in fault yourself?"

"It is not wrong to like to work and read, is it?" asked Margaret.

"No, dear child, not in themselves; but there is such a thing as working or reading at a wrong time. There are many things perfectly right and necessary in themselves, but which become absolute sins if indulged in at improper times. Take for instance, sleeping, eating, and drinking—all indispensable and right; but we may not, nevertheless, become gluttons or sluggards. If we do, we abuse God's gifts and blessings, and fall into sin. I should imagine, Margaret, your wisest plan when deputed to take care of the little ones would be this—to put aside all your own occupations for the time, and devote yourself entirely to them."

"Oh, but they don't want me to do that, Mrs. Seymour," replied Margaret, "or mamma either. If I see that they do not get into mischief, and keep with them, that is all I need do. I generally get a book and read, because the children don't like me to play with them."

"And why don't they?" asked Mrs. Seymour. "Do they never want Alice or any other child to play with them?"

"But Alice likes playing with them, and I don't."

"And are you never to do anything you don't like, dear Margaret? I am afraid, my child, you do not look upon this matter in a right light. If told to look after your little sister and brothers, you seem to take it as a matter of course that it must be disagreeable, and you allow your feelings of dislike to get so much the better of you, that you neither try to amuse, or be amused by them. No wonder the little ones do not care for such a companion in their sports. You would be grieved if I said you were selfish and unkind, Margaret, and yet I fear you are so, by your own accounts."

"Oh! Mrs. Seymour," cried Margaret, with tears in her eyes; "you do not really think I am so naughty. But I do so love to read, and can't help doing it whenever I have a chance; and it is so tiresome to be interrupted in the middle of some interesting story. If I have to put my book down, and go and look after Julia or the boys, I can't help feeling cross."

Alice started at the word *cross*—it had a peculiar meaning for her now, ever since that conversation with her mother. She looked up eagerly, and was going to speak, but Mrs. Seymour smiled, and made her a sign to be silent, while she continued to Margaret, "I have no doubt, dear, it is a trial to you; but do you think that every one would be vexed at having to do it?"

"It might not make you so," she answered, "because you are so good; or Alice, because she loves children so much, that I think she would rather play with them."

"And yet Alice has no little ones to play with at home," said Mrs. Seymour, gently.

Margaret looked up, a tear was stealing down Alice's cheek, and Mrs. Seymour's eyes too were full of tears.

"Forgive me, dear Mrs. Seymour," she exclaimed, as she rose and threw her arms round the lady's neck, "forgive me for grieving you; I will try and not be selfish any more: but indeed it is so hard. Why has not Alice the little brothers and sisters I don't deserve to have? Why should we each have what is hardest for us to bear?"

Mrs. Seymour opened the Bible which lay on the table, and read solemnly, "He that taketh not up his cross, and followeth me, is not worthy of me."

"My dear child," she continued in a few moments, "this verse is the key to many mysterious dispensations of an All-wise Providence. You would follow Jesus I think, Margaret; then take up the cross He has chosen for you. Do not let your praiseworthy love of employment become a sin, by making you unkind and selfish. Try to be like the dear Saviour, the self-denying, the self-sacrificing. If you find, dear Margaret, that it is so hard to put down the book or the work to attend to the little ones, when they are with you; then take my advice, and try to give them your undivided attention, and play with and amuse them, instead of irritating yourself by trying to do both things at once."

"And is this really the cross I have to carry?" asked Margaret thoughtfully; "and is it God that I offend when I am teased with the little ones?"

"Even so, my dear. One little girl has to struggle with a rebellious feeling against Him who has left her

so many lonely hours, without brother or sister to share her joys and griefs (and Mrs. Seymour laid her hand on her Alice's bowed head as she spoke), and another little child has to try and overcome her natural love of solitary pursuits, and be an unselfish, cheerful sharer and bearer of the joys and sorrows of her little sister and brothers. To each little girl," she continued, drawing both to her in a fond embrace—"to each little girl I can only repeat again, 'He that taketh not up his cross, and followeth me, is not worthy of me.'"

It was with grave looks and subdued voices that the friends resumed their employments. The solemn truth of the reality of their own crosses went home to their young hearts. They felt that they were indeed crosses, and all the more impressively because each child knew, had their positions been reversed, that the crosses would have vanished. It was solemn and wonderful to them that they should each have the temper and disposition which found a cross for them in their respective daily life. And they were hard to take up too; but as the children sat silently at their work, unspoken prayers went up to the throne of God for the help He alone could give to enable them each to overcome and be worthy followers of His dear Son Jesus Christ.

That afternoon proved wet and gloomy, much to the girls' satisfaction, as they could not go out, but were able to work away at the little furniture. Mrs. Seymour gave her assistance in completing the most difficult parts; and pleased both the children very much by cutting out two little sets of bedding and bedclothes for the little bed-

steads, which they were to make at their leisure. When Margaret returned home in the evening, she had the satisfaction of taking back the furniture nearly all finished, and Alice promised soon to come and help her to complete it.

Some weeks passed away, and the doll's house was given to Margaret by her kind friend. She invited Alice to share with her the pleasure of furnishing the little apartments. Everything looked beautiful; and to make it quite perfect, Mrs. Seymour gave Margaret some pretty little wax dolls, which the girls dressed to represent the whole family of papa, mamma, children and servants. Many a pleasant hour was spent over it all, and I am glad to say that little Julia was allowed to share her sister's enjoyment. Margaret found to her surprise that, when treated with more kindness and consideration, the little girl was really companionable and amusing, and there was every reason for hoping that in time they would be all to each other that sisters ought to be.

CHAPTER V.

MR. RUTHERFORD'S CHILDREN.

One morning, towards the end of summer, Alice was at work with her mother in the little sitting-room, when Mr. Seymour came in with letters from the post, and handed one to his wife. When Mrs. Seymour had read it, she gave it to her husband, and turning to Alice, said,

"I have some pleasant news for you, Alice. This letter is from your Aunt Rutherford, asking us to take charge of your cousins for a few weeks. Your uncle has been very ill, and is ordered change of air; and your aunt wants to go with him to some watering-place where he can have perfect rest and quiet."

"Oh! mamma, how delightful!" cried Alice, joyfully, jumping up and throwing down her work. "When are they to come? I hope to-day."

"Not quite so soon," replied her mother, laughing; "so you may go on with your work a little longer, my dear. Your aunt says they will be here some time next week. It will depend upon your uncle's health, and when he is able to travel."

But Alice was too excited with this unexpected news to settle down to her lessons again. She took up her work, and tried to be steady; but it was of no use. The needle would stand still every second stitch, while she asked her mamma endless questions about her cousins. She had not seen them for three or four years, and had almost forgotten what they were like. At last Mrs. Seymour, seeing her state of excitement, gave her leave to put work and books away for the day, and to run off and calm herself by telling nurse the news. So Alice was soon sitting in her old seat in the bay-window, talking to nurse as fast as her little tongue could go, asking for all her recollections of her cousins, and making all kinds of plans for their happiness and amusement.

A few days later the eagerly expected party arrived.

There were four of them. Arthur, the eldest, was about eleven years old; he had not yet been sent to school, owing to great delicacy of health, which caused his parents much anxiety, particularly as he was their only son. Kate, the eldest girl, was a few months older than Alice, and Frances about as much younger; while little Eda was between three and four years old.

Mrs. Seymour had made every arrangement for the comfort of her nephew and nieces; who on their parts were delighted at coming to spend a few weeks in the country.

It was just dinner-time when the little party arrived, and they were all much refreshed by it, except poor Arthur, who was fatigued with the journey, and had to lie down soon afterwards. It was then that Alice asked if they might go into the garden. It was a lovely afternoon, and Kate and Frances were eager to get out into the fresh air. They had had enough of staying indoors in town, and hoped their aunt would let them be out as much as possible now.

"May I go too?" asked little Eda, looking at her aunt. "I would like some flowers very much."

"Oh! Simmons can take Eda out. She always does at home," said Kate. "We don't want her with us."

"Nurse Simmons will be busy unpacking and arranging your clothes, my dear," replied Mrs. Seymour, quietly. "She cannot take Eda out this afternoon; and as you are only going into the garden, I think you and Frances can take charge of her for a little while."

Kate looked sulky, and muttered, "What a bother!

I shan't look after her." Frances, I think, would have followed her sister's example, but she observed her aunt's look of surprise at Kate's conduct, and wishing to make a more favourable impression, she cleared the cloud from her brow, and promised to take care of Eda.

But Frances' obedience did not extend beyond this promise, for as soon as the little girls were in the garden, out of Mrs. Seymour's sight, she dropped her little sister's hand, and bid her run away and amuse herself, for they did not want her company. Alice ventured to remind Frances quietly that she had taken charge of Eda.

"Well, so I am taking charge of her," replied Frances, ungraciously. "You don't think I'm going to run about after her all the afternoon, do you, Alice? We want to talk to you. She can play by herself. I'm sure she can't get into any mischief here."

"I don't think that is the kind of care-taking mamma meant," said Alice. "We were talking about it with Margaret Conway, some time ago, and I am afraid she will not be pleased if Eda is left to run about alone."

"Nonsense, Alice," replied both her cousins. "How can you know anything about it, when you have no brothers or sisters? Of course, we know best. If aunt is angry, it can't be helped; she ought to have let Simmons take the child out."

Alice was only half satisfied, but she was too polite and shy to say anything more; so little Eda was allowed to scamper away over the smooth lawns, where she was soon chasing the butterflies and bees, and looking at and

smelling the bright flowers, which she had never seen before in such rich profusion.

Kate and Frances then began telling Alice all about their town life, and its many advantages and delights. They were evidently inclined to look with pity upon their country cousin, who they thought could have had no experience of life, such as they enjoyed. She must lead a dull life of it, compared to the excitement of their school; for lately the little girls had become day-scholars at a most fashionable establishment. They described in glowing colours all its advantages; and Frances informed Alice, with an air of modesty that her words belied, that she was quite the favourite pupil of her class, and so far advanced in her studies as to eclipse them all.

"Kate, I suppose, is in a higher class," remarked Alice, "as she is a year older than you, Frances."

"Oh dear, no," answered the girl contemptuously, "you don't know, Alice, how dull Kate is. If I did not help her, she could not keep her place at all."

"That's not true, Frances," interrupted Kate angrily; "I can get on very well without you."

"What, do you mean to say I never help you in French?" asked Frances; "or in German, or to read your new music? If it was not for my own sake, I would not do it at all, only I should be ashamed to have a sister so stupid as you are, if left to yourself."

"You're very unkind, Frances," cried Kate, bursting into tears. "If I am not as clever as you are, it's not my fault; and you need not go and tell every one about it."

"Little Eda looked up smilingly as her aunt approached, and held up her hands full of the pretty flowers."—PAGE 31.

