THE SNOW-MAN AT MARDON PARK—P. 38.

ALICE CAROL

AND OTHER TALES

WILLIAM AND ROBERT CHAMBERS
LONDON AND EDINBURGH
1870

CHAMBERS'S LIBRARY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Second Series

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PREFACE.

THE success which the first series of their LIBRARY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE in twenty volumes met with, has induced the Publishers to project another, in which a similar principle will be followed—namely, that of offering to young people a course of reading, specially adapted to their understanding. The language will be simple, and the direct aim of the series will be twofold: 1st, to amuse; and 2d, to temper that amusement with instruction and morality.

W. & R. C.

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INTRODUCTION.

How differently does Christmas come round to different people! To some, it comes laden with pleasures and festivities, parties and balls; to children, it brings visions of mince-pies and plum-pudding, and pantomimes, and frolics of every description. Happy the poor, on the other hand, if it bring them a supply of beef and coal, and blankets and warm clothing! To others—perhaps under the pressure of some recent and great affliction, or suffering from some of the many ills that flesh is heir to, their path strewed with thorns, and troubles and

anxieties pressing hard upon them—how does Christmas appear? Does it not bring before them, with double force, the memory of former days, when they, too, could say that their 'lines had fallen in pleasant places'—now, alas! how changed? Let us, however, endeavour to be content, whether it come to us in sunshine or in gloom; and may none of us, at that season of rejoicing and thanksgiving, be unmindful of those precepts of universal love and charity inculcated by Him whose birth is then celebrated; and may we all, in our several capacities, help to bear one another's burdens, and shew that, like Him, we are indeed filled with 'Peace and good-will towards Men!'

CHAPTER I.

Our story opens at a ladies' school in London, a few days before the Christmas holidays. "How I wish Saturday were come!" was the exclamation uttered by several voices from a party of

young girls chatting round the fire. They were in the course of a fashionable education at an establishment conducted by Mrs Barlow, who took only a limited number of pupils; and these belonged either to wealthy parents, or had the recommendation of wealthy connexions; for, as Mrs Barlow's terms were high, none but those of adequate means thought of placing their daughters with that lady, who had the first masters to teach them music and dancing, and all the accomplishments considered necessary in the world of fashion. The girls were now talking of going home, and of the pleasures they anticipated during the holidays. The oldest of them, nearly seventeen, was to leave school altogether, and pictured with delight her introduction into society, and presentation at the first drawing-room of the ensuing season. Some lived in the country, where they would find large parties assembled for Christmas festivities; others, younger, were expecting juvenile balls, and all sorts of amusements: in short, every one of them had something pleasant in anticipation, excepting Alice Errol, a little girl of about eight years old, who sat a silent listener to their conversation. Poor

Alice had no happy home to receive her during the holidays, but was to be left with Mrs Barlow. Her father, of good family, but no fortune, had emigrated early in life to Canada, where he married an American lady, by whom he had several children, who all died save Alice; and their mother, always delicate, had followed them about two years before. Mr Errol, who, by diligence and lucky speculations, had made a considerable fortune, longed again to see his native land; and having now no ties to bind him to Canada, resolved to end his days in England. He had made preparations for his departure, and only waited to wind up his affairs, which took more time than he expected. But Alice, his only child, was drooping; and fearful of her inheriting the fragile constitution of her mother, and being advised to try the effect of an immediate sea-voyage, he took a passage to England for her and an old and trusty nurse, having first apprised his London correspondent of their expected arrival. Their voyage was prosperous: but the poor woman, unused to the sea, was completely prostrated by sickness, and died a few days before the ship reached England. The captain took charge

of the little girl, and delivered her safely to her father's agent, Mr Grose. He was a thoroughly upright and trustworthy man of business, but an old bachelor, of rather eccentric habits, and he felt much at a loss to know what to do with his little charge without her own attendant; and having no one in his own household who could properly look after her, and having heard Mrs Barlow recommended as a competent person, he thought he could not do better than place her with that lady for the few months that would ensue before her father's arrival to claim her. So Alice was in a few days removed to Mrs Barlow's house in the Regent's Park, with strong injunctions on the part of Mr Grose, and a faithful promise from the lady, that she should be treated with the greatest kindness, and receive a motherly superintendence. Perhaps another might have been happy there, with so many young play-fellows; but Alice was a shy child, and unaccustomed to strangers, having been almost the sole companion of her invalid mother, and afterwards, the darling of her father, who centered all his affections in his only surviving child. She was therefore ill

prepared to encounter a fashionable schoolmistress and girls of high spirits, who often pained her by commenting upon what they termed her Yankee ways. It was not that they were purposely unkind, but she was mortified by their banter; and as Mrs Barlow did not take the trouble to study the little American, as she was called, poor Alice's sensitive nature longed for sympathy, and she dreaded that lady as well as the more boisterous companions of her own age. Now, when the girls were all revelling in the prospect of home and home-pleasures, Alice felt more than usually sad, and when one of them rather abruptly said, "Well, Alice, and where are *you* going for the holidays?" her heart swelled, and she suddenly burst into tears. They might have felt sorry for, and tried to comfort her, but just then a teacher called them to some occupation, and the opportunity of making such an effort was lost, and their ideas took a different direction. Alice, too, was obliged to attend the summons with the rest.

When the important Saturday arrived, then it was she felt most keenly her solitary position, as carriage after carriage came to fetch her

school-fellows, some to their homes in London, others to the various railway-stations, each and all looking pleased and happy. And when the last carriage had driven away, and the last girl had said, "Good-bye, Alice," the tears dropped slowly one by one down her sad face. She ran up to her little room, and sobbed and cried for half an hour, thinking of her own distant home, her papa and mamma, and the poor old nurse, whose burial at sea had almost broken her heart before they landed. At last she remembered the little Bible her mother had given her, and her dying request that she would read it, and never forget to pray to her Father in heaven in all the trials she might meet with, when she herself was removed from this world. But since she had come to Mrs Barlow's, she had not been able to obey her mother's parting wish, for she seldom could find a moment to herself; and when she had attempted to bring it out amongst the other girls, they had frequently laughed at her. Now, however, she opened it, and the first words that met her eyes were, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not;" and though at first nearly blinded by tears, she

read on for several minutes, and then knelt down and prayed; and the poor child grew calm, and rose from her knees comforted.

The evening passed off more pleasantly than she expected, and a young lady who drank tea with Mrs Barlow, took so much notice of the little girl, and talked so kindly to her, that she was quite sorry when called to go to bed. The next day, Sunday, they went to church in the morning, and dined between the services; and then attending church again at six o'clock, the time passed less heavily than she had feared; but the next few days were a sore trial to her. Mrs Barlow, fond of gaiety, and necessarily much confined at home with her school during the session, made amends by going into a round of company during the vacation, and contrived to dine out or go to parties every evening, so that poor Alice was left to amuse herself as best she could, the servants following the example of their mistress, and neglecting the little stranger. Alice thus became thoroughly miserable and down-hearted; her father's arrival had been so long delayed, that she almost ceased to expect him, and she began fully to experience that sick-

ness of the heart produced by hope long deferred.

It wanted now but a few days to Christmas; the weather had been for some time thick and gloomy, and the London fog had the effect of still more depressing the spirits of poor Alice, who had no one to associate with, and who with feelings by nature morbidly sensitive, went about the house moping and wretched, whilst her thoughts again and again went back to the happy time when she was surrounded by friends, and was loved and caressed in her own far-off country. The snow had been falling all day. Mrs Barlow had dressed and gone out to a party, first desiring that Alice might have her supper taken up stairs to the drawing-room; but she little cared for that kind of indulgence, and had just finished her lonely meal, the servant remarking that Miss Errol must be ill, or going to be so, for she ate so little. Alice said she was quite well, but that she could not eat any more, and added: "I think you said, Ruth, that you wished to go out this evening. I will go to bed early, and then you can go out the sooner."

"Thank you, Miss Alice," said Ruth. "They

will be waiting for me, and I shall be very glad, indeed, if you would. When will you be ready?"

"In about ten minutes. Will you come for me then, please, Ruth?"

The maid went down stairs, and Alice thought to herself, "Every one has friends but me; but I am tired of sitting up alone, and Ruth wants to enjoy herself." But in our darkest hours Heaven is watching over us, and happiness was nigh this seemingly deserted child. She put away her book, and was preparing to leave the room, when a loud knock rang through the house, and footsteps were immediately afterwards heard on the stairs; the door opened, Alice turned round, gave a slight cry, and springing forward, was clasped to her father's bosom!

CHAPTER II.

About the same time as the events in the foregoing chapter, a poor woman sat busily sewing by the light of a solitary candle in a

scantily furnished room, belonging to a house in one of the numerous narrow streets in the outskirts of the metropolis. She was a widow; and during her husband's life (he had been a journeyman carpenter), they had lived comfortably on his earnings, she gaining something likewise by needlework; but sickness overtook the family, and carried off two of their children, and then attacked the father. He had a long illness, and being unable to work, and she also losing her employers, who were afraid to trust work where fever made its abode, they gradually fell into extreme poverty; and when the man died, the widow was compelled to part with most of her furniture, and to rent the little room where we now find her, endeavouring to gain a poor livelihood by taking in what is called slop-work from some of the cheap ready-made clothing-shops. She had four children left. Susan, the eldest, who was seventeen, had had a good education for her situation in life when her parents were in comparative prosperity, and she now assisted her mother in sewing and teaching the two youngest, a boy of five, and a girl of seven years old. Besides, they had the additional burden

of nursing her eldest brother William, who had worked at his father's trade, and had managed to get pretty constant employment, and bring his earnings towards the common stock, until about two months previously, when, from a fall, he hurt his back; and though he had now got over the accident, he had never recovered his health sufficiently to go to work again, or indeed to sit up for more than an hour or two in the day. It therefore seemed improbable that he would be able to assist them for a long time. He was a good boy, and fretted much to see his mother and sister so overworked; for, with all their care and economy, and sitting up, sometimes, half the night, they could hardly contrive to earn enough to keep them in food and clothing, and were now, besides, unfortunately behind-hand in their rent, for which their landlord began to be somewhat impatient. However, Susan had just then obtained some finer work from the proprietor of a hotel, and having finished it, had gone to receive the money, which they hoped would help a little towards the arrears of rent. William was in bed, and, his mother believed, asleep; but in reality he was watching her wearied face, down

which the tears coursed ever and anon as she sat sewing. He could bear it no longer, but trying to raise himself up, he begged she would rest for a short time.

