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CHARLOTTE
AND HER
ENEMY

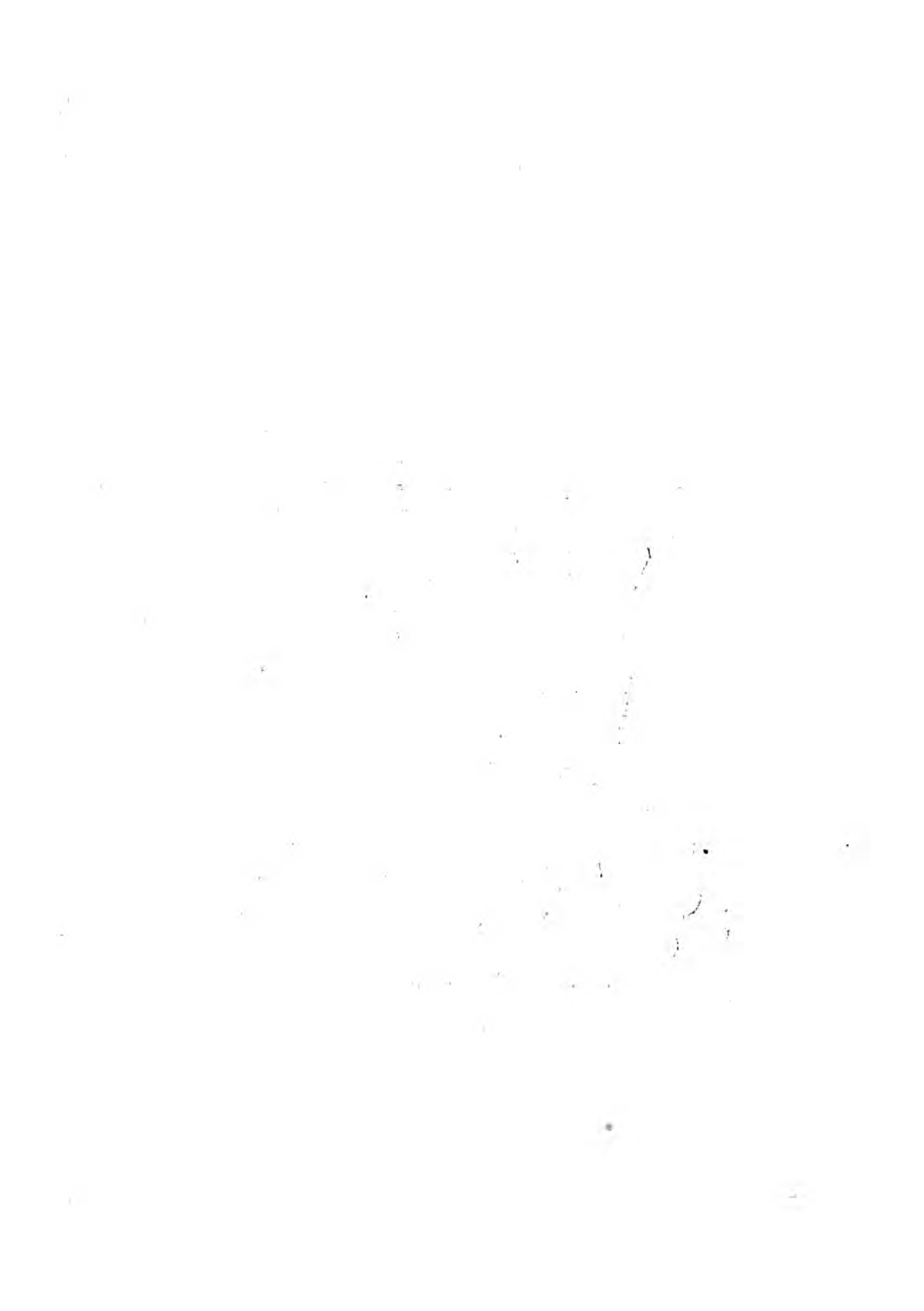
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CHARLOTTE AND HER ENEMY.

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CHARLOTTE AND HER ENEMY.

CHAPTER I.

CHARLOTTE'S HOME.



CHARLOTTE was ten years old. She lived with her grandfather and grandmother, who were getting somewhat aged. Their house was a large, old-fashioned one, with three windows looking out of the roof, like three great eyes, to see what was going on below them. The parlour was a very large room, with wood-work curiously carved into panels, and a queer little three-sided cupboard in the corner. Behind it was a long, low dining-room, a bed-room, kitchen, and woodshed, all kept beautifully clean, for Mrs Richards was a neat old lady, who never allowed a speck of dirt or a cobweb to lie undisturbed on her premises. Charlotte had

a large chamber for a bed-room, which she liked very much, though it was furnished differently from most bed-rooms now-a-days. It had two beds in it,—a single one where Charlotte slept, which stood in the corner, and was covered with a pretty pink-and-white patchwork quilt, and one with slender high posts, surrounded by curtains of old-fashioned chintz. These curtains hung from the wall to the floor, and were looped up at the corners of the foot-board. Charlotte liked these old-fashioned curtains very much, and was never tired of studying the men, women, sheep, dogs, hens, and chickens on them. She gave names to the men and women, and used to hold long conversations with them; of course herself answering, as well as asking, all the questions.

A narrow looking-glass hung from the wall over a little toilet table, an old-fashioned chest of drawers with brass handles stood on one side of the room, and a bureau, equally quaint-looking and old-fashioned, on the other.

Before the windows stood a beautiful old oak-tree, and in front of the house a fine old elm, whose drooping branches overhung the mossy roof, and whose leaves made sweet music when the wind stirred them softly in the summer twilight.

Charlotte was not much better or worse than other girls of her age; there were good and bad traits mingled in her character; but her grandfather and grandmother were very fond of her, and often indulged her more than was wise. She had come to live with them several years before; and being the only young person in the family, might have been very useful to them. Indeed, she was so in many respects, but very troublesome in others.

Charlotte had a good many friends, but she had enemies also, which disturbed her peace perpetually, and made her frequently very unhappy. Some of these were almost constantly attacking her in some form or other. Morning and evening, summer and winter, these foes were lurking near her; heat never melted, cold never froze them, light never blinded, darkness never frightened them! They would come boldly into her room at all hours, follow her into the parlour, dining-room, and kitchen; go with her to school, to walk, to church, sometimes all of them together, at others only one; but very rarely indeed was she free from the presence of one or other of these foes.

I propose to tell you of one of these enemies, for, it may be, similar ones lurk about your path, and cause you much perplexity, even if you are not

aware of it; for, what was very singular, Charlotte seldom thought of these enemies, or made any effort to drive them off. She even regarded some of them as friends, cherishing them tenderly, and hugging them closely to her heart!



CHAPTER II.

MORNING.

ONE of Charlotte's enemies, perhaps the most harassing and troublesome of them all, was Indolence, and it was sure to attack her as soon as she awoke.

It is a bright, beautiful May morning. Charlotte is sleeping soundly under the pretty pink-and-white patchwork quilt; but the birds have been awake since four o'clock, singing in the old elm and the oak-tree the merriest songs that were ever heard. A thrush began the concert, leading off with his clear note, which rung out over all the village, and seemed to rise up above the tree-tops to the sky. Then the robins followed. They were no great singers, to be sure, and had no variety of notes, but such as they had they sung with right good-will; and all the blackbirds, and tomtits, and chaffinches, and little chirping sparrows struck in,

and swelled the chorus, till the whole air was full of melody.

At half-past five Mrs Richards called from the foot of the stairs—

‘Charlotte! Charlotte! it is time to get up. Do you hear?’

No response.

‘Charlotte! Charlotte!’ (this time very loud indeed) ‘breakfast is almost ready, and you *must* get up immediately. Are you awake?’

A very feeble voice replied, ‘Yes, grandmother;’ and Mrs Richards returned to the kitchen.

Nothing could have been pleasanter than for Charlotte to have jumped up at once that beautiful morning, dressed herself neatly, and gone down with a smiling face to breakfast with her grandfather and grandmother. She knew she ought, and indeed she really wanted to do so; but one of her enemies had crept into the bed, and was whispering to her, ‘Oh, it is so early, I wouldn’t wake up yet; there is plenty of time for another nap! What is the use of being up by daylight?’ and Charlotte shut her eyes again.

‘Charlotte! Charlotte! where are you? Breakfast is ready now. Are you coming?’ And again a very sleepy voice replied, ‘Yes, grandmother.’

In fact, Charlotte did try now to wake up; but it seemed as if heavy weights were on her eyes, holding them together, and all she accomplished was to reach a state of half-consciousness, in which she felt very uncomfortable. Something kept telling her, 'You *must* get up—this very minute!' but the enemy whispered, 'Just wait a minute or two; they always call before breakfast is ready; take another nap—one more *little* nap!' and she yielded. If she had only jumped up at the first call, how wide-awake and happy she would now have been, eating her breakfast with her kind friends down-stairs! Yes, it was a cruel enemy that pinned her to her bed that beautiful May morning.

When the clock struck seven, Charlotte started up in a fright. 'Oh, it is so late! what will grandfather say to me? Oh, how I wish I had got up when I was first called! I did mean to; but—' and she began dressing in a terrible hurry. Of course every strap and string and button was getting tangled, and hindering her, till she was in a fret. She had no time to unbraid her hair, and brush the soft folds till they were smooth and glossy, and then braid them neatly up again; no time to clean her nails or brush her teeth properly; no time to lay back the clothes from the bed, and open the win-

dows and let the golden sunlight and fresh air stream into the room; no time to kneel quietly beside her bed and thank God for sweet sleep and the bright morning light; no time to read a verse from the Bible or a sweet little hymn,—no, indeed. She must throw on her clothes in the quickest way, wash a little spot round her eyes, smooth the top of her hair, and go down with her boot-laces dangling, her dress half hooked, and one side an inch higher at the neck than the other. She felt ashamed to go down so late, and dreaded to see her grandfather's great eyes looking at her over the top of his spectacles. How differently she looked and felt from the smiling, tidy little girl who might have gone skipping into the breakfast-room an hour or two before!

Never was a best parlour neater than Mrs Richard's kitchen; it was really delightful to go into it that morning, the floor and tables were scoured so clean, the window curtains were so white, and the air that stole in through the roses and honeysuckle was so fragrant. Prayers were over, and Mr Richards had gone to his work when Charlotte came down.

‘Good morning, Charlotte,’ said her grandmother, as she entered, speaking in a pleasant voice.

But the child could not answer pleasantly ; she felt unhappy, as if she should cry, and sat down behind the door.

‘Why, Charlotte, don’t look dismal, now you have got up, but be active and help me a little. But eat your breakfast first ; I have kept it warm for you ;’ and the good grandmother uncovered a plate of nice buttered toast, and another plate, on which was a piece of ham and a fried egg. Charlotte ate a few mouthfuls ; but good as the breakfast was, she did not relish it ; she felt ashamed, stupid, cross, headachy. The enemy had stolen away the light step, sparkling eye, and merry voice which belonged to her. Cruel enemy ! How much he took away from her ; how much he inflicted on her !