"But you see it's true," whispered Frances to her cousin; "even she can't deny it. I would not be as dull as Kate for a great deal."

Alice opened her big blue eyes very wide, as she looked at her cousins. Their conduct surprised and grieved her. She had always imagined that

> "Where sisters dwell and brothers meet,
> Quarrels should never come."

But if these were the scenes which she must witness daily during her cousins' visit, where would be all the pleasure and happiness she had anticipated from their society? Alice turned sorrowfully from them, and at last proposed looking for Eda, who was not to be seen. But the little one was not far off. Left to herself, she was not long in finding something to do; but unfortunately not as harmless as it might have been.

The elder girls found the child sitting in the middle of a splendid bed of verbenas, and quietly picking off every flower within her reach. She had already stripped more than half the plants, and was covered with their brilliant blossoms.

Just as the other children espied the little culprit, Mrs. Seymour came out of the house. She had seen from the drawing-room window where she was sitting and which opened on the lawn, the mischief the little child was amusing herself with, and came out to put an end to it.

Little Eda looked up smilingly as her aunt approached, and held up her hands full of the "putty flowers." Her hat had been thrown aside, and she sat bareheaded, the

setting sun behind her shining like a glory through her golden curls, and deepening all the gorgeous colours of the red verbenas, which contrasted strikingly with the fair white-robed little child in their midst. Mrs. Seymour could not help pausing to admire the lovely little one; and then, lifting her in her arms, she turned to the sisters, saying,

"How is it, my dears, that you have allowed Eda to get into such mischief? Surely you knew she must not pick these flowers. Why did you not tell your cousins, Alice? I thought three little girls as old as you are could certainly keep one little one out of mischief for an hour or two."

"It's not my fault," said Kate, sulkily: "I never said I would look after her."

"But what has Frances to say for herself?" asked Mrs. Seymour, turning to her. "She cannot forget her promise to take care of Eda."

Frances tried to excuse herself, and shift the blame on the others. Alice, who was least to blame, looked the most guilty of the party, and it was only from her, in the end, that Mrs. Seymour could get at the truth of the matter.

"I am sorry to find, my dears," she then said, addressing the sisters, "that you cannot be trusted alone, and that you seem to consider promises only binding so long as they cannot be broken without incurring immediate punishment. I suppose you thought your neglect of Eda was not likely to be discovered. I hope, my dear little nieces, you will remember that I am accustomed to be

obeyed implicitly, and that in future you will only undertake what you intend to perform."

Kate blushed and looked abashed at her aunt's reproof, but Frances muttered to herself, "What a fuss about nothing!"

Alice whispered to her mamma that she was very sorry, but had been afraid to interfere, and then asked if they might all go into the kitchen garden, and have some fruit. The Rutherfords looked so delighted at the idea, that Mrs. Seymour could not refuse, only she thought it necessary to accompany them; so taking Eda in her arms with her lap full of flowers, Mrs. Seymour led the way to the kitchen garden.

Everything was new and interesting to the little city girls. There was a large hot-house, and the beautiful bunches of grapes just beginning to ripen in it, particularly excited their admiration. Frances hoped they would not have to go home before they were ripe; but Kate expressed her preference for the peaches and plums covering the long walls round the garden. The only fruit now ripe were the gooseberries and the currants, and the gleanings of the raspberry. Mrs. Seymour sat down on a bench, with Eda on her knee, and gave the elder girls permission to get what raspberries they could. Kate and Frances thought they had never tasted any fruit so delicious as the few white ones they were able to find. Alice brought all she found to little Eda, who was trying to make a bunch of the verbena flowers.

She had listened very gravely while her aunt spoke to her sisters, and now said she was sorry she had picked

the "f'owers," but she wanted them for "poor Arthur, who couldn't come out with them." Mrs. Seymour kissed her, and promised she should have as many flowers as she wanted, only she must never again pick them without leave. They made a great ball of the verbenas, for her to take back to her brother; and Alice picked a leaf full of the best raspberries she could get, for Eda to give him as well.

It was quite dusk when they returned to the house. Arthur was sitting listlessly in the drawing-room, and thinking himself ill-used for being left so long alone.

"Oh! here you are at last," he exclaimed, as they came in; "I am so tired of being alone—but nobody ever thinks of me."

"Some one has thought of you this evening, Arthur," replied his aunt; while little Eda threw him the big verbena ball, and carried him the fruit which Alice had brought in for her.

"What beautiful raspberries!" cried the boy, as he began eating them; "you dear little thing, to remember your poor brother: it's more than other people do, at any rate," and he looked reproachfully at his elder sisters.

"We have something else to do besides waiting on you, Arthur," said Kate, answering his looks; "we can't be your slaves, because you are always ill, or fancy yourself so."

"Yes, indeed," added Frances; "illness is a nice excuse for being idle and having everything one's own way. Really, Arthur, you might be more reasonable; you quite forget how much we have to do."

"Important business, no doubt," sneered her brother; and turning to his aunt, he continued, "You have no idea how unbearable Frances has become since she went to school, aunt: she thinks herself the one person in the world to be admired; as to poor Kate, she won't allow her any merit at all—I have a nice pair of amiable sisters in them. This is the flower of our flock, aunt," and he drew Eda over to him and kissed her; "I believe she is worth the rest of us put together."

"Not a very flattering conclusion to come to, Arthur," replied Mrs. Seymour, smiling; "we must hope it is not quite the truth, for your own and your elder sisters' sake."

That evening, after the children were all asleep, Mrs. Seymour thought long and deeply about them, and their evident faults and imperfections; but now, for a time at least, they were under her charge, and she must do what she could for them. Fervent prayers went up to God that night that she herself might be so directed in her management of them that their stay with her might prove a blessing to them in time and for eternity

CHAPTER VI.

TOM WILLIS AND HIS BROKEN LEG.

"Oh, mamma," cried Alice, running into the drawing-room where Mrs. Seymour and Arthur were sitting, the day after the Rutherfords' arrival, "such a dreadful accident has just happened to poor Tom Willis."

"What is it, my dear?" asked her mother anxiously.

Alice was flushed and out of breath with the eager haste with which she had run in to tell her mother, so it was only by broken sentences and exclamations that Mrs. Seymour made out at last, that the poor boy had lost his footing in ascending a high ladder with a load of bricks, had fallen many feet to the ground, broken his leg, and otherwise been so seriously injured as to make his recovery a matter of doubt.

Mrs. Seymour rose hastily on hearing this sad tale; her bonnet and cloak were soon on, and a small basket filled with comforts. Meanwhile Alice had been joined by Kate and Frances, who had followed her into the house. They had been playing in the garden together when Alice was told of the accident by the gardener, and had run in to tell her mother.

When Mrs. Seymour came down stairs, and found them all in the hall, she asked if they would like to walk with her as far as Mrs. Willis's cottage. They all said "yes;" so Mrs. Seymour summoned Arthur to go too, as it was only a short distance.

Tom Willis was the eldest son of a poor woman whose husband had died two years before, leaving his widow with four children to support, the eldest then only twelve years old. But she had found many kind friends in her need, and had hitherto managed to keep them all clothed and fed. When old enough, this boy Tom had been apprenticed to the trade he preferred, and all seemed going well with him.

Mrs. Seymour was very grave during her walk to the poor woman's cottage. She knew the scene that awaited

her, and how little hope or comfort she could bring to the mother's broken heart. Alice, too, was silent and grave; she was accustomed to go with her mother on these errands of love and mercy. She loved to do what she could for the poor, and tried to deny herself some of her many luxuries, that she might have wherewith to minister to their many wants. But her mother always tried to impress upon her that gifts and money alone, can never find the way to the hearts of the poor. Charity of the letter, without that of the spirit, is indeed cold and unfruitful. The meeting of heart and heart, on the common ground of our humanity, as being alike created, redeemed, and capable of being sanctified by the same Triune God, and differing only as regards the portion of this world's goods—this is the charity of the Bible. The tear of sympathy, the kind word, the courteous action, are far more precious to the poor than the costliest gifts. So little Alice was learning, both by precept and example, "that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all godliness." She was taught to be kind to all both in word and deed, and to show respect to the aged, be they ever so poor. Many an aged hand had rested on her head; and many a blessing and prayer had gone up to God from abodes of poverty and piety, which had been gladdened by her bright presence, for sweet "Miss Alice" and her beloved mother.

When they arrived at the widow's cottage, which was one of two or three close to the church, Mrs. Seymour took the basket from Alice, and bade the children go and sit in the church porch and wait for her.

"I wish mamma had let me go with her," she said, when they were all at last seated. "I should like to have tried to comfort poor Mary and Jane."

"Oh! Alice, you dreadful child," cried Frances affectedly. "You don't mean to say you like going into such houses, and talking to ragged little girls?"

Alice flushed up with mingled shame and indignation. It was new to her to have her charitable visits and feelings thus censured.

"Perhaps I don't always quite like it," she answered ingenuously; "but mamma likes me to do what I can for the little children. I don't think you would speak so contemptuously, Frances, if you knew how nice some of them are."

"How can there be anything nice in common people or their children?" remarked Kate. "They are always so dirty and untidy. Why can't they be cleaner and neater, and then one would have more satisfaction in doing anything for them? I have seen quite enough of them to make me wish never to see more."

"Certainly they are sometimes very dirty," answered Alice; "but I have heard mamma say we ought to bear with it and be sorry for them, as it is so much harder for them to be neat and nice than for us. But really, Kate, I do know some very nice little children, and I don't think even you could say they are dirty."

Her cousins laughed incredulously, and said they should like to see them. Just then the gate of the churchyard was opened, and two little girls came in. They were crying bitterly, and without perceiving the

children in the porch, they passed on to a grave at the far end of the churchyard.

"Those are Mary and Jane," said Alice softly, as soon as they were out of hearing, "the sisters of poor Tom. That is their father's grave they have gone to. Poor little things, I ought to go and speak to them."

"Why don't you go, then," sneered Frances.

"But I must leave you if I do," replied Alice.

"Never mind that," put in Arthur; "don't let us hinder you doing what you wish."

But Alice still hesitated, not quite sure if it was polite to leave her cousins. Frances laughed and said, "Ah! ah! Alice, I don't believe you like talking to dirty little girls, after all."

"They are not dirty, and I do like talking to them very much," exclaimed Alice, as she ran off.

Mary and Jane were two of the nice children that Alice took pleasure in. Therefore she felt irritated and indignant when they were so rudely spoken of; for they were neat, clean, good little girls.

"I am so sorry for you," said Alice, as she came up to them, and sat down on the grass, her own tears beginning to flow as the little girls broke out into fresh weeping.

"Oh! Miss Alice," sobbed Mary at last, "what shall we all do without dear Tom? He was always so kind and so good, and now, just when mother thought he would do so well,"—and tears choked her utterance.

