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“And shall I really see the sea, mamma; the big, wonderful sea? Is it quite true that we are to go? and for a whole fortnight too?”—Page 9.

MAUDE'S



# VISIT TO SANDYBEACH.

BY

MRS. WALLER,

AUTHOR OF

“CROSSES OF CHILDHOOD,” “PROCRASTINATING MARY,” ETC.



LONDON:

S. W. PARTRIDGE, 9, PATERNOSTER ROW.

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through a suburban street of a large commercial city in the west of England. He seemed in haste to finish that part of his beat; nor was there, apparently, much to detain him. He passed house after house on his way down the street, without so much as one glance at the packet of letters in his hand. But he stopped at last; and after looking from the topmost of his bundle to the number of the house before which he had paused, he opened its little garden gate, and proceeded towards the door. It was sufficiently evident a letter was an unusual arrival at No. 36.

And so thought the little girl, about twelve years old, who sat in the open window of the little parlour. She sprang up with an exclamation of surprise, and stretched out her hand for the postman's letter.

“For Mrs. Prescott,” said the man, methodically, as

he gave it to the excited child. Little cared he whether he brought good or bad tidings to the inmates. It was all one to him; and he turned away indifferently, to continue his accustomed round, without one thought about the news he left behind.

But not so little Maude; her pale pensive face flushed with surprise and anticipation as she took the letter. Ere the postman had left the garden she was half way upstairs to her mother's room, shouting out in her eagerness—"A letter, mamma! a letter! who ever can it be from? I'm sure it's not Aunt Caroline's writing."

"Don't be too sure of that, Maude," replied her mother smiling, though her own cheek flushed a little as she took the letter. Mrs. Prescott turned it over once or twice before opening. The writing and postmark were not familiar; and with the strange perversity so often seen, she must needs try to discover her correspondent by these outward signs, instead of opening the letter at once.

But it was done at last. With a quick eye Mrs. Prescott scanned its contents, looking so pleased and surprised that Maude, who stood beside her, hazarded the question, "Who is it from?"

"It is from Mrs. Talbot," said her mother; "and contains something most gratifying and unexpected. You and I are asked to spend a fortnight at Sandybeach; and the invitation is so kind and cordial, that I really think I may accept it."

“But who is Mrs. Talbot, mamma?” asked the little girl, struck more with the strange name, than the unlooked-for news.

“An old friend of mine, dear,” answered her mother; “though one I have not seen for years, not indeed since she married. I can hardly understand why she has thus suddenly remembered me.”

“And will you go to see her, mamma?” asked Maude, laying her hand affectionately on her mother’s shoulder.

“I do not see any reason for refusing, my dear,” was the reply. “Mrs. Talbot has made every arrangement for our convenience. She promises to send her carriage to meet us at the Stonehill station, to get us comfortably over the six miles’ drive. A few mouthfuls of sea air will do neither of us any harm, will they? I often sigh at the sight of those pale cheeks (patting Maude’s tenderly); but as we cannot afford any change, we have to make the best of it. I am glad, however, my child can now have a little pleasure, without much expense.”

Maude’s colour deepened, her dark eyes sparkled with unusual brilliancy, and the tears nearly overflowed as she asked, “And shall I really see the sea, mamma; the big, wonderful sea? Oh, dear mamma, is it quite true that we are to go? and for a whole fortnight?”

Mrs. Prescott looked up lovingly at the eager child. There were tears in her own eyes as she put her arm

round Maude, and kissed her affectionately. Perhaps it was to hide them that she pressed the child's head down on her own shoulder, before she told her that in all probability they would start for Sandybeach in a few days.

A few minutes later the little girl sat at her old post in the parlour window; but with very different thoughts and feelings now, than those which had been her companions before the postman's visit.

It was only that very morning that Maude had been pining in secret for some of the sweet country sights and scenes she read of in her books. The green pastures, the golden corn fields, and the brightness of summer flowers were realized by little Maude's vivid imagination; but of the sea, the glorious, ever-changing, beautiful sea, the child had often dreamt and wondered without being able to form an idea of its might and magnitude.

And now she was to see it all. No wonder the little girl's heart swelled with new and undefined feelings. Few of us are strangers to such emotions, when, like Maude, we look forward to a first or renewed acquaintance with all that is grand, lovely, and ennobling in this God-created world of ours.

And while Maude thus thought of the hoped-for realization of her day-dreams, her mother sat thoughtfully at her desk. She was in no haste to write her note, so much had this renewal of her friendship with Mrs. Talbot stirred up the memories of the past; and at last, pain and pleasure, alike called into activity by the

long retrospect, sent the tears streaming down her cheeks. Mrs. Talbot was the dearest friend of her youth; they were both clergymen's daughters, and had shared the same pleasures and pursuits for many years, until Mrs. Talbot married. Her new home was in a distant county, of which Mr. Talbot was an influential man; and there his wife had lived ever since, surrounded with wealth and luxury. Her children, three daughters and two sons, had been brought up in the full enjoyment of everything to make their young lives bright and happy.

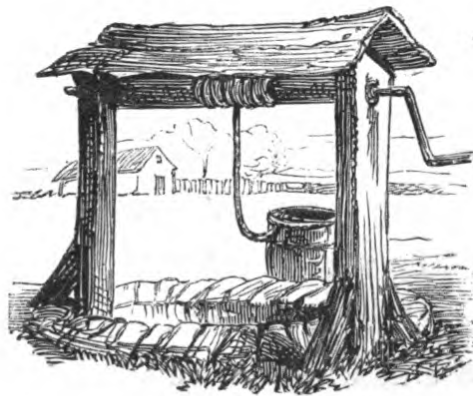
Meanwhile, Mrs. Talbot had lost sight of, but not forgotten, the friend of her youth. When, about a year after her own marriage, she heard of the other's union with a rising physician in this western city, Mrs. Talbot had been the first to write and congratulate her friend, and wish her the happiness which was, alas! of but short duration; for Dr. Prescott died a few months after little Maude's birth, leaving his wife and child in comparative poverty. And sorrows were multiplied to the poor widow, for her own father died; and she was left almost alone in the world. So she settled herself quietly in No. 36, with one faithful servant. The city was endeared to her by recollections of her husband; and there were still a few friends left to her, true and faithful even in her adversity.

And so, midst the smoke and dust of the busy town, with but few pleasures and fewer companions, Maude had grown up a shy, sensitive child; but with a mind



and imagination keen to appreciate such pleasures as she was now to enjoy. Sandybeach combined all the freshness of the open sea, with the retirement and beauties of such country life as Maude had never known. And it was for her child's sake that Mrs. Prescott prepared to encounter the trials of a meeting with her old friend. Under her altered circumstances, there must be some bitterness in store for her at Sandybeach ; but Mrs. Prescott trusted Maude's age and innocence would shield her from the like sufferings, and that to her at least the visit would be one of pleasure only.

So the note of acceptance was written and despatched, and the mother and child returned home just in time for their six o'clock tea.



## CHAPTER II.

## MAUDE'S TROUBLE.

"MAMMA," said Maude abruptly to her mother, as they sat at tea, "is Mrs. Talbot a very rich person?" The child's manner was peculiarly thoughtful, nor did she look up at her mother, as was usual with her when asking a question.

Mrs. Prescott noticed her little daughter's manner, and for a moment or two made no reply.

"She is a very rich person, my dear," she said at last; "but, unless much changed, of a most sweet and lovable disposition."

"I suppose she lives in a very fine house, then?" continued Maude, still bent on her own thoughts, and taking no notice of her mother's last words.

"I can hardly tell you, Maude," was the quiet reply, though there was a slight touch of sadness in Mrs. Prescott's tone, as she began to perceive the drift of the little girl's remarks. "I daresay it is not so fine as their own home; but Mrs. Talbot says they have plenty of spare rooms, and that there is a garden and trees about the house, which we shall like very much."

"How old are Mrs. Talbot's children, mamma?" again asked Maude, in the same moody tones.

"Laura and Janette are twins, and nearly fourteen years old now, I think; Louisa is about your own age. The boys are some years younger, and you won't have much to say to them, I daresay; but Mrs. Talbot says her daughters will take good care of you. I am sure you will have a very happy time of it, my child. There is so much to see which will be new and interesting.

"If only they were not rich, mamma," cried Maude in a voice broken by a sudden sob. Then meeting her mother's eyes as she raised her own, she broke down completely, and hiding her face in her hands burst into tears.

"I am afraid Maude is a very foolish little girl," said Mrs. Prescott, when the child began to compose herself; "she is going to deprive herself of much happiness by an evil spirit of pride and envy."

"No, no, mamma, not that," said Maude, raising her head in self-vindication; "indeed I don't envy other people, mamma; only I don't like being looked down upon and despised."

"No guest will be ungraciously treated in Mrs. Talbot's house" replied Mrs. Prescott. "You may be quite sure she would not have asked us unless we were to be welcome. So make up your mind, my child, to be happy, and thankful for such an opportunity of enjoying yourself."

“But, mamma,” asked Maude, doubtfully, “are my clothes good enough for visiting? Such rich people as the Talbots will have everything so grand. Surely they will think us dreadfully shabby?”