Charlotte’s morning work was to wash the breakfast dishes, clean the knives, dust the dining-room, and make her bed. This morning her grandmother had washed the dishes ; but as she had a lesson to get (because the evening before Indolence had told her there was no need of studying it then), she ought to have moved about briskly. But she did not. She dawdled round the woodshed, looking at the chickens, and playing with the cat, till her grandmother ordered her to get the knife-board,

and then she did it with a pouting face. Her enemy was in her hand and arm; so that when she scraped the brick and rubbed the knives, they moved very slowly! Oh, if you could have seen Susie Brisk clean *her* knives that morning! She had been up by five o'clock, set the table, fed the chickens, peeled the potatoes, and washed the dishes, and now her fingers rubbed well and quickly along the knife-board; and when she had wiped them carefully, and held them up for her mother to see, they shone like silver; and there was a sparkle, too, in Susie's black eyes, which it would have done your heart good to see!

Indolence! Indolence! Indolence! What sad confusion you brought into Charlotte's work that beautiful morning! How you made her drag slowly from room to room; how, under your influence, she only half-cleaned her knives, half-dusted the furniture, and half-tidied her own room, it was sorrowful to tell. See her tumble her night-dress into all sorts of wrinkles as she rolls it up; see how crookedly the sheets and quilt are put upon her bed; how she leaves hair in her combs and brush; and squeezes everything into her drawers in the most disorderly manner! And her room is a fair type of her mind; all is confusion there, too; and when she tries to

get her lesson, she thinks of Lizzie Peters' funny jokes, and of Mary Allen's horrid old bonnet, and fifty other things, instead of how Turkey in Asia is bounded, what are its rivers, lakes, and mountains ; and all because Indolence is at her elbow with his odious whisper, saying, 'There is time enough yet, —don't be in a hurry !' So the lesson was but half-learned when Lizzie Peters came along ; and catching up her books, and throwing on her bonnet hastily, Charlotte set off for school.



CHAPTER III.

THE DAY.

IT would have been well for Charlotte if her enemy had stayed behind when she went to school. But no, he followed her; he made her loiter by the way, and get a late mark; he kept her from paying attention when the beautiful chapter in the Bible about Mary and Martha, and their brother who died and lived again, was read; he prevented her applying herself to her arithmetic enough to understand the lesson, so that she annoyed her teacher by perpetually teasing her for answers she should have obtained herself; he caused her to linger on the way home, so that her grandfather's patience was quite exhausted, and he reproved her severely when she arrived. This made Charlotte weep bitterly; for she was an affectionate little girl, and really loved her grand-

parents, and was grieved when they were displeased with her. She could not eat her dinner; and by the time she reached school in the afternoon, her head was really aching so hard that, though she tried to study, she could accomplish little. The day was an uncomfortable, lost day,—that day which, but for Indolence, might have been such a bright, happy, useful one.

And many such days did Indolence inflict upon little Charlotte. He did not every day pursue her quite so closely; but he was always hovering near, ready to make her neglect her duties, or perform them in a sluggish manner; and so great was the influence he exerted over her, that the very movements of her body became changed; her soft blue eyes grew languid; her hands and feet lifted themselves feebly, and her whole figure began to lose the springy lightness which is so natural to children.

Her schoolmates noticed it, and would say to each other: 'Charlotte Richards is a sweet good girl, always generous and kind, but she *is so lazy!*'

'I don't know what will become of you,' said Susie Brisk to her one day; 'I really believe you are too lazy to eat! I wouldn't be such a dawdling sleepy-head for all the world.'

Charlotte cried; and the girls all said Susie was

ill-natured and unkind ; and so she was, for her own active nature was so opposed to Charlotte's that she could not help being irritated when they came in contact. But then they all felt that, loving and gentle as Charlotte was, she had very trying ways, and was always rather a dead weight on their plans for study or enjoyment. But most of them overlooked her faults, and loved her in spite of them, for she seldom was cross or angry ; and good-temper always gains friends at school.

Charlotte was naturally a good scholar, and could learn her lessons so rapidly, that she managed to say them pretty well in spite of her idle habits. But if she had applied herself closely, her progress would have been still greater, and she would have acquired a faculty of fixing her attention, which would have been worth more to her in after life than all the knowledge contained in her school-books. She ran over her lessons hastily, remembered the words long enough to repeat them, and then, without thinking or caring much for their meaning, let them slip out of her memory again.

Her teacher, Miss Tracy, loved her pupils, especially the gentle girl who had always a pleasant smile and kind word for her, and she grieved to see her under the influence of such an enemy.

She saw how he was stealing away her time, her strength, her talents, and knew that, if not resisted, he would make her an inefficient, useless woman, in spite of her many excellences. And she very often thought, 'What can I do to help Charlotte to overcome her enemy?'



CHAPTER I-V.

THE STREAM.

THE schoolhouse in which Miss Tracy taught, stood on a little hill, beyond a stream of very pure cold water. It was a pretty stream; willow bushes overhung its banks, and dipped their long slender arms into it; one beautiful birch-tree leaned over it, so that in the still summer days all its fluttering leaves were pictured in the clear water, and beyond the leaves, far down in the bright mirror, shone a soft blue sky, almost softer and fairer than the sky overhead. Creeping mosses and lovely creeping plants grew close to the edge of the water, and modest little wild-flowers opened their bright faces in that quiet spot. The school-girls liked to pick these flowers, and they often took off their shoes and stockings, and waded out on the smooth round stones to look under the

bridge, and get the wreaths of wild clematis which grew there.

Charlotte loved this stream very dearly; for she had a quick eye for what was beautiful in nature, and she had learned a little dialogue between Jenny and the brook, which she was very fond of repeating to her teacher and schoolmates.

JENNY AND THE BROOK.

JENNY.

I spy thee, little babbling brook,
Beside the forest tree;
Oh, stop beneath its cooling shade;
In thy pure waters let me wade;
Come, stop awhile with me.

I spy thee basking in the sun,
Close by the meadow's brink;
And little lambs come one by one,
With nimble foot and bleating tongue,
A cooling draught to drink.

Whither so fast, thou babbling brook,
Over smooth moss and stone;
Splashing, dashing, bounding, leaping,
Without resting, eating, sleeping,
Covered with snowy foam?

BROOK.

I bathe the feet of forest trees,
And cheer the sunny way ;
On drooping bud and lowly moss,
On thirsty, parching meadow grass,
I fling my cooling spray.

I make nice homes for little fish,
In corner, crevice, nook ;
Oh, you would laugh to see the trout
Hide here and there, and then dart out,
To seize the fisher's hook !

At work, at work ; no time have I
To spend in idle play ;
From eve till morn, from morn till eve—
So, if you please, I'll take my leave,
I must be on my way !

One afternoon Miss Tracy took tea at Mr Richards', and after tea she said to Charlotte, 'I am going to Brookville ; would you like to walk over with me ?' Charlotte was delighted, and her grandmother's consent being obtained, they set off about six o'clock. Brookville was a factory village nearly two miles from Mr Richards' ; but there was a foot-path through the fields leading by the bank of the stream, which greatly lessened the distance, and they took this path.

All was so still, so green and beautiful, that Charlotte enjoyed this walk very much.

‘This makes me think of your poetry, Charlotte,’ said Miss Tracy, ‘for this little stream is always “at work—at work!” and has no time to “spend in idle play.” It never stands still, you see.’

‘No, ma’am; but then I don’t think it *works*, Miss Tracy; I think it is always playing. I should love to glide along as easily as it does,—doing nothing all day long.’

‘But it is doing something,’ said Miss Tracy; ‘perhaps it can’t be called work exactly, for it has no mind to plan and execute labour; but it fulfils the end for which it was made, and does a great deal of good. Let us suppose it to be a living being that thinks and talks; and I will give you a little history of it, if you wish to hear it. The sun is still so hot, I would rather sit awhile in the shade here, than go on.’

So Miss Tracy spread her shawl on a grassy knoll, and Charlotte nestled close beside her, putting her hand in hers.

‘Oh, how sweet it is here!’ she said. ‘I should like to stay here always.’

Miss Tracy smiled. ‘Now,’ said she, ‘I will tell you

'THE STORY OF WILLOW-BROOK.

'Willow-Brook was born among high hills. It was a tiny thing at first, only a few silvery drops trickling out from under a stone. But other little bright drops fed it, till it was strong enough to creep softly along to some grass near by. It was a loving little baby of a brook, and kissed everything it crept up to,—the grass, the pebbles, the flowers ; and they all looked the brighter for being kissed by its pretty little mouth ! By-and-by it became quite strong, and walked off where it chose, making a path for itself among the sand and bushes, growing ever still larger and stronger. It began to talk, too ; and a very low, sweet, murmuring voice it had,—one which would have been lost in a noisy town, but among the lonely woods and rocks it sounded very sweetly.

"I am a happy little brook ; I love everybody, and everybody loves me," was its song, as it tripped merrily away. In time, Willow-Brook grew old enough to think, and to ask herself, "What was I made for ? Everything has a life-work to do : I wonder what mine is ?" She pondered upon this a great deal, as she stole softly along under the shadows of the hills. "I have had a great deal done for me," she murmured ; "the sky looks down

lovingly into my bosom all day long; the sun twinkles brightly through the leaves to give me light; and at night, when the darkness begins to come, the beautiful little stars shine out to keep me company, till the sun comes back again. The birds sit close by, and sing such sweet songs, my heart runs over with delight; and every little leaf and flower-bud on the bank, nods and smiles to me, as I go by. I think there never was a little brook that had so much to make it happy; and now I wonder if there is anything I can do for others. I don't expect to do great things, for I am only a little brook, living down on the ground in the quiet woods. But I will sing as well as I know how, as I travel on; perhaps the trees and flowers will like to hear me. I can give the pretty birds a sip of water when they are thirsty, and I can moisten the roots of the wild-flowers, the alder-bushes, and the willows. At any rate, I will love everything dearly, and do *all I can* to make others happy; though it is so very little I can do at best."

'And so she did. She brightened everything she touched. The old grey stones smiled as she tripped over them; the thread-like roots of the flowers and grasses drank rich supplies from her clear waters, and sent forth shoots, so green and

vigorous, they were beautiful to see; and even the large oaks and birches on the bank, were fed and refreshed by her crystal drops. Many a bright-eyed bird sipped a cheering draught from her; and the playful lambs, with the graver mothers of the flock, came down to her to quench their thirst; and even the stately ox was glad to draw in supplies from the generous little stream which never refused to give. So free-hearted was little Willow-Brook, and so anxious to do good to everything, that when there were dry and dusty branches on the trees, too high for her to reach, she would send up a little mist-wreath to moisten every twig and leaf, and in this way refresh the hills above her. Dear little Willow-Brook! No wonder she was happy as she wandered on.