"Perhaps he won't die," whispered Alice, trying to

comfort her. "God will let him get well again, if we all pray to Him."

"But if he lives, miss, he will always be a cripple."

"Why so?" asked Alice. "People are not always cripples who break their legs."

"Oh! but, miss, his back is hurt, and I heard the neighbours say he can never be what he was. How can we pray for his life, if he is to be only a cripple?"

Alice did not immediately reply. Comforting in such a trouble as this was a new task to her. As she looked round in her perplexity, she caught sight of these words on a tombstone: "Not my will, but Thine, be done;" and taking the little girls tenderly by the hands, she directed their attention to them, and said, "We can at least pray that, dear Mary and Jane. Whatever God wills is sure to be for the best; and whether Tom dies or lives, you know it will be His doing."

But the little girls could only weep on; they could not yet take comfort from this thought. Alice looked pityingly at them, as she rose to go back to her cousins; and yielding to the sympathising yearnings of her loving heart, she stooped down and kissed each little pale, sad face, as she bid them "Good bye."

As Alice joined her cousins, Mrs. Seymour called them. "I am sorry, my dears," she said, meeting the children at the gate, "to have kept you so long; but I hope Alice has taken good care of you."

Kate laughed sarcastically, as she replied, "Alice found some companions that pleased her more than we did, aunt; and she forsook us for them."

"How can you say so, Kate?" exclaimed Alice indignantly. "Arthur said I might go." And turning to her mamma, she continued, "I only went to speak to Mary and Jane, they were crying so, and would not be comforted; they said their brother would either die, or be a cripple. Was it wrong to speak to them, mamma?"

"No, my dear; and I am sure your cousins will excuse you for having left them. We must all feel deeply for these poor people, in such a time of grief and trial."

"But, aunt," said Kate again, "surely you will not say Alice was right to kiss and embrace these little girls?"

Alice blushed violently; she had forgotten her cousins could see her from the porch, while she was talking to Jane and Mary. She hung down her head, and looked quite ashamed. She hardly knew if she had done right or wrong.

"If Alice did so, my dear," replied Mrs. Seymour to her niece, "she doubtless acted from a kindly feeling of love and sympathy, which made her forget, for a time, social differences. But I do not think," she added, taking Alice's hand, "that my little girl is ever likely to forget, in ordinary circumstances, what is due to herself and others. Sorrow, like another great leveller, Death, breaks down all social barriers. It must come to all classes alike; and if we have once known any great sorrow, a sympathetic chord is established in our hearts, which must vibrate at the sight of others' griefs, whether they be high or low."

"But the poor cannot feel like us, aunt?" asked Arthur.

"Why not, my boy; have they not the same bodies and souls?"

"I suppose we are all alike so far," answered the boy, musingly. "But there must be a difference somewhere, or they would hate dirt and disorder, and everything about them, as much as we do. Why are they not like us, aunt?"

"For two reasons, dear Arthur—the want of education and refinement, and the force of circumstances. We ought to pity, not despise the poor. But few of us would go through their ordeal of poverty and degradation from the cradle, and come out of it less hardened and repulsive than our ordinary poor people."

"Oh! then you do allow that they are repulsive, aunt," said Frances. "Why, Alice here wanted to persuade us they were really nice."

"Alice never sees poverty or the poor, in their worst phases, Frances; and many of her village friends are well conducted, intelligent children. But what I want to impress upon you, my dears, is this—that we ought to feel for the poor man as for one who might have done better things if differently circumstanced. We are all equal in God's sight. He sees no difference in the mind of the peasant or the king. Many talents and feelings may lie dormant in the hovel, because there is nothing to call them out or cultivate them, which would do honour to a palace."

"Then, perhaps, you would like every one to be equal in this world?" said Arthur.

His aunt smiled as she replied, "However much

we may wish for such a state of affairs, Arthur, the world's history proves to us that it is impossible. As long as we are what we are, it seems as if there must be rich and poor. Reason and the records of the past convince us that no state of society can exist, for any length of time, where the rights and positions of all can remain equal in everything. But I do not want to discuss these things with you, only remember, that if we are rich and others poor (I speak of rich and poor as classes), it is neither our merit nor their fault."

"I don't wonder now, you are so kind and loving to every one," answered Arthur. "Of course, if we can believe that we are really so much alike, we must be kind to the poor, and feel for them. Yet it seems hard to believe we might have been like those children," and he pointed to some ragged urchins at play in the distance.

"It is hard, Arthur, and a lesson scarcely learnt in a lifetime. It is only when we are really sensible of our own sinfulness, and the depravity of our hearts, that such a thing seems possible, or that we are sufficiently thankful for the education, position, and wealth which elevate and refine us. But there is a far higher ground where we find men's hearts meeting with mutual sympathy, and can recognise our equality."

"On religious grounds, I suppose, aunt," replied Arthur; "I have often heard people talk about it, but not exactly as you put it. It does only seem reasonable that, if we can be equal in religious things, we may be so in other things also. I must try and feel for the poor, aunt: you make it seem so cruel to be otherwise."

Mrs. Seymour looked kindly at her nephew, as he walked on thoughtfully. He was an intelligent, fine-looking lad, but hitherto his delicacy had been a great drawback to his education. He had done little else as yet but read every book he could lay his hands on. Regular study, or even much thinking, had been too fatiguing. He had lived an indolent life, petted by his parents, and lately much neglected by his elder sisters. But now his health was decidedly improving, and a tutor or school began to be talked of. The boy's mind, too, was becoming more vigorous, and the long dormant energy and talent were beginning to waken. Now was the time for "the good seed to be sown," and as his aunt watched him, she hoped it would be given her "to do what she could."

The three little girls had listened attentively to Mrs. Seymour's remarks. Frances whispered to her sister that nothing would make her believe *they* could ever have been common children.

Alice held her mother's hand tightly, as she talked with Arthur, and often looked up lovingly in her sweet face. All Mrs. Seymour said was not new to the little girl, but she was never tired of listening to her mother's instructions; and was very much pleased at the impression they seemed to make on Arthur.

"I like Arthur very much," she said to her mother, when alone with her that evening. "But Kate and Frances"—and she shook her head doubtfully—"must I like them too, mamma?"

"How can you ask such a question, my child?"

answered her mother; "must not the same charity we were talking about to-day, be extended to every one we know? Try not to think of your cousins' defects, my dear. No one is so faulty as not to have some good point, and on that a charitable spirit loves to dwell; and such a spirit my little Alice must pray to have towards her cousins, and then this visit will prove a blessing to herself, and perhaps to them."

CHAPTER VII.

SCHOOL-HOURS; OR, THE SEWING LESSON.

"My dear children," said Mrs. Seymour, the next morning at breakfast, to the three Rutherfords, "your uncle and I have decided that although you have come here for pleasure, it will not mar your enjoyment if we have an hour or two of regular employment every morning. You know that even of play we can have too much; so, to make play pleasanter, we will, if you please, work for a short time each day, and then you will all appreciate your freedom for the rest of it."

Alice looked pleased at this proposition, for she loved the lessons with her mother very much. But not so the cousins; and after breakfast they expressed their disapprobation of their aunt's plan in no measured terms.

"As if we had not lessons enough at school?" growled Kate. "It will spoil all our pleasure if we are to be kept in doors half the day."

"It is too bad, certainly," remarked Frances; "and I

don't wonder at your disliking it, Kate: aunt must find out now how backward you are."

"There you are at it again, Frances," said Arthur sharply, turning to his sister; "I wonder how many times a day you inform us of that fact. Can you never forget poor Kate's deficiencies? I had ten times rather be dull like her, than as conceited as you are."

"It does not matter to you whether you are clever or not," replied Frances; "you're always so ill, that, of course, you don't care about it."

"But he will get better some day soon," said Kate, "because I heard papa say so; and then, I only hope you'll find some one more clever than yourself, Frances."

"Well, what if I do?" rejoined her sister snappishly; "at any rate, I shan't be so vexed about it as somebody else that I know."

This quarrelling was put an end to by a call from Mrs. Seymour, and they walked off to the little sitting-room by no means in the best of tempers.

Alice was already there with her books and work. It was a pretty, cheerful room, looking out upon the garden; nor was there anything formidable in the face of the dear aunt, who awaited them with a smile.

Mrs. Seymour did not wish to make these school hours irksome to her nephews and nieces; and seeing the gloomy faces, she determined that, for that morning at least, the business should be more play than work. So she bade the children seat themselves, and bidding them pay attention, began reading an interesting history, stopping every now and then to ask questions.

After the history came geography, arithmetic, and other subjects, which Mrs. Seymour treated in the same way. She knew the general capabilities of her little pupils, and only put such questions as they could readily answer. Frances was soon in a state of eager excitement to give the most and the best answers, particularly as she found to her surprise, that the other three children were quite holding their own with her as they went along. For since Frances had been to school, all these ordinary studies were much neglected, for the sake of the more brilliant accomplishments for which she had unusual talents. Kate also did not fail to perceive that she was keeping pace with her sister, and became animated and attentive. Arthur and Alice had their share also, for Mrs. Seymour classed them by their ages, and allowed no one to answer out of turn. Unperceived by the children, she noted down the answers given by each child on the different subjects, for Mrs. Seymour was not long in observing Frances' eagerness to be first, her look of triumph when she answered well, or when the others had to pass a question. And her aunt hoped that her place would be such in the examination, as to humble her a little in her own estimation.

After an hour thus spent, Mrs. Seymour concluded her instructions by a general reading of the 19th chapter of St. Luke's Gospel. By this time the rain was falling heavily, and the children looked out with dismay at the heavy clouds, which foretold its continuance.

"Never mind, my dears," said Mrs. Seymour, "I will find you all something pleasant to do: but first we

must have a little needlework. See," she added, holding up some pretty little pinafores, "do you think you can help me to make these? Come, let me see which little girl will finish her seam first and best."

This was quite enough for Frances. She was all impatience to begin; and her aunt thought it necessary to remind her that the work must be neatly done. Now, working was one of the things that Kate could really do well. So it was with the pleasant hope of being successful that she settled herself to her seam; while Mrs. Seymour, who knew Arthur had a taste for drawing, provided him with paper and pencils, promising that, if his production was good enough, it should have a place in her album.

"What a pity it is wet to-day, mamma," said Alice, at last; "we shall not be able to go and ask how poor Tom Willis is."

"I thought it would be a wet day," replied her mother; "so I have already sent to make inquiries from the doctor, who says the poor boy is likely to live."

"But will he be a cripple, mamma?"

"In all probability he will, Alice. When the back is once seriously injured, it is almost impossible to regain perfect health."

"Poor Mary and Jane!" said Alice, musingly; "do you know, mamma, they spoke as if that would be worse than his dying. Why should they think so? Surely they would rather have him alive and crippled, than quite dead and gone away."