“Perhaps they may,” was the answer, accompanied by a sigh, for Mrs. Prescott was not quite indifferent to such matters; “but it will be our own fault if these things make us unhappy. If we go to Sandybeach prepared to be vexed at these trifles, we are almost certain to fancy ourselves slighted and neglected. I was afraid you had some such idea in your little head just now. But, Maude,” continued Mrs. Prescott in lower tones, and drawing the child closer to her, “you must try to overcome this proud sensitiveness about your position. Such as it is, it is given us by God. Wealth makes people neither better nor worse in His eyes; for He looks deeper, and reads the heart. In a worldly point of view we may have much to endure; and I believe there is but one thing that can help us to suffer patiently. And that is to think of Him who had not where to lay His head, and whose whole ministry while on earth enforced the precious truth, ‘that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of this world to confound the things which are mighty.’” Now-a-days, Maude, the might is all on the side of the wealthy, and such as you and I may well consider ourselves among

the weak ones of the world. But if we are poor as regards this world's goods, we must try and be all the richer towards God."

Maude's eyes brightened as her mother spoke, for the right chord was touched, and the child's faith in the goodness and love of God revived. What mattered it whether her frock was less costly than the Talbots' so long as she loved God, and proved herself His child by dutiful obedience. And Maude went off to her bed that evening with her heart full of thoughts that would have done honour to many of the wise ones of the world. But for all that, her first fears had not quite died out; for her mother was awakened more than once that night by the child's restlessness, as she murmured tearfully in her troubled dreams of her shabby dresses and the Talbots' disdain.



## CHAPTER III.

### A MOONLIGHT TALK AND WALK.

THAT same evening Mrs. Talbot, her father, Mr. Merton, and the three little girls whom Maude feared, sauntered together along the shore at Sandybeach.

It was a lovely moonlight evening. The tide was coming in quietly, aided by a light westerly breeze, which broke the even surface of the water into long sparkling ripples, making soft music on the smooth sand. It was an evening on which to be still, and listen with devout wonder to the silent voice of nature, speaking through the moon, the stars, the mighty ocean, and the soft murmuring of the breezes amidst the fields and trees along the coast. Even the children hushed their merry tones instinctively, and walked quietly beside their mother.

“How Annie will enjoy such a scene as this,” said Mrs. Talbot to her father, as she stopped and looked out over the shining sea. “I purposely invited her during the time of moonlight: she always loved it so much.”

“And will still, I should think, Susan,” replied Mr. Merton. “Adversity is hardly likely to harden such a

nature as hers, though you must prepare yourself to find her greatly changed."

"But perhaps Mrs. Prescott won't come, mamma," suggested Laura; "I'm sure papa doesn't expect her; he said so this morning."

"I hope she will though, my dear," replied Mrs. Talbot. "I have long been wishing for an opportunity of renewing our friendship, and shall be sorry if anything prevents her coming."

"I would rather she did not come," whispered Laura to Janette; "strangers will spoil all our pleasure."

Mrs. Talbot took no notice of Laura's remark. Perhaps she guessed its purport well enough, for she sighed and looked sad, as she turned again to her father with another comment on the beauty of the evening.

"Beautiful indeed," he said; "it should fill our hearts with love and gratitude to our God, for providing us so richly with sights and sounds to remind us of His power and goodness. 'What can we render unto Him for all His benefits.'"

"A question we may well ask ourselves, but which finds no adequate reply," observed Mrs. Talbot, thoughtfully. "I never can enjoy such scenes as these without feeling an intense desire to do more for Him who has done so much for us."

"Dear mamma," said Louisa softly, and putting her hand in her mother's as she spoke, "I wish we could always live in the beautiful moonlight; don't you?"

“But why do you wish it, my child?” said Mrs. Talbot, interested in her question and earnestness.

“Should we not be better, mamma, if it was always like this?” answered the child. “Surely no one could be naughty now?”

“I don’t know about that, Louisa,” said her grand-papa, patting her shoulder. “If it was always beautiful and moonlight, we should soon get accustomed to it, and be as naughty as ever. No, no, my child, we must have a surer foundation for our desire to serve God than the passing emotions called forth by some special exhibition of His loving-kindness.”

“Ah! I see we are in for one of your practical lectures, papa,” said Mrs. Talbot, playfully. “I daresay you are right in bidding us not build too much on our emotions; for faith and love must be something more than mere feelings; but still, like Louisa, I would ask you why it seems so much easier to be good on a night like this?” And Mrs. Talbot pressed her little girl’s hand, as if inquiring whether she had properly expressed her thoughts.

The child looked up at her mother with a bright smile, and nodded an assent; while the twin sisters, struck with the strangeness and truthfulness of their mother’s question, also gave attentive ears to their grandfather’s answer.

And very solemn and reverent was Mr. Merton’s manner as, raising his hat from his head, he replied,



“Because, my dears, at a time like this, we feel and acknowledge the mighty omnipresence of God. We become conscious we are living in a God-created world ; that His eye is on us, as on the rest of His beautiful works ; thus, feeling His wonderful love and goodness, our hearts become animated with sentiments of gratitude, and we desire to please Him. His love for us begets some measure of love in us, which we desire to prove. And as it is out of our power to make Him any personal returns, we show our love to Him in affection and sympathy towards others of His creatures who happen to cross our path.” The old man ceased speaking, and his eye rested tenderly on his daughter and her children, who stood silently around him.

“Then Louisa was right in wishing it was always like this,” said Janette, musingly. “It certainly is very strange, but quite true, that one does feel better when it is very beautiful. I wonder why we can’t always feel this way.”

“And so we might, Janette,” he replied, “if we could always remember God sees us, and if we always felt the same love and gratitude towards Him.”

“But why don’t we?” persisted the child, who seemed determined to search the matter out, at least to her own satisfaction.

“You may well ask, my child,” was the reply. “Why do we ever do wrong when we wish to do right, or sin in the face of prohibitions and warnings? It’s only the thrice-



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told tale, Janette, the never-ending conflict between nature and grace—the infirmities of the flesh on the one side, and the aspirations of the spirit on the other.”

Janette made no reply. Her grandfather's words were rather beyond her, though she understood well enough what he meant; for she and her sisters were too well instructed by their mother to be ignorant of their own natural depravity—the constant struggle between good and evil which exists in all our hearts. In head knowledge they were not deficient; but to know and to do are two very different things. We must believe with the heart as well as the head, before we learn to feel and practice what we know.

But Mrs. Talbot did not let the conversation drop. “Then, in times like these, you think our better nature, or grace, is in the ascendant?” she said, turning to her father. “After all, it must be so; and the loving feelings we experience towards all that our heavenly Father has made are the consequence. Ah! if we could only always retain such sensibility to God's love and presence, how differently we should act?”

“Ay, that we should,” he replied, earnestly. “There would be no more quarrellings and bickerings; no more envyings and strife; and no more lost opportunities of doing good, and loving even as we are loved. Truly St. Paul epitomised the law and the gospel in those precious words, ‘Love is the fulfilling of the law.’ Add to these those of St. John, ‘He that dwelleth in

love dwelleth in God, and God in him,' and 'we love him because He first loved us,' then we get a clear idea of the necessity of realizing our Father's love to us, as a means of perfecting our love towards Him, and of attaining 'faith that worketh by love,' to influence our daily life."

"But, grandpapa," said Laura, who had listened attentively to his words, "it is so hard to find opportunities of showing our faith by our works."

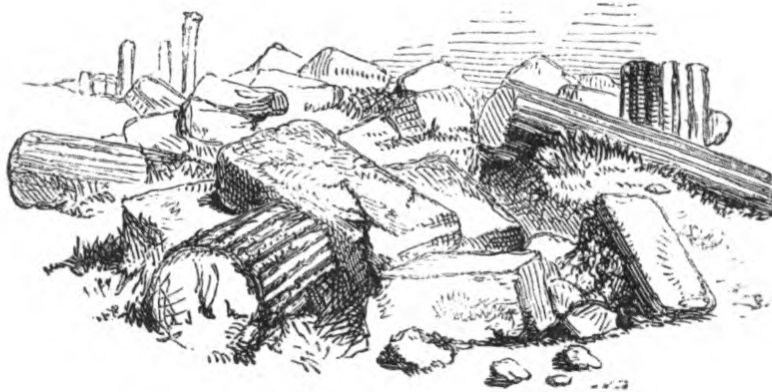
"Not if we are really trying to live unto God, Laura," he replied. "We have only to remember always to show our love to Him by loving His creatures, and doing our best to benefit them at all times for His sake. Then we shall have work enough, and to spare. You have all partially realized God's presence in your hearts this evening, and have felt the chords of your own affections vibrate for a moment with answering love and gratitude. Carry as much of that feeling as you can into your life to-morrow, and you will need no one to tell you how to prove it."

They were nearing the house by this time; and the broad glare of the lamp through the open windows jarred unpleasantly on the feelings of the whole party. The finer tones of thought and feeling died out at this first contact with the materialism of their everyday world, and the impressions received during that moonlight walk were dissipated in at least some of the party before bedtime.