‘After a time Willow-Brook became more enterprising. She emerged from the wood, and flashed out into the sunlight of broad green meadows. But it was for no selfish ends she ran about in all sorts of fanciful crooks and curves, to hunt up thirsty trees and dried-up pastures, and give them a refreshing draught from her brimming cup; she brightened the soft meadows into a richer green; the stately elms sent out their giant roots to her, and drew up into their great branches new life and

vigour; and the graceful sprays which went up from her breast at evening, and robed the hills in a garment of silver gauze, bore freshness and beauty on their wings; they kissed the dust from every tiny leaf upon the hill-sides, and quickened every vein into quicker circulation. And yet Willow-Brook was just as humble as before, and went softly on her way, singing the same murmuring song. She sung it all day and all night long, "and the stars heard," and the hills towering far above her, and the grey old rocks, and the forest trees, and meadow-grasses, and human hearts,—all heard that low, sweet song, and blessed her for it, for it spoke of God's love to all the creatures He had made!

'But Willow-Brook was not always to glide on her way so peacefully. After miles and miles of pleasant wandering, she found her course arrested suddenly. A huge stone dam has been built across her path. Men have seen her bounding life, and wish to use it for their own benefit. They would fetter that silver stream, take her out from the blessed air and sunshine, and make her work for them, under the dingy walls of yonder factory. The heart of Willow-Brook rebels.

"Shall I become man's slave?" she cries, as she pauses above the dam, declining to take the leap;

"shall I go down into dark holes to do his dirty work for him? Shall I, born to sing among the hills, and dance with joyous step along green meadows, be chained to a dark water-wheel, turning it round and round in ceaseless din?"

'And Willow-Brook paused to think. And as she thought, milder and better feelings took possession of her heart.

"Have I not longed for work?" she said, with a melancholy ripple running across her breast. "Have I not always wished I might be made useful; and now that a great work is given me to do, shall I refuse because it is distasteful? Shall I decline to labour, when all created things obey this great law of working for the good of others? Shall I not rather rejoice to gather up all my strength, and plunge into the thickest of the toil,—rejoice to leave my life of careless ease and begin to work in earnest? I shall not, by working for him, become man's slave. Oh no! I shall be doing it for my great Maker, who has done so much for me. He will smile upon my efforts, and rejoice to see me become a blessing to man by a life of self-denying toil."

"'Twas but a moment, and the bright stream leaped joyfully over the dam, singing as the foam

rose sparkling all around her, for her heart was filled with a richer and higher joy than she had ever felt before. She was pursuing her mission with a loving, trusting spirit, and no shadow rested now on her fair face. Graceful as when she tripped through lovely flower-banks, Willow-Brook ran smilingly under the dark factory wall, applying all her energies to the task before her. It was *work*,—hard, serious work,—but it was done cheerily.

‘See how that monster-wheel responds to her vigorous touch! How slowly and with heaving breath its huge bulk begins to revolve steadily, giving an impulse to innumerable beams, and rods, and lesser wheels, till all the complicated machinery of that vast building, with its thousand spindles, belts, and looms, is set in motion! Wonderful power!—wonderful effect! And all had been silent and motionless but for the energetic touch of little Willow-Brook!

‘Go into that wareroom, and see the thousands of yards of woollen cloth lying there, ready to be packed and sent to the different portions of the world; think of all the men, women, and children, who will be clothed by it in comfortable garments; and you will have some idea of what Willow-Brook has done for the good of others.’

Miss Tracy paused; her cheek was flushed and her eye bright with emotion. In the little tale she had been weaving, she had almost forgot that any one was near her; but seeing Charlotte looking up with eager eyes, she said—

‘You don’t think Willow-Brook was to be pitied, do you, for having work to do?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Charlotte, ‘I am sure it was a noble thing to do so much good; and yet I can’t help feeling sorry that she doesn’t run among the beautiful hills and meadows any more. Must she be shut up there *always*, in the dismal old factory?’

‘We shall see,’ said Miss Tracy.

‘But don’t *you* feel sorry to have Willow-Brook chained up under there, turning the great water-wheel?’ asked Charlotte.

‘If Willow-Brook were a human being,’ replied Miss Tracy, ‘I should say the joy of being useful is so much greater than that of being pleasantly idle, I was sure she was far happier under the factory than in the sunlight.’

Charlotte looked dissatisfied, but said nothing.

‘We are so made,’ continued Miss Tracy, ‘that activity is delightful to us; and if we fancy idleness is pleasanter and try it, we always find it makes us very uncomfortable. No idle person is

ever happy. Sauntering lazily about, hour after hour, day after day, we become so dull and lifeless that we are a burden to ourselves; whereas, if we fairly set about some work in good earnest, we feel cheerful and happy.'

Charlotte looked down, and sat twisting her bonnet-strings in her fingers. At last she said—

'I don't like to work, Miss Tracy. I suppose it's wrong; but it is always a task, and never a pleasure to me. I don't think it is so with other girls, but I cannot help it.'

'I think you are far less happy than if you liked to work, Charlotte. But that is not the great motive for activity. *It is not right* to live in the world without doing all we can to make others better and happier. We all have friends who love us, and whom we can assist in some way; and we ought to scatter blessings in our path, as we go on, just as Willow-Brook did.

'But we must be going now; the sun is almost down, and it will be pleasant walking.'

So they walked on, talking cheerfully, till they came out on the public road, just above the great stone dam, and they both stopped a moment to look at the wide, still sheet of water.

'There is where Willow-Brook felt vexed, and

wanted to stand still,' said Charlotte. 'I shall always think of it when I see the dam. See, how she jumps over!'

'Yes, I am sure she sets about her work with right good-will.'

The shop was just beyond, and Miss Tracy went into it to do the shopping for which she had come over.



CHAPTER V.

THE WALK HOME.

HER shopping over, Miss Tracy proposed walking a little farther, and returning home by a different road. As they were opposite the factory buildings, Charlotte said—

‘It’s very funny, but I can’t keep from thinking about Willow-Brook all the time, and how she feels. There she runs under the factory walls, all bright and shining.’

‘Did you ever see the water-wheel?’

‘No, ma’am. I wish I could.’

‘We will walk over here again some time, and I will ask Mr Pierson to let us see it; it is too late now.’

‘Does it always go?’

‘Yes, the force of the water pressing against it keeps it turning; and when they wish to stop it, they shut the water off.’

‘And does the wheel make the other things go?’

‘Yes, it is the great moving power of the whole; the other machinery is so connected with it, that its movements keep the whole in motion. You have been in this factory?’

‘Yes, once with grandfather; and there was such a whirling, and such a dreadful noise there, it made me giddy. There was a disagreeable smell too.’

‘Yes, of the oil upon the wool. Look here, Charlotte,’ and Miss Tracy pointed to a large pool of water almost as black as ink. ‘Here is some of the Willow-Brook water, once so bright and clear.’

‘Oh, how vile it looks! it is too bad. Dear, pretty Willow-Brook, it is a shame to spoil it so!’

‘It has been used for dyeing, and will run clear again,’ said Miss Tracy.

‘But is Willow-Brook really the name of this little river?’ asked Charlotte.

‘No; I have never heard it called anything but Mill River, or Mill Brook; but I think it deserves a prettier name; and there are so many willows growing on its banks, Willow-Brook seems an appropriate one.’

‘Yes, it is a pretty name, and I shall always call it so. But, Miss Tracy, do all factories go by water?’

‘Some are worked by steam. What would you think of having your pretty Willow-Brook water shut up in a huge copper boiler, with a great fire under it, and kept boiling and boiling till it was tortured into steam?’

‘Oh horrible!’ exclaimed Charlotte. And then she laughed, and said, ‘But it really doesn’t feel anything, you know; it’s only water, not a real, living person.’

By this time they had reached a point of land overlooking the stream. It had fully escaped from the factory buildings, and having taken a little turn, was winding away into a beautiful little meadow.

‘You see your favourite is not kept in prison always. Here she is, with her face as bright and sparkling as ever, as full of dimples and sunny smiles; and she is singing just as merrily. Indeed, I can’t help fancying there is a sweeter tone added to her song, and that she is saying, “Oh, I am so happy now—so happy because I have done some good.” See how merrily she trips along, running to embrace that great stone with both her pretty arms! If we could walk farther, we should soon come to a lovely little waterfall, where Willow-Brook leaps dashing down into a dark, deep ravine. Listen, and you will hear the sound of it now.’

‘Yes, and I hear that sound sometimes at night, after I am in bed, and everything is still.’

‘I think it must be the water falling over the dam which you hear in your room.’

‘Perhaps it is; but it sounds very sweetly, and I love to lie and hear it.’

‘Yes, I know of no sound more musical or sweet than that of falling water, nor of any sight more beautiful.’

‘When I hear it now at night,’ said Charlotte, ‘I shall remember it is saying, “Play is done, work’s begun;” and shall think how glad Willow-Brook is to work, and to do some good in the world!’

‘I hope you will, Charlotte, and that it will be a pleasanter sound than ever to you. I believe this stream works a good deal of machinery below here, and that this is only the beginning of its usefulness. There is Mr Manning. I will ask him about it. Good evening; Mr Manning.’

‘Good evening, ma’am—a pleasant evening!’

‘Yes, sir, very pleasant indeed. I have been looking at this little stream of water. I think it works other factories, does it not?’

‘Oh yes, ma’am; it’s one of the busiest little streams in the country. For all it looks so small, it has a great fall, coming from such high ground, and it never fails in the driest summer.’

‘What other mills are on it?’

‘Oh, just below here, half a mile or so, there is Slate and Wood’s cotton factory; then there’s Brown’s grist-mill, and a great saw-mill, where there’s a deal of timber sawn; then you come to Taylorville, where all Taylor’s great works are—the greatest woollen-mills in the country, you know; and there’s Turner’s satinet factory; and I believe one or two more before you get to the end;—yes, there is a paper-mill and a silk factory both.’

‘Where does it empty itself?’

‘About twelve miles from here, into the great river.’

‘Does it increase much in size?’

‘Not much; it is a little wider, and a good deal deeper. It’s a very little river to do so much; but I don’t know such good water-power anywhere as it furnishes.’

After thanking the old gentleman for his information, they walked on.

‘You see Willow-Brook accomplishes a vast amount of good in the world. How many thousands are made happier for its labours, and yet it is but a little stream!’

By this time they were approaching home. Charlotte looked up at Miss Tracy very earnestly, and said—

‘I want to ask you something, if I may venture to do so.’

‘What is it? You need not feel afraid to speak freely to me.’

‘Didn’t you tell me about Willow-Brook because you thought I was a very idle girl?’

‘Yes, I did partly for that; partly to increase my own industry and hopefulness.’

Charlotte again looked up with inquiring eyes at her teacher, who was herself quite young.