"Dear mother," said he, "Susan will soon be back, and then she will bring us some money, and who knows but the lady may give her some more work. Do leave off working so hard now."

"Alas! my boy, I *must* finish this to-night. Fanny and James are asleep, and I can do more now than when they are about; besides, *they* must have food, when Susan and I can do without much."

"Oh, when shall I ever be strong again to work and help you! How glad I used to be to bring you my wages on Saturday night!"

"Well, William, you must try and bear it patiently, till God sees fit to give you strength. Till then, we must work hard; and you must take all we can procure for you, for yesterday little Fanny told me you pretended not to be able to eat when I was away, and gave your dinner to Jemmy, who was hungry; and you know the doctor says you want good living more than medicine to bring you round again."

Just then, Susan came in.

"Well, dear," said her mother, "you look tired."

"No, dearest mother, I am not tired to-night; Mrs Harvey has paid me a sovereign, and she gave me supper, so I do not want anything more; besides, she told me to call again on Thursday morning, when perhaps she might have some more fine work to give me from a lady, as I brought it back clean, and very well done, and she thought she might trust me."

"Thank God, my dear child, for her kindness. And now," whispered she, "I will get a little porter for William; and then, we will ask Mr Manning to take the rest for the rent, and when we tell him how you hope to earn some more from Mrs Harvey, perhaps he may trust us a little longer, till William can get about again."

Susan took her mother's work, whilst the latter went out; and the poor boy told her how it made his heart ache to see them wearing themselves out; but Susan would not hear of it, and said she hoped they would get over their troubles by industry, and God's blessing, and was sure they should do well, when he

could go to work again, and things would be better, now she had found a friend kind enough to give her employment more productive than any they had hitherto had. When their mother returned with the porter for William, he first insisted upon her drinking some of it, a luxury she had not tasted for a long time. The two women sat up until they had finished the work for the shop, and then retired to their humble pallet, praying for God's blessing and strength to bear whatever trials He thought fit to send them.

Christmas came to *them* in poverty and privation—their prospects were gloomy in the extreme, and nothing but the widow's humble but perfect trust in Providence enabled her to bear up against the carking care and sorrow that had been her portion ever since, and, indeed, for some time before her husband's death; and things had gradually but surely been growing worse from that period, spite of all her exertions. She endeavoured to think cheerfully and hopefully, but the picture of former happy Christmases *would* force itself upon her, when, in her neat and comfortable home, with her husband and all her children

about her, well clothed and healthy, they had been so happy—and the contrast was too painful. She slept but little, and that little was broken and troubled by waking thoughts, that formed themselves into dreams of rough men coming to take her little remnant of goods, even the bed from her sick child; and she woke unrefreshed, to begin again the struggles of another day. Sorely was she tempted to wish that God would release her from her troubles, and take her from the sight of her hungry children; but she rejected the temptation with all her strength, and in silence, whilst those around her were sleeping, poured forth her supplications for more patience, and prayed that her trials might be sanctified to her. And thankful was she that *they* could forget their sorrows in the sleep denied to her; and when she thought again of them, she almost wondered that she could have entertained even a moment's desire to leave them.

The next day, the snow came down thick and fast, and the cold was intense. Scarcely could the poor family derive any warmth from their handful of fuel; and in taking to the shop the finished work of last evening, the poor widow

was wet through. But the few hardly earned shillings were welcome, and she brought back a fresh supply of work, upon which she and Susan immediately began to employ themselves, though they were repeatedly compelled to leave off, to warm their numbed fingers. Poor William's cough was very troublesome, and he felt the cold dreadfully; and the two little ones in vain tried to warm themselves by creeping close to their mother and sister. Much in this way passed each day, mother and daughter working for bread to satisfy the cravings of hunger, but, alas! unable to procure the comforts necessary for the invalid, whose strength seemed decreasing. And the widow's cheek grew hollow, and her careworn face was a plain index to the inward struggle that was consuming her.

Alas! could we lift the curtain, and look at the homes of many of our fellow-creatures, what unknown suffering might we there discern. It is not the tongues that are loudest in complaint that deserve the most commiseration, though they may often receive the greatest amount of pity from the casual observer In large cities such as London, where extremes

meet, we may be enjoying every comfort that a good Providence bestows upon his creatures here, while but a few streets, nay, a few doors off, there may be misery and wretchedness in every shape, and hearts in which the hope for better days has almost ceased to exist.

CHAPTER III.

We left Alice in her father's arms. For some moments, neither could speak, their hearts were so full. Soon, however, he was able to explain, that having arrived that morning, and made inquiries, he learned the place of Alice's location, and the reason of it, from a letter that had been left for him by Mr Grose, who happened to be absent at that time from town. Mr Grose's letter also stated all the particulars of nurse's death, which he had not heard of before. He came, therefore, to Mrs Barlow's for his child, and was much disappointed both to find her left by herself, and that her health had

not improved since they had last parted. He had engaged apartments for himself and a black, who had been his servant many years, at a quiet hotel recommended in Mr Grose's letter; and after sitting for an hour with Alice on his knee, talking, and hearing her own artless account of her adventures on board the vessel, and during her stay in England, he set her gently down, and said he would come for her in the morning, and arrange with Mrs Barlow for her leaving directly. But Alice, who had thought of nothing less than parting from her newly found parent, was full of dismay at such an idea, and beseechingly clung to him, saying, "Do take me with you to-night, papa—pray, do," and looked so imploring, that he scarcely knew how to refuse.

"My darling child," said he, "I have no one but old Frank with me, and it is so late to-night, that you ought to be going to bed directly; and how we could manage, I don't know. To-morrow, I may get a person to be a companion for you, and you can come at once and be with me; and when I am out, which I must be a great deal, till my business is quite settled, there will be some one

always to sit with you, and attend to all your wants."

Alice was obliged to submit, though her tell-tale face shewed how disappointed she felt; and after giving her one more embrace, and reiterating his promise that she should come early to his hotel, Mr Errol left the house. That very evening, he asked the mistress of the hotel if she knew of a person who might come immediately to wait upon his little daughter. He explained all the circumstances, and that Alice would be left to her care chiefly, whilst they remained there, as business would take him out frequently. The mistress, who was the same Mrs Harvey that had given Susan work, could not, at the moment, think of any one fit for the situation, until suddenly she remembered that poor girl, and was going to mention her, when she checked herself, recollecting that she was unprovided with presentable clothing. But upon second thoughts, she told Mr Errol the only person she could think of just then was a young but very honest girl, whom she knew to be thoroughly respectable; but she was afraid her poverty would not permit of her having clothes sufficiently good to appear in

before Miss Errol, but that she expected her the next morning to inquire for some work, and he could see her if he pleased. Mr Errol, who was generous and kind-hearted, and, moreover, required a servant for Alice directly, said, if that was the only objection, and the girl was suitable in other respects, it could be easily remedied; and it was agreed that Mr Errol would see her when she called. Early the next morning, old Frank was despatched for Alice, with a note from his master to Mrs Barlow, stating that he would himself call at a later hour. Frank was overjoyed to go for his young mistress, and Alice was equally delighted to see Frank, who had carried her, a baby, in his arms, and had the most profound love and respect for everything belonging to his master. He handed her into the cab with all imaginable care, and during the short drive to the hotel, was continually looking back from his seat by the driver, to see if she was quite comfortable in the warm over-coat of Mr Errol's, that he had brought of his own accord to wrap her in. How happy she felt we need not say, nor with what pleasure she breakfasted with her father, nor need we add that her

tongue scarcely ceased talking, save now and then, when she crept up to his side for another and another kiss. After breakfast, Mrs Harvey announced that Susan Bond was down stairs; and Mr Errol requested that she would come up forthwith. She had previously been told by Mrs Harvey that perhaps she might get a place with a gentleman to look after his little girl, and she now entered the room, feeling very nervous, and trembling much; but Mr Errol's kind manner reassured her; and, after asking her several questions, and finding she answered in a modest, unpretending way, and had a good-tempered expression of countenance, he said that if he engaged her, she must be ready to come at a moment. Susan said she must consult her mother, who knew nothing of the proposal, and if she could spare her, she would be thankful to take the place, "only," added she, glancing at her worn and faded apparel, "I am scarcely fit to attend upon any young lady."

Mr Errol noticed the look, and replied, "Well, you can go home; and if you think you can do what is required for my little girl, and your mother is willing you should come, I will, after a little consideration, let you know the

result. Mrs Harvey offers to take the responsibility of your good character and willingness to oblige, upon herself, which is a great point in your favour." So saying, he motioned Susan to leave them, who curtsied, and took her departure.

He had watched Alice's face, and now asked how she would like Susan as nurse and companion.

"Dear papa, she looks as if she would love me; and if she were better dressed, I daresay she would look very nice."

Mr Errol smiled, and sent for Mrs Harvey; and after dwelling much upon the necessity of good temper and entire trustworthiness, he decided to engage Susan Bond, and desired Mrs Harvey to see that she was provided with neat clothes, for that he should require her services the following morning at latest.

Meanwhile, Susan told her mother of the prospects that were opening upon her.

"Though, mother," said she, "I fear, should the gentleman consent to try me, you would find it harder to nurse William and take care of the children, besides sewing, all alone."