"So it seems to you, dear; but you must re-

member that the poor do not think about things as we do—they cannot."

"And can you tell us why?" asked Arthur, looking up: "I am sure papa and mamma would rather have me, weak and sick as I am, than not have me at all. Why don't poor fathers and mothers think the same?"

"Will you tell me first, Arthur, how poor people get money for food and clothing?"

"By working for it; and I have often heard that with the hardest work they can sometimes scarcely get enough."

"Then if a poor man is disabled and cannot work, how is he to live?"

Arthur thought for a moment, and then replied, "I suppose he must either starve or beg, unless somebody helps him."

"But if each person's work only supports himself, who is to help those who cannot help themselves?"

"The rich do that, don't they, aunt?"

"They ought to; but unfortunately none do as much as they might. And then, again, there is a noble spirit of independence amongst some of our poor, which scorns to take what has not been earned by honest labour."

"But there would be no degradation in taking help for those who are helpless among them," said the boy.

"We think so, and generally wish to do what we can; but I have often found that the rest of the family will work early and late, and deny themselves in every way to keep the helpless, and of this class is poor widow Willis. Ever since her husband's death she has kept herself and

her children without much aid from any one, beyond constant employment and liberal pay; it must have been a great relief to her, when her son was fairly started in life by her own honest exertions. But think of the change now. The poor boy is suddenly thrown back on her hands, a burden to himself and her for life, and all the hard earned gains of the last few years gone for nothing. No doubt she loves her son dearly, but can you wonder that such a thought as this should rise in her heart: 'Better for him to lie at rest in the quiet churchyard, than to live on in pain and want through many hopeless years?"

The children all looked thoughtful as Mrs. Seymour ceased speaking. Life was so fair and bright to them, that it was strange and startling to hear death talked of as preferable in any case.

"And do you think Tom would feel about it in the same way, aunt?" at last Kate asked.

"As far as mere worldly things are concerned I think he would, dear; he knows he will be a burden to his mother, and must suffer much himself. The longing alone for all the health, activity, and enjoyments which have been his, will make life intolerable. I think I know some one else who can enter a little into this feeling (and she glanced at Arthur), and yet that boy has more to make him happy than Tom can ever have. He has a cross, but a light and gilded one, I think, compared to that which poor Tom Willis must prepare to take up."

"Surely, aunt," exclaimed Frances, "you are not

comparing Arthur and this Tom Willis; what can there be in common between them?"

"The want of health and the sufferings they both have to bear, and also the longings for the happiness and employments which cannot consequently be theirs. But I see Arthur understands me," added Mrs. Seymour, looking at her nephew, who was bending over his drawing with a flushed face. He looked up and met her kindly glance.

"I never thought of my bad health as a cross before," he said; "I have often heard people speak of their crosses: are they these kind of things, aunt?"

"Yes, Arthur, crosses come to us in many forms—endless I might say, for I doubt if two people ever suffer exactly the same trials. Many crosses may be fitly spoken of as mere gilded trifles compared to others, hard and heavy, with suffering and temptation; and such a one, I fear, is in store for poor Tom Willis."

"And why is his heavier than mine, aunt? Just now you said I could feel for him, because I also suffer, and yet you now speak of my cross so lightly."

"Because, my dear boy, I wish to make you sensible of your blessings and thankful for them, instead of spending your time in vain repining." Arthur blushed, for it was quite true that he often exaggerated his ailments, and made them an excuse for selfish exactions. "Just compare yourself for a few moments, Arthur," continued Mrs. Seymour, "with this poor crippled boy: all to make suffering tolerable is yours, and all to make it intolerable is his. Then, will the boy whose cross is

lightened for him in every way refuse to take it up, and turn away into the bye-paths of selfish discontent?"

Arthur's eyes filled with tears. "Can it be taken up now, aunt?" he said; "or has he gone too far?"

"God forbid! But remember, dear boy, that the moment he turns the cross will be on him. There will be many a weary step of the selfish discontented path to be retrodden, before the right road is regained, and it is only in that right road that the cross can be a light one. But do you know, my dears, how to gain that road, and why, in it, our crosses may grow daily lighter?"

Arthur did not reply, and Kate and Frances also looked at a loss for an answer; only Alice whispered, "You know I do, mamma."

Mrs. Seymour then continued, "Who first bore the cross for us? not only the actual material cross, but who suffered for us, being 'in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin?' Heb. iv. 15. And why did Jesus suffer thus, my children? Not only as our example, but also that in Him we might have access to the Father, that we may 'come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need,' Heb. iv. 16. Crosses are countless in this world, my dears, and man never yet found out a way to bear them like God's way; if He gives the cross He also gives the help to bear it."

"We should indeed be badly off without that, mamma," said Alice gravely. "No one can follow Jesus without God's help, even if their cross is ever so light; can they, mamma?"

"No, my dear," replied Mrs. Seymour; "all man's wisdom and philosophy cannot help us here. The cross may be borne, perhaps, but it will be on some bye-path of man's invention, and not on that road over each step of which our Saviour bore His cross, heavy with the accumulated sins and woes of countless generations. The Spirit that conquered then is ever ready to help us to conquer now. We need only ask to have, and seek to find; 'for your heavenly Father' is ever ready to give 'the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.'"

At that moment a message came that Mrs. Seymour was wanted in the library, and she hastened away.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWO SISTERS.

THERE was silence for some minutes after Mrs. Seymour had gone; but presently Kate remarked, "What a strange idea that is, that every one has a cross."

"But it must be true," said Alice, "because it says so in the Bible."

"Yes, I know it does," answered her cousin; "but does not that mean grown-up people? I was thinking of children like us. Do you really think, Alice, that all have crosses?"

"Mamma says so, Kate; and I begin to believe it now."

"Have you a cross, then?" asked Frances, inquisi-

tively. Alice coloured, while her cousin continued, "Why, what can there be to cross you, Alice? You ought to be as happy as the day is long. Here you are alone, with everything to give you pleasure."

"Yes, but—*alone*," answered Alice quietly, turning away to hide her emotion.

Kate and Frances looked at each other in surprise. So this was Alice's cross. How stupid they had been not to think of it before. Although these little sisters were not all they ought to have been to each other, still they could not fail to recognise the pleasure of having a constant companion of their own age.

"I wonder if we have crosses too," whispered Frances confidentially to her sister. "It seems Alice and Arthur have. I have no doubt aunt will find us each one too, Kate, if we ask her," and she laughed.

But Kate did not answer. She was thinking too seriously on the subject, to speak irreverently about it. She went on steadily at her work, pondering her aunt's remarks. She dared not try to find out her own cross. If it was what conscience suggested, how had she borne it hitherto, and how could she ever bear it?

Soon afterwards, Mrs. Seymour returned to the young party with her own work. In a minute or two Frances jumped up, exclaiming, "There, aunt, my seam is done. I am so glad I have done first;" and she glanced triumphantly at Alice and her sister.

This was too much for poor Kate. Her heart was softened by her serious meditations, and she had made so sure of being first, at least in this. And now to be

beaten in the one thing she could do well. Her work fell to the ground, and she burst into tears.

"What a great baby!" muttered Frances to herself, turning away to the window to conceal a smile, which she had tact enough to feel would be displeasing to her aunt.

But Mrs. Seymour was already beside Kate.

"My dear child," she said gently, "I am sorry to see such a spirit of envy between you and your sister, that neither can bear the other to excel. What can this all end in, if it goes on?"

Kate hid her face in her hands, and continued to weep violently; her overwrought feelings could not be immediately restrained, but after a time she became more composed.

"I did not think you would have cared so much about this, my dear," continued Mrs. Seymour, when she saw that Kate could attend to her again, "or I would not have subjected you to this trial of skill. I only wished to excite you all to industry, and never thought jealousy could be called out by such a trifle. However, we must see if Frances is really the winner in this contest. Come, my dear, and let me see your work."

Frances came over from the window, and put the pinafore confidently into her aunt's hand; but one look was enough for Mrs. Seymour. "Why, Frances," she exclaimed, "how could you work so badly? I warned you to be careful. Why did your eagerness to be first tempt you to work so untidily?" and she pointed to many long stitches and irregularities. It was now

Frances's turn to look crestfallen, but she was too proud to cry; and, snatching the work from her aunt's hand, she sat down, and began to undo it.

"Take care, Frances," said Mrs. Seymour warningly, as the child plucked away angrily at the offending stitches; "you will tear the pinafore, if you are not more careful; and if I see much more of this temper I shall have to punish you."

"I have done now, aunt," said Kate, who had by this time recovered herself enough to put the few last stitches to her work. "I hope it is neat enough. Mamma says I work very well for my age."

Mrs. Seymour looked carefully over Kate's seam, and then, kissing her, said, "That will do very well indeed, my dear; I am quite satisfied with your work, but I am very far from being satisfied with the conduct of my little nieces."

"I am very sorry, aunt," answered Kate, with an effort to keep back the fast-rising tears; "but indeed I could not help it. It is so hard never to do anything well."

"But, my dear, who says you never do anything well? You have just shown me you can work well."

"But at school Frances is before me in everything, and they all call me stupid;" and Kate's tears broke forth again. Her usual pride and reserve gave way before her aunt's kindness and the morning's trials.

"Are you sure your sister is always before you, Kate?" asked Mrs. Seymour. "She may have more talent for some things, but which do you think answered best at our examination this morning?"

"Frances of course thinks she did," replied Arthur; "but I'm not so sure of it. I think it was either Alice or Kate."

"You are right, Arthur," said his aunt. "Kate gave the best and the most answers on the whole. You need not look incredulous, Frances (for that little girl looked up in surprise). See, here are my proofs (and she held up some papers). I have not failed to notice, my dear, how you underrate your sister; and as I had a suspicion that Kate could do better than you expected, I took the precaution of noting down all your answers. The only thing, Frances, in which you excelled her this morning was geography. In everything else Kate was first."

"How mean to take advantage of us in that way," thought Frances; "I should have done better, if I had known what aunt was doing;" and she tried to conceal her mortification over her work.

Kate blushed with pleasure at the unusual praise, and Alice and Arthur were delighted. They could not help feeling satisfaction at Frances getting the rebuff her conceit merited; and Mrs. Seymour continued, "I do not think, Kate, you need despair about yourself. You must exert yourself, my dear girl; you may perhaps be slow at learning, which always makes a person appear duller than others; but from what I have seen of you both, I am sure you are pretty nearly equal in ordinary things."

"But only in ordinary things, aunt," said Kate, whose momentary elation was subsiding, and giving place to her usual desponding opinion of herself. "You

only asked us common questions. Of course any one could answer them."