‘You do not know that I, too, am sometimes tempted to be indolent, and wish I had not to work so hard. Teaching seems very tiresome to me at times; but I have a mother who is poor, and I know I ought to be earning something. So,’ she added, with a smile, ‘I wish to encourage my own heart, as well as yours, by the example of little Willow-Brook.’

It was perhaps a strange confidence to place in so young a child; but Charlotte understood it. She walked along some time in silence; then she said—

‘I wish I wasn’t so indolent;’ and the tears stood in her eyes. ‘I wish I could be of some use in the world.’

‘I am sure you do, dear child. And you are so young, you can overcome your faults, if you really

wish to do so, and begin in earnest. I think indolence is one of your greatest faults, and it prevents you from doing what you might for others.'

'But what good could I do if I tried?'

'A great deal in many ways. You could help your grandfather and grandmother constantly; you are a comfort to them now, but you would be a still greater one if you were always thoughtful and active. You could give me a great deal of pleasure by being always punctual in coming to school, and in learning your lessons thoroughly. It troubles me every day to see you putting them off as you do, getting them in a great hurry, and getting them imperfectly at last.'

'But I am at the head of my class, Miss Tracy.'

'Yes, but you do not learn your lessons thoroughly. When your class is examined, some of them will be greatly in advance of you, because they studied more, and will remember longer what they learned. I have no doubt Jane Hartwell, who is so slow to learn, will remember what she commits to memory as long as she lives; while what you have repeated so glibly, has slipped away from you already.'

'But it is the habit of doing everything heedlessly and imperfectly which is to be most deplored. You are forming your character for life now, and if this

loitering, idle disposition strengthens, you will be always indolent. A grown person cannot change her character as a child can; the pliable wax has become hardened into stone; and however bitterly she may mourn over the past, she cannot recall it, or escape the consequences.'

'But how can I become industrious, Miss Tracy? How can I overcome my faults?'

'By setting yourself resolutely about it. Your great fault is indolence, and you must struggle against it all the time. When I give you occupation at school, or your grandmother employment at home, you must not linger and think how disagreeable it is, and loll about, dreading to begin; but set about it *at once*, no matter how unpleasant it is. Say to yourself cheerfully, "I *will* do this; I will not be an idle girl, but an industrious one;" and by persevering, you will succeed.

'You have powerful motives for activity. Your grandparents will be made happier; your companions improved by your example; your own character elevated; and then, Charlotte, you have a Father in heaven who is always looking with love upon you. He has made you to be useful, to be happy in loving Him, and in doing all the good you can in the world; and every sincere

attempt you make to do right will meet with his approval.'

They had now reached home. Miss Tracy went in; but after sitting a short time with Mr and Mrs Richards, she bade them good-night, and affectionately kissing Charlotte, went away.

Charlotte soon after went to her room. The last words her grandmother said, were—

'I wish you would try to get up to breakfast to-morrow morning, Charlotte. It is a great trouble to me to have you lie so late, and it frets your grandfather too. I want you to wash the dishes; and if you are here, you can do a great many little things for me. Do try to wake when I call you.'

'Yes, grandmother, I certainly will to-morrow morning.'

Charlotte felt in an unusually thoughtful mood that night. She raised the curtain and looked out. Everything was still. The leaves on the old oak-tree did not stir; the dark shadows of its branches lay motionless on the dewy grass. Above, the moon was shining clear, and its soft light lay on all the houses and trees, and the distant hills. Very bright and beautiful it was, but very still,—almost solemn in its exceeding stillness.

Charlotte looked into its face, and wondered if

God lived there, and if He was looking down at her then. Her heart felt very sad. She remembered her faults, and it seemed to her as if she never should be good. On her young heart was resting that burden which, in later years, so often weighs down the soul,—the burden of unforgiven sin,—and she felt alone and helpless. She did not see that Jesus was standing by her; she did not hear his gentle whisper: ‘Come unto *me*, and I will give you rest.’ ‘I am He that forgiveth iniquity, and pardoneth all your sin.’

Charlotte had only vague ideas of God, or of her own relation to Him. She feared Him as a Being of terrible power, who spoke in the awful thunder, and could put her to death at any moment. She did not hear his voice in the sweet beauty of that summer evening, or believe that He loved her better than any other friend. She meant to become religious some time or other; but she did not wish to do it then, for she thought religion was something very gloomy. Ah, she did not know that to love Jesus, to go to Him for the pardon of all her sins, and to receive from Him a new heart, was just what would free her from those sad, painful longings—just what would fill her whole being with pure enjoyment and perfect peace.

She knelt beside her bed and repeated the Lord's Prayer. After she had lain down, the solemn, still moonlight shone into her room, and fell across her bed. She felt almost afraid of its pure brightness, and as she lay there alone, she wept, because she felt so very sad and lonely. Soon after her eyes closed, and she was lost in the dreamless sleep of childhood.



CHAPTER VI.

DIFFICULTIES.

‘**C**HARLOTTE! Charlotte! it is time to get up.’



Charlotte heard as in a dream, and did not open her eyes till her grandmother bent over her and laid her hand on her forehead.

‘Don’t you remember you were going to get up early this morning? Breakfast is almost ready.’

Charlotte opened her eyes and smiled, and said, ‘Yes, I will; I remember.’

Her grandmother opened the window, and saying, ‘Now, don’t go to sleep again,’ went out.

How Charlotte’s eyes did draw together! How impossible it seemed to lift a finger, much less to move her whole body! But making a great effort, she sprung out of bed. Half-awake and half-asleep, she groped about, and put on her shoes and stock-

ings, her eyes opening and shutting all the time, till at length she succeeded in pouring some water into the basin. The first touch of that pure cold water on her face roused her. How nice it felt, and how wide-awake she was! She washed herself carefully, braided her hair, and dressed herself very neatly, thinking all the time, 'How glad I am I didn't go to sleep again! I won't let indolence come near me to-day—no, not once!' and she stamped her little foot on the floor in her great zeal. She flew about briskly, opened the other window, threw the clothes from her bed, and ran down stairs; she felt as happy as a little lark as she tripped into the kitchen, and when her grandfather said, 'What, you up! Dear me, what is going to happen?' she laughed merrily.

'Grandmother, here I am; don't you see?' and the old lady, who was in the pantry, looked very smiling, and said—

'Why, sure enough, you are our little early bird this morning. I am so glad!'

'Now, what can I do, grandmother? I am not going to be idle to-day, not a single minute! You must give me some work to do.'

So grandmother drew out the table, and Charlotte put everything on it, being very particular to

lay each knife and fork properly, to set the cups and saucers, the sugar-bowl and cream-jug, and the spoons and plates, each in the right place. Then she helped to peel the potatoes, and carried them in, while her grandmother took up the meat; she filled the water-pitcher, and carried it to the table, and her grandmother took in the coffee-pot.

Charlotte looked very fresh and rosy that morning, and a sweet feeling nestled at her heart—the consciousness of having done right—the very sweetest feeling we can ever know. Her breakfast tasted very nice to her, and she said to herself, ‘Willow-Brook was right; it is pleasanter to work than to be idle.’

When her grandfather took his Bible, she listened, and when he prayed, Charlotte tried to pray also; but his words were not very plain to her, so she repeated the Lord’s Prayer to herself. She washed the dishes, cleaned the knives, fed the chickens, swept the woodshed, dusted the sitting-room, and made her bed, all before the clock struck eight.

‘Why, how early it is grandmother! It has been such a long morning. What shall I do now?’

‘I wish you would pick these beans for me; I want to bake some bread, and am in a great hurry.’

Charlotte took the dish, but with an unpleasant

look; for of all things in the world, she disliked to pick beans. The excitement of the early morning was beginning to subside, and her old enemy stood by, ready to step in and take possession.

‘Oh, how I hate to pick beans!’ she said, as she stirred her fingers round among them. She played with them, stopping to talk with the cat, then to look at a humming-bird among the flowers, and then to read from a newspaper that lay by her on the table, so that when her grandmother came for them, they were not half-finished.

‘Why, Charlotte, how long you have been about these beans! I want them this minute, and must stop and do them myself.’

This disturbed Charlotte. She knew she had yielded to her old enemy, and it troubled her, though she chose to blame others rather than herself. She went and sat down at the woodshed door, talking to herself much after this fashion:

‘There is no use in my trying to do right; nobody gives me any credit. I got up ever so early this morning, and have worked just as hard as I could; and now, because the beans didn’t happen to be done, grandmother is blaming me. I’m sure I tried to do just as well as I could.’

Oh, Charlotte, Charlotte! you know you have

not done as well as you could, and that is what makes you unhappy. You deserved credit for doing well for a time, and you had it ; but it is uphill work to conquer an old enemy. You must struggle in right good earnest with it, and not be discouraged by the first failure. Try—try again. Dry up your tears ; jump up, and go in and see if your grandmother wishes any more of you.

But Charlotte did not do this ; she went up-stairs and stayed, feeling very much disheartened, till half-past eight, and then set out for school.

The sun shone very brightly that beautiful May morning. The air was full of sweet odours ; the birds flitted about merrily, carrying straws to their nests, and then flying off with tireless wing to look for more ; the gardens looked gay with their red and yellow tulips and daffodils in full bloom. Charlotte felt this brightness and beauty in her heart, and when she came in sight of Willow-Brook, she had regained a portion of her cheerfulness.

‘ Dear little Willow-Brook,’ she said, stopping to see it splash merrily along over the stones ; ‘ it is prettier than ever, this morning. It is always doing good, I know it is, and never gets discouraged nor out of temper. How I wish I could do the same !’

‘Are you here, Charlotte?’ said Miss Tracy, coming up from the opposite side of the road; ‘I am glad to see you on your way to school so early. I am sure you were up in good time this morning.’

Miss Tracy looked so pleased and so kind, that Charlotte told her all her troubles as they walked along; how she had got up early and been so happy, and then had been idle again, and cross, breaking all her good resolutions, and how she had felt discouraged about trying to do right.

‘I am very glad you drove indolence away when you first waked up. Do that every morning for a month, and you will find he won’t come to torment you as soon as you are called. Every time you resist his influence, you have taken one step in the right path, and the easier it will be for you to take another.’

‘But you see I didn’t keep good, Miss Tracy.’

‘No, I am very sorry for that, and I think you are sorry too; let it teach you to be more on your guard next time. When you go into school, I want you to make an effort to apply yourself closely, and to persevere in studying, however disagreeable it is. Your lesson to-day in geography has many hard names in it, and I am sure it will try your patience. Let me see you overcoming your indo-

lent propensity, and it will really give me a great deal of pleasure.

‘And remember, Charlotte, that you have a Friend as well as an enemy; and that when your enemy seeks to turn you from the right course, this Friend can help you to resist and conquer him. We are none of us strong enough to do right without help; we try and try, and fail so often; we should have every reason for despairing of ever being better, but for this unseen Friend. You know who it is—Jesus Christ. He loves you very tenderly; He will always hear when you ask for help; and when you are trying to do right, He will always know it, whether other friends do or not, and will give you strength, if you ask sincerely for it. I want you, Charlotte, to know and love this Friend, and to have him for *your* Friend—the kindest, best Friend any little girl can ever have.’