Mrs Bond thought of Susan's shabby clothes, and of the impossibility of getting things fit

for her to go to service with, but she did not like to damp her hopes, and having expressed her thankfulness at the prospect of a situation, assured her daughter that though she would try to get on without her, they would all miss her very much. Judge of their joy when, some hours later, Mrs Harvey sent to say that Mr Errol would take Susan to wait upon Miss Alice, and that she had instructions to buy her suitable things. Mrs Harvey also wished to see Susan directly; and while the poor widow fell on her knees to thank God for such sudden happiness, Susan hastened to the hotel, and was speedily provided by Mrs Harvey, from a ready-made clothing-shop, with a neat dress, cloak, and bonnet, and some necessary additional clothing; and was told to come very early the next morning, to dress Miss Alice. Susan could hardly believe it; and though she wished to help her mother all that night, her fingers refused to obey her direction, and she made many a false stitch in the work she was engaged upon. But she was up early, and off to the hotel, with her mother's blessing and prayers, that she might be kept from all evil in the new course of

life she was entering upon. William, half in sorrow and half in joy, cried heartily. She was in good time, and was shewn into the little girl's room, where was another bed which she was to occupy while they stayed at the hotel; and she began her duties at once by assisting to dress her new charge. When Alice had gone down to breakfast with her father, she employed herself in nicely arranging everything, and had only just finished when she was called to her own breakfast. How different was the good meal provided for her, from the scanty food allotted to her family at home; and it was with shame and remorse that she compared her comforts with *their* sufferings. After breakfast, Mr Errol told her that as his business would detain him out until the evening, she must be with Miss Alice in his absence, and walk out with her, and that Frank would attend them; and to be careful that her feet were not wet, for she was delicate and must be tenderly watched; and she was to be wrapped up very warm. Susan promised obedience; and kissing Alice, he went out.

CHAPTER IV.

As Mr Errol was going down stairs, he happened to run against a gentleman who was coming forward, and as both were stopping to apologise, the latter, looking hard at him, exclaimed, "Can it be my old friend, Errol?" At the same moment, the other said, "John Landor?" They had been young together, but Mr Errol, seeking his fortune in the New World, they had lost sight of each other until this accidental meeting. Now, however, Mr Landor would not so easily let him go, and after mutual explanations, he insisted upon Mr Errol, Alice, her maid, Frank, and all, coming to his house to spend Christmas. He was a gentleman of good property, with a handsome place in Surrey, was married, and had a family. He would take no denial, saying that he and his wife were always glad to see their friends, and took leave, after exacting a promise that they would be at Mardon Park on Christmas Eve, three days from that time.

Mr Errol felt great delight at meeting with his old friend, and thought what a happiness it would be for Alice to pass her Christmas with a family-party, instead of alone with him. When he returned in the evening, he found her sitting with Susan, looking very happy. Susan left the room, and Alice jumped upon her father's knee, and putting her arms round his neck, said she wanted him to grant her a great favour.

"Well, let me hear it, and all you have done to-day; and I have something to tell you that you will like to hear."

"But do please say 'Yes,' first, dear pa."

"If it is nothing wrong, and it will please my darling, she knows I will grant it."

"Then I want you to give Susan's brother, who is ill, some wine and things to make him strong."

Mr Errol was afraid Susan might have been asking Alice for relief, but was glad to find, on questioning his little girl, that she had not mentioned the subject of her own accord, but that Alice had found out all about Susan's home by her own interrogatories and childish curiosity.

"Well," he said, "we will make proper inquiries; but you must not say a word to her; and if what you tell me is correct, I will do something for them. But now, listen to me. On Monday, I am going to take you into Surrey, to an old friend of mine, to spend Christmas with his family."

Alice felt rather nervous at the idea of seeing fresh children, after the school-girls whose careless merriment had so pained her; but her papa said there was no cause for alarm, as they had a mother who would be kind to her; and, besides, he was going too, with Susan, to wait upon her. So Alice began to think she should like to see the country, and leave London behind, which had proved till now anything but a happy residence.

The next day, as Mr Errol was disengaged till the afternoon, he took Alice out himself, and they walked to the street where Susan's mother lived; and as Alice knew the number of the house, they came in unawares upon the family, which Mr Errol did purposely, that he might judge better of the real state of their circumstances. They found Mrs Bond working hard, as usual, at the same time watching

a pot, in which a few potatoes were boiling, whilst William was sitting up, propped by a pillow, and looking wan and weary, though trying to teach Jemmy to read from an old spelling-book. They were all surprised to see a gentleman and little girl enter their humble room. The widow rose, and brought forward their only two chairs; and Mr Errol said he was Susan's master, and had come at the desire of his little daughter, who was anxious to know if anything could be done for the invalid boy.

"And, indeed," added he, "he looks very ill, and seems to want something better than you can, perhaps, procure."

"Yes, sir," she answered, "he is very badly; and the doctor says he is sinking for want of proper nourishment, and medicine does not do him much good now; but he sends him draughts, and William takes them, and we try to hope they will keep him up till the warm weather comes again."

"My good woman, he must have some wine, and be properly nursed. My little girl here has set her heart upon it, and I will send you some, that he may have a glass every day; and some

coal, too, for you are all starving with cold. Susan goes with us on Monday into the country, but she shall bring you a few needful comforts this evening.

Little Fanny, the other girl, who had been on an errand for their landlady, just then came in. The poor child was crying with the cold, and Alice, when she compared *her* thin clothing with her own warm haps, pitied her extremely. The widow was almost speechless with gratitude, and altogether overcome; and Mr Errol, seeing she was weak from fasting and overwork, sent immediately for some porter and a loaf of bread; and as soon as it came in, he took Alice away, thinking they would enjoy it best by themselves. Mrs Bond now, indeed, felt that her unshaken trust in the Almighty had not been misplaced, and that her prayers had found acceptance; and for William, too, that he should have the comforts she had vainly striven to procure for him by working day and night, and denying herself all sustenance but what could just keep life together. Mr Errol was glad he had seen Susan's home, and told Alice, now that he was satisfied of the truth of all she had heard, that he

would send things by Susan to-night. Alice was delighted to tell Susan where they had been, and that her papa was going to send William some wine; and Susan was too much overjoyed to find words to thank her darling mistress. When Mr Errol came in, he gave Frank money to buy some tea, sugar, and coffee, and two bottles of wine, with currants and things to make a plum-pudding, and some beef, that Mrs Bond might have a dinner on Christmas-day, and sent him with Susan to buy some flannel for William, and a pair of warm blankets; and then he was to put all the things in a cab, and go with her to her mother's. He also told him to see if coal had been sent in, as he ordered, and sent Mrs Bond five shillings besides by Frank.

Oh! how can we describe Susan's joyful meeting with her family, or their astonishment when Frank brought in all the parcels from the cab! He sat down, and was soon at play with the two children, who ran their fingers through his woolly hair, and were delighted at his white teeth, and laughing, good-humoured face. But after staying nearly an hour, Susan remembered that her master had requested her

to be back in good time, and she and Frank proceeded homewards, charged with the duty and grateful thanks of Mrs Bond and William towards Mr Errol and Miss Alice. But she was to come and spend the greater part of the next day, Sunday, with her family, as Alice would be with her papa; and Frank pacified the children, who clung to his coat, by promising to come again and see them, when they all returned from Mardon Park.

That night there was warmth in the poor widow's room, and peace and thankfulness in her heart.

CHAPTER V.

On Monday, Mr Errol and Alice, attended by Frank and Susan, went by the railway a short distance out of London, and stopped at a small station about a mile and a half from Mardon Park, where they found Mr Landor's carriage waiting, and were soon welcomed by that

gentleman and his lady. The young people were just going to tea; and as soon as Susan had taken off Alice's bonnet and pelisse, she sat down with them, and the little girls were most kind and attentive to their new guest. Mr Landor's family consisted of three girls, the two eldest of whom were twins, about a year older than Alice, and there were two boys older still. The youngest girl was a little flaxen-haired fairy of seven years old; then came Harry, three years younger; and another had been added to the family just a month before. Mrs Landor, never very strong, had not quite recovered, so they did not receive general company this Christmas. A sister of Mr Landor's was also living with them, who was of great assistance in taking care of the children, and superintending the establishment, when sometimes Mrs Landor was too unwell for much exertion. She was now about thirty, not handsome, but good-tempered, and very agreeable, and the children were all fond of Aunt Lizzie, who was the great promoter of their amusements, and entered into all their little pleasures and troubles likewise, so that she was in constant requisition by the youthful as well as the elder part of the family.

She drank tea with the little party, and seeing how shy and nervous Alice felt with strangers, she kindly devoted herself to the task of making her comfortable, and by tact and quiet management, contrived to put her more at her ease, and bring her to regard her young companions with less fear. George and Frederic, the two schoolboys, dined with the family at a later hour. When the little girls came down in the evening, Alice at first crept shyly up to her papa, and seemed but half-willing to join the children, who played at some quiet game; but Aunt Lizzie tempted her to venture amongst them again under her auspices, and, after a while, she began to enjoy herself with the rest. Being Christmas-eve, the school-children from the village came to sing hymns and carols; and then came bedtime for the young ones, Alice in a pretty little room, with Susan close by. Mrs Landor and her sister-in-law soon retired, leaving the two old friends sitting up to have a long chat over old times. They had each much to tell of the years that had passed since they had been school-friends together, so it was very late before they separated.