“I wonder what grandpapa was aiming at all the evening,” said Janette to Laura, as they were undressing. “I’m sure he meant something by talking so much about love. Of course we love everybody we ought to, and what more can he want?”

“You are always imagining some mystery or another, Janette,” replied her sister. “For my part, I still think that girls like us have very little chance of being able to do anything good, even if we wished it.”

Louisa said nothing; but perhaps she thought the more. There was an earnestness about her expression, when she rose from her evening prayers, that spoke of a resolution formed in a strength greater than her own, and which promised better things for her than the outspoken thoughts of her sisters.



## CHAPTER IV.

## THE THREE SISTERS.

IT was breakfast time, the next morning, when Mrs. Prescott's acceptance of her friend's invitation was brought in.

"So they *are* coming, George," said Mrs. Talbot to her husband, a fine looking man, who was seated at one end of the table, deep in his papers.

"The Prescotts, I suppose you mean, Susan," he replied carelessly. "Well, it is more than I expected. Pride and poverty so often go together, I thought your friend would prove no exception to the general rule. I hope she'll be happy, that's all ; but I fancy there will be more of pain than pleasure in the meeting."

An expression of mental pain passed over Mrs. Talbot's face at this inconsiderate remark ; but she replied cheerfully, that it rested with them to make the visit a pleasant one to the Prescotts.

"Ah, well," he answered, without even looking up, "that's your business, my dear. I am glad there are no male friends to entertain ; and so long as you and the girls can all be happy together, and leave me in peace, I'll be quite content."

“I wish I were a boy for the time being,” whispered Laura to Janette, who sat beside her.

But the words were overheard by Mr. Merton, who also sat next her; and Laura seemed rather disconcerted by his quiet question: “Why do you wish to be a boy?”

“I’ll tell you, grandpapa,” said Janette, confidentially, leaning across Laura, with an odd mixture of innocence and shrewdness on her face. “Laura doesn’t want to have to do the agreeable to strangers, and wishes she had papa’s excuse for keeping out of the way.”

“Shrewdly guessed, I declare,” cried Mr. Talbot laughing, for he had looked up from his paper to hear what Janette said. “Laura’s tell-tale cheeks prove you quite right, Jenny; but Laura must abide by her sex, and play the hostess to your mother’s protégées.”

Again the colour rose in Mrs. Talbot’s cheeks; but she answered quietly, “I hope Laura and Janette will respect themselves, George, and do honour to the position in which they are placed. It is a privilege to be hospitable in such a case as this.”

“Is it?” said Mr. Talbot, glancing at his wife with quizzical gravity. “Well, you’ll have ample opportunity for enjoying this privilege, and I hope it will prove satisfactory.”

Mrs. Talbot sighed, but made no attempt to continue a conversation of which the tone was evidently distressing; and half an hour later the elders of the party dispersed



to their various occupations ; while the three girls seated themselves in the sunny window, and again began discussing their expected guests.

“ I wish mamma had never asked them, that I do,” said Laura irritably ; “ and so does papa, too, I’m sure. I don’t believe he would ever have let her do it, only he thought they’d never come. What a horrid bore they’ll be, and for a whole fortnight, too.”

“ I wonder what they are like, and how they will be dressed,” remarked Janette, taking up the word. “ I believe they are dreadfully poor, almost as poor as common people.”

“ But Mrs. Prescott was mamma’s bosom friend,” put in the younger sister, feeling as if in some way her sister’s remarks reflected upon her mother.

“ Yes, so she was ; and that’s just the very thing I can’t quite understand,” answered Janette, speaking very fast, and looking very wise. “ How is it possible that any friend of mamma’s can have so ‘ come down ’ in the world as to be living in a wretched little four-roomed house, in a great dusty town. Why can’t she have a nice cottage somewhere, all covered with roses and honeysuckle, and keep a nice pony carriage to drive about in, in an interesting way, with her one little daughter. There’d be some pleasure in patronizing people of that kind ; but really a widow lady, living in a square red-brick house, is not respectable.”

“ But perhaps she doesn’t live in such a house,

Janette," suggested Louisa, smiling, in spite of herself, at her sister's manner.

"I'm sure she does," said the other confidently, "and you'll see I'm quite right. Only wait till they come, and I'll find it out. After all it may be amusing enough for a day or two, worming out all their secrets; for they must have some curious ones, if they are what mamma says, and yet so poor."

"I don't suppose mamma knows much about them," said Laura. "She's not seen Mrs. Prescott for years, and of course she is altered. Mamma owns to being altered herself, only that's on the right side. A clergyman's daughter is not like a rich country gentleman's wife; and of course a doctor's widow is just as much below the first, as the second is above it."

"I don't think you take quite the right view of it, Laura," said Louisa, thoughtfully. "I know we are rich, and they are poor; but for all that, Mrs. Prescott and her child may be very respectable."

"Whatever they are you're welcome to them," answered Laura. "Of course Mrs. Prescott is mamma's charge, and Maude is nearest in age to you."

"But you and Janette are the eldest," said Louisa. "You'd take very good care not to leave me to entertain the ladies Howard, and they're younger than I am. Why should you neglect Maude Prescott?"

"The Howards are our equals and our neighbours, and she's not," was the ready reply.

“As to being equals, don't be too sure,” answered Louisa. “We don't yet belong to the aristocracy, Laura. Our mother is a clergyman's daughter, and so is Maude's. There's more equality there, I'm thinking, than between us and the Howards, whose father is an earl, and whose mother is a duke's daughter.”

“They are neighbours, then; you can't deny that, Louisa,” was the angry retort. “I can do the civil to our neighbours if necessary, even be they poor; but these people are strangers whom we have never seen. I shan't put myself out of the way for them. Indeed, I shall take every opportunity of treating Miss Prescott with the cool indifference she deserves.”

“How now, Laura,” said a voice behind her, and a hand laid on her shoulder made her turn round with a start, to confront her father. He had returned to the breakfast room, and overheard her last words. “How now, Laura? Is this the way you forget yourself and your position, and deliberately prepare to behave unbecomingly?”

The first words that rose to Laura's lips were a defence of her conduct, as only an imitation of his own; and the casual observer might have said as much. But Mr. Talbot must not be judged superficially, for he often said more than he meant, and now the evils of his light speaking were only too evident in the conduct of his elder daughters, who were under the false impression that he shared their sentiments about the Prescotts, and

would countenance their actions. On the contrary, however, much as he might laugh beforehand about his wife's 'poor protégées,' no man was likely to be kinder or more courteous than himself to these very guests. But children, though keen observers in many ways, are puzzled by such contradictions, and Mr. Talbot was justly punished for indulging his love of free speaking at the expense of his principles, by his daughter's ill-natured imitation of his conduct. And at the same time it roused the nobler part of his own nature, and brought him forward instantly as the champion of those against whom he had thoughtlessly cast the first stone.

The indignation, therefore, which Laura read in her father's eyes cowed her for the moment. She looked down, and muttered something about Maude's age, and there being no necessity for them all to make much of her.

"And why not?" said her father. "She is just the person you ought to study; and once for all, Laura, I shall expect you to do so. Let me hear no more of this pride and nonsense, but let me see you to-morrow giving such attention to your guest as your position requires." And without another word Mr. Talbot walked away, more vexed than he chose to confess at the consequence of his own indiscretion.

"I don't believe he means it a bit," were Laura's first words when he was out of hearing. "He's just as vexed

as we are that the Prescotts are coming. However, I must be careful before him now. Otherwise, it won't make any difference."

"I'm sure it ought to then, Laura," said Louisa, decidedly. "You know papa often says what he doesn't quite mean, and—and—" finding she was on the point of accusing her father, she stopped abruptly.

"Come, speak out, Louisa," laughed Laura, enjoying the girl's discomfiture. "Haven't I just allowed papa does not mean what he says, or says what he means, it's all the same thing. Only I wonder that *you*, the model of good conduct, should dare to admit as much. I suppose you want to make me believe he thinks like you, that it is our bounden duty, as young ladies, or Christians, or something or another you can't explain, to treat this little girl as an equal and a neighbour."

"And so we ought to," answered Louisa warmly, while the colour deepened in her cheeks.

"I hope you will then," was the cool reply. "I shan't interfere with you in any way."

"Nor I either," said Janette; "only I shall like to find out if my suppositions are right, and if they do live in a shabby little red-brick house."

Louisa waited to hear no more, but ran off to join her mother on the lawn; and, after exchanging looks of triumph and amusement, the twins put on their hats, and followed the others to the beach.

## CHAPTER V.

## AN OLD MAN'S MEDITATIONS.

MEANWHILE, upstairs, at the open window of his own room above the dining-room, sat Mr. Merton, with his Bible on his knee. And as he read and meditated on his favourite theme, the love of God, the children's voices attracted his attention; and, becoming interested in what they said, he laid down his book and listened.

As he heard his elder grandchildren give expression to their feelings about the expected guests, his face became clouded, and he murmured, "Labour lost, labour lost; already they forget last night." But at Louisa's expostulations his face brightened again into a smile as he whispered, "Not all lost, thank God, I think it will take root there." And when Laura's plain speaking had been so suddenly interrupted by her father's voice, Mr. Merton leant forward, in his eagerness to hear. "Take higher ground with her, George," he almost cried out, as his son-in-law spoke; "nothing but that can counterbalance the ill effects of your own light speaking."