Charlotte looked into Miss Tracy’s face, and saw tears in her eyes. She did not say a word in reply; and soon other scholars came, and the bell rang for work, and they all went into the schoolroom.

Miss Tracy left the place a few weeks after, and saw nothing more of Charlotte; but the little seed dropped that morning sank deep into the child’s heart, and took root there. The thought of Jesus

Christ as a Friend who loved her, and could help her to resist evil, came to her again and again ; and many years afterwards Charlotte said, in speaking of her early religious impressions, ‘I heard a great many sermons, and many different persons talked with me about religion ; but I cannot remember anything that impressed me so much as that one remark of Miss Tracy’s, as we stood by the schoolhouse door that morning : “I want you, Charlotte, to have Jesus for *your* Friend—the kindest, best Friend a little girl can ever have.”’



CHAPTER VII.

CHANGES.

THAT day Charlotte tried to study, and she succeeded pretty well, though her old enemy was continually harassing her, trying to distract her attention, and often beguiling her into a listless state, from which she could only rouse herself by a painful effort.

But with these interruptions, Charlotte studied much more perseveringly than usual, and she felt the approval of her own heart, as she went home at night. She tried to be useful to her grandmother on her return; and when, at supper, she had some of the beans on her plate, she remembered with regret the folly of the morning.

At night, when she went to her pleasant room, she remembered what Miss Tracy had said of Jesus as a friend; and the more she thought of the weak-

ness of her own heart, and how little able she was to keep her resolutions in one single instance, the more she saw she needed just such a friend as He was. She did not think she was becoming religious, which was something very indefinite and vague to her; but she knelt down, and with an earnest desire to be heard, asked Jesus Christ to be a friend to her. She told Him with many tears how lonely she felt; no father nor mother; no brother nor sister; she told Him how she could not do right if she tried, because wicked feelings came into her heart, and asked Him to give her better feelings.

It was all still in that little room, nothing to be seen but the sweet moonlight on the floor, and the old-fashioned chest of drawers on which the moonbeams fell very brightly; but, we doubt not, Jesus drew near to hear that prayer, and to answer it.

It may be angel eyes looked on that child, and hovered near that pillow to guard it from all evil through all the long night-watches, and that the sweet peace which descended into Charlotte's heart as she lay down after her prayer, was the first breathing of a renewed soul. For when, many years afterward, Charlotte consecrated herself publicly to the Saviour in the house of God, she felt that there was no particular time when the great

change in her soul was so manifest that she could specify it; but from her deep conviction at this time of her own inability to do right, of her earnest desire to have Jesus for a friend, and to be aided by Him in feeling and doing right, she sometimes hoped that even from that hour she had attempted to serve God by trusting and loving the Saviour.

One thing is certain, Jesus will be a friend to the youngest who calls upon Him, and will never turn a deaf ear to any sincere request for help. Go to Him with all your cares and sorrows, and above all, with your sins; tell Him your weakness, your need of a friend to make you better; of a friend to love you, and preserve you from all danger; and especially your need of a friend who can pardon your sins and give you a heart to love holiness and God, and He will listen, and will help you. He will draw near to you, breathing into your soul right thoughts and feelings, thus expelling the evil ones which would otherwise gain possession there. No other friend can do this for you but Jesus Christ—'God manifest in the flesh.'

When she was called the next morning, Charlotte found it easier to wake than on the previous day, simply because she waked at once the morning before. She felt pretty sleepy; but rose directly,

and had time to dress herself thoroughly, and to kneel beside her bed, and thank God for taking care of her through the night, and to ask Him to keep her during this new day.

She opened her window, and let in the freshness and fragrance of the morning air; and when she looked out on the meadows and the distant hills, and saw how beautiful everything was, her heart was filled with joy; she felt inclined to sing as loud and cheerily as the birds on the elm; and when she remembered that God had made all around her so very beautiful, and that He would be *her* friend, there was a very soft and tender feeling at her heart. It was not joy exactly—it was something deeper and sweeter. Could it be that such a great Being would love *her*—a little girl, a weak foolish child, who was so often doing wrong? How wonderful it was! What a precious thought, if she might only dare to believe it!

With this peaceful feeling in her heart, Charlotte went into the kitchen,—that light, clean, beautiful kitchen,—and she thought it had never looked so pleasant before. She loved her grandfather and grandmother better than ever; she loved the sweet blossoms on the apple-tree that stood by the back door, and the morning glories that ran over it; the

little swallows and sparrows that flew round the roof of the barn, even the dear little chickens that followed her as she went to feed them ;—not that she loved these all alike, but there was an outgoing from her heart toward them all. She was very active in helping her grandmother, and really felt glad she could be useful to her ; and when her grandfather called to her from the sitting-room, and said—

‘Charlotte, do find last week’s paper for me ; it is somewhere among the piles in the closet,’ she left setting the table, and looked over the whole pile very patiently ; and when she carried it to her grandfather, and he said—

‘Why, Charlotte, you are eyes to your old grandfather,’ her heart felt so light, she could have danced for joy.

It was because she was doing right.

Before prayers her grandfather read that chapter in which Jesus tells the story of the wicked son that wandered away from his father’s house, and spent all he had in a far country, and then came back humble and penitent, and was joyfully welcomed by his loving father. Charlotte heard every word, and felt glad that he came home and was so tenderly received. She tried to pray when the others did,

and again that tender feeling came into her heart and filled her eyes with tears, as she thought of having an unseen friend like Jesus Christ to love her.

Charlotte's voice was usually gentle, and her step light; but one who watched her closely that morning, would have seen they were lighter and gentler than ever. It was Saturday, and there was to be no school all day. There was to be a little party of school-girls that afternoon, to which Charlotte was invited; but her grandmother had not told her whether she might go. She did hope she might; but it was with a little fear she asked after breakfast—

‘Grandmother, may I go over to Sarah Prentiss’s this afternoon? Susan, and Mary Jane, and Maria, and Emily are all going.’

For some reason Mrs Richards did not choose that Charlotte should associate with Sarah Prentiss, and she said very decidedly—

‘No, you can’t go.’

Charlotte did not tease. I am glad to say she had not that habit, for her grandmother’s ‘no’ always meant *no*, and could not be changed into anything else; but she felt bitterly disappointed. The girls at school had been talking of the visit for a week, and laying plans for it; and they expected to

have so much pleasure, and had so taken it for granted that Charlotte would be with them, that it was very hard to find that she could not go.

‘Why can’t I go as other girls do?’ she thought. ‘Grandmother never lets me go anywhere;’ and the light step and happy smile were all gone.

Charlotte went up-stairs to make her bed. She sat down by the window, and thought over her disappointment, till it was magnified tenfold. There were the same lovely meadows, and fair green hills, which had looked so bright and beautiful two hours before, but they waked no emotion of delight. A dark mist had risen up from her heart, and covered everything around her with a dark, dreary cloud. She was discontented, and therefore miserable; she forgot all her blessings, and thought only of her troubles, till she felt sure she was a very ill-used and afflicted individual. Ah, how little a speck could dim the brightness of her vision, and blot out all the beauty from her landscape!

Slowly she dried her tears, and set about putting her room in order. As she laid the sheets on her little bed, very carefully, thinking all the while of her trials, a sudden thought came to her,—whispered to her soul, we doubt not, by the unseen Friend who had not deserted her: ‘I can *do right*, if

I am unhappy. Though this day will be such a sad one, I can try to be useful to others.' It was a ray of light—a very little ray—just edging the dark cloud of sorrow.

Some older person, in looking at Charlotte's feeling, may say, 'How foolish! What a little thing to cry and make such a fuss over! Such a foolish child is not worth minding!'

Does it occur to him, that when he refuses to be comforted because his property is swept away, or the cherished plan of his life destroyed, He who holds the destiny of worlds in his hands might say as He looked on, 'How foolish! what an insignificant loss to mourn over!' But He does not. The great Father sees that the grief is real in the heart of the man,—real, too, in the heart of the child; and as the latter hushes her sobs, and resolves to try to do right if she is unhappy, He perhaps sees as great an effort at self-control, at true submission, as when the strong man composes his spirit, and goes forward, determined to do his duty amid the wreck of cherished hopes. All events must be trivial in his eyes, except as they affect the character; and in that view nothing is despised, for He knows that an impression made on the soul may outlast worlds.

Charlotte had lost her joyfulness; but as she went

about the house, assisting her grandmother, she became tolerably cheerful once more, though very often some thought of the party, and of those going to it, would come to sadden her.

But that Saturday seemed destined to be one of trial for the poor child, and another cloud was rising on her horizon, darker than the first, which had only half-cleared away.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE LONG SEAM.



It was ten o'clock on Saturday morning. The dishes were all washed and put away, the rooms swept and dusted, the blinds closed to keep out the sun, and everything looked as neat as possible in Mrs Richards' house. The old lady had gone into the sitting-room, and was taking from the closet a basket in which were large bundles of cotton and other cloth. Charlotte was standing at the back door looking into the meadow, and thinking what a lovely day it was, and what a nice time to go down to the river, and pick wild-flowers; and she had just planned a ramble that would last till noon, when her grandmother called her.

'Here is a pair of sheets cut off, Charlotte. As you are going to be at home all day, you may help me to make one of them. I will measure

off as much as I think you can sew, and put a pin in.'

'Oh, grandmother, I don't like to sew to-day. It is so pleasant, I want to go and walk. I do want to go down into the meadow *so much!*'

'For what, child?'

Charlotte hung her head at first, for she really had no reason to give, but that she wanted a little amusement; but looking up in a minute, she said in her most winning tone—

'It is so beautiful down there, grandmother, and I know I can find ever so many wild-flowers on the bank.'

Now, as we have said, grandmother Richards was very kind, often far too indulgent, but she could be very firm. She was a very practical person, and had no sympathy with Charlotte's love of natural scenery. To gather wild-flowers, was, in her eyes, about as foolish a reason for going to walk, as could be given; besides, she had made up her mind to turn over a new leaf. She saw Charlotte's tendency to idleness, and that she was growing up without any habits of application, and wisely decided that this tendency must be counteracted, or she would become an idle, useless, unhappy woman. Only the night before she had said to her husband—

‘I must give the child some steady work to do ; she is old enough to sew every day. Why, at her age, I could spin a run a day, and helped mother to make the shirts for the whole family,—and with five boys, that was no small matter ; while Charlotte can hardly sew an over-and-over seam decently. Girls are not good for anything now-a-days ; none of ’em are half brought up. But I must attend to it ; I will begin to-morrow, and give her a task every day, and see that she does it. It will be hard work to keep her at it, I know, she is so indolent ; but I must not let her grow up so, it will be the ruin of her.’