"Of course they could," put in Frances pertly, catching at this view of the case; "but I should like to see what hand you would make of French, or music, or drawing. You are quite welcome to your small triumph, Kate; but what *I* value is Mdlle. Duber's approbation. They do me justice at school, anyhow. Why, I suppose Mary and Jane, Alice's friends, could have answered as well as you this morning."

"The grapes are sour," said Arthur, laughingly, to his aunt; but to her this was too serious a matter for jesting.

"Oh! Frances, Frances," she exclaimed sadly, "how grievously you are abusing all God's good gifts to you. Did He give you talents only to minister to your self-conceit? Do you remember the chapter we read this morning? Can you give an account of your talents?"

"Why, aunt, I use them. What more can I do? I don't bury them," answered Frances, flippantly.

"Better almost bury them, my child, than use them in the service of Satan."

"Oh! aunt, you can't mean that I do that. What have I done so very wicked?" and Frances actually looked a little frightened.

Mrs. Seymour took her kindly by the hand, as she replied, "God has been very good to you, my child, in giving you more than an ordinary share of talents and quickness; but instead of this being a blessing to you, your abuse of them and your self-conceit are making

them a daily curse. You quite forget that God is the giver of all you have. It is no merit of yours that you are more clever than others, nor is it their fault. Do you ever think of this?"

"I can't help being pleased when I am praised, aunt; or thinking other people stupid when they are so," said Frances, rather sullenly.

"I know you yourself cannot help it, dear; but there is One who wishes you to do otherwise, and who will help you to do it, too."

Frances made a movement of impatience, as she replied peevishly, "I know all that, aunt. One would think we were heathens; you really speak as if we never read our Bibles, or heard about God. We can't be always thinking of these things."

"For shame, Frances," said Arthur, indignantly. "How dare you speak so rudely? You may be sure I shall tell papa of it. You are really becoming unbearable since you went to school."

"I am afraid school has only developed the evil that was always there, Arthur," said Mrs. Seymour, turning to him. "I am very sorry to see your sister making such misery for herself. She has a heavy cross in her naturally self-conceited disposition, and she is allowing her talents to aggravate the evil. Envy, hatred, and malice, all follow in the train of self-conceit; and yet she makes no effort to overcome this besetting sin, but goes on daily perverting by its means all God's good gifts. Better to be dull and common-place, than use all our noblest powers for the promotion of

evil in others, and the consummation of our own eternal misery."

"Aunt," whispered Kate, after a moment's silence, "I will try and bear my cross, and not be discontented any more at not being clever. Poor Frances, hers is the worst cross, I think; for it is so pleasant to be praised, and so hard not to be naughty about it, I am sure." But she added more gaily, "At any rate, I have not often that chance, so much the better for me."

Just then Alice, who was looking out of the window, cried out, "Oh! mamma, there is the carriage coming through the park. Where can it have been?"

"Cannot you guess, dear?" said her mother, smiling. "Who do you like to have here on a wet day?"

"Is it Margaret, then?" said the child, eagerly.

"Yes, Margaret and all the little ones, to spend the rest of the day with you."

"Oh! how delightful. How kind of you, mamma;" and Alice kissed her mother. "May we put everything away before they come?"

So the three little girls were soon busy putting away books and work. Arthur still kept his pencils and paper. He liked the quiet occupation of drawing, and confessed to not feeling much interest about the new arrivals. So they left him in possession of the little sitting-room, and repaired to the nursery, where the Conways soon joined them.

They were a very happy party. Little Eda was charmed with the twins, and Julia took to herself patronising airs as the eldest of the younger children. But, by and bye,

Margaret ran down stairs for a basket, which she brought carefully to the nursery, and opening it, took out Alice's white kitten, Snowflake, which was now old enough to leave its mother. The poor little thing looked very much frightened, and I dare say wished itself back again beside its dear mother at the parsonage, as so many of us do, when we first start in life. But little Eda at last settled the little soft white thing in her lap; and her gentle caresses soothed it into a light slumber, broken every now and then by a soft purr of satisfaction as it felt the little protecting hand on its head or back.

Dinner time came, and the afternoon passed away only too quickly. They had many a merry game, but towards dusk they were tired of play, and clustered round Mrs. Seymour to hear a story. She had been much pleased by observing that her nieces were more amiable than she had expected. The morning's conversation had not been quite thrown away even upon the volatile Frances; and when the two little girls went to rest that night, after the Conways' departure, their aunt perceived more warmth and affection in their evening kiss than usual. It emboldened her to say, as she returned it, "God bless you, my dears, and give you His help to be what you ought to be, and may be. Oh! seek Him early while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near; for whosoever cometh unto Him, He will in no wise cast out."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FEVER IN THE VILLAGE.

WEEKS passed quickly away, and summer had given place to autumn. Frances had had the satisfaction of eating many a bunch of grapes whose ripening she had eagerly watched, and the delicious plums and peaches had quite realized Kate's expectations. But now their season had passed away, as well as that of the bright flowers, Eda's especial pets. The days were often wet and cold, making the house and a comfortable fire the pleasantest resort. Mrs. Seymour now saw more of her nieces, and was glad to find a decided improvement in Kate. Even Frances sometimes seemed about to turn over a new leaf, but her impressions wanted depth, and were generally dissipated before any permanent improvement was made. Mrs. Seymour often thought that the child must have something to thoroughly arouse and startle her out of her selfish conceit, if seriousness was ever to be produced. But she knew that this rested in God's hands, and that in His own good time the call would come. She could but pray and hope for the best.

One day Mr. Seymour came in to luncheon, with an anxious expression on his usually cheerful countenance. "I have just heard, my dear," he said to his wife, "that the worst kind of scarlet fever is in the village."

Mrs. Seymour looked up in alarm. "And who is ill?" she asked.

"The doctor's children were the first to have it, and are very ill. Jones, the sexton, has lost his eldest boy, and some other little one is not expected to live many hours. I saw Mr. Conway, and he tells me that it began some days ago, but he did not hear of it till this morning. The doctor had hoped that it would not go beyond his own family; but now that Jones' boy is dead, it cannot be concealed."

Mrs. Seymour became very grave. It was many years since she had been in contact with this dangerous disease; but what she had known of it, fully justified her feeling the greatest alarm for her little community.

"We have only Alice and Eda to fear for," she said to her husband; "fortunately Arthur, Frances, and Kate have all passed through the ordeal. In fact, I have always attributed Arthur's delicacy to the after effects of the disease. But I am very sorry for our poor people. It is so many years since we have had scarlet fever here, that but few of the children have had it, and I fear it will run through them all. I shall not be able to do much for them on account of our own little ones. We must not expose them to the infection, and must forbid them all intercourse with the villagers. It is the only thing we can do, and we must trust to God for the rest."

"Shall we not be able to see Margaret, then?" asked Alice.

"As long as they continue well at the parsonage, my dear, there will be nothing to prevent it; they may escape altogether, but the little ones have not had the fever."

"I hope they won't have it at all, mamma," said Alice; "it must be dreadful to be ill."

"It is, dear. Health is a blessing that but few of us rightly appreciate while it is ours. God grant, my children, it may be always yours, and that none of you may be laid on a bed of pain and sickness, at least for many years."

A few days before this it had been arranged that this very afternoon was to be spent by Alice and her cousins at the parsonage. As Mr. Conway had told Mr. Seymour, that morning, that they were still expected, and that all his little folks were quite well, there seemed no reason for depriving the children of an afternoon's enjoyment. The parsonage was close to the church, and, therefore, at some distance from the rest of the village. There were, also, two or three cottages on the same spot, one of which was occupied by the widow Willis. As long as the enemy did not come into this neighbourhood, there was no occasion to give up the visits to the parsonage or to the poor woman with her crippled boy.

Still Mrs. Seymour could not help feeling unusually anxious about her little charges, as she watched them scampering across the park to the parsonage. She would fain have fled away with them all from the infected spot, to purer and more healthy air; but she knew this was a faithless, sinful feeling. They were as safe there as elsewhere, for over each child a Father's eye watched vigilantly—an eye which never slumbered or slept. If she took all reasonable precautions for preserving them in health, she might leave them trustingly in His hands.

The young people met that afternoon with mutual delight, for they had not seen each other for some days. They played in the garden till the evening, then Mrs. Conway summoned them into the house.

Margaret's beautiful doll's-house was an unfailing source of amusement when Alice and her cousins were at the parsonage. It was usually all cleaned out and freshly arranged, and there was much friendly debating about the legitimate positions of the various chairs and tables. But this afternoon was not to pass off so amicably. Alice happened to remark to Kate how neatly Margaret had made up some of the things, and Frances, who could not bear to hear any one praised but herself, immediately differed with her cousin.

"I am sure these are not well made," she exclaimed, pointing to some of the articles in question. "Just see here; this chair will only stand on three legs, and that table is quite crooked."

"Oh! Frances," whispered Kate, "don't be so rude to Margaret; you forget we are in her house."

"I don't care for that," said Frances, doggedly, and making no attempt to lower her voice; "truth is truth, and I'd defy any one to say that furniture is made up properly. I am sure I could do it a great deal better. I only wish I had the chance of showing you how well I could turn them out."

Alice and Kate looked quite ashamed to hear Frances talk in this rude boastful way; but Margaret, who, whatever her faults might be, was certainly not conceited, replied quietly, "If you want to try your hand at them,

Frances, you can easily get some sets: I saw a number of them at Mrs. Dawson's the other day. But I warn you, Frances, that you will find it more difficult than you think to make up; however, you must try, I suppose, to be convinced."

"I am afraid Frances won't be able to get any now, then," said Kate; "for you know, Margaret, the scarlet fever is in the village, and Aunt Seymour has forbidden us to go there, or get anything from there at present."

"Have you not had it, then?" asked Margaret: "I have, but not the three little ones. Dear little things, I hope they will escape."

"I hope they will," answered Kate; "we have all had it except Eda. It was a long time ago, before she was born, and it is since then that Arthur has been so delicate. We had another little brother at that time, a baby, but he died of it, and I know mamma always dreaded Eda's having it. Aunt Seymour knows all this; and then, of course, she must be anxious for Alice."

"We must hope it won't come amongst us now," said Margaret, and the conversation took another turn.

But Frances's desire for the furniture was not so soon forgotten. It was particularly irritating to her not to be able immediately to prove the superiority of her toy-making abilities. The longer she looked at the little things the more she longed to try her hand at them; and before the evening was over she determined to get some sets at any price, even if she had to go to the village for them herself. The fever and her aunt's commands were all forgotten in the eagerness to show

off her talents, and have her conceit gratified by the credit she must obtain if successful. Frances went to bed that night revolving all kinds of plans for getting possession of the coveted furniture. Of course it must be a secret till made up, but this only enhanced the attractiveness of the whole scheme.

CHAPTER X.

THE FEVER BROUGHT HOME.