When Mr. Talbot was gone, and Laura's next words showed the correctness of his judgment, Mr. Merton leant back in his chair with a sigh of disappointment. "I thought so," he murmured sadly, "I thought so; mere worldly wisdom cannot overcome such pride as hers. Ah, George, George, when will you ever learn that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, and that the best and noblest principles you can teach your children are to be found only in this precious Book."

Mr. Merton relapsed into silence, and closed his eyes; but his lips moved, and his clasped hands worked in the earnestness of his mental prayer for the children and grandchildren, whose best interests he had so much at heart.

By-and-bye the twins' merry laughter as they raced through the garden down to the beach, recalled grandpapa to a sense of the present, and he called mildly to the children as they looked back and caught sight of him watching them from the window. They smilingly returned his greeting; but Laura's cheek flushed with sudden shame, as she turned to Janette and whispered, "Grandpapa must have heard all we said, Janette; I wish I had known he was there."

"Ah, Laura," thought Mr. Merton, noticing the blush and interpreting her words, "you are ashamed to find I overheard you; and you forget that the eye of your heavenly Father is ever beholding you. Well, go your

way. Doubtless, this will work together for your good in the end; but I must have an eye on you, nevertheless. You may forget God for a time. Be it my business to remind you of His presence, and bring you to a right sense of duty. Laura would prove her faith by her works," he added, still talking to himself, "and methinks she is blinding herself to a grand opportunity for action. Poor little Maude Prescott. I fear she stands but a poor chance of enjoyment with such entertainers. But if this visit gives me occasion to bring home some precious truths to these children's hearts, it will do its appointed work, and may never be forgotten. God grant it may teach them Christ's lesson of universal love to all mankind, for His sake."

We will not longer follow the old man's thoughts. He was not one to forget God, even without the solemnising influence of the moonlight or the voices of the sea. Sunshine, and the cheerful sounds of daylight and domestic life, were equally eloquent to him of the all pervading love and goodness of our Almighty Father.





## CHAPTER VI.

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

IT was quite late on the following evening when Mrs. Prescott and her little daughter arrived at Sandybeach.

Though nothing could be more cordial and affectionate than the welcome given to their guests by the elders of the Talbot party, we all know the feelings of shyness and restraint which so often attend meetings of this kind. And we all know also, how a sociable meal and a good night's rest alter our whole tone of mind; and with what far more agreeable feelings we meet in the morning than those with which we separated at night.

Perhaps no one experienced this change more strikingly than Maude Prescott. In spite of her endeavours to overcome them, she had not forgotten her old fears about her appearance, and the reception she would receive at Sandybeach. The child was so full of shy apprehension on her arrival, that it sealed her lips to any attempt at conversation, beyond the few words that good breeding required. But though thus silent, Maude was not unobservant. Her bright eyes

roved hither and thither, over every one and everything, while the active little mind made its own comments, and drew conclusions from what she saw and heard which finally reassured her. And consequently a freedom from restraint, and a look of expectant happiness, brightened her face the following morning when she appeared at the breakfast table.

Maude had made up her mind that there was no reason why this visit should be otherwise than pleasant. She had perceived with a thrill of pleasure Mrs. Talbot's affection for her mother, the courteous hospitality of Mr. Talbot's manners, and the fatherly kindness of Mr. Merton. Maude had likewise taken mental observations of the three girls; she had admired the dark beauty of the twins, and the fair gentleness of the younger sister; and she remarked, with a satisfaction of which she was almost ashamed, that their dress scarcely differed from her own. There was little choice between their plain Swiss muslins and her own clean neat print. Whatever the Miss Talbots might wear in their own home at Avonmere Park, here, staying for a few weeks at the sea side, a stranger could scarcely distinguish by outward signs between them and the widow's orphan who had for a short time become their guest.

Nothing occurred during breakfast to disturb little Maude's equanimity. She contrived to get between Louisa and Mr. Merton; for Maude was attracted towards the younger sister by a subtle instinct,

which pointed her out as her best friend. But the children made but few advances, during breakfast, towards friendship; though a few looks and smiles were exchanged, the earnest of better things by-and-bye.

It was not, however, without a feeling of trepidation that Maude found herself consigned to the care of the three Talbots after breakfast. For Mrs. Talbot did not understand the sensitiveness of little Maude, and wishing to talk alone with her mother, had no scruples in leaving her with her own daughters.

“They can take care of themselves, Annie,” she said in answer to a timid suggestion of Mrs. Prescott’s that Maude was unaccustomed to be away from her. “You may trust Maude with them, I’m sure. This is the best possible place for children, as they can’t get into mischief; and they will be within sight and sound of the house all the morning. You and I can have a chat as we sit on the beach, while they make friends with each other. Children get on much better when left to themselves.”

So Mrs. Prescott could say no more, and Maude had to get her hat and join the sisters. Just as the four children were starting for their ramble, with the soberness which often characterizes them when told to be merry, they met Mr. Talbot.

“Ah,” he cried cheerfully, as he stopped to speak to them, “so you’re off to show Maude our lions. Well,

take good care of her and yourselves, girls ; but give me a kiss first, for I must go to Stonehill on business, and may not come back till to-morrow."

His three children lifted up smiling faces to be kissed, and Maude ventured to hold out her hand by way of parting salutation. "Is this your first visit to the sea?" he asked kindly, still holding her hand. She nodded an assent, looked timidly at him through her dark eye-lashes, and he continued, "I almost envy you the pleasures in store for you, my dear child. I can still remember my own feelings on first seeing the wonders of the sea shore. But I see you are impatient to be off," he added, as Maude's eye wandered from his face to the distant sea glittering in the sunshine. "Well, I won't keep you. Good bye; and mind you are ready to tell me to-morrow what you think of the ocean. Take care of your little friend, Laura," he added, kissing the child with almost as much warmth as he had kissed his own girls, before he turned away.

Mr. Talbot felt none the worse in his heart that day, as he rode off to Stonehill, for his kindness to the little fatherless child. He had been actuated by the desire to excite the emulation of his elder daughters, and ensure Maude a fair measure of attention and kindness. But had he seen the look of pride with which Laura followed his retreating figure, showing only too plainly that his motives were seen through, and not appreciated, he would have argued ill for the success of his scheme,

and must have feared for the happiness of the poor little girl, who followed his proud daughters down the avenue, with such a sensitive heart all ready prepared in its tenderest points to suffer from the shafts with which their pride and ill-will intended to assail it.



## CHAPTER VII.

## MAUDE'S DREAMS REALIZED.

"WELL, what are we to do with ourselves all the morning?" observed Laura to Janette, as soon as she considered herself free from supervision. "I'm tired of the beach, Jenny. Shall we go and play croquet?" And Laura looked across Maude at her sister, with a cool effrontery which signified as plainly as words the indifference she felt for the young guest.

Even Janette was taken rather aback, and lost her self-possession, at her sister's commencement of hostilities. Louisa, however, interposed eagerly, and said Maude must be consulted before their plays were arranged. She must decide for or against the beach, and of course they must do as she wished.

Poor little Maude's colour rose almost as much at Louisa's defence as at Laura's insolence. Her discomfiture was complete, when the elder girl turned to her abruptly and inquired "what she wished to do, as it seemed they were under her orders." Maude managed to articulate something about "doing as they liked," but Laura was not thus easily put off. Pleading fatigue

at being kept so long standing, she sat down deliberately on the grass plot, "to await," as she said in tones of freezing politeness, "Miss Prescott's pleasure," while Maude feeling each moment more uncomfortable, with difficulty restrained her tears.

Louisa stood for a moment looking from one to another of the silent trio; for surprise at this unexpected scene kept Janette speechless. Shame for her sister's conduct heightened Louisa's colour, and seeing that Maude was incapable of taking her own part, she again came to the rescue.

"Maude of course wishes to go to the beach," she said decidedly. "Don't you remember, Laura, how anxious we were to get down to the sea the day we came, although we had often been here before? It's a shame to tantalize Maude any longer, when she must be longing to see it, so I shall carry her off, and you can do as you like." Then asking Maude to come with her, the two bounded away, and were soon out of sight.

A few minutes later the elder girls took the same road, exchanging looks and words little to their credit. And not a thought crossed their mind of the parents' eyes that watched them—the earthly and the heavenly Father—as they walked in the companionship of such "evil communications" respecting the poor child whose circumstances should have been her chief claim on their kindness and forbearance. And the good old clergyman sighed as he looked after them, from his usual post of

observation. Again he mentally apostrophized his son-in-law, as he took up his hat and prepared to follow the children; and he prayed that the will and the opportunity might shortly be given him to speak some word in season to those so dear to him.

So, out into the sunny beach, we will follow them all, where little Maude's dreams are to be realized, and the wonders of the mighty deep to be unfolded before her.