It would have been far easier for Mrs Richards to have allowed her grandchild to continue idle, but she was too conscientious to do so ; and very often in after life was Charlotte heard to say, ‘If grandmother had not been more persevering than most persons, I should have been the most indolent woman in the world. I can very well remember what hard work she had to pin me down to anything.’

The sheet was unrolled, the two selvages laid together and basted, and the pin which was to mark the limit of Charlotte’s task put in. Her grandmother threaded the needle and commenced the

seam, and handed it to Charlotte. She took it unpleasantly, dragged it after her to a seat in the corner, and sat down with her face to the wall, and her back to her grandmother, who went on quietly cutting out more work.

All the evil feelings of Charlotte's heart were again aroused; she was vexed, disappointed, discouraged. It seemed to her as if everybody and everything conspired to torment and ill-treat her, and her vivid imagination was again employed in magnifying all her trials, and in convincing herself that she was ill-used and injured. Instead of regarding her grandmother as a friend, she thought of her, sitting there behind her tearing off cloth, as a cruel enemy doing all she could to torment her! She thought of the bright meadows, the pretty wild-flowers, the blue sky overhead, and then of herself shut up in that dismal room, kept a prisoner there by her cruel old grandmother! She thought of Sarah Prentiss, and of all the other girls enjoying themselves together, and she compelled to stay at home and sew on that hateful old sheet. Yes, if it had been anything else,—a dress, a shirt, or even an apron, it would have been a little less distressing; but that interminable seam, over and over, over and over, and no end to it—it was intolerable!

Her thread knotted and then broke ; she joined the ends badly, and took long stitches, and drew the thread so tight the seam was badly fulled ; and all the time her state of mind grew worse and worse.

‘Let me look at your work, Charlotte. I want you to sew that neatly, for it is a nice sheet. Don’t drag it so, but lift it carefully, and bring it here.’

Charlotte brought it to her grandmother reluctantly, for she knew it was improperly done. Mrs Richards adjusted her spectacles and examined it.

‘Why, Charlotte Richards, I am astonished ! What made you do this so badly ? You can’t sew as well as a girl of your age ought to ; but you can do a great deal better than this. It can’t be left so. You must pick every stitch of it out and begin again.’

At this Charlotte burst into a loud fit of crying.

‘Oh, need I do any more to-day, grandmother ?’ she cried ; ‘I am so hot, and my head aches.’

But for once her grandmother was decided.

‘Yes, Charlotte, you must take it all out and sew it to that pin ; and sew it neatly, or you will have to take it out again. I know you can sew it well, and I shan’t allow your naughtiness and ill-temper to excuse you from it. I ought to give you twice

as long a seam for a punishment; but when you have sewed to that pin, you can lay your work aside for to-day, and not before.'

Charlotte went back to her seat and cried harder than ever. Picking out was worst of all; and she was sure she shouldn't get it done till the evening. Her grandmother was very much grieved and displeased.

'Charlotte,' she said sternly, 'I am ashamed to see a great girl ten years old making such a baby of herself—and for what? Because I wish you to learn to sew neatly, and to acquire a habit of applying yourself to something useful, instead of wasting all your time. When your mother was of your age, she was of great assistance in sewing for the family; she could hem and stitch very neatly, and seemed fond of doing it. But I am afraid you will grow up to be very idle and inefficient, a burden to yourself and to others; you certainly will, unless you begin to apply yourself. Do you want to be a useless woman?'

A stifled 'No, grandmother,' was followed by a great sob.

'Then set about your work cheerfully, with a proper spirit, and you will soon finish it. I hope I shall never again see such an unwillingness to do

what I require of you as I have this morning. Here is a stiff pin to pick out your work with. The sooner you begin, the sooner it will be done.'

Charlotte took the pin with a very dismal face, and began slowly to pick out her stitches; she had drawn the thread so tightly, it was no easy matter to do this. Her grandmother was called away, so she was left to her own reflections. No one who saw her red eyes, swollen cheeks, and unhappy expression, would dream of their belonging to the bright-eyed, smiling girl who had skipped about so merrily in the morning.

Charlotte went on picking out stitches. At first she could think of nothing but her own troubles, look at the 'awfully long seam' before her, and wonder if she should ever reach the pin.

But in time better thoughts came. She began to look at things in their true light,—to see that she had been very naughty.

She said to herself, 'Oh dear, I never shall like to work! I don't like to do it, and I can't. The more I try to do right, the worse I am. What a wicked girl I have been to-day, when I meant to be so good!' The tears that now fell one by one on the sheet, and were sorrowfully wiped away, were a degree less bitter than the preceding ones.

As she worked on, thinking of all her trials and broken resolutions, she remembered the unseen Friend, who could help her to do right. But it seemed to her too late to ask Him now. She had behaved so badly just when she meant to have been so good, it must be hopeless to try any more, she thought. Poor Charlotte! the more she was unable to overcome her faults by her own efforts, the more she needed the help of her unseen Friend.

And while she sat there, sad and sorrowful, that Friend drew near and whispered words of hope and trust to her heart. He bade her look to Him, and, depending upon his strength, strive yet more earnestly to do right.

She grew composed; and, by the time the last stitch was taken out, she had resolved to try again to be amiable and industrious; and she lifted up from her heart a feeble, but humble petition for help to keep it. It was heard; and new courage and hope came into her heart. She wiped away her tears, turned round her chair and placed it by the window, and began to sew her seam once more very carefully, so that every stitch might be small and even.

More and more did sweet and quiet thoughts come to her as she sat and sewed. She saw no one had been unkind to her, that her grandmother

wished to improve her, and help her to become industrious, and she felt truly penitent for her behaviour to this kind friend. She could not help wishing she could go to the party, but she once more resolved to try to be kind and useful at home; and this time she added, 'If Thou wilt help me, O Lord Jesus!'

Her fingers were badly pricked, and her eyes felt uncomfortable, but she persevered, stitch after stitch, till the task was nearly half-done, when her grandmother called her to set the table; and her first words to her grandmother, who feared to see a sullen child, were—

'Oh, grandmother, it's half-done, *almost*,' and her face was beaming with pleasure.

After dinner, Mrs Richards said, 'I will wash up the dishes alone to-day, and you may go on sewing now.'

Charlotte felt very grateful; but she said in a soft voice, 'No, grandmother, I would rather help you to do them.'

So she wiped the dishes, and cleaned the knives, and laid them all nicely away in the cupboard, her heart once more feeling light and joyful.

When she had washed her hands, and taken off her apron, and seated herself at her sewing once

more, there was nothing unpleasant about it; she rather enjoyed taking little stitches, and seeing how fast she was getting on.

No, it was not the seam which made her so very miserable in the morning, but the bad feelings in her heart.

Mrs Richards always took a nap after dinner, and Charlotte sewed on alone for an hour, singing a little song she had learned at school in a low voice. She was careful to sew quite up to the pin, and a little beyond it, and then she shook out the sheet and commenced folding it nicely. She felt very happy; happier than she had almost ever done in her life. She wished her grandmother could see her work; and just as she finished folding it, she heard her moving, and ran into the bed-room.

‘Oh, grandmother, it’s all done, and I want you to see if it isn’t done nicely!’

‘Then run and get my glasses from the sitting-room.’

When the spectacles were brought, and the seam examined, grandmother said she had never seen any of Charlotte’s work so well done.

‘I believe you will make a nice seamstress, yet! I am sure you will, if you will sew an hour or two every day.’

‘I will, grandmother ; I don’t like to sew, but I want to learn to do it nicely. I want to be useful to you, grandmother, and to grandfather, and to everybody.’

‘I hope you will be, dear child ; you are a great help to me now, when you do as well as you can.’

Charlotte resolved she would always do her best ; and then remembering how easy it was for her to break her resolutions, she uttered another silent prayer for help from her unseen Friend, to enable her to keep this one.



CHAPTER IX.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON.

NEVER did a little girl go out under the blue sky happier than Charlotte Richards was that Saturday afternoon, as she tied on her bonnet, and went through the gate into the meadow. Her heart was full of kind and loving feelings ; her step was light, her eye sparkling, and her whole face full of smiles. Never had the whole world looked so beautiful to her as then. That meadow was a charming place ; it was very level, and the greenest of grass grew there, and a great many apple-trees were standing about in it, now covered with sweet blossoms. The birds were flying from branch to branch, sometimes pausing on a twig long enough to sing a few happy notes, then flying away again. The pretty blue violets were scattered thickly in the grass, and Charlotte gathered her hands quite full

of them; the delicate anemones, with their white petals just tinged with pink—the fairest and most graceful of all our spring flowers—stood nodding their heads on their slender stalks, and the white strawberry blossom, and the yellow adder’s-tongue, nestled close by, in the fresh springing grass. Charlotte gathered some of all, each was so bright and pretty. A narrow path led through the meadow to the little stream, which Miss Tracy had named Willow-Brook. Charlotte followed it till she came to her favourite place of resort, which she called the Dell. It was a little cup-like hollow, covered now with green grass and violets, and in the centre of it was a little rustic seat.

When she descended into this spot, Charlotte felt as if the world was completely shut out; she could not see beyond it on three sides, and on the fourth, she looked on the water, overhung with willows and hazel-bushes. She had grown up so separate from children, and had received so little sympathy in her peculiar tastes from her aged friends, that she had accustomed herself to look upon the hills, and trees, and flowers, as friends; and hundreds of times, when her heart was lonely, she had come down to this sheltered nook, and fancied that the inanimate objects around her knew what she felt, and gave

her sympathy, and smiles, and love. It was the longing for communion with something that understood her feelings, and her needs, that stirred the child's young heart; and now that she was learning to know Him who made the hills, and trees, and flowers, and to believe that He was a loving friend, and that it was his smile which gave them all their beauty, her heart loved and enjoyed them more than ever.

It was very still that Saturday afternoon, and she lay on the grass, and looked up into the sky. It seemed very, very far off, but very blue and beautiful; she could hear no sound but the sighing of the wind, the soft fluttering of the leaves, and now and then a twittering note from some wandering bird, except that the sweet murmur of Willow-Brook was audible, as it glided brightly by. If, in the morning, Charlotte's gloom had been reflected on all surrounding things, so was her joy now, and she could hardly contain herself, so intense was her delight in every lovely thing about her; even the tiniest flower, or leaf, or blade of grass, had a charm to her.

She thought here of her unseen Friend, and that thought softened and deepened all her other joys. To have such a loving Friend, who would be near

her always, wherever she might go—one who could forgive all that had been wrong in her, and help her to do everything that was right—was exactly what her weak, craving nature needed ; and if no words of prayer were on her lips, there was the going forth of grateful feeling from her heart ; and that incense blending with the glad sounds of nature, but richer far in God's estimation than they, rose up an acceptable offering to the great Creator.