For some time past Mrs. Seymour had wished to make an expedition to the neighbouring town for some shopping and visiting, but hitherto the weather had been too uncertain. The morning after the children's visit to the parsonage was bright and cloudless, and Mr. Seymour desired his wife to take advantage of it.

"I suppose I ought to do so," said Mrs. Seymour, "only then I must leave one of the elder children at home with Eda, and I am sorry to have to deprive any of them of the pleasure of going with me."

The little people looked anxiously round, each hoping one of the others would volunteer to stay at home. Frances's first thought was, "What a good opportunity for getting the paper furniture;" still it was not easy to give up the pleasant expedition. For a moment she was undecided, when something whispered to her heart how much she would be praised if she cheerfully gave up the drive. That settled the matter.

"I will stay at home, aunt, if I may," she said with a pleasant smile.

Mrs. Seymour looked as surprised and pleased as Frances expected, and replied, "You will have a long lonely day, I fear, my dear. Are you quite sure you wish to stay at home?"

"Yes, indeed, aunt," answered the little girl, quite confirmed in her resolution by her aunt's evident pleasure at her unusual self-denial; "I shall amuse myself very well with Eda and Simmons."

"Let me stay instead of you," said Alice, anxiously; "you know I have often been to the town, but it will all be new to you. Do go, Frances."

"No, thank you, Alice," replied her cousin, "I don't care at all about it; you will enjoy it much more. You forget, as I have always lived in a town, it would be nothing new to me."

Alice was going to renew her entreaties, but Mrs. Seymour checked her, saying, "As Frances has volunteered to stay at home, Alice, we must not deprive her of the pleasure of being generous and self-denying: so you and Kate run away and get dressed."

Frances blushed at her aunt's praise, but partly with shame, for she felt how little it was deserved. However, she must play her part out now, and she cheerfully helped her sister and cousin to get ready. But she was quite impatient for them to be gone, for she began rather to regret her generosity, and felt that she could not be satisfied with herself for being so foolish, till the object was attained that had induced such a sacrifice.

Before the happy party started, Mrs. Seymour kissed Frances most affectionately. She could not help hoping the child had improved when she so unselfishly denied herself a long anticipated pleasure for the sake of another.

"I hope you will not be very dull, my child," she said; "I have ordered you a nice little dinner, with Eda and Simmons, and in the afternoon you can pay a visit at the parsonage; but don't be out late. Good bye."

The "good bye" was echoed by the three children; Arthur on the driver's box with the coachman, and Kate and Alice inside with Mrs. Seymour. A few moments afterwards they were gone, and then Frances could not help shedding some tears of regret as she watched them driving down the avenue; but in a few minutes she recovered her composure, and ran away to find Simmons, and try to persuade her to go out before dinner. However, Simmons was not to be persuaded; and Frances had to curb her impatience, and amuse herself the best way she could till dinner-time. Soon afterwards they started for the parsonage.

It was now the chief difficulties of Frances's scheme had to be overcome; for she must either induce Simmons to come with her to the village, or go there by herself. As soon as they were fairly in the park, Frances bid Eda run on before, and, turning to the nurse, said,

"I am going to ask you a very great favour, Simmons; but you are so kind and good, I'm sure you will grant it. No one is so ready to oblige me as you are."

"Well, Miss Frances, what is it? I am always glad to do what I can for you."

"Then, will you come with me to the village this afternoon, for I do want so much to get something at Mrs. Dawson's?"

"You forget Mrs. Seymour's orders, my dear young lady. We are none of us to go to the village while the fever is there. It is so dreadfully catching that we might bring it home in our clothes to Miss Eda or your cousin."

"That's all stuff and nonsense, Simmons. I have often heard papa say that diseases are never carried about in that way; and surely he knows best. Of course it won't do to take Eda there; but we can manage it very nicely by leaving her with the Conways."

"But I daren't disobey your aunt, Miss Frances," persisted Simmons. "Supposing any harm came of it, I should never forgive myself."

"No harm can come of it, Simmons. No one will know anything about it but ourselves. Now do, there's a dear, good creature, come with me; if you don't, I shall only have to go alone, for go I will. But I am sure, dear Simmons, you will come with me, and then I will give you a nice new neck ribbon; we can get it at Taylor's as we go along. I saw such a beauty there the other day, that will just match your nice blue dress."

"But do you really think there is no chance of our bringing home the fever, Miss Frances?" said the nurse, beginning to waver. "I always like to oblige you; and if you are sure it will do no harm, I don't mind going with you, rather than you should go alone."

"That's a good Simmons," cried Frances, joyfully;

"I was sure you would listen to reason, and not believe all the old women's stories about the fever being so catching. Never fear, it'll be all right."

They soon afterwards reached the parsonage. Margaret was delighted to see them, and wanted Frances to take off her bonnet, as there was still an hour or two of daylight, and they need not go home till dusk.

"I am afraid I can't stay this afternoon," said Frances; "Simmons and I have some commissions to do. But will you take care of Eda while we are gone?"

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Conway. "Not to the village, I hope, with that dreadful fever all about."

"I was to call at Widow Willis's for aunt," answered Frances, who had this excuse all ready; and to avoid further questions, she turned away.

"You go in here," said Frances, as they reached the haberdasher Taylor's, and giving Simmons her purse, she added, "Choose any ribbon you like, and come on to Mrs. Dawson's. We must not waste time, or Mrs. Conway may suspect something."

Simmons was nothing loath to go into Taylor's on such an errand; and Frances went on to Mrs. Dawson, the stationer's. There were no other customers in the shop, much to the little girl's satisfaction; for the fewer people that saw her in the village the less chance of detection. Mrs. Dawson waited behind the counter, with red eyes and anxious look.

"Good day, Mrs. Dawson," said Frances; "will you please show me the little sets of paper furniture you got from town, like Miss Conway's?"

Mrs. Dawson soon produced them, inquiring at the same time for every one at the park, while Frances looked over the little sets. Before she had made her choice, Simmons came in, and bid her be quick, as it was getting cold and damp.

"Have you no set with a piano?" asked Frances, anxiously of the shopkeeper. "I want the handsomest sets I can get. Have you no more?"

Mrs. Dawson glanced at them, and replied, "We have more than these somewhere, miss. I must call Anna; she will know where they are."

Anna soon answered her mother's call and question. "Don't you remember, mother," she said, "that we took some up to Sarah yesterday to amuse her?"

"Aye, sure enough we did, child; but all this trouble and sickness drives things out of one's head. Go, fetch them, Anna. This is a sad time for us all, miss," she continued, addressing Frances; "so many of the children ill. Our poor Sarah is very bad to-day, and I fear is getting the fever. I wonder, miss, you were not afraid to come near us."

"Oh! we have all had the scarlet fever long ago," replied the child. Anna just then brought down the other sets, and Frances selected two of these, and got all the things necessary for making them up. The parcel was soon in Simmons's pocket, with the neck-ribbon which had purchased the faithless nurse's consent; and they both hurried back to the parsonage.

As they passed Widow Willis's cottage, Frances recollected that she must pay her a visit, to account for her

absence. She just made a general inquiry, in her aunt's name, as to Tom's health, and then rushed out again. She dared not waste any more time. She had saved herself a falsehood, and that was all she wanted. She could truthfully affirm that she had seen Widow Willis.

"What have you been doing all this time, Frances?" asked Margaret, as the little girl came to fetch her sister.

"I said I was going to Widow Willis," replied Frances, unblushingly; "and to Widow Willis, of course, I have been."

"Her society must have been very attractive to have kept you so long," said Margaret, drily; "you must be getting quite a taste for such visitings, Frances."

"Perhaps I am," replied the other, shortly; "stranger things have happened. But come, Eda, we must go;" and, after a hasty good-bye, they started for home.

Frances was all impatience to begin the dearly bought toys; so as soon as they reached the house she begged Simmons to let her work at it till tea-time; and as it was to be a secret, to keep it in her room, where there would be less chance of discovery than elsewhere. Simmons consented, provided Frances promised to take good care of her sister Eda for an hour, while she went to have a chat with the housekeeper.

Frances could not of course refuse, though she knew it was wrong of Simmons to leave Eda; so the nurse lighted the lamp, and went down stairs.

Frances's nimble fingers were soon hard at work at her furniture. To amuse and keep the little one quiet she

had given her a pair of scissors and the outside wrappers of the sets, on which were pictures of some of the articles; and little Eda was quite happy and busy trying to imitate her sister.

Thus employed Simmons found them both when she returned with the tea; afterwards she helped Frances to put everything away in an empty drawer to be out of sight; and the little girl was just going down to the drawing-room when the carriage returned.

Alice and her two cousins had had a delightful day. They had bought each other many new books and toys, and had all subscribed together to buy a little workbox for Frances, "who had been so generous as to stay at home." Frances found it rather embarrassing to give an account of her own day, but she made the best of it, told of her visit to the Conways and to Widow Willis, and hoped her "aunt was not angry with her for calling." Once again did the unworthy child receive the affectionate commendation she so little merited; and her blushes of shame were mistaken for those of modesty. But bedtime came at last, and sleep closed the bright eyes, and stilled the active little tongues, of all the young party.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRST SUFFERER.

In the course of two or three days Frances contrived to pay many stealthy visits to Simmons's room, and to finish the set of drawing-room furniture. It quite realized her expectations; for to do the little girl justice, few children of her age could surpass her in anything, if she chose to exert herself. It was with no small satisfaction that Frances, on the evening of the third day, arranged it all on the table, and called Simmons and Eda to come and look.

But, of course, this praise-loving little girl could not be satisfied with such a limited display of her performances, and she began thinking how she could manage to get Margaret invited to come and see them, that in displaying her handywork to her astonished eyes she might enjoy the full triumph of success.

It was, therefore, with much pleasure that Frances heard her aunt tell Alice before they went to bed, that the little Conways were to spend the following afternoon with them, if all was well.

The next morning passed very slowly away for the impatient Frances. The usual lessons were so badly performed as to subject her to Mrs. Seymour's censure. But this only made matters worse, for then mortified vanity increased her bad temper and irritability. Dinner-

time came at last; and with the Conways' arrival afterwards, Frances' good temper returned.

The afternoon was damp and chilly, so that Mrs. Seymour advised the young people to be content with in-door amusements; and accordingly Margaret and her sister and brothers hastened to the nursery to take off their walking things. Now was the time for Frances to produce her treasures. So, telling Margaret she had something to show her, which she would bring to the little sitting-room, she ran off to fetch them.

But when Frances opened the door of Simmons's room she was much surprised to find the nurse sitting with Eda asleep in her lap, and weeping violently. "What's the matter, Simmons?" she asked, as she opened the drawer and began arranging the furniture on a small tray she had brought for the purpose.