A pleasant spot for such a first introduction was the smooth sandy shore of the rightly named village of Sandybeach. It was situated in the centre of a deep and wide-spreading bay. The coast stretched away on either side, rising and becoming bolder and more rugged as it curved outwards, till it terminated in two precipitous headlands far out to sea. But about Sandybeach, trees, fields, and houses, all mingled with each other to the very confines of the shore. Of these latter, Elm Lodge claimed the foremost place, and its gardens and shrubberies needed the protection of a seawall as a preservation from encroachments.

The natural attractions of the village of Sandybeach were therefore so great that it generally became a favourite resort with those who had once made its acquaintance. House after house had sprung up along the beach to meet the demand created by the summer visitors who frequented the spot. Bazaars, bathing machines, and donkeys had followed as a natural con-



sequence ; and from May till September the beach teemed with the merry lounging life of a fashionable watering place.

But Elm Lodge and its fortunate possessors stood aloof from the bustle. The lodging houses had confined themselves to its northern side, and the long stretch of sands south of the Lodge were rarely invaded by the crowd north of it. Therefore, as long as the Talbots confined themselves to their own limits, they had it all their own way, and could dig and play to their hearts' content without fear of interruption.

And smooth, and firm, and glittering under the glorious summer sun stretched the yellow sands, as Maude and Louisa raced down to the water's edge. The tide was out, and the little waves came tumbling in playfully one after another, making such music as Maude's ears had never heard before. The child stood as if spell-bound, looking out over the sparkling waters, while her breath came fast and her colour rose. New and overpowering emotions surged up within her ; the undefined sense of the power which created and controlled the mighty element stretched at her feet, reflecting in its placid waters the vast cloudless heavens, was too much for the sensitive child, and she well nigh wept with excitement.

Louisa watched her with sympathizing interest ; though a natural delicacy of feeling, and a sufficient appreciation of the others' thoughts, kept her silent

and apart, waiting till her first emotions had subsided. But Laura and Janette gave themselves no time for such considerations, as they joined the others.

“Well, Maude,” said Janette, inquisitively peering under the child’s hat, “what do you think of it? You can have formed little idea of such things, living in a smoky town, in a little square red-brick house.”

“How do you know I live in such a house?” retorted Maude. The sudden discord of these cruel words was too much for her feeble little heart, where feeling and imagination had yet to learn a juster equipoise with qualities of heavier metal. The overstrained sensibilities broke, as they too often do, in a sudden burst of temper against the common sense that opposed them.

“Oh, pray don’t take offence at my simple remark,” replied the other, with feigned contrition. “I only thought all town houses were built of red brick. I daresay they are very pretty and very nice; still I prefer something less brilliant.”

“It’s not Maude’s fault if she has to live in a red-brick house,” said Louisa, again injudiciously taking up the cudgel for her friend.

“I didn’t say it was,” answered Janette pertly, and little caring whether Maude overheard her or not, while she amused herself with skimming pebbles along the surface of the water, whose might and beauty were powerless to touch her heart.

“Are we to stand here idling all the morning?” said Laura at last, after some moments of uncomfortable silence. “We are generally busy at play long before this. It’s most provoking when people don’t know their own minds, and can’t say what they wish. But I shan’t wait any longer. Run back, Janette, for our spades. The tide is coming in, and we can have some fine fun making castles.”

So away went Janette for their tools, and Louisa began explaining the play to Maude, and describing the excitement of watching the waves coming in, and gradually washing away what they had built up. By the time Janette returned the children were all eager to begin, and each appropriating her property prepared for work.

Laura, whose age and abilities gave her the lead where action was needed, soon marked out the plan for their fortress, at a sufficient distance from the water to allow of its completion ere the tide reached its walls. She laid the first stone, as she called it, by heaping a spade full of sand on the spot where the highest tower was to be raised, and then she and her sisters set to work with a will, digging out and building up with the practised skill of experience.

For some minutes they laboured away in silent happiness, even Louisa forgetting in the excitement of her play that Maude could not join them. But looking up at last, she perceived the little guest standing watching



“Looking up at last, Louisa perceived the little guest standing watching them, while the expression of her eyes testified to her desire to share their pleasure.”—Page 46.



them, while the expression of her eyes testified to her desire to share their pleasure.

Louisa's better feelings instantly prevailed. "Maude has no spade," she said, as she raised herself and rested on her own. "How stupid of us to forget it. Do stop, Laura, while I run and ask mamma to let us get her one."

Maude's bright smile rewarded Louisa's thoughtfulness; but Laura refused to give up working, saying there was no time to be lost. Louisa's good intentions were not to be thus frustrated; and she ran off to find her mother, and get the desired permission. In a few minutes she returned, but with slower steps and a clouded brow, for she foresaw the opposition her mother's message would meet with from her sisters.

"Well," said Janette, looking up, "have you got leave to go for your friend's spade?"

"Mamma says I mustn't go alone with Maude," replied Louisa, hesitatingly. "She says you and Laura must come with us, and we are to go to Miss Jones."

"Now, you are really too bad, Louisa," cried Laura, flinging down her spade in anger. "What did you go bothering about the spade at all for? As if Maude couldn't do without one, or else wait till to-morrow. We shall lose all the morning, for the tide will be in before we come back."

"It won't take more than a quarter of an hour," said Louisa. "If we make haste we shall soon be back, and Maude will help us to finish the castle."

“Much good her help will be,” muttered Laura, moving nevertheless in the right direction. “I suppose she has never had a spade in her hand.”

“Yes I have,” said Maude, defiantly, “I often dig in the garden, and have a nice spade of my own.”

“Pity you didn’t bring it with you, then; it would have saved us this journey,” returned Laura; while Janette asked innocently, “if the garden were in front of the house, and how many flowers there were in it.”

“Oh, a great many,” began Maude eagerly. “There are two or three beautiful roses, and ever so many stocks and wallflowers; and mamma gave me a geranium on my birthday, which I have put in the middle bed.”

“Ah! I understand,” said the other, “just such a nice little garden as our labourers delight in. It must quite make your arms ache, Maude, digging such an immense piece of ground.”

Maude looked up in surprise. Poor little child! She had allowed herself to be drawn for the amusement of the haughty girls, and now felt all the mortification the wisest of us experience under such circumstances. No wonder she turned away with a flushing cheek and quivering lip, firmly resolved in her own mind not to be betrayed into any more humiliating revelations. But Janette had no intention of allowing her to maintain this reserve, for she was equally determined to know every secret of the child’s life before the day was over.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE SAND CASTLE.

“Now, Maude, choose your spade,” said Louisa, when the four children reached Miss Jones’ bazaar; “here are some of all kinds.” And the two little girls were soon busy discussing their respective merits. Maude chose the one recommended by the shopkeeper, who detached it from the bundle, and prepared to wrap it up.

“Never mind putting it up, Miss Jones,” cried Louisa, interposing, “we are going to dig at once. Come along, Maude,” and she ran off.

Maude stretched out her hand for the pretty wooden spade, and was turning to follow her friend, when Janette laid a detaining hand on her arm, and told her she had “forgotten to pay for it.”

It was pitiful to see the change that came over the little girl’s animated countenance at these words. Even heartless Janette felt half ashamed of herself when Maude flushed and then grew pale, turned hither and thither as if seeking help, and finally laid down the spade on the counter, and walked silently towards the door.



“What, going without it after all,” cried Laura, stopping her midway. “Are we to have had the hot walk all for nothing, Maude? I’m sure you needn’t be offended because Janette reminded you to pay for your purchase. Come, make haste and settle with Miss Jones; it’s only sixpence.”

“But I’ve no money,” said Maude, in a tone of mingled shame and indignation.

“Then you came shopping without your purse, like the foolish grenadier in the nursery rhyme,” cried Janette, laughing. “Well, never mind, Maude, I’ll lend you sixpence, and you can repay me by-and-bye.” And the thoughtless girl put her hand in her pocket, and produced a purse from which she leisurely proceeded to extract the required sum.

“Please don’t,” said Maude, again coming forward; “I can’t repay you without asking mamma. How could I be so foolish as to forget I must pay for the spade? Please come back to the beach; I can do very well without it.”

“And you grudge even a sixpence, Maude,” said Janette, in apparent surprise, and repocketing her own money as she spoke. “Well, if you won’t be persuaded, I can’t help it. Only pray don’t look so dreadfully wistful while we’re digging, when you won’t give sixpence to enjoy the same pleasure yourself.”

“I’ve told you that I have no money,” cried Maude, as she flashed her dark eyes on Janette. Then bursting

into tears, Maude rushed into the open air, and ran up against Louisa and her grandfather, who were just coming in."

"What, Maude crying?" asked Mr. Merton, kindly, as she looked up in surprise. "This will never do, my dear; it does not look very much like the enjoyment we anticipated for you. Come dry your eyes, and tell me what's the matter."

"She only came to buy a spade without the money to pay for it, grandpapa," said Janette, coming up at that moment. "I offered to pay for her, but she declined my kind offices."

"I couldn't repay her," murmured Maude, through her tears.