The next morning, Alice was awakened by a

merry peal from the church-bells, ushering in Christmas. When dressed, on going down, she found Aunt Lizzie already up and surrounded by the children, superintending the division of some plain but good substantial pudding, of which each poor family in the parish was to have a supply on that day, besides meat; and the different recipients of Mr Landor's bounty soon arrived with baskets, for their shares, which were all distributed before breakfast. Alice looked with astonishment and delight at the immense puddings the cook was cutting up into large thick slices, and at the happy faces that came forward and received their several portions to carry home; and how she admired the large boughs of holly, and ivy and misletoe that decorated the hall and staircase, and the dining-room! The leaves and red berries looked so bright, and the fire shone so cheerfully, that she felt happier than she had done since she left America. Though the ground was covered with snow, the whole party, including Mrs Landor, walked to church, which was just outside the park gates. But a path had been nicely swept all the way, and they enjoyed walking on the clean ground, with a little wall

of snow on each side, on which the boys wrote their own names, and Alice's, as they went along. The church was hung with evergreens, and the stove gave out a genial warmth; then there was the old square family pew, with soft hassocks and crimson lining, and the servants in another pew, some little way off, but within view, and under the master's eye. But comfortable as it all looked, and rich as Mr Landor was in this world's gifts, there was something very near, that told of the instability of earthly possessions, and that even *his* happiness had its drawbacks. On the wall, just over their pew, was a simple marble slab, telling that Emma and Blanche, two beloved ones, had been taken from them, and that their remains reposed in the large vault outside the church. Their deaths had taken place two years before, but their memory was still cherished, and their parents still sorrowed for their loss, though the first poignant feelings of bereavement had passed away; and many a time, when looking at their little group, both father and mother would think of the two little ones they had so loved besides, and whose vacant places left such a gap amongst their household treasures. There was

illness at the rectory, and that pew was in consequence unoccupied; so the curate officiated alone, and was afterwards invited to dine at Mardon Park. He was a young man, quiet and gentlemanly, and was often their guest, and a great favourite with the young people. Having many young brothers and sisters at home, he was accustomed to children, and knew how to amuse and play with them, and was Aunt Lizzie's willing coadjutor in devising all kinds of fun; and even managed to bring out Alice, notwithstanding her shyness, so that he was of great use just at this time. Altogether, she was very happy, and her father felt so too, when he saw her playing with them all. But in the midst of her pleasure she did not forget poor Mrs Bond, and on kissing Mr Errol before she went to bed, she whispered, "I am so glad, papa, that Susan's brother and mother have had a good dinner to-day."

The next day, Mr Errol went back to town, leaving her with his friends, and promising to return in about ten days, when he hoped his business would permit him to stay longer with them; but before he went, he cordially thanked Mr and Mrs Landor for their kindness in taking

charge of his little girl, and expressed his happiness at leaving her under their care during his unavoidable absence.

CHAPTER VI.

Meanwhile, Alice grew daily happier, and more accustomed to all the family. George even got her upon his pony, and led it as far as the entrance-lodge and back, whilst Frederic held her firmly on. She was frightened at first, but got over her terror when she found the beautiful creature was so gentle. Then the two boys took her between them, and kept her from falling, when they made slides on the ice. This was an alarming business; but she saw Sophy, and Gertrude, and even little Clara slide fearlessly; so after a few attempts with her two supporters, and then with one alone, she took courage, and made one good slide without assistance, and actually enjoyed the sport. George, and Frederic too, with the gardener's help, made a snow-man

of gigantic stature, stretching out his long arms in front of the hall-door; and they used to look at it by moonlight, when it made the most grotesque appearance imaginable, and caused much laughter. Of an evening, there were all sorts of merry games; and Mr Landor, Aunt Lizzie, and Mr Salisbury, the young curate, would sometimes join in Blindman's Buff, and Puss in the Corner, or the more quiet amusements of telling stories and making puzzles. And then there were the mummers, who swept the room to find a silver penny; and the village band. But with all these recreations, there was quiet reading, and lessons between whiles; and Alice shared with the others the patient instructions of Mrs Landor and her sister. Alice, too, wrote some letters to her papa, in which she told him all she did, and how gay she was, and begged him to make haste and finish his business, that he might come down and be with them all.

The morning of the New Year brought great pleasure to the children, for each received some pretty gift. Alice had a handsome doll from Mrs Landor, and a work-box from Aunt Lizzie, and Mr Landor gave her a nice little book. Mr Errol had sent her a box by the

railway, full of presents, to distribute among her young friends, and they all gave her something in return; and great was the enjoyment of that day. Altogether, Alice was fast becoming a lively child, so great was the change produced by mixing with a cheerful and united family, and the company of well brought-up and nice children of her own age. One morning, when Mr Errol came from London, he saw a merry group of children running and laughing, and to his great surprise and delight, Alice came up to him out of breath, pursued by the rest, with rosy cheeks, and looking as happy as any of the party. This time he came to stay, having at length concluded his business, and he became domesticated with the family, and began to feel as happy, in his own quiet way, as Alice did in hers. Both Mrs and Miss Landor were good musicians, and the harp and piano often enlivened the social circle. Mr Errol, who had taste and a good voice, joined in their vocal melody, and proved a valuable addition to their little concerts.

The crowning festivity for the children was a Twelfth-cake, and a little juvenile party on Twelfth-night, when the children of several

neighbouring families joined the circle; and who of all others should draw the queen but Alice! Then there was a magic lantern, which was a source of great delight to the assembled party, as all kinds of fantastic figures danced by, and was shewn off to advantage by Mr Landor, with Mr Salisbury's assistance, followed by a variety of pleasant games. She was now thoroughly acquainted with her young friends, and enjoyed the scene much, and was even able to perform her part as queen with tolerable composure, with the help of a nice boy older than herself, who happened to draw the king, whom she had seen before, and had been very kind to her on several occasions. And there was such a beautiful Christmas-tree, splendidly lighted up with innumerable waxen tapers, and hung with glittering ornaments. The tree was not despoiled of its treasures; but instead, there was a lottery—all prizes and no blanks—and all were gratified, as they received some little remembrance of this pleasant evening.

Nor, in this happy Christmas, were their less fortunate fellow-creatures forgotten. Besides the good dinner on Christmas-day, at the beginning of the year, Mr Landor gave away coal,

and blankets, and warm clothing to all the poor people in the parish; and little parcels of tea were distributed to the old women on the day of the juvenile party. The servants, too, had their Christmas entertainment, to which they were allowed to ask their friends, and had everything provided for them in the most liberal manner. Frank and Susan were delighted—the latter only regretted that her family could not enjoy the same happiness. As for Frank, he was so droll, and had so many odd tricks and gesticulations, that he furnished nearly as much amusement as he received. Susan wrote home accounts of all that happened at Mardon Park, for the gratification of her mother and William, and how she wished they could see the beautiful place, and how dear Miss Alice was improved in health and spirits; and great delight did these letters give to the widow and her invalid child. Mrs Bond, too, found time to write once, and tell that William was getting much better; and that they could never be sufficiently thankful to Mr Errol, whose visit, and the nourishing things he had sent, had been the means, under God's blessing, of giving him what he so much needed, strength and hope; and she concluded

by hoping that Susan felt as grateful as she did for such unlooked-for mercies bestowed upon them, and would study all she could to deserve her master's great bounty, and to shew her gratitude by every means in her power, however small that might be; and concluded by commending her beloved child to the care of that Almighty Father, whose merciful Providence had sent them so kind a benefactor.

CHAPTER VII.

But pleasures come to an end, as all things else; and the time arrived when George and Frederic were to return to school. The children all looked blank when the actual morning arrived, and hardly tasted their breakfast. Mrs Landor and Aunt Lizzie could not restrain their tears, and their father got over the leave-taking as quickly as possible. Alice cried almost as much as Sophy and Gertrude, when the two

boys drove off from the door; and none of the family could quite recover their spirits all that day. But there is a happy elasticity in youth, and they were soon able to resume their usual occupations; and Aunt Lizzie found her task of teaching perhaps more easy, now that her little scholars gave their undivided attention to their lessons, whilst before it was rather apt to be distracted by the lively spirits of the schoolboys, who were always full of merry pranks, and wanting their sisters and Alice to join them. They took pleasant walks together, and often went into the cottages to visit poor families; and Mrs Landor and Aunt Lizzie would read the Bible to them, and give advice so kindly, not assuming airs of patronage, as some ladies do when they call upon their poorer neighbours, that their visits were always received with pleasure, and many an aged countenance, which had been sad and weary before in the cheerless cold days of winter, would light up at their entrance.

Mr Errol now talked of shortening his visit, and taking Alice to a house he had purchased in London, in one of those new and airy localities that have sprung into existence within the last

few years. But they had all become fond of the little girl, who, now that her shyness had worn off, was quite an entertaining companion, and she, and Sophy, and Gertrude were inseparable companions. Mr and Mrs Landor begged he would not separate the young playmates so quickly, and that he too would not yet think of leaving them for some time longer, or they should believe they had failed to be as agreeable to him as his society had proved to them. He therefore yielded to their entreaties so far as to delay his departure one more week, and perhaps he was not unwilling to be persuaded, for he daily enjoyed his visit more and more, while a secret fascination seemed to bind him to the spot. For the first time in his life, he found himself with a family, every member of which contributed in some degree to the happiness of the whole, and the result was most agreeable to all who came in contact with them. Mr Landor was the model of an English gentleman, respected by all; his wife and sister seconded him in all his views for the good of his tenantry; and many were the benevolent schemes devised and carried out by their acting in unison altogether. His piety was genuine and unaffected. He encouraged

no party-spirit in religion, the bane of true Christianity. High and Low Church were terms not used in their little circle. Every morning and evening, the servants were assembled for family-worship, when a portion of the Scriptures was read, but there was no parade or ostentation, and everything was conducted in the quietest manner—their religion being shewn more in deeds than in words. Above all, gossip and detraction were banished from their conversation; and if casual visitors would sometimes enter upon the details of their neighbours, Mr Landor always endeavoured to change the subject. But he was very hospitable, and kept up a friendly intercourse with all the surrounding families, and all met with a kind reception and hearty welcome who visited at Mardon Park. Such was the domestic circle in which Mr Errol was so pleasantly included, and so hospitably treated, where the Christian virtues shone in the most amiable light, and precept and practice went hand in hand. Truly it might be said it was a God-fearing household. He thought of Alice, and of the great advantage in every way that her visit had been to her, and could hardly refrain from sighing at the prospect

of the lonely home she was going to, and the danger of her losing the good impressions she had received. He longed for one who could supply the place of the mother she had lost, and who would make his domestic hearth a happy resting-place to himself. But where could he look for the presiding deity, such as he pictured to his mind? His heart told him not far off. Long before he was himself aware of it, he had been deeply impressed by the agreeable manners and good sense of Miss Landor, and every hour passed in her society had deepened that feeling. Her mind was highly cultivated, and she was a graceful and accomplished woman. Mr Errol discovered that such a companion was absolutely necessary to his future happiness; and that unless she would consent to share his home, his life would henceforth be without comfort, and desolate indeed. He was still comparatively young, and the secret prescience that seldom deceives us gave him hopes that she would listen to him favourably; and when he took courage to lay before her, in an honourable and manly way, the state of his feelings, he had the happiness to receive from her the assurance that he was not indifferent to her, and that his regard

and esteem were reciprocated. Mr and Mrs Landor, on being informed of what had passed, congratulated them both, and wished them every happiness, though they frankly owned they should not know what to do without Aunt Lizzie, and should be very sorry to lose her.