"It's all along of that horrible furniture," said the nurse spitefully; "I wish I'd never set eyes on it, Miss Frances. I'd give all I have if it were only safe back at Mrs. Dawson's."

"Why, what ails the poor little chairs and tables?" asked Frances, smiling.

"Don't you know, miss, that Mrs. Dawson's children have the scarlet fever, and didn't those horrid things come out of the very room where little Sarah was sick. If poor little Miss Eda don't catch it, my name's not Simmons. It's my belief the darling is sickening for it now. She was coughing in the night, and complained of her head before she fell off to sleep. Oh! dear! Oh! dear! what shall I do when your aunt finds

it out? How wrong I was to let you get those things; and then, to make matters worse, you let her play with them just fresh from the sick room. I'm sure she'll get the fever, and die like her poor little brother;" and the poor woman wept louder than before.

"What nonsense you talk, Simmons," said Frances, hastily; "as if such a thing could happen. Didn't I tell you, papa said diseases were never given in that way? The idea of your sitting down to cry because Eda has a headache, and has gone to sleep. Don't make a fuss about nothing;" and the little girl hurried away.

But Frances felt more deeply than she chose to express. What if Eda were really getting the fever? And was it her fault? For a moment she was inclined to put away the toys, in case things should turn out as the nurse anticipated. But the fear of such a punishment and detection, had not been sufficiently powerful to overcome the cravings of the little girl's self-conceit. For the sake of the triumph now, she dared all the after consequences; and boldly carried the toys into the sitting-room, where the children anxiously awaited her.

"Oh! how pretty, and how beautifully made up," was their unanimous exclamation, as they examined the different articles, which were handsomer and more elaborate than any of Margaret's. "But where did you get them, and when did you make them?" asked Alice.

"Oh! that's my secret," said Frances, laughing. "Where there's a will, there's a way, as I think I have proved."

Alice and Kate looked at each other in bewilderment,

and began guessing; but they could get nothing from Frances except a laughing silence. She could not tell the truth, and therefore thought it best to say nothing.

At last Alice turned to Margaret, and asked her to help them to find out this secret. But Margaret had her own conjectures on the subject. She blushed when thus appealed to, and looked up imploringly at Frances, who met her glance unflinchingly, and would not appear to understand her; and Margaret, shaken in her suspicions, turned away, saying to Alice, "If you who live in the same house with Frances can't find out the secret, I'm sure I can't help you. But where is little Eda all this time?"

The little ones now perceived that Eda had not yet made her appearance, and asked if they might go and find her. So the little troop of merry children hastened away through the long passages to the little girl's room. On their way they met Arthur, and when he heard where they were going, he turned and went with them, as he had not seen little Eda since the early morning.

When they entered the room, the children found Simmons (who had got over her fright) chatting cheerfully to Eda, who was sitting in her lap, but with flushed cheek and heavy eyes. When she spoke she often coughed, and complained of a pain in her throat. All the children crowded round her, showing their love and sympathy by kisses and caresses. They were "so sorry poor Eda was sick."

For a few moments Arthur joined the rest in their efforts to amuse the little one; but suddenly a thought

seemed to strike him, and jumping up he hastened out of the room. Soon afterwards Frances, whose vanity was only half satisfied with the praise her work had obtained, persuaded the elder girls to return with her to the sitting-room, where she had left the furniture, that it might be again looked at and admired.

But Frances found it in the hands of some one to whom she had not intended to show it at present, viz., Mrs. Seymour. The lady turned round as the children entered, and asked, "Whose is this pretty furniture, my dears? I have been looking at it all, and find it so well made that I am anxious to know who did it."

"Frances made it all by herself," cried the children. "We never knew anything about it till to-day."

"Frances, was it?" said Mrs. Seymour in surprise, "She was the last of you I should have thought of."

"Then you were not in her secret, mamma," exclaimed Alice. "We thought you might have got them for her when we went to town. It was the only thing we could think of, for Frances wouldn't tell us anything."

"Perhaps she will tell me," said Mrs. Seymour, turning to the little girl.

Frances blushed, but was silent till her aunt repeated the question.

"I don't choose to tell," she then said doggedly; "surely I may get toys for myself with my own money, without telling every one where and when."

"Frances!" exclaimed her aunt, "how can you speak to me so impertinently? you quite forget yourself, my

child. Explain this mystery at once, or I shall be compelled to punish you severely."

But at that moment Arthur ran into the room: "I have found you at last, aunt," he cried; "I have had such a hunt for you all over the house. Pray come to Eda's room, for I fear she is very ill."

"Surely not, Arthur," said his aunt in alarm, as she followed him out of the room; "Simmons said she was quite well this morning."

"I am afraid she has scarlet fever," answered the boy, as he hurried her along.

When they entered the little girl's room Mrs. Seymour found Eda in the act of pushing away, with her hot hands, the little Conways, who were inviting her to play with many endearments; while Julia stood behind her kissing her golden curls and smoothing them with her hands. Eda looked up at her aunt as she bent over her, saying hoarsely, "Eda sick—Eda's throat hurt."

"Arthur," said Mrs. Seymour, turning quickly to her nephew, "take Julia and the twins to their sister, then go for your uncle. Ask him to order the carriage to take the Conways home, and to send for the doctor. I fear your little sister is indeed getting the fever."

Arthur hurried the little ones away, and then Mrs. Seymour tried to persuade Eda to come to her, for Simmons, whose fears had returned with the lady's last words, was weeping almost hysterically.

But the little child clung to her nurse: in the hour of sickness the best known and most familiar one is always the dearest. "I won't leave you, Simmy," she said;

"but don't cry so;—look, your tears are spoiling the nice new ribbon," and the little thing lifted her pinafore and tried to wipe off the offending spots.

"Oh! don't, darling, don't," cried the nurse; "I wish I'd never seen that ribbon; 'twas in an evil hour I bought it, when it may cost you your sweet life." And the poor woman moaned and sobbed aloud.

"What is the meaning of all this, Simmons?" said Mrs. Seymour; "what has that ribbon to do with Eda and her illness?"

The unhappy woman clasped her hands as she exclaimed, "Forgive me; forgive me, ma'am; but I went to the village the day you were away."

"For the sake of that ribbon you disobeyed my orders, and have endangered your little charge's life?" said Mrs. Seymour.

"'Twas Miss Frances gave me the ribbon, ma'am. She wanted to go to Dawson's, and I was wicked enough to take the ribbon and hold my tongue."

Mrs. Seymour stood for a moment petrified with grief and amazement at this sudden and unexpected disclosure. "You let her go to Dawson's, Simmons," she said at last, "and they have the fever there! It was to buy that furniture, I suppose; I thought I recognised it. But I did not think Frances was so guilty. How did it all happen?"

Now that the ice was broken and the worst told, Simmons was able to check her tears, and tell Mrs. Seymour all we already know of the walk to the parsonage and the visit to the village; nor did she

forget to mention that the sets Frances chose came from the sick child's chamber. She concluded with many excuses for her own unfaithfulness and entreaties for forgiveness.

"Oh! Simmons," said Mrs. Seymour, sadly, "see the mischief you have wrought; it hardly seems the time to talk of forgiveness. We must do all we can to avert the terrible punishment that may be in store for you and that guilty child Frances. I fear this poor little one will be very ill; she requires all our thoughts now. You must undress and put her to bed."

Poor Simmons was quite broken down with self-reproach; and Mrs. Seymour had to bid her bestir herself, and prove her repentance by a more tender attendance on her little charge, before the nurse roused herself to active exertion. Then leaving her undressing Eda, Mrs. Seymour sought the other children.

They were all in the sitting-room, looking pale and frightened. "Is Eda very ill?" asked Alice, as her mother entered.

"It is scarlet fever I fear, my child; and I have no difficulty now in accounting for its sudden visit to us." Then turning to her niece, she continued: "I know everything now, Frances; Simmons has told me all that passed the day we were away. Your own conscience will punish you enough, I fear, for your duplicity and disobedience, when it is likely to entail such fearful consequences on us all."

Frances quailed before her aunt's unusual sternness; and all the other children stood aghast, while Margaret

exclaimed: "Then you did get the furniture at Dawson's. Oh, Frances, how could you be so naughty! That was what kept you so long when you came to see us. I thought so, and was sure of it when I saw the things to-day. Oh! Frances, how dared you do it! I feel as if I never could like you again;" and Margaret gathered her little sister and brothers around her, and stood aloof from the guilty child, who still tried to brave out her shame. Even Alice and Kate drew away instinctively from one who had so grossly offended.

Frances looked up and found herself standing alone. At last her pride gave way; she turned from them, and hid her face in her hands. Her guilt appeared to her in its true colours, and a bitter, unavailing remorse took possession of her. It was her vanity, leading on to disobedience and deceit, that had brought this trouble on them all. There could be no peace now for her till all danger was past and gone.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Seymour hastened the Conways' departure, and wrote a few lines to their mother accounting for their sudden return home, as, owing to the negligence of the nurse and her niece, the little ones had been unfortunately exposed to the infection of the fever, which Eda had taken. She promised full explanations at some future time, and advised her to be careful of the little ones if they seemed at all unwell.

Just as the children drove off with this note Mr. Seymour returned with the doctor, for whom he had gone himself on receiving his wife's message.

They all hastened to Eda's room, who by this time

was comfortably in bed. The doctor looked grave as he examined his little patient, and pronounced her, without doubt, sickening with scarlet fever, and, he feared, in its worst form. "I am surprised at your having it here," he remarked, "for you are so far from the village that you were likely to escape. However, these diseases are very capricious, and there is no accounting sometimes for their sudden visits. I trust Miss Alice will not catch the fever. She has not seen her cousin to-day, I hope?"

"Unfortunately both Alice and all the little Conways were here not half an hour ago," replied Mrs. Seymour, sadly. "Simmons concealed Eda's illness from me,—I should have known nothing of it if Arthur had not come for me. I do not think so much about Alice; but it is hard on poor Mrs. Conway for us to have brought her little ones in contact with this dreaded disease. I fear they can hardly escape."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, and said it was just possible. He then gave directions for Eda's treatment and took his leave, promising to call again before night. Afterwards Mrs. Seymour took her husband aside, and told him the tale of Frances's disobedience. It was a sad story: the nurse's culpable weakness, and the meanness of the little girl stooping to bribe her to a compliance to her wishes. Mr. Seymour was greatly grieved, and inclined to punish Frances most severely; but his wife suggested that nothing they could do would be so salutary as God's own dealings with the child, and the chastise-

ment with which He had been pleased to follow up her guilt. They could only pray that it might not rest too heavy on them all, and do what they could for the innocent little sufferer.

CHAPTER XII.

LIGHT THROUGH THE CLOUD.—CONCLUSION.