"But this is no question of borrowing or repaying," said Mr. Merton, gently. "Maude's spade is to be a present from me, girls; and she will keep it in remembrance of her mother's old friend. Run in, Louisa, and fetch the spade. I never knew yet any little girl visiting at the sea-side who didn't owe her first spade to some kind old friend. All your own, girls, were my presents." By this time Louisa was back with the purchase; and Mr. Merton placed it himself in Maude's hands, and bid her go and be happy. The child's smiles had already chased away her tears as she thanked him heartily, and ran off with the sisters to resume their play, while the old gentleman slowly followed them, drawing his own conclusions from what he had seen and heard.

Meanwhile the four children returned to their castle. Louisa expressed her regret to Maude for her forgetfulness about the spade, which ought to have been put down to her mother's account. Even Janette and Laura, who, while surmising this, had in wanton sport tormented their little guest, now endeavoured to make some amends for their cruelty by greater kindness; and all were delighted to find their castle still at such a distance from the waves as rendered the completion of it a possibility.

Four active little girls, working with good temper and energy, soon erected such a substantial fortification as bid fair to withstand more than the ordinary number of onslaughts from the advancing waves. But they had only just finished it, when the enemy gave notice of his approach by a wave of unusual size, which dashed against the outwork of the erection, and made its way through a gap into the moat within. The children shouted with delight at this first intimation that the best part of the play was really beginning. They all four crowded on to the top of the largest tower, where it had been previously arranged they were to remain till the advancing waters rendered it untenable.

The sport bid fair to be more exciting than they had anticipated; for a stiff breeze was coming up with the tide, and the waves were momentarily increasing in size and power. To Maude the novel amusement of watching them, and speculating on their advance, was

wonderfully attractive. Forgetting everything else she gave herself up to her enjoyment, and laughed and shouted at each fresh attack with a zest she would have thought impossible half-an-hour before.

But so eager were the little party in watching the progress of the enemy to their front, where two tall slender towers still held out against his assaults, that they quite forgot that it was possible for him to take them in rear. Laura's plan of defence was, we fear, very defective; for she had left weak points both right and left, of which the tide had naturally taken advantage. Therefore when she turned round to see if their retreat was secured to them, she found that the deep moat behind them was full of water, and that only a jump of two or three feet could land them dryshod on the beach beyond. Their castle stood on an island in the midst of the foaming and ever advancing waves.

"We must jump at once," cried Laura; and exerting all her agility, she cleared the intervening waters with a bold spring, and sat down to watch the others' retreat.

Louisa was the second to make her escape from their insecure position. The double shock of the sisters' jump broke down a fresh portion of the already dilapidated walls, and left the two remaining girls more exposed to the sea's inroads.

"What grand fun this is," cried Janette, dancing about on their eminence, and still further demolishing their protection. "I don't think in all our castle

building we ever had such an adventure. Here we are positively surrounded by the sea—besieged in our own fortress, and obliged to beat an ignominious retreat. Come along, Maude, we must make the best of our way to the shore, or we shall really run some chance of being drowned.”

With a vigorous spring Janette bounded to the shore; but either she was less agile than her sisters, or the waters had increased in width, for she did not succeed in landing dryshod. Both her feet came plump into the water with a splash, which sent the drops far and wide in a glittering shower; and amidst the shouts and laughter of the trio, Janette scrambled up the beach to her sisters.

Poor little Maude! There she stood on the island in the wash of the waves; deserted by her friends, and with a vague terror rising in her poor little breast. Louisa's heart smote her as she looked at the trembling child running nervously to and fro on her ever decreasing sandhill; and she went down to the water's edge again, and sought to encourage her.

“I'm so sorry I left you, dear Maude,” she said; “we ought to have seen you safe to land first; and now I can't get back to you. But jump, Maude, jump; the longer you delay the worse it will be. I'm sure you can easily manage it just here.”

“But I shall get my feet wet, Louisa,” pleaded the poor little child. “I know I can't do it without. Oh

dear ! oh dear ! what shall I do ? Mamma said I must always be so careful not to wet my boots."

"They'll be wet, anyway, in a minute," cried Janette ; "there's such a great big wave coming behind you, Maude. If you don't make haste, you'll surely be washed away."

Maude looked round anxiously, and sure enough an enormous wave (to her inexperienced eye) seemed just on the point of overwhelming her. Made desperate by terror, with a cry of anguish which even the girls perceived was unaffected, the child leaped wildly towards the shore. But of course she alighted far short of it, and almost up to her knees in the deepest waters of the moat. Sobbing and screaming, with no artificial excitement, the poor little terror-stricken girl scrambled on to the shore, with dress and petticoats wet to the waist, and the water running in streams over the boots of which she had meant to be so careful.

"Well, you are a nice figure, Miss Prescott," was Laura's kindly greeting to the weeping child. "What a little stupid you were to wait so long, instead of jumping with me."

Maude only answered by a fresh burst of sobbing, and cast such woebegone looks at her streaming clothes as excited Janette's risibility.

"What a fuss you are making about getting wet," she said, after a hearty laugh. "Why, Maude, I'm nearly as bad as yourself (and she poked out two feet

soaked up to the ankles.) It's only a case of dry stockings and boots, and a clean frock and petticoat. You were not so silly, surely, as to think you were going to be drowned? It's all the more fun when we get a little wet; and mamma only laughs at the rows of wet boots she sees sent down to be dried after a day on the sands. Come, dry your eyes and come with me. I can't bear these wet boots any longer."

"But I have no others to put on," sobbed Maude, telling out in her grief what she had hoped to conceal.

"What! no second pair of boots!" cried Janette in surprise. "You forgot to bring them, I suppose, Maude. How could you be so stupid? People always get wet feet at the sea-side; and you should have brought two or three pairs."

"But I have only one good pair," answered Maude, too truthful to take advantage of the excuse of forgetfulness. "My old ones were too shabby to bring, and mamma bid me be careful of these. She said salt water would spoil them; and I can't have new ones till Christmas."

Now that Janette had extracted the painful facts she desired to know, she again became conscious of the cruelty and impropriety of her curiosity, and utterly at a loss what to say. But again Louisa came forward cheerfully to the rescue of her friend, and suggested the possibility of a pair of her boots fitting Maude, and begged her to come back to the Lodge and try them on.

“How fortunate you are just the same size,” said Janette, finding her voice again, as they all walked up the beach (for curiosity once more overmastered her better feelings); I daresay all Louisa’s things will just fit you, Maude, if you haven’t enough of your own to change when you get wet.”

But Maude was spared the necessity of further exposing the poverty of her wardrobe to her ungenerous questioner. Mrs. Talbot and her mother came up a moment later to see what was amiss, and Louisa came forward to make excuses for Maude’s pitiable plight. She then whispered a word or two in her mother’s ear which met with a smiling assent, though the next minute Mrs. Talbot’s eyes rested on little Maude’s figure with such a glance of tender pity as brought the hot blood to the child’s cheeks.

“Go with Louisa, dear,” she said, kindly, as she met the child’s eyes. “We’re quite accustomed to the accidents of wet feet, and your boots will be none the worse for one wetting. But make haste and change your wet clothes; and after dinner you shall have a donkey ride.”

More pleasure in store for Maude. No wonder that her eyes brightened again, with such anticipations. When she appeared half an hour later in the dining-room dressed in the one other nice frock she possessed, and with her little feet laced up in a pair of Louisa’s strong Balmoral boots, it was difficult to recognise in her the weeping disconsolate child of an hour before.



## CHAPTER IX.

### THE DONKEY RIDE.

IT was a beautiful afternoon when the four little girls started for their ride. Riding was no novelty to the Talbots. They were properly equipped in riding skirts, and flourished the pretty little riding whips they used with their ponies at home. Still they enjoyed the donkey rides, and often made excursions into the country attended by a steady old man-servant to keep them out of mischief.

But to Maude Prescott a donkey was a steed of unknown size and spirit, and it was with mingled feelings of fear and pleasure that she found herself lifted into the saddle by the careful old John, and directed how to seat herself and hold the reins. Even Mrs. Prescott felt a little nervous at starting off her child on such a novel expedition; but Mrs. Talbot laughed at her fears, though, to reassure her, she bid John be very careful of Miss Maude, and be sure and not allow her to trot or gallop till quite sure of her seat.

“I’ll take good care of her, ma’am,” replied the old

servant ; “ she’ll feel at home in her saddle after a bit, ma’am, I’m quite sure ; for it’s my belief she’s a born horsewoman, she takes to it so kindly.”

The ladies laughed, and Maude smiled shyly at the commendation ; and with more cautions and good byes, the party started, Maude, with the servant beside her, bringing up the rear.

For the first few moments Maude was more frightened than pleased at the unusual motion ; but she prudently held her tongue, and was surprised to find how soon she accommodated herself to her position. By the time they left the Lodge avenue, and turned down towards the beach, Maude had forgotten her first fears, and was able to look about and enjoy the scene before her.

And it was such a scene as fills thoughtful, sensitive hearts with glad feelings of joy and thankfulness, of which every one, however, could not give a satisfactory explanation. The sky was no longer cloudless, as in the morning ; for with the westerly breeze, brought up with the flowing tide, had come whole regiments of clouds, coursing over the deep blue sky in ever varying forms. Piled up in majestic confusion, the sunlight brought out their magnitude in bold relief, and measured the heights and depths of their mighty ranges. Here and there a few well-defined masses chased each other across a broad belt of blue, each in their turn obscuring the sunshine, and chequering land and water with their gigantic shadows.