And Alice, who so loved Aunt Lizzie, was not *she* glad of it? The truth must be told. She had been so long her father's sole darling, that a feeling of jealousy took possession of her, and she could not help regarding Miss Landor as usurping her place; and when Mr Errol asked her how she would like Aunt Lizzie to live with them, and be a mamma to her, the poor child looked very grave, and then began to sob violently. Her papa's heart was touched, and he tried to pacify her, but without much success. Alice could not feel satisfied, though he talked to her a long time, and lavished the most tender caresses upon her; and he was vexed to see that she appeared to feel a restraint in Miss Landor's presence, whereas before she had evinced more fondness for her than the rest of the family. That lady saw the change, and divined the cause; but she deemed it best not to notice it, and told Mr Errol that Alice was of a most

affectionate disposition, and she felt sure this little estrangement would not be of long continuance, but it was only natural, under the circumstances, she having been so long without a rival in his affections. And she took the right course, as it proved. A few days afterwards, Alice being confined to her room with a severe indisposition, Miss Landor did all she could to enliven her solitude, for the little girls were forbidden to go to her, and chatted and read to her, and told her pretty stories, besides giving her the medicines, and softly moving her pillows when feverish and uncomfortable. All Alice's love and gratitude returned towards her kind nurse; and the first day she was allowed to sit up, she asked Miss Landor to take her on her lap, and putting up her face for a kiss, whispered, "Will you love me as my own mamma did, and let papa love me too?"

"Yes, dear child," said Aunt Lizzie, "we both love you, and will often think and talk of your dear mamma."

Looking up tearfully, Alice continued, "I was afraid, when papa had another wife, he would forget mamma, and want me to forget her too."

"No, dearest; on the contrary, we will cherish her memory, and I will remember the precious charge she has left me in you, which I will devote myself, with God's help, to keep as she would wish." So saying, she encouraged Alice, who felt shy at entering upon the subject, to talk of her early childhood and the scenes of her old home; and in her gentle way, shewing an interest in these recollections, the little girl became quite confidential with her former friend; and when Mr Errol entered the room, he had the happiness of seeing the two beings he loved most in the world on the best of terms together. The peace and confidence thus restored never received a check. Mr Errol felt very anxious that no unnecessary delay should be permitted to retard their marriage. He could not furnish his new house, nor arrange anything to his mind without Miss Landor, and as there was no reasonable cause for deferring it beyond a few weeks, he persuaded her to accede to his request that it should take place within a month from that time; and it was settled that Alice should remain at Mardon with her kind friends until the ceremony had been performed. Accordingly, Mr Errol went back to London,

but made repeated visits to Mardon Park, and when the happy day arrived, he came to claim his bride. They were married quietly at the parish church, by our old friend Mr Salisbury, as the rector and his family had gone from home for change of air, after their severe illness in the winter. Her three nieces and Alice were the bridemaids; the school-children had a feast and holiday on the occasion, and all Aunt Lizzie's old pensioners were remembered when she left the village. Mr Errol and his bride set off immediately on a little tour of a fortnight's duration, and then returned for Alice, and with her took possession of their new house in London.

CHAPTER VIII.

During these changes, so momentous to Alice, she had not forgotten Mrs Bond and her family. She had interested Aunt Lizzie by her recital of the destitution in which she and her papa had

found them, and Susan had behaved so well, and made herself so useful in every capacity whilst at Mardon Park, that Mr Landor undertook to befriend the widow; and having some interest, got little James into one of the charitable institutions for educating poor children, with which London abounds; and not long afterwards, he found means to place Fanny also in one of the same, where she would be taught everything likely to be of use to her. Mrs Bond having thus the little ones provided for, and Susan in a comfortable service, was able to give her whole attention to William, who began to improve wonderfully, and after a time, resumed his work, at which he was very expert. Once more, then, she knew what it was to be free from the constant trouble that had for so long a time bowed her to the ground, and she was not forgetful of the Hand that had been her support through all her affliction, and brought her out of great tribulation. For Mr Errol and his family she entertained the deepest affection, and never failed to mingle her benefactor's name with those of her own family, when she knelt down in prayer for those dearest to her. Before long, too, she had an opportunity

of shewing her gratitude in a season of great distress to him.

About a year after their marriage, Alice was attacked by scarlet fever; Mrs Errol was the mother of a boy only a week old, and therefore could not go near her; nevertheless, she caught the infection, and both she and Alice were dangerously ill. Susan, who at first was Alice's attendant, took the fever from her, though in a milder form, and was confined to her room. Mr Errol was in a state bordering on distraction at the danger of his beloved wife and child. Then it was that Mrs Bond, hearing of his calamity, came and insisted upon taking the sole charge of Alice, never leaving her, day or night, for all the time the poor child was hanging between life and death, and unconscious who was her nurse. Mrs Errol was the first to recover, but Alice remained long in a precarious state, and when she was at length pronounced out of danger, she was but a shadow of her former self. It was now Mr Errol's turn to be grateful for Mrs Bond's unremitting attention to his darling child. But in vain he wished her to accept some recompense for her time, and the loss of her usual employment.

She absolutely refused to take anything from him, and begged he would not try to force it upon her, but allow her the happiness of thinking she had been enabled to acknowledge, in some degree, the deep debt of gratitude she owed him; and when Alice no longer required her care, she returned home, thankful to have been of use to those she had such reason to love and respect.

But there was more comfort in store for the widow. Mr Grose, formerly mentioned as Mr Errol's London correspondent, lost his housekeeper, who had lived with him many years. Mr Errol thought what an invaluable person Mrs Bond would be to him, and recommended her to his old friend; and she having now no young children to engage her time, and William being able to earn his own living, was but too glad to accept the situation; and made herself so agreeable to Mr Grose, by studying his ways, and attending to all his little oddities, that the old gentleman declared he had never been so comfortable in his life. A few years afterwards, when he died, after being nursed by her through a long and tedious illness, he left her a handsome provision, which made her easy and

independent for the remainder of her days. Her children all turned out respectably, and prospered; and Mrs Bond, when looking back on her past troubles, would often recall the Christmas that had approached with sickness and penury, and reflect how unexpectedly she and her family had been relieved from pressing misery through the intervention of Him who can "make the widow's heart to sing for joy."

Mr and Mrs Errol were happy too; and as for Alice, she had ever cause to remember with thankfulness the Christmas that had introduced her to her friends at Mardon Park, and to Aunt Lizzie, who proved the very kindest of stepmothers. One little boy and girl were added to Mr Errol's family, who shared with Alice the care and affection of their father and mother; and frequent were the visits between the two families, who lived in a mutual interchange of love and kindly feeling one to another.

CONCLUSION.

And now, having brought this little tale to a close, let us see if we cannot draw some useful moral from these few pages. The incidents there related are commonplace, and might happen to any of us, being indeed those that occur every day. But the most trifling events will furnish subjects for reflection, and teach a lesson to those willing to be instructed. We have endeavoured to exemplify, in the character of the poor widow, the virtues of Faith and Hope, in the midst of her greatest trials; and in the amiable family at Mardon Park, that Love or Charity which is the very bond of peace and of all virtue. Christmas comes in a variety of ways—sometimes smilingly, sometimes the reverse; but should some be cast down by disappointment, or even be enduring the heavier pangs of that grief that refuses comfort —or should poverty and all its attendant evils be present with them, and they look on all sides and find none ready to help, let them

strive to hold fast their faith in Him who both seeth their afflictions, and can relieve them. And those who are enjoying health and prosperity —let *them* remember whence come these blessings; and let them strive to do all the good they can in their generation, both by precept and example, and in all *kindness* and *gentleness*, try to relieve the sorrows of their less highly favoured brethren. They shall not go without their reward in this world or the next. "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days."

THE

THREE BOULDERS.

THE THREE BOULDERS:

A WITCH-STORY.

A good many years ago—I will not pretend to say how many—lived a lank, long-legged dominie in our good old town of Edinburgh, otherwise denominated "Auld Reekie." He had read a good deal, and taught a good deal, and no doubt, on account of so long giving forth his opinions as law, had come to consider himself the wisest man in Edinburgh. Now, he was very ill pleased that he could not get everybody to have the same opinion, and pondered a good deal upon the means he should take to convince them of it. At last, after much trepidation, he

naughty children; and every night, after their parents were snugly asleep in their nests, they stole away to fly about and amuse themselves in all manner of ways for an hour or two, with some other disobedient young crows; and they flew about so fast, and croaked so loud in their delight, that any human being who chanced to see or hear them, thought they were evil spirits.

One night, about half-past eleven o'clock, the old dominie, having written his farewell letter, and prepared everything for his departure from this life, left his smoky little house, and wandered away alone, through the Queen's Park, and round by the foot of the dreadful Samson's Ribs. You may be sure his nerves were in a great flutter at the idea of these great frowning rocks falling flat upon him. Every stone that creaked beneath his foot—every blade of grass that waved in the breeze—every tree that nodded to the moonshine, made the poor solitary man quite nervous. Every little while his courage failed him, and he would stop and almost turn, and then again walk firmly onwards, for he would not like it to be said that the wisest man was a coward. Why should he be

frightened now? He had passed the bounds of all fear.