THE next few days were anxious ones for all at the park. Eda grew rapidly worse, and the fever developed itself most virulently. For some hours the child was in imminent danger; but at last she was pronounced safe, just in time to allow Mrs. Seymour to give her attention to Alice, who had begun to sicken. Once again came the wearing anxiety and suspense, till she, too, was past the crisis and doing well. It was only then that Mrs. Seymour could breathe freely, or think of the other children, who had wandered disconsolately about the house during those sad days; too anxious about their sister and Alice to be able to amuse themselves, and too young to be of much use in their sick rooms.

Frances's state of mind had been most pitiable while her sister was in danger. Every one felt sorry for her, although they could not help blaming her as the chief cause of all their trouble. She had become a little more cheerful, when all their anxieties began again about the little Conways. Julia fell ill near the same

time as Alice, and got over the disease as favourably; and then came the news that the twins were very ill, worse even than little Eda had been. Mrs. Seymour hurried off to see if she could be of any use. The children watched anxiously for her return, especially poor Frances. She knew it was her fault that they had been exposed to the infection; for she ought not to have taken them to Eda's room when she was ill. But Frances had been so unwilling to believe that her disobedience had given her sister the fever, and so taken up with herself and her own performances, that she had not thought of it. The poor child was now suffering the keenest remorse. From beginning to end she saw her conduct as it was: how the desire to prove her superiority to Margaret had led her on to disobedience, and tampering with a servant's fidelity; and then how, in her selfish triumph, she had exposed their little guests to the danger.

At last Mrs. Seymour returned. The children met her at the door. She was very grave. Frances looked up in her face, but could not ask for the news she dreaded to hear. Mrs. Seymour laid her hand kindly on the child's shoulder, her repentance and suffering were too acute not to merit some pity. "They are no better, my poor child," she said gently, "and you must prepare yourself for the worst. But God is merciful, and may yet spare them to their parents, and avert this terrible punishment from you. Oh! Frances, what trouble you have brought upon us all;" and Mrs. Seymour sat down, and covering her face with her

hands burst into tears. They were the first she had shed since the anxiety began. It was no time for weeping then, when so much had to be done.

Mrs. Seymour was worn out with her own long watching, and broken down with the sight of the great grief at the parsonage. But she could not long indulge her emotion, for a frightened exclamation from Kate made her look up hastily. Frances stood where her aunt had left her, pale as death, and shaking from head to foot, while she gasped convulsively for breath. As Mrs. Seymour approached her she gave a shrill scream, and went off into violent hysterics. The fit was long and severe, but at last it subsided, and Frances lay on the sofa quite exhausted. Her aunt administered a restorative; and covering her with a shawl, begged her to try and compose herself to sleep, while she went to look after the little convalescent upstairs.

An hour or two afterwards Mrs. Seymour gently opened the library door and looked in. Frances was on her knees beside the sofa. She raised her head when she heard the door open, but hid her face again when she saw her aunt, and began crying.

Mrs. Seymour came into the room, and locking the door, knelt down beside her niece. She put her arms round her, and said, "I am rejoiced, my child, to find you seeking comfort where alone it can be found. Let us both supplicate Him, if it be possible, to take this cup from us, yet not our will, but His be done."

"I can't pray, aunt," sobbed the child: "I am too wicked, God won't hear me. But oh! if the twins die,

I shall never be happy again. Do pray, aunt—God will hear you."

"And you also, my poor child. You have sinned against us, and in His sight, but come like the prodigal, and cast yourself at His feet. Jesus stands ready to pardon and receive you. His precious blood can wash away your sins. Only come to the Cross, my child; and through it become reconciled to your offended God and Father."

"But will He spare the twins, aunt? I can only think of them; only say they won't die," and Frances clasped her hands, and looked up wildly at her aunt.

"My dear child," replied Mrs. Seymour with gentle firmness, "the dear boys are in God's hands, and we can only pray Him to do with them as seemeth good in His sight; but whether they live or die, Frances, makes no difference with regard to you, and your transgressions: if nothing had come of it, my child, your sin was still the same; and oh, how grievous must it have been in God's sight if it needed such a chastisement as this."

"Then it will not make me worse if they should die?" asked the child anxiously; "it seems as if I would be a murderer then."

"You must not indulge such thoughts, dear child," replied her aunt kindly; "it is only natural they should arise in your heart, but they can do no one any good, and yourself much harm. Look at your sin as it is, my dear; the consequences of it can neither make it better nor worse, they only serve to make you feel it more acutely. Do you remember, Frances, the first conversa-

tion we had together on serious subjects, after you came here? Did I not warn you then of your besetting sin, and how it was perverting all God's good gifts to you, making them a cross instead of a blessing? Is not all this remorse and suffering only a new phase of the old trouble? Tell me honestly, my child, what made you first wish for the furniture which has cost us all so dear?"

"I wanted to do it better than Margaret," answered Frances, in a low tone; "I knew I could, and they did not seem to believe me."

"I thought it was so," said Mrs. Seymour; "I feared my little niece's vanity and love of approbation was the germ of all this evil. Yes, Frances, that is the root of the matter, and there you must strike if you would reform. I know it will be hard, beyond your strength, my child, for sins of thought are the most difficult to recognise and control; but God will help you. He will give you His Holy Spirit to purify and regulate your every thought; give you such watchfulness as will detect the beginnings of evil, and also such strength as can alone subdue it."

Frances again asked her aunt to pray for her. They were still on their knees, and Mrs. Seymour gladly offered up a fervent prayer for the repentant and suffering child, that God would forgive all her past sins for His dear Son's sake, and give her such a measure of His Holy Spirit as she needed for the future; that He would make this time of sorrow and chastisement of saving benefit, that whether the little ones lived or died it might be the beginning of better things for them all.

Frances seemed much comforted when they rose from their knees, and returned her aunt's kiss most warmly. Mrs. Seymour advised her to join her brother and sister, and try and find some occupation during the hours of suspense that might be before them. Towards evening Mrs. Seymour again visited the parsonage, but the accounts she brought back were no better. It was feared the children could not survive the night.

And so it was. The sweet little boys passed away before morning to their heavenly Father's home. The first thing that Frances heard, when she awoke from a troubled sleep that morning, was the tolling of the church bell, which announced that all was over. Each stroke fell like a blow on the child's heart. Only those who have grieved as she did, can understand the depth and bitterness of the sorrow caused by her own sin and disobedience. As her aunt dressed her she could not but think how wonderful and inscrutable are God's dealings with His people. The rousing she had often thought necessary for Frances had indeed come to her now, and with all the sharper poignancy, because traceable to her own besetting sin and its results.

In the course of the morning Frances became much calmer, and at last asked her aunt if she thought she might go to the parsonage for a last look at the sweet boys. Mrs. Seymour wrote a line to Mr. Conway, preferring the child's request. The good clergyman, who knew of Frances's sin and heartfelt sorrow, willingly acquiesced. He thought that anything which would deepen her present feelings must be salutary, and he was

sure that the sight of the dead babes, lying side by side in their last long sleep, would have a calming but, at the same time, a hallowing influence. So, late in the afternoon, Mrs. Seymour and Frances went to the parsonage.

Mr. Conway met them at the door. His grief was very great, but he knew all came from God, who doeth all things well, and the bereaved father bowed submissively to His will. They went to the chamber of death. Frances was quite calm; awe kept back her tears as she looked on the sweet faces of the dead boys, bearing as they did a faint impress of the joy and peace to which the gentle spirits had departed.

"We can hardly weep for them, as we look on them now," said their father. "Such peace, such chastened joy, seems stamped on each little face. It seems to bid us think of the full perfection of it they now enjoy. They are rejoicing in the presence of God their Father. Pain, grief, and sin are over for ever. We shall go to them, but they will not, nor can we wish that they should, return to us. And you, my child," he continued, turning to Frances, and laying his hand gently on her bowed head, "be not swallowed up with over much sorrow. Your sin must make this a grievous sight to you; but in this bitter hour look still to Jesus; He can and He will pardon. Dwell not too much upon the past; nothing can recall it now; no tears, no remorse can undo what has been done. But there is a future before you, my child. Rouse yourself, then; up, and be doing. Wrestle, and fight, and pray; take unto you the whole armour of God, and strive, with His help,

to overcome in future the sin within and the temptation without. May God bless you; and if, in after years, we can look back upon this scene as the beginning of better things for you, then indeed these blessed babes will not have lived or died for nought."

Frances' tears flowed freely as her aunt led her from the room. But the bitterness was gone from them now, and "the godly sorrow that worketh repentance to salvation" was shedding its influences over her heart. On their way down stairs they unexpectedly met Margaret. She looked worn and unhappy, and her eyes were swollen with weeping. Frances threw her arms round the little girl's neck, and whispered, "Can you forgive me, Margaret?"

"Oh! Frances," sobbed the child, as her tears broke forth, "we all need to forgive and be forgiven." Then turning to Mrs. Seymour, she exclaimed: "Why did I not bear my cross better, dear Mrs. Seymour? I never was to them what I ought to have been, and now they are taken from me. I see now how wicked, how selfish I have been. Darling little brothers, I never deserved to have you, so God has taken you to heaven."

Mrs. Seymour kissed and soothed the weeping child. and whispered words of comfort to her. No wonder that at such a time all her past unkindnesses should rise up in judgment with her heart, and that every aggravation and fault of the little ones should be forgotten. How few of us value our dearest blessings as we should, till deprived of them; and then, when the hour of sorrow comes, how keen the edge of all these

recollections. Would that all knew from whence alone comfort can be drawn in such an hour! for "the sorrow of the world worketh death," but "godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of."

Little more remains for us to tell. It was many days before the young people at the park regained their usual spirits. To Alice, the loss of her little friends had been a great shock; and she seemed to dread so much the renewal of their every-day life, with such a blank in their circle, that Mrs. Seymour was very glad when an invitation came for her to return to town, with her cousins, for a few weeks. Mrs. Rutherford had returned home with her husband, who was better, but still in such delicate health as to require her constant care.

As soon, therefore, as Eda and Alice were well enough to travel, the little party started; Alice's spirits raised with the prospect of much that was new and pleasant in a town life, and the Rutherfords happy in anticipating a meeting with their parents. With them went a long letter from Mrs. Seymour to her sister, with a detailed account of all the late events at the park. She also advised Simmons' dismissal, as not sufficiently trustworthy, and Frances' removal from a school where her talents seemed overrated, and her natural feelings called out by injudicious treatment.

Mrs. Rutherford wisely acted on her sister's suggestions. She had not been able to give as much attention

to her children as she wished, owing to her husband's health; and was most grateful to her sister for all her care and kindness to her little flock for so many weeks.

And those weeks were a fresh era in all those children's lives. New ideas had been brought before them, and a new influence—even that of God's Holy Spirit—sprung up in their hearts. Each child took up its little cross from that time, and patiently, prayerfully, and earnestly sought to follow Jesus.

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