Maude watched this ever-changing scene with an interest its beauty well deserved. As the shadows passed over her, she would look up at the clouds, and wonder at the apparent disproportion between themselves and the vast surface they overshadowed. But presently a mass of cloud seemed to detach itself from the ranges to windward, and Maude saw it rise higher and higher in the sky, while darker and darker grew the waters beneath, as its shadow shut out the sunshine. Slowly, but surely, the shade line advanced over the waters across the yellow sands, till Maude found herself within it, and the sun hidden from her sight. Maude loved the cheerful sunshine, and her eyes roved hither and thither over the dark mass above her, in search of some hopeful glimpse of blue sky. As she looked, a new phase of beauty appeared before her wondering eyes. Through a cleft in the cloud the sun suddenly poured a flood of light upon the sea, midway between her and the horizon. Distinct against the dark back ground of the clouds appeared his dazzling rays, radiating from his unseen centre, while the edges of the cloud openings shone like silver. Involuntarily the child checked her donkey's quiet walk, and paused to look and admire. The first sight of such a scene filled her little heart with overpowering thoughts. It seemed to her as if this light through the cloud was a more positive demonstration of God's presence in His works, than anything she had yet seen in nature. She felt as if He looked down

through that opening on the world beneath, and her child's heart worshipped silently in the presence of its Creator.

But Janette's voice suddenly startled her out of her meditation.

"What are you stopping for, Maude?" she cried, as she looked back and perceived the child looking dreamily seaward, while the old servant stood watching her with interest. "Pray come on, or we shall never have time to go round by the wood."

"Let her look, Miss Jane," said John, laying a detaining hand on the donkey's bridle, as Maude prepared to obey the summons. "Isn't it the first time the young lady has seen the sea; and bless her sweet face it does one's heart good to see her look so pleased and solemn like, watching the shade and sunshine playing over the waves."

"Why, John, you've grown quite poetical," laughed Laura, "and look almost as solemn as Miss Maude herself. But we're practical people, John, so please to come on. I've no intention of being kept here all day while you look at the sea."

Maude was moving by this time. The sisters' voices had broken the spell, and she was ready now to go on. A few minutes afterwards they turned off the beach and entered a shady lane.

"Now for a good gallop," cried the three sisters, simultaneously, and preparing accordingly.

But Maude's voice was heard begging timidly she might be allowed to walk ; and the old servant again interposed on her behalf.

"You can't gallop, young ladies, till Miss Prescott is ready," he said firmly, but respectfully. "Your mamma said so, decidedly. If you will only give Miss Maude a little more time, she'll like a gallop as well as any of you."

"Are we to go at this snail's pace all the afternoon?" said Laura, angrily. "If that's the case, I wish Maude had stayed at home with her mother. What's the use of her coming out to enjoy nothing herself, and spoil our pleasure. She could have looked at the sea, and sentimentalized to her heart's content from the Lodge windows."

No one but Janette heeded Laura's rude words, for Louisa was taking the more ladylike and sensible course of trying to persuade, not abuse, their little guest into greater courage. And John seconded her by assurances that he would keep close beside her, and that she had only to hold on tight and not be afraid.

Meanwhile the twins had dropped behind, inflaming each other's anger against Maude.

"Such a great baby as she is," said Janette ; "she cried about getting wet. I suppose the tears would come again directly if we insisted on galloping. I wonder what part of her clothes she's afraid of spoiling this time. It must be a great bore to be poor ; but certainly poor

people have no right to come out of their own set, and make other people uncomfortable."

"I quite agree with papa, that they had much better have stayed at home," added Laura. "It can't be any possible pleasure to them if these kind of things are going on continually. But I positively won't walk any longer to please any one. Come along, Jenny, and let the others do as they like."

Janette willingly agreed to her sister's proposal, and the two girls touched up their beasts, and urged them on with voice and hand into a wild gallop. On they came, tearing down the lane towards the rest of the party. Instinctively Louisa drew to one side to let them pass, coming inadvertently between Maude and her protector, John. Before he could change his position, the two girls came racing past them, laughing and shouting louder than before, at the evident discomfiture of the others. Janette passed close to Maude, whose spirited young donkey was ready enough to take offence. Possessed with a mad spirit of mischief, and further incited by the frightened face Maude turned towards her, Janette raised her whip in passing, and hit the child's donkey a stinging blow across the back. The little beast laid back his ears, resented the affront by lashing out behind, and then dashed down the lane at full gallop, while Louisa's donkey, equally up to mischief, followed his example.

Even this latter experienced little rider retained her

seat with difficulty, so quick and unexpected were the movements of her steed ; but to Maude the consequences of Janette's thoughtlessness were more serious. Almost unseated by the animal's first plunge, his forward bound completely threw her, and she fell heavily to the ground with a violence in proportion to the suddenness of the fall. Fortunately she fell clear of the saddle ; for the donkey tore after his companions, never pausing till he had distanced them, when he stopped and began grazing along the bank with quiet complacency, as if satisfied at having proved his superiority.

The three Talbots cried out in dismay when the riderless donkey overtook them. They pulled up directly, and began retracing their steps along the winding lane, fearing everything for poor little Maude, of whom they could see or hear nothing.

And no wonder ; for the last turn in the lane revealed a scene which struck them dumb with terror. Maude lay pale and insensible, supported by the old servant, the blood trickling in a thin stream over her colourless face, which looked more like death than anything the girls had ever seen. John's own face was blanched with apprehension, and tears dimmed his eyes as he looked up as the children approached.

"We must get her home at once," he said, promptly. "Ride down to the beach as fast as you can, Miss Louisa, and send up a fly. I'll be bringing her as far as I can to meet you."



“The last turn in the lane revealed a scene which struck them dumb with terror. Maude lay pale and insensible, supported by the old servant, the blood trickling in a thin stream over her colourless face.”—Page 66.





Gulping down a great heart-broken sob with praiseworthy determination, Louisa obeyed; but the twins, conscious that the mischief was of their doing, dared neither offer to follow her, or volunteer their assistance to the old man in his labour of love. Shame and sorrow was their just portion for their share in the business.

And so they carried poor little Maude back, bruised and unconscious, to the house she had left only half an hour before full of health and happiness. What would not Laura and Janette have given to live that half hour over again.



## CHAPTER X.

## THE TRUTH DEMONSTRATED.

MAUDE'S injuries proved less serious than was at first anticipated. She had struck her head, in falling, against a sharp stone; but her hat had partially saved her from a blow which might otherwise have been fatal. By the time she was undressed and put to bed she had begun to recover consciousness; but the doctor pronounced her ill enough to require great care for the present, though he expressed the hope that a few days would see her well again.

It would be hard to say which of the two mothers was most to be pitied when a plain statement of the accident and its causes was laid before them by the faithful old servant. He had seen Janette strike the donkey, and divined the spirit which prompted the act. In justice to all parties, Mrs. Talbot felt herself bound to tell her friend everything. And truly her feelings were by no means enviable; but Mrs. Prescott appreciated her motives, and did her best to alleviate her friend's sorrow and mortification.

As to Laura and Janette, they were too old to be punished like little children; but the consequences of

their bad conduct, and the just anger of their parents, were felt acutely by the two girls. With a few stern words Mrs. Talbot banished them from her presence for the rest of the day, further confining them to the house and grounds, and signifying that the duration of their punishment would depend upon themselves.

But it was not till later in the day that Mr. Merton was made acquainted with the catastrophe, the climax of the pride and ill feeling of his grandchildren towards their unoffending little guest. He had started for his usual afternoon's walk soon after the children's departure, and did not return till the first alarm and excitement about Maude had subsided. True to his purpose of keeping an eye on the young people, he had taken the road on which he ought to have met them. But of course he returned to the house without seeing anything of the party, and wholly unprepared for the sad news with which his daughter greeted him. The father and daughter's thoughts naturally dwelt chiefly on the moral delinquencies of those in whom they were most interested; and they talked long and sadly of the twins' faults.

Comparing the facts and words which had come to the knowledge of himself and his daughter with the manservant's account, Mr. Merton had little difficulty in surmising the missing links in the chain of evidence against them. And he took upon himself the duty of bringing the case home to them, and making it the means of teaching lessons he trusted would never be forgotten.

But not lightly, or without due preparation, did he set about his work. He meditated long and prayerfully, with his Bible on his knee, in the quiet evening hours, before he met his grandchildren. The moonlight was again streaming down in floods of silver when he descended to the garden, where the two girls were wandering to and fro, full of sorrow for their thoughtlessness and its consequences, but with little or no idea of the true nature of their manifold shortcomings.

"I would speak with you, my children," said their grandfather gently, as he intercepted them on the lawn. "Come and sit down here beside me, while we talk over the events of the last few days."

In silence, and with averted faces, the girls obeyed.