At the same hour, on the same night, the lonely little witch-woman came out of her low turf-hut to seek a kind of herb that grew high up on Arthur's Seat, a little to the west of Duddingston Loch. She knew the moonlight that night was strong, and expected this precious plant to have a wondrous power. So, mixing up the rest of her marvellous compound, she put it into a small goblet, and with her staff in her other hand, she wended her way up the hill.

And at the same hour, on the same night, the three disobedient crows, having seen their friends fast asleep, slunk out of the shadow of the trees. They did not meet any of their companions, so they went towards their usual meeting-place, up on the steep side of the hill, and waited till some one would come. They waited a good while; and in the meantime were amusing themselves pulling up with their beaks and claws a number of little, green, ferny-looking plants, making a small bare circle, "that they might know the place again," they thought.

When the little witch-woman came up to the

place, and found all the precious plants torn up and wasted, she was in a fearful rage, and throwing the contents of her goblet among the crows, she cried out: "The first time you move from that wasted spot, may each of you turn into a boulder of rock a thousand times larger than yourselves!" When the naughty crows heard this denouncement, they felt very much afraid, and crouched close to each other, the biggest in the middle; and the old woman hobbled grumbling away.

By the time the old dominie came to the commencement of Samson's Ribs, he was quite trembling, and expected every moment to feel them come tottering about his ears. He got a great start, as he thought he heard a voice from the top, and looking up hastily, he forgot to attend to his feet, so tripping over a rock, he fell flat on his nose, at the same time uttering an unearthly shriek.

When the three crows heard the dominie cry, they thought it was their father calling them home, so, forgetting all about the old witch, they attempted to fly off towards their nest. But the charm was not forgotten, for no sooner had they tried to rise, than they became quite stiff

and large, and were turned into rocks a thousand times larger than themselves, and came thundering down, right over Samson's Ribs.

The dominie was just attempting to get up again, when he heard the rumbling noise, and began to wish he had not come. He hastily cried, "O yes! I believe you; but do not fall, I pray," when the rocks crashed all around him, and rolled down, downwards. He thought he was killed, poor man, and so he lay quite still, scolding himself for his pride and his love of fame. Then he wondered what the people of Edinburgh would think next morning—and what his pupils would do—and what would come next, now, since he was dead. Then he began to wonder if he was really dead, so he tried to raise his head, and open his eyes to see. Sure enough, there was the moon shining quite as bright as ever—there was Duddingston in the distance—there were the rocks above him as firm as ever. "I am alive!" said he, quite astonished, as he shook off a shower of gravel and earth, and rose to his feet, finding that he had only got a broken nose and a sprained ankle, by being the "wisest man in Edinburgh." Then he looked down, and saw three huge

boulders lying a good way below him, and he said, "Yes, by the bye, the prophecy does not say that the 'wisest man' was to be killed; neither does it say that the whole of the rock was to fall on him. I have seen enough to convince me. I have been wonderfully preserved from destruction, and henceforth my care must be to convince others!"

Whether he did so or not, I really do not remember; all that I know is, that if you look at the bank below Samson's Ribs, you will find the three boulders there, waiting quite patiently for a counter-charm to make them crows once more.

Moral.—Do not consider anything too trifling for your notice, till you have considered it well. If you *do* consider well first, you will find some moral, even in this childish and fanciful Tale of the Three Boulders.

A

STORY OF A SILVER FORK.

A STORY OF A SILVER FORK.

"No, indeed, Emily; I could never eat my dinner with these horrid steel forks. Why, in the world, did papa not keep the silver ones? I am sure he did not lose so much money as all that."

"O Sophia, hush, hush! for fear dear papa should hear you. Do not distress him more than necessary, for I know that he is anxious enough already, and all for our sakes, too. We ought to try and assist him, instead of murmuring at our slight privations."

"Slight! It is all very well"—— and Sophia murmured away to herself.

Emily and Sophia were the only daughters of an active merchant, who had hitherto kept them in affluence and elegance, but by the unexpected

failure of his principal bank, he found himself left, though not in poverty, yet under the necessity of greatly retrenching his expenses. His wife and his eldest daughter Emily affectionately and cheerfully submitted to the change; but Sophia, though only ten years of age, grumbled incessantly, and caused the greatest unhappiness to her relations. Emily tried hard to improve her by conversation and example, but to no purpose, and the above exclamation was uttered just after an affectionate reproof. They were taking their early dinner alone, while their mamma was waiting for their papa's return from business. They were seated in a tidy parlour, plain, though furnished with everything conducive to comfort; but to the eyes of the two girls things assumed a totally different hue. To Emily, she found that, through trying to be cheerful and content to please her parents, she had become so in reality, until she really found more pleasure and thankfulness, as she looked round their small parlour, than she had done when in the spacious drawing-rooms of their former home. To Sophia, everything appeared miserable and wretched; and because her things were not the very best, she forgot

entirely to be thankful for what they had. She was sulky and unhappy, and did not speak to Emily again that night.

At school, the next day, she was treated with marked contempt by Lucy Howard, a vain, silly girl, who was formerly one of her greatest friends. Sophia knew well enough the cause of this sudden coolness, and though despising Lucy thoroughly in her heart for it, she could not help feeling hurt and angry with her.

Strange enough to say, at the play-hour the conversation ran so:

"I would not eat my dinner without a silver fork, I can assure you," said Lucy, tossing her head.

"Nor I," said one.

"Nor I," said another, while Sophia sat silent and mortified, feeling deeply the intended wound.

"I suppose you will have to do it now, Mademoiselle Sophie?" asked her former friend ironically.

"No such thing, I can assure you!" said Sophia indignantly, blushing deeply as she rose and walked away amidst a suppressed titter. She saw her sister chatting gaily amongst some simple, well-educated girls; but

she could not join them, and felt determined to be miserable.

In the afternoon, their mother called them both to her, and said, "I am sorry, Sophia, that the change should cause you so much pain as you constantly shew. Your papa was wounded deeply by overhearing a conversation between you and your sister regarding it. He has put himself about to give you this, for he would not ask you to want anything he could possibly give you." So saying, she handed her a beautiful new silver fork. "He also bought one for you, Emily, as a reward for your patience, and to make you the same as your sister. For ourselves, we are happy enough, and are perfectly content even to use a steel fork."

Sophia took hers, and walked away sullenly; she could not refuse it, as she wished she could have done, for the thought of the lie she had told in the school that day. Silly child! she thought its guilt was wiped away now.

Emily stood by her mother's side. "Thank you, mamma, it is so kind of you! But I could not use it, when you are not doing so. Do not ask me; it would be painful; please lock it up till we are all able to be the same as ever."

Two or three days rolled on, and Sophia was cross and unhappy. She had replied spitefully to the taunts of Lucy Howard; she had been rude to her sister, and sulky to her mother, and she was miserable, for her conscience was pricking her. One day, Emily stayed all night with her aunt, and Sophia was going to bed alone. As she entered their room, she saw her beautiful fork lying partly on the floor, and partly on a book, while the foot of a chair was on it. She had thrown it there in a fit of passion, and the chair had been put over it accidentally. It was all bent as she took it up and looked at it. She was alone; and now, as she looked at the wasted fork, the memory of everything connected with it rushed back upon her mind, and she burst into tears. She could not but contrast her own behaviour with that of her sister: she remembered what that gentle sister had often told her, of how much they ought to be thankful for the blessings they possessed—a hundredfold more than many others; she thought of a pale-looking beggar-girl she met sometimes on the way to school; she thought of her father's struggles and anxiety, of her mother's sympathy and economy, of her sister's

gentleness, and of her own selfishness, her untruths, her pride, and her unkindness, and her heart was subdued and melted. It was long before she fell asleep, but she did so with a light and hopeful heart, for she had asked for pardon for her sins, and for help to conquer them in the future.

Many years passed away, and Mr Edwards was once more an opulent man. There was a splendid fête in his house, the brilliant lights streamed over rich dresses and bright jewels. It was in honour of his youngest daughter, Sophia, who was now a happy bride. A manly voice whispered in her ear, "Come, my own Sophia, the festival waits for you. Why care for that just now?"

"Ah! I must lay away my dear old silver fork. Emily and I were looking at it just now. Henry, it has done me more good than words can tell."

"I don't know how to credit that, love. I think your goodness must have come by nature."

Sophia shook her head and smiled. "I will tell you about it again. I am ready now."

"Oh, you are fair to night!" said her

companion. "You are beautiful, my bride! No wonder that all hearts bow down to you. Nay, do not blush so, for I tell you. I could never have loved you for your beauty, had not I found the beauty within brighter far."

"It is all a reflection of Emily's: if there is any, I owe it all to her, and to my silver fork." And the two loving hearts entered the bright hall together, and a murmur of admiration was heard around, as everybody said, without envy, "She is good as she is beautiful!"

Just one more peep at its story.

It is lying upon a table in an elegant dining-room, still bent as it was long ago. Sophia, with the smile upon her lips still higher and holier than ever, is lifting it with her white jewelled fingers, and placing it in a casket. The door opens, and her husband enters, and pats on the head a chubby little fellow who is just leaving the room.

"I was just telling Alfred a story that I well know, about this silver fork, Henry."

He went silently over to her, sat down by her, and clasped her hand in his, while bowing over it he said, "My noble, my peerless wife! Truly

no perfection can be more beautiful than thy earnest and constant struggle after it. You have made my life one continued sunshine."

"Then I am happy!" she said, as she cast a loving glance on the precious casket. It was no more in herself she sought for happiness; she had nigh conquered her unruly spirit by her constant striving, and her help from on high; and so lived in the calm joy of blessing others, loving and beloved—with a cheering hope of still greater happiness in that life which is yet to come.