Why was Charlotte so very happy that afternoon ? She was away from the party she had so eagerly wished to join, and all by herself, beside that little murmuring stream,—why so joyous and grateful there ? It was because she had the approbation of her own conscience ; because she had struggled to overcome her enemy, and had, by God's help, obtained a victory ; because, loving Jesus, her heart was in harmony with all that was fair and beautiful around her. It is what is *within* us, and not what is *around* us, that makes us happy or unhappy.

If this truth were really believed, how much more enjoyment of life there might be ! for we ourselves give the colouring to our emotions, while external circumstances can never be controlled by us. You may have kind friends, beautiful homes, expensive clothing, everything about you that you may regard

as essential to enjoyment, but if you have, at the same time, discontented feelings, evil tempers and desires, you will be very wretched ; while the poor girl, half-fed, and half-clothed, and living in an uncomfortable home, if she have a cheerful, amiable, unselfish spirit there, will be as blithe and joyous as a singing-bird. I dare say you do not quite believe this ; but when you are unhappy, examine, and see if things *around* you are not quite as pleasant as they have been when you were happy ; see if it is not something *within* you that pouts your lip, contracts your forehead, fills your eyes with tears, and your heart with sorrow ; and in nine cases out of ten, I know you will find it so. Drive off the enemy that lurks within you, and things without will then look bright enough.

Sin was the serpent which crept into the garden of Eden, and beautiful as it was, in all outward loveliness, when he had entered, it was no longer a place of joy ; and in every paradise, where sin comes now, it brings misery and woe as surely as at first.

Willow-Brook was peculiarly attractive to Charlotte that afternoon, for she remembered the little history of it ; and she thought it said a great many things to *her*. It told of its home among the far-off hills, and of all the kind deeds it had done as it

wandered on its way, brightening and beautifying every spot it touched ; and as Charlotte gazed on its dimpling face, she said, '*I* will try to do good also ; I will see if I cannot make every place I go to a little brighter and happier for my presence. When I grow up to be a woman, perhaps I can do a great deal to make the world better ;' and the thought of the unseen Friend, who would always help her, brought a thrill of joy to her heart. A blackbird near by gave a sweet little trill, the bright young leaves waved in the breeze, the pretty violets smiled ; and they all seemed to say to Charlotte, '*We* do all we can to make the world fair and beautiful, and so must *you*.'

Charlotte lingered beside the brook longer than usual, reluctant to leave so sweet a place ; and she repeated aloud the songs and hymns she knew. Some of them she thought exactly suited the place ; this one, especially, she liked so much, that after repeating it aloud, she sung it to a favourite tune :—

HOW BEAUTIFUL IS EARTH.

'O God ! how beautiful is earth,
In sunlight or in shade ;
Her forests with their waving arch,
Her flowers that gem the glade ;

Her hillocks white with fleecy flocks,
Her fields with grain that glow ;
Her sparkling rivers, deep and broad,
That through the valley flow ;

Her crested waves that dash the shore,
And lift their anthem loud ;
Her mountains with their solemn brows,
That woo the sailing cloud !

O God ! how beautiful is life,
That Thou dost lend us here ;
With tinted hopes that line the cloud,
With joys that gem the tear

But if this earth, which changes mar,
This life to death that leads,
Are made so beautiful by Him,
From whom all good proceeds,—

How glorious must that region be,
Where all the pure and blest,
From chance, and fear, and sorrow free,
Attain eternal rest !'



CHAPTER X.

MARY OWEN'S STORY.

THE summer had passed away, and the golden days of autumn had come. The term had closed, and Miss Tracy, having taken an affectionate leave of her pupils, returned to her home. Charlotte had improved during the summer; she had made a sincere effort to conquer Indolence, and succeeded to some extent, though her old enemy was not to be vanquished at once. Every day he was lurking about, ready for a fresh attack, and unless she made a hearty struggle to subdue him, she fell a victim to his power. Often she felt languid, and yielded to him, without attempting to rouse herself; but when she went to her little room at night, she would regret it, and ask the Lord Jesus to pardon her, and help her once more to do right.

‘I wonder,’ she said to herself one day, ‘I wonder the Lord Jesus does not get tired of helping me,—I keep doing wrong so much!’

But the Lord Jesus was not tired; He was always nigh to forgive and help her when she sought Him.

The school closed on Wednesday afternoon, and as the children came home with their books in their arms or bags, they expressed their different opinions freely.

‘Well, for one, I’m thankful to have school over,’ exclaimed Susie Brisk; ‘I’m tired to death of learning lessons!’

‘So am I,’ said Joanna Brown; ‘it did seem as if the term never would end; the last fortnight was longer than ever. I don’t like to study much, and I never did.’

‘I’d keep it to myself, if I didn’t,’ said Maria Prentiss; ‘I should think you might be ashamed to be bragging of it.’

‘I don’t pretend to be anything I am not,’ said Joanna in a tart tone; ‘if I don’t like a thing, I’ll say so right out, and not go on talking one way and thinking another, as some folks do.’

Maria’s eyes flashed, and she was about to give an angry rejoinder, when Jessie Reed said, with her gentle voice—

‘I am sorry we are not to have Miss Tracy for a teacher any more; I like her better than any teacher I ever went to.’

‘So do I,’ said Charlotte, ‘a great deal better; and I am as sorry as I can be that school is over. I’d rather learn lessons than do housework or sew.’

‘You have never hurt yourself doing either, I’m sure,’ replied Maria, whose great enemy was Anger. ‘Everybody says you are as lazy as you can be, everywhere!’

An angry word rose to Charlotte’s lips, for though Anger was not her most troublesome foe, he made her an occasional visit, and was coming into her heart now; but her unseen Friend softly whispered, ‘Try to do right; keep silent, if you cannot speak kindly.’ So she said nothing, but tears came to her eyes.

Little Jessie Reed, a delicate, sweet-tempered child, whom everybody petted and loved, was very much distressed.

‘Why, Maria,’ said she, ‘you shouldn’t tease Charlotte so; it isn’t kind of you;’ and she went and put her hand in Charlotte’s, and looked into her face lovingly.

Charlotte pressed the little hand, but she could not speak for a moment; then she said quietly—

‘I know it is true, Maria, that I have been idle at school, and everywhere. Indolence is my great enemy, Miss Tracy says, and so does grandmother ; but I do mean to try and overcome it.’

‘That is right,’ said Mary Owen, one of the oldest girls in school, who had just come up. ‘We are not to blame for having a fault, if we try to subdue it ; and I dare say, Charlotte, you’ll get to be one of the most industrious girls in school yet.’

‘Do you think so?’ asked Charlotte, her face brightening, for they all looked up to Mary Owen, as one of ‘the great girls.’ But she added more sadly, ‘I am afraid I never shall *like* to work ; I *can* work, but I don’t like to do it ; so I am lazy still.’

‘You deserve all the more credit, then. If we only do what is pleasant to us, we are generally very selfish. Self-denial is a good thing, and we may practise it till habit makes it much easier to us than at first. By-and-by you’ll like to work, I dare say.’

‘I hope so ; but if I think I do one day, I am sure to hate it all the more the next !’

Mary Owen laughed heartily. ‘Why, you make me think of the poor frog,’ said she, ‘that lived at the bottom of the well, who, if he hopped up one inch, was sure the next time he jumped to slip back

two ; so he gave up trying, and went to live in the well again. But I think you are more like another frog I have heard of.'

'What did he do, Miss Mary?'

'I will tell you if you will let me sit down on this seat. It is the last chance I shall have to tell you a story, and I think there's time for a short one.'

The children all gathered about her, for Mary Owen was famous for telling stories ; some of which were very funny ones. None could tell whether she had read them in a book or made them out of her own head ; for if asked, she would always evade the question with a merry laugh and jest.

'There, now, keep quiet,' said she, 'and I will tell you the affecting story of an aspiring frog !

'Once on a time there was a poor froggie, who lived with his mother at the bottom of a very, very deep well. His bright little eyes could see the light by looking up, and up, and up, ever so far, and he wondered very much what it was. So, being a brave, smart little fellow, he one day said to old mother frog, "I mean to get up to the sky we see away yonder." "You never will, if you try ever so much," croaked mother frog, in her hoarsest voice. "And what would you do if you did get there? Who knows what is going on up in day-light?"

"That's just what I mean to find out," said little froggie, with a very brisk peep. He gave a hop, and landed an inch higher than he was before. "Oh, I shall get there pretty soon," he cried, quite puffed up by his success; "it isn't anything to climb up to the sky; see how I do it!" and he gave another leap; but somehow his little toes slipped off the stones, and he came down to the bottom with a great bounce.

"There, I told you so," growled mother frog; "do stay where you are, and behave yourself."

Little froggie felt very sorrowful; he couldn't help wishing to get up where it was a little lighter, and he felt pretty sure there was some way of doing it, if he only knew how. His little round eyes were too bright, and his legs too long and slender to be made for nothing, he thought, as he lay there looking up wishfully, and meditating on the best way of climbing to the light. A bright, beaming star gazed down into the well, directly at him; it kept twinkling and beckoning, and froggie was sure she was nodding to him to come up and see her. It made his heart beat very fast, to think that such a beautiful star should be shining on him, and he determined to make another effort. His mother had settled herself between two smooth stones for a nice nap, and he said to himself, "Now is the time to try; perhaps

one stout leap will take me quite up to the star!" So he gathered all his strength for a mighty effort, and gave a tremendous jump, which carried him *two inches* nearer to the star!

'Froggie felt a little disappointed that after such a prodigious leap it was no lighter round him. He could not even see the star so well as he did before, and he had half a mind to hop back and never try again to find the light; but as he had a nice little chink to put his toes in, he resolved to stay there awhile. In time, the star again came and looked at him, more smilingly than before. "Keep on, little froggie," she seemed to say, "and you'll get up here by-and-by." So, after he was well rested, he gave another leap, hoping it would bring him close to the star, but lo, he slipped backwards almost to where he was at first. Out of breath, and with his little legs very tired indeed, froggie curled himself up, glad, at any rate, to rest a little. He was more than ever discouraged now. Why should he try again to reach the light? He would certainly fall back if he did, and be just as badly off as ever; yes, and worse too, for such exertion tired him terribly, and quite took his breath away. He gave a little disconsolate peep, and settled into a chink, and took a nap.

‘When he awoke, he saw nothing of the beautiful star; nothing was over his head but a blue sky. He lay all day, lazily looking up at it, watching for the star, which never came; for nothing was to be seen on the sky but white clouds, which floated over and passed away, till finally the sky itself grew gray and dim, and froggie was just going to give up looking for the star any more, when out it shone, round, sparkling, and beautiful as ever, looking straight at him with inviting eyes!

‘Froggie was perplexed. “I long to get up there,” thought he, “but how can I? I wonder if there is any use in my trying again?” The beautiful star shone so brightly, it seemed to him he must try once more. “I am farther up than I was at first,” he said; “I jumped two inches, and I only fell back one, and even one inch is a beginning.” So he gave another leap, and found himself almost two inches higher than before. This was some gain; and such a bold, brave heart had little froggie, that he determined to keep trying, even if he sometimes failed.