"A beautiful evening," remarked Mr. Merton, after a few moments' pause; "how calm, and sweet, and still it is. How deep are the shadows of yon trees, and how bright the light shed down upon us by that brilliant moon. However use may harden us to the daily tokens of God's love, we must be cold indeed not to acknowledge it at such an hour as this."

Mr. Merton paused and looked earnestly at his grandchildren, who, surprised at his unexpected address, met his quiet glances with questioning looks.

"Yes, children," continued he solemnly, "the omnipresent God is even now beholding us. His eye has followed each of us through every moment of the past, reading our most secret thoughts, and noting all our

words and actions. And now, in this quiet evening hour, He watches us still. His Holy Spirit hovers round us, sanctifying our spirits' aspirations, and accepting the homage of our souls for the dear Redeemer's sake."

Again Mr. Merton paused, and turned from one to the other of the children; but no look of love or adoration answered his. Mute and blank sat the two girls, with a vague terror growing up in their hearts; for, like Jonah of old, they would fain have fled from the presence of the Almighty.

"Have you no words to-night, my dears?" continued Mr. Merton as he read their thoughts. "You tremble and turn pale when reminded of what should never be forgotten. Where are the soft feelings you experienced only three nights ago, when we stood together on the beach, and acknowledged our Father's ever present love? What change has come over you since then, that you must needs fear instead of love?"

Pride and reserve gave way before this last appeal, and both children burst into tears. The good clergyman's eyes were not dry, as he took their hands within his own, and continued tenderly:—

"Ah! my children, sin has come between you and your heavenly Father. No longer as a parent can you behold Him. You have forgotten all His loving precepts in your pride and self-will, and now your hearts tremble and fear at the recollection of your forgetfulness and its consequences."

“We are very sorry, grandpapa,” sobbed Janette. “Indeed I never meant to hurt Maude when I hit the donkey.”

“I dare say not,” said Mr. Merton, glad to find he was so far understood. “That mischievous act, Janette, is the most excusable part of your conduct; and you quite misunderstand yourself if you think it is only that which makes you feel uncomfortable.”

“Why, what else did we do wrong, grandpapa?” asked Janette in surprise, for she was one of those ever ready to speak up in self-vindication.

“Can you ask, Janette?” he replied sorrowfully. “Has not your whole conduct towards this poor girl, even from the first moment you heard of her, been a direct violation of our Saviour’s teachings? I shall not touch on the low ground of the ill-breeding and bad taste you have both displayed; but shall take the highest view I can of the case, and prove to you both, I hope, how utterly you have overlooked the first principles of Christianity in your treatment of little Maude.”

“What can you mean, grandpapa?” again asked Janette, opening her eyes very wide. Laura also looked up inquiringly, as if equally at a loss to perceive the connection between their bad conduct to Maude, and Christian principles.

“I see you don’t understand me,” said Mr. Merton, with a half smile at their bewilderment. “Be it my task to enlighten you. Firstly, I must remind you of what

we demonstrated that evening on the beach, viz., that the more we realize in our hearts God's love to us, the more we feel them overflowing in love to Him, which, finding no other outlet, makes itself visible to every one by our bestowing a larger measure of love on our fellow-beings. 'For if we love not our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God, whom we have not seen?' The one must be the proof of the other, and is moreover its natural consequence. The first and great commandment, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God,' is immediately followed by the equally stringent one, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' "

"But, grandpapa," said Laura eagerly, as he paused, "surely no one now-a-days acts up to the old-fashioned explanation of this commandment, 'All men are my neighbours.' We cannot be expected to love every one as ourselves."

"I hardly know what you mean by the term 'old-fashioned,' Laura, as applied to Gospel truths," was the calm reply. "Thank God, their fashion changeth not, for they are immutable and infallible as their Divine originator, and suitable alike for every age, society, and sex. But you would have better expressed your thoughts, my dear, had you asked me, as did the lawyer our Saviour, 'And who is my neighbour?'" "

"And if I ask that now, grandpapa?" said Laura, looking puzzled, while Janette's eyebrows were raised in astonishment.



“I must quote Christ’s own words in answering you,” he said, “for none others have such life and power.” Then in solemn and impressive tones the old clergyman repeated the parable of the Good Samaritan, concluding with the direct question, “‘Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?’”

The twins looked at him and each other as he paused for their answer. Janette’s tones implied her utter unconsciousness of any self-application, as she asked curiously, “But to whom, grandpapa, have Laura and I failed to show such mercy?”

“Such mercy!” he repeated emphatically, and looking round on her with an earnestness which commanded attention. “Is the teaching of our Saviour’s parables confined to their literal fulfilment, Janette? Dare you narrow down the principles contained in this story to mere deeds of compassion towards the destitute? Is there no such thing as mental suffering, keener oftentimes than the cutting of a two-edged sword? Is commonplace almsgiving, and the easy charity of ministering to a man’s temporal necessities, is that all? Is not the soul-destroying venom of evil-speaking, the cruel inuendo, the bitter taunt which wounds soul and spirit in wanton sport—are not these things equally violations of the Lord’s commandments?”

Janette’s eyes fell before the severe look of her grandfather, while he continued vehemently, “Priest and

Levite have you both proved yourselves this day, in your treatment of little Maude. Confiding and innocent, she came amongst you; poor in spirit, too, and in this world's goods, and wounded by rough encounters with a poverty of which you both know nothing. Priest-like, Laura has passed by at every opportunity this day, crushing this little bruised spirit with proud indifference, and going on her own way, thoughtless of Maude's sufferings and trials. Levite-like, Janette has come and looked on her. With a cold, cruel curiosity she has satisfied herself that the poverty, the nakedness, and the wounds were all there, and, when a helping hand might have been tendered, has 'passed by on the other side.' If ever the spirit of a commandment is broken irrespective of the letter, you, Laura and Janette, have sinned this day in God's sight. And you are as guilty before Him as though convicted like that priest and Levite of a positive act of inhumanity towards a suffering fellow-creature. Where is your obedience to the universal law of love, when, for the gratification of a foolish pride and a selfish curiosity, you have tortured a young guest on all points, and wantonly deprived her of the enjoyment which was her due. Poor unoffending little child. God only knows how she has felt and suffered this day; and you only put the finishing touch to your work by the rude violence which caused the accident. Had she died, as might well have chanced but for God's interposing mercy, Laura's pride and Janette's

curiosity would have been the chief agents in the catastrophe.”

Well might the two girls weep and tremble at this new and startling view of their offences, summed up so impressively by their grandfather. Their thoughts, words, and actions through the last few hours stared them in the face; and they could only lay their hands on their mouths, and plead guilty before God and man.

They hung their heads and listened humbly while the good clergyman continued his admonitions. He pointed out their many errors, dwelling particularly on their abuse of God's good gifts to them. The wealth and position which should have raised them above such petty considerations had been made their excuse for despising one of God's little ones, because His providence had denied her a like share of the world's good things. “Even the mere worldling must have condemned your conduct,” observed their grandfather in conclusion, “for you outraged courtesy and good breeding in a manner none could overlook. Of the three of you, Louisa's behaviour only could bear investigation. And why? Not because she was better bred or more alive to her advantages than you were, but because she dared to forget these things, and allowed herself to be actuated by the faint reflections of the love of God, which the contemplation of His goodness and greatness had diffused over her heart. Had you all been influenced by such motives, how differently must this day have ended for Maude and yourselves. Re-

member, my children, to the last hour of your lives, that in everything Christ, and Christ only, is an example worthy of imitation. High or low, rich or poor, old or young, we must all go to Him if we desire to attain any measure of that perfection which even the most worldly are compelled to admire, when they see its developments in His earnest followers. We need no other study than God's Word, no other rule of life than love to God and our neighbour, to fit us for the higher as well as the lower walks of life."

At this moment a hand was laid on Mr. Merton's shoulder, and looking round he perceived his son-in-law.

"And is that the teaching of your gospel, father?" he said earnestly. "I have heard, since my return from Stonehill, how mere worldly policy has failed to keep my daughters within bounds; and it was such a tale as made my cheeks burn with shame for myself and them. Methinks the love of God and of man is a better starting point for the regulation of our conduct toward others, if we may always expect to see its influence illustrated as in Louisa's conduct towards Maude. I shall never again preach the wisdom of this world respecting anything to my children, but will send them to the Bible, that they may learn how best to act in every future circumstance of their lives."

The old clergyman warmly pressed his son-in-law's extended hand, and the sense of a work well performed through the power of God's ever present Spirit filled his

heart with such peace and joy as they only know who make His will the rule and regulator of their every-day life.

We need say but little more of the party at Elm Lodge. Maude recovered from the effects of her fall as soon as could be expected, and lost nothing by it after all. The fortnight was extended to a month before she and her mother returned to their old home, carrying with them the love and esteem of every member of the Talbot family. Laura and Janette profited by the lesson taught them, and laid themselves out to make up to the child after her recovery, for their bad conduct before the accident.

And often in their future lives, when tempted to sin, a word reminding them of Maude's visit checked the rude word and unkind action, and led them to remember the great love of Him "who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all," and patiently and prayerfully "to love even as they were loved."



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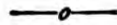
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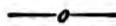
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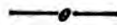
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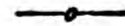
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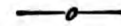
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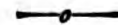
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