ARBOROOK AND MARINA.

ARBOROOK AND MARINA.

THERE was a great battle between the Sea-gulls and the forest Crows. Day after day, their armies encamped upon the broad flat sands; but since the first great day, but little or nothing had been done but looking at, and defying one another. The king of the Crows was a young, brave, headstrong fellow; but the old monarch of the Sea-gulls made up in wisdom and experience what he wanted in bravery; so they were very equally matched—too equally matched, indeed, for neither wished to take the lead, and commence the battle. Both tribes were getting wearied of the endless parades on the sea-shore, and began to wish either for action or for leave to return home to their enjoyments, instead of wheeling about,

and drilling, and skirmishing. The state of affairs being thus, both of the chiefs were much perplexed, and secretly wished in their hearts that the other would offer conditions of peace, yet did not wish to be the first to do so.

One bright sunny morning, the young Crow-prince Arborook walked along by the very verge of the wood, where it skirted the sea-shore. The scene was very beautiful, but he did not notice it, for his mind was taken up with affairs of the government. Suddenly, upon turning a corner, he came upon the whole royal family of the Sea-gulls sporting about and flapping their wings in glee and innocence. He stood still and looked, pleased and amused. He watched the eldest princess, and saw what grace and beauty she had; he gazed upon her soft meek eye and her sleek plumage, and he thought he had never seen one more beautiful. All that day, he was surly and sour to all his friends, and he neither would nor could give them any reason for his behaviour. But next morning he was up early, and walking along the same road he had been yesterday; and he felt his heart jump as he saw the pretty princess Marina sitting on the sands alone, and looking

very sad. He hurried up to her, and soon made friends with her, and felt himself decidedly in love. He spoke to her as softly as he could, and she bent her graceful head, but he could see that her gentle eyes were liquid with tears, and he was delighted. When he parted from her, he no longer hesitated what he should do, but flying home, he ordered his whole army to arrange itself as usual; then bidding his trumpeter go forward to sound a parley, he advanced to the old Sea-gull, and repeatedly bowed his head, almost to the ground, while the whole of his enemies were staring at him, and rejoicing that he had been the first to ask for a cessation of hostilities. He began—"Most noble monarch, I find myself unable to continue war against you, under the circumstances in which I am placed." Here all the courtiers smiled. "Sire, I have seen, and I love your daughter Marina; how could I lift my hand against her father's race? Oh! give her to me; let her be my queen, and a pledge of our future amity!"

The old king was very much astonished, as well as indignant, that one whom he considered an ugly black Crow, should dare to ask his beautiful daughter in marriage, and proudly

refused him. The poor prince went away sadly and silent, yet determined to persevere, for he loved her too well to give her up so lightly. For another day, the two armies encamped before one another, deciding at last to commence the combat the next day at noon, when the tide would be back. Poor Arborook wandered out mournfully alone, yet he got one peep at his dear princess, and that rejoiced him greatly. The next morning early—long, long before the mid-day gathering of the tribes, Prince Arborook was flying alone with great speed towards the dwelling of the old Sea-gull. He met him himself, and he angrily asked what he wanted; and he said, that not being able to sleep for thinking of his dear Marina, he had been sitting on a solitary tree, when he heard some men speaking about having some fine sport to-day with shooting the Sea-gulls. He had come to warn them to get out of harm's way, for he said he loved them too well to wish any of them hurt, and he wanted nothing but peace between their nations.

The old king trembled a little when he thought of the men and the guns that he could not fly from, but he felt very thankful that he

had heard in time to hide themselves securely. And he felt very glad the prince wished peace; but he pretended to look sour, for he did not want him to marry his daughter, as he had promised her to the king of the wild Swans. The young Marina, noticing her father talking to her lover, came up to see what was the matter; but just at that moment they heard a bang, and knew it was a shot aimed at the group. Arborook hastily covered his beloved over with his wing, just in time to receive the wound intended for her. The old king flew away in terror, and Arborook wanted Marina to fly away also, but she would not—she said she would never leave him when he was wounded for her sake. Then she heard a boat approaching, and retreated to a little distance, when the men, bursting out into a laugh, cried, "We've only shot a Crow." So saying, they rowed away; and Marina, coming back, helped to drag her dear prince away to a shelter that she knew. There they found her father, who was ashamed at leaving his daughter to her danger, but delighted to see her safe again. They lifted the wounded Arborook into a nice warm corner in a rock, and an old Sea-gull, who was skilled in curing

wounds, came to nurse him. The Sea-gull king felt very sorry for him; but his daughter wept great tears of amber when she saw how much her lover suffered. She never left him, night or day, but watched him asleep or awake. He soon got better, and the suffering they had borne, made them love each other all the more; and her father could not refuse then to let them be married. So the troops, instead of fighting, mingled together in rejoicings, and were drilled to make splendid figures and wheels in the air, to be ready for the happy occasion.

At last the day arrived—the sun was bright, the sky was blue, and the waves also—the tide was far back, and the two nations arranged in beautiful order. And in the space between them, the young people were united by an ancient Raven, and blessed by their old father, while shouts of joy rung all around, at the prospect of uninterrupted peace. When the ceremony was over, the amusements began, and they feasted and rejoiced all day, while the black-birds and the thrushes of the wood united with the sea to supply the music. The little sea-birds, too, stood and looked on delightedly; and any human being that passed, stared

astonished, wondering what could be the matter with the Crows and the Sea-gulls.

And every little while there are like meetings, to keep up the friendly spirit; and the young couple spend a long time every summer among the Sea-gulls, for since their union, nothing but joy happened to Arborook and Marina.

A TRUE GHOST STORY.

A TRUE GHOST-STORY.

I USED to read a great many ghost-stories, and was a faithful believer in all their mysteries; indeed, my superstition had caused a good deal of unhappiness both to myself and my family. I could not go into a dark room alone; the sound of twelve o'clock striking always made me nervous; and in the winter-time, I could not rise in the morning, unless the candle or gas had been previously lit.

One evening, I got hold of a book filled with tales of hobgoblins and spirits. I sat up alone and read it, after supper, in my own room, for I was greatly interested. Suddenly, however, I looked at the clock, and seeing that it was already half-past eleven, I hurried to get to bed and be asleep before the dreaded hour. But my

extreme anxiety kept my eyes open. The night was fierce and windy, and the sleet and snow were rattling on the window-panes. The clock at last struck—it sounded like a knell to me—and my ears seemed to have become supernaturally awake to catch even the slightest sound. Gradually, at last, I sank in a sort of half-waking slumber, so slight and uneasy, that I still knew of my constant dread; and I saw strange sights and apparitions then—wild nightmares jostled me, and imps peered mockingly at me, till the cold sweat of terror stood upon me. Then I fell into a deeper sleep, but still dreamed strange dreams.

Suddenly I started up. I thought I had slept but an hour, and calculated it must just be one o'clock now. I felt rather uncomfortable, and lay still, listening nervously. For awhile I heard nothing but the storm without, when I caught the sound of a stealthy footstep in the passages. I trembled all over; but how can I describe my terror when I heard my room-door opened, and the footsteps approaching! My heart leaped in agony, and yet, impelled by a strange and complicated feeling, I opened my eyes. The wind was still moaning fitfully, the moon

was peering through a rifting cloud, and by its dim eerie light, it shewed me a gigantic form standing near me, with upraised arm and mantled figure. The next moment, the moon was hid, and I trembled with awful dread at being left alone in the darkness with such an unknown being. Yet I watched the spot where I had seen it last, when I saw a dim, ghastly, smoky light issue from a sort of lamp it held, and I saw the long gaunt fingers that touched it; but I saw no more, for my heart sickened, and I closed my eyes. But again my heart rebounded as I heard a harsh grating sound repeated several times—it ceased, and I looked again. A blue sulphurous light played round the ghastly finger-tips, and then disappeared. In agony I cried, "For the love of Heaven, save me!" "You are too late!" was answered in a deep, husky, hollow tone, as if rusty for want of using. I hid my head in breathless agony beneath the bedclothes. Again I heard the grating sounds; the footsteps approached my bed; I felt the figure bend over me, for I heard its rough ghostly breathing. It cried again, and such a cry, "You are too late! too late! Arise! I warn you, arise!" I felt a heavy hand laid on my

shoulder! I could endure it no longer; I was choking, and I felt growing mad, and throwing back the bedclothes, I started up, and saw—— my mother, who, in spite of her cold, had kindly risen to wake me for an early train, and had lit my gas!

THE

THREE BIRTHDAYS.

THE

THREE BIRTHDAYS.

CHAPTER I.

"Alas! regardless of their doom,
The little victims play!
No sense have they of ills to come,
Nor care beyond to-day."—GRAY.

"MY BIRTHDAY!" What a delightful sound to children! and delightful it was to Florence Elrington, bright-eyed, merry little Florence, who, on the day in question, was nine years old. She was the youngest of the two daughters of Mr Elrington—Agnes, the eldest, being four years her senior. Several other children had been born, and taken from this life almost

as soon as they had entered into it; and the two little girls being all that remained of their once numerous family, were quite idolised by their parents. Florence especially appeared to engage the largest share of their attention, though not really of their affection, and was, indeed, the plaything of the whole house; and so little restriction had been placed upon her will, that she was in some danger of becoming that disagreeable member of society—a spoiled child. Agnes, naturally more quiet and unobtrusive in manner, was contented with far less general notice, and casual observers might have called her cold, which was anything but the truth, for there was under this calm surface a depth of feeling and devotion that only required opportunity to shine forth in the brightest colours. But it is with Florence we have now to do, and of her birthday, looked forward to with such pleasure.

This morning she could scarcely restrain her wild delight, and after receiving papa's and mamma's caresses, she rushed into the garden for flowers, shouting as she went, with her favourite Newfoundland dog jumping about,

seeming to participate in the unbounded joy of his young mistress.