‘And he did. Often he slipped back and felt disheartened, but he rallied again, and exerted himself more than ever. Thus he rose, inch by inch, slowly but surely, for if he fell, it was never to the

bottom from whence he started. If little froggie had ever heard of the word "*excelsior*" (which means *higher, still higher*), it must be he had taken it for his motto, so perfectly did he act upon it. He was often weary—so very weary that it seemed utterly impossible ever to jump again; but when he looked down to the bottom of the well, and saw how far he had come, he felt new hope and courage. "Never will I go back to that dismal spot," he cried, "better perish on my way to the light."

'The star came often to cheer him with her beautiful smile; but she seemed as far off as ever, though it continually grew lighter all about him.

'Little froggie had grown much stronger, and could give longer leaps than formerly, so that his progress was increased. Steadily now, inch by inch, he rose toward the day. He seldom slipped, so well had he learned where to put his toes, and so vigorous had he grown by such constant exercise.

'He now neared the top rapidly. Brighter and brighter grew the stones around him! nearer and nearer seemed the source of day! How froggie's heart leaped for joy! "Oh, if I had stayed at the bottom, what a weak, miserable frog I should have been! now I am so vigorous, so happy!" and he hopped on and on, till one bright, beautiful April

morning, he leaped out on the edge of the curb which surrounded the well. What a scene met his eye! All the fair green earth, and the tall trees, and the beautiful flowers were spread out around him, and above bent the wide, wide sky, so blue and bright! Instead of the star he hoped to find in it, the great blazing sun, with all its glory, was shining there. Happy little froggie! He leaped on to the soft grass, and hopped along, often stopping to see the wonders around him, for he kept his bright little eyes wide open to see all that was going on. He travelled on, with his heart full of gladness, till at length he found a little pond of water in the meadow, half-hidden by the rushes and tall grass, where there were a great many other frogs, as nimble and happy as himself. What a joyous croak of welcome they all gave him! and that night they made such a large frog party to meet him, and they were all so very merry, though they had only cold water for refreshment, that the people of the neighbourhood said, "What a croaking those frogs make to-night! I never heard such a noisy set of frogs in all my life!"

'From that time onward froggie made that pond his home, never taking any long journey or visiting his old home. He was always a very active frog,

and jumped in and out of the little pond every night. When he looked upward, as he was still very fond of doing, he saw not only one bright, beautiful star, but thousands upon thousands, each shining as fair, and twinkling as charmingly, as his old favourite had done. When he gazes at them, he gives his shrillest, merriest croak; the other frogs hear him, and they croak, till their glad concert rings out through the village.'

When Mary Owen had finished her story, the children laughed a great deal to think how smart and persevering little froggie was. At the corner the children separated, none going Charlotte's way but Mary Owen. When they were left alone, Mary said—

'I think you are like froggie in a great many things, Charlotte. Your evil habits are like the bottom of his well, a dark and dismal abyss, from which you wish to rise; and, like him, you fancied you could do it at one jump; and when you found yourself one inch above the old level, thought you were so near perfection,—the bright star which beckoned you,—that a single effort more would bring you to it. When you fell back into the old habit, you were discouraged, and thought there was no use in trying more; and now, like little froggie,

although you have crept up an inch or two, you are hesitating whether to make another effort, or go back to the bottom of the well—to the old bad habit. Is it not so?’

‘Yes, it really is,’ replied Charlotte.

‘Well, Charlotte, I can only hope you will have as brave a heart as little froggie, and be as persevering as he was. Remember, when you fall you are not quite at the bottom, as at first,—that a beginning has been made. Every little helps; each step plants you on higher ground, and gives you new strength to take another. Each time you apply yourself to sewing, or study, or house-work, when you feel idle, you take a step, if only a little one; you rise nearer to a brighter and purer atmosphere, though absolute perfection still, like the star, be very far above you. So, Charlotte, remember little froggie when you are tempted to give up, and take another leap; keep trying, and you will certainly get to the top some day.’

Charlotte said she would; and then added, with a laugh, ‘But my grandmother isn’t at all like old mother frog; she tries to help me.’

‘Yes, indeed.’

They had now reached Mary Owen’s home, and she kissed Charlotte, and went in at the gate. Char-

lotte walked on, thinking of little froggie, and feeling sure she should never forget him. 'Now I have two stories to think of,' said she, 'Willow-Brook and Little Froggie, and they will both help me to do right.' She wanted to tell Mary Owen about her unseen Friend, but she did not quite dare to. She wondered if she knew about Him, and if she had Him for *her* friend.



CHAPTER XI.

AUTUMN AFTERNOONS.

DURING the vacation, the autumn days were so sunny and beautiful, that Charlotte found it very hard to confine herself within doors, and she had many a severe struggle with indolence, sometimes yielding, but often overcoming it. Her grandmother needed her help in the morning about the house, for her quick feet could save a great many steps by running to the door, and up-stairs, and down to the cellar; and she could wash dishes, shell beans, clean knives, dust, and do a great many other little things, which helped her grandmother very much.

Mrs Richards made a rule at the beginning of the vacation, for Charlotte, viz., That she should sew one hour in the forenoon and two in the afternoon of every day except Saturday, when she usually

either made visits, or had young friends to see her.

The afternoon task was most trying to Charlotte's patience. She often felt so dull she could hardly keep her eyes open, when she sat sewing on a sheet, or hemming a towel, or making the sleeve of a shirt. The sun would rest on a broad stripe on the carpet, the flies buzz lazily on the window, the fire burn sleepily on the hearth, and pussy would increase the general quiet by curling herself up on the rug, tucking her feet under her and going to sleep. Even grandmother would drop off into a doze in her arm-chair, and Charlotte would amuse herself by watching her spectacles slide down to the tip of her nose as her head nodded lower and lower, till a sudden start would open her eyes, and, looking about her, she would exclaim, 'Why, really, I believe I almost lost myself!' and then commence sewing.

It was in these hours, sitting by that pleasant south window, in her low chair, that Charlotte's fiercest battles with her great enemy were fought. 'How I do hate to sew!' she would say to herself. 'Oh, dear, if I were not obliged to be mewed up here and sew;' and she would lay down her work, and lie back in her chair, and think again, 'Oh, if

I could only have a good run in the meadow, or go over and see Jessie Reed!’ and sometimes she was impatient enough to forget all her good resolutions, and plead with her grandmother to put her work away, and to cry when the old lady said—

‘No, Charlotte, not till the time comes; then you will have time enough for a walk before tea.’

But on the whole, she made progress; each day it became easier for her to apply herself, and when her task was done, and she bounded off out of doors, how she did enjoy it!—tenfold more for the previous confinement, and because she carried an approving conscience with her.

‘Charlotte,’ said her grandmother one day, as she was folding up her work, ‘you have been a very good girl this week; you have sewed more steadily and neatly than you have ever done before. I think you will overcome your indolence entirely, if you continue to apply yourself as steadily as you have done of late. I can’t tell you how much it pleases me to see you trying to improve yourself, Charlotte.’

The old lady’s tones were unusually soft and tender, and Charlotte’s heart was very much touched by her approving words.

‘You are a comfort to me every day of my life,’

she continued, 'and now I am growing old, I need some one to lean upon. When you first came to me a feeble child, that required constant care and watching, I felt as if the task of rearing you was greater than I could undertake; but now you can repay me for all my toil, if you are only earnest in overcoming your faults, and in trying to do right in all things.'

'I *will* try, grandmother; and if I live, I will always take care of you and grandfather, and be a daughter to you.'

Mrs Richards was not given to caresses, and she seldom manifested deep emotion; but Charlotte saw her wipe a tear from under her spectacles, and she resolved anew, her unseen Friend helping her, that she would be a blessing to those who had watched over her in her infancy.

Here we leave Charlotte and her enemy. Some important victories over him had been achieved, and his power over her heart and actions was very sensibly weakened. Charlotte could open her eyes and jump up without any trouble when she was called, and she thus formed a habit of early rising, which continued through life. She became capable of sitting steadily at a task, whether of sewing or

study, and of giving her whole mind to it cheerfully. Her face grew more animated, her step more elastic, and her heart more happy, as she shook off the fetters of indolence, which had bound both mind and body; and even the neighbours said, 'How much more active and sprightly Charlotte Richards is than she used to be! she will be a real treasure to her grandmother.'

Twenty years after, Charlotte Richards sat in a pleasant parlour, with a little girl beside her. The child of ten was now a woman of thirty, quiet and industrious, and the little Bessie beside her was much more like the Charlotte Richards of old. She was hemming a pocket-handkerchief, and her restless movements showed she hated to sew, and was longing to be out, chasing butterflies, driving a hoop, or doing anything, rather than sit there till her task was done. Aunt Charlotte felt a hearty sympathy for her; she knew it was hard, but she also knew that now was the time for her to form habits of industry and self-control, which would be invaluable to her through life. She knew that in this wide world there is a great deal to be done, and she wished the dear girl to have strong hands and a willing heart for her share of life's burdens.

As she looked on the restless child, how vividly rose before her the nice kitchen, the pleasant sitting-room, and the old-fashioned chamber of her early home; how distinctly she remembered her grandmother's words and tones that Saturday morning when she sat crying over her long seam! She told Bessie about it, and repeated, as well as she could, the stories of Willow-Brook and Little Froggie. Bessie laughed, but a tear stood in Aunt Charlotte's eyes, for her grandmother, and Miss Tracy, and Mary Owen were all gone now,—passed away into a better world.

'I think,' she said after a little pause, 'I was one of the most indolent of children, and if my grandmother had not undertaken in earnest to correct me, I don't know what would have become of me; I should have certainly been a most useless, unhappy woman. It seemed hard to me then to be compelled to apply myself; but I am very grateful to her now for being so decided in making me do it. Those long hours in the sitting-room, when I sat uneasily, bending over a task I loathed, were the hours in which I learned to control myself,—to do what was right, if it was unpleasant; and it was thus I acquired whatever is valuable in my present character and habits.'

‘ So you overcame your enemy at last ? ’ said Bessie, who knew the same foe was lurking in her path.

‘ Yes, in some good degree, I did. I certainly have overcome my aversion to sewing, for I am now remarkably fond of it ; and my needle has cheered many an hour of my life that would otherwise have been sad and lonely, so that I often call it my little comforter.’

‘ I don’t believe I shall ever like to sew,’ said Bessie, ‘ I do so hate to do it now ! ’

‘ Not more than I did once. I dare say you will, if you live to my age, enjoy it as well as I do. I think indolence is your great enemy, as it was mine, and I hope that you will overcome it. You will, I know, if you set yourself resolutely about it, and seek for help from the Lord Jesus, the unseen Friend. In yourself you are very weak, but in Him you can be strong, and become conqueror and more than conqueror over every foe.’

THE END.

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