But the gardener had been beforehand with her, and came forward with a magnificent bouquet of roses.

"See, Miss Florence, I knew you would be for gathering the roses; so I have cut them for you, that your mamma's favourite trees may not be spoiled, nor your fingers scratched with the thorns."

"Oh! thank you, Willy," said Florence; "how lovely and sweet, and how nicely you have made them up! Oh, there are the carriages coming up the drive. Come, Neptune!" And the two friends ran back to the house, to meet the children invited to spend the day with Florence.

The neighbourhood was populous, and, as there was much intercourse kept up amongst the surrounding families, there was quite a collection of young people assembled at Wellstead Manor on the occasion. It was a brilliant morning, at the close of the leafy month of June, and the children longed to be in the open air; so, after admiring the grand new baby-house, and the beautifully dressed

wax-doll, the gifts of the fond parents to their darling, and visiting her pet canaries, the little party adjourned to the garden, where they amused themselves with nice swings under the large trees: tired of this, they wandered into the conservatories, closely followed by watchful Willy, who, from experience, dreaded these irruptions into his sacred precincts. But Florence little heeded his expostulations, as the tiny hands reached forth to pluck some delicate blossom, the pride of his collection, and enjoyed the old man's vexation, whilst they persisted in excruciating the tender nerves of the shrinking mimosa, by repeated and somewhat rude attacks upon its sensitive leaves. The peacocks next attracted their attention, displaying their splendid tails on the stone balustrade of the terrace, with the ever-changing colours of their necks, unsurpassed in hue by any artificial tint, and strutting as if fully conscious of their claims to admiration. They then watched the goldfish in their basin, into which poured water from an ornamental fountain sparkling in the sun, and shedding a grateful freshness all around. Innumerable butterflies were hovering about the flowers with which the parterres were

filled; and the rosery, Mr Elrington's particular delight, was one of the most exquisite pictures that could be conceived.

The children penetrated into every corner of these delightful pleasure-grounds; and at length quite fatigued with their researches and discoveries, and with so many beautiful sights, were glad when the sound of the gong summoned them in to an early dinner, at which Florence presided as queen of the day.

CHAPTER II.

"The thoughtless day, the easy night,
The spirits pure, the slumbers light."—GRAY.

REFRESHED by an hour's rest, and with unabated spirits, the young hostess proposed, and it was carried by acclamation, that they should sally forth to a copse not far off, where grew delicious wild-strawberries, and have their tea there, with those indispensable accompaniments

to gipsy-life—a fire and kettle. Accordingly, Florence's white donkey was laden with panniers filled with all things requisite for a delightful repast in the woods, and abundance of cream for the fruit. The children all took little baskets to gather the strawberries, and set off, attended by Mrs Elrington's and the young ladies' own maid, with a man-servant leading the donkey, and Florence's inseparable companion, Neptune. Arrived at the spot, some of the party roamed through the copse, baskets in hand, gathering strawberries; others brought in sticks to light the fire; whilst one or two superintended the boiling of the kettle for the tea, all of which was delightful fun. Neptune, meanwhile, lay down, and some employed themselves in trying to bury him in leaves and flowers, which they found a hopeless task; for as soon as they had covered him with a good heap, and hoped he would be quiet, he would suddenly get up and shake himself, scattering their labours in all directions, and scamper round them with a playful bark, and no persuasions of his young mistress could induce him to be still. It really seemed as if he thought

that her birthday gave him the privilege to be as wild and frolicksome as any of the party. Suddenly, however, he stopped, and bounded forward; and looking up, they saw Mrs Elrington approaching, with a small basket on her arm.

"Oh! here comes mamma," cried Florence and Agnes together, who bounding up to her, exclaimed, "We have gathered the strawberries, so you are just too late to help us, and here is a nice soft seat for you." And off she went to see if the tea was ready, and to hurry the arrangements.

"My pets," said Mrs Elrington smiling, "I came through the wood on my way to see poor Mary, for I thought she would like some of Florence's cake, and some of the cowslip-wine. Last year, you know, she was as well and as merry as you are now; she is very ill indeed to-day, and much worse, I hear."

Mary was Nurse Prescott's daughter, and used to come and play with the little Elringtons, and had been taken into the house at Wellstead, to attend the children, and be Florence's companion when the rest of the family were engaged. She was so universally beloved, that all were

sorry when failing health prevented her continuing there. But without any visible cause, the poor girl wasted away, and she was now in the last stage of consumption, which had lately made rapid strides. Gladly would Mrs Elrington have kept, and had her tenderly nursed at the Manor, but Mary wished to be with her mother; and by her own desire she was removed to the cottage where Mrs Prescott lived with her son, on the outskirts of the very wood where the children were enjoying themselves. There Mary was supplied from the house with everything that could make her comfortable; but too surely was the disease doing its work, and death, though perhaps somewhat retarded in its progress, was evidently approaching. Agnes, always thoughtful, entreated her mamma to take the strawberries she had gathered, and pleaded hard to go and see Mary instead of staying with her young companions; but to this Mrs Elrington would not consent.

"But, dear Agnes," said she, "I will take your strawberries; Mary has often gathered them with you, and your thinking of her now will please her."

Florence kissed her mamma, who hoped she,

too, would have offered some portion of her gatherings to Mary; but though generally good-natured, she seldom thought of sacrificing any little enjoyment of her own to others. The characters of children are more often to be seen in such trifles than in greater things; and dearly as Mrs Elrington loved Florence, she sighed at these little manifestations of selfishness, which marred much of the pleasure she took in watching her quickness and cleverness in other things, and her many good qualities. Just now, too, with poor Mary so near the little throng of joyous faces round the rural feast, it struck her more forcibly than usual that Florence should have so totally forgotten her humble playmate in the midst of her own pleasure. It is singular this constitution of our nature, that we may remain blind for years to the cause of those very effects we deplore in others; and haply, when we are least thinking of it, some trivial incident touches the vibrating chord, and we find that we have been ourselves instrumental in encouraging the fault we complain of. So reflected Mrs Elrington as she proceeded slowly on her Christian errand to Mary, and sadly but firmly resolved, at

whatever cost to her own feelings, to keep a more careful watch over Florence for the future, and to endeavour to eradicate the evils of over-indulgence, before her temper and habits became fixed.

She stayed some time at the cottage, and then returned to the copse; when finding the little party had finished their meal, and some rain-drops were beginning to fall, she hastened the preparations for departure, and they arrived at the house only in time to avoid being thoroughly wetted by a heavy rain that set in for the evening. As there was no prospect of its clearing up, and the children had lost some of the exuberant spirits that had supported them through this long holiday, Mrs Elrington thought it better to order the carriages at once; and after an affectionate leave of their friends at Wellstead Manor, the little guests were driven off, carrying with them a happy recollection of the ninth anniversary of Florence's birth.

She herself, tired out by so much excitement, was speedily undressed and snug in bed, and before many minutes had elapsed, had forgotten the day and all its pleasures in the sound and healthful repose of childhood

CHAPTER III.

"A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent."—BYRON.

MARY PRESCOTT was dying; a message was brought to the house the next morning that she had passed a dreadfully restless night, and was sinking fast; and as she had expressed a wish to see Mrs Elrington and the young ladies once more, nurse had taken the liberty of asking if they would be so kind as to come to the cottage. Florence was in the midst of some funny story she was telling her papa, about Neptune throwing down little Katie Broadhurst in some of his wild antics, when the servant delivered this message, and she was silent instantly. Agnes turned very pale, and inexpressibly shocked, was going to fetch her bonnet, while their mamma, not less affected, prepared to leave the room for the same purpose, when Mr Elrington, seeing their distress, ordered the carriage, and immediately drove to the house of the poor invalid. They did not arrive too soon.

The last change had been quicker than was anticipated; and though Mary was still sensible, lying half raised in the bed, her head supported on her mother's bosom, her breath was becoming shorter, and her gaze more fixed. Mrs Elrington took each of her children by the hand, and knelt down by the bedside. Mary seemed for a moment to recognise them, and smiled faintly; her head then drooped, and giving a last sigh, quietly resigned herself to the hands of her Maker. Her brother, a tall, robust, fine specimen of English peasantry, who had succeeded his father as woodman on the estate, fell upon the bed, crying like a child; and the poor mother, though more composed, was sadly overcome. Mrs Prescott thanked them for so kindly acceding to poor Mary's wish, and soon afterwards they left the cottage, with cautious and noiseless steps, and with feelings of awe and reverence, such as they had never before experienced, but to which the presence of death must dispose the minds of even the most careless. Silently they walked on, till they entered the little copse, and the contrast of the death-bed they had just witnessed with the merry party of the day before, affected them all. Florence

broke out into loud sobbing, and Agnes wept silently, but freely. Mrs Elrington did not attempt to check Florence's passionate outburst, but inwardly prayed that what she had this day seen might take effect in her dear child's heart, and be of permanent influence to her for good. Agnes gently pressed her mother's hand, as she looked at the spot trodden by so many little feet, and the pressure was returned. In that moment, mother and child understood each other. May we hope that the mother's prayer for her youngest was accepted; for when in private Mrs Elrington spoke affectionately but seriously to her of poor little Mary, and of the untiring good temper she had ever displayed when Florence often selfishly exacted more than the poor girl's strength could well bear; and how thankful she had been for the little kindnesses and comforts she received during her illness, and the humility with which she resigned herself to the will of her Heavenly Father, with her pious trust in her Saviour's atonement, Florence was deeply affected. Seeing this, Mrs Elrington would not distress her by saying too much at a time; but at night, when she knelt down by her mother's knee to say her

prayer before going to rest, both joined in the same petition to the throne of grace, that the fresh year of her life, she had just entered upon, might be an era whence to date a lasting amendment. Fondly her mamma embraced her, placed her in her little bed, and with a fervent kiss, and softly murmured blessing, left her.

Mary was buried on the following Sunday. She had few near relations, and none followed her remains to the grave but her mother and brother, and an elder sister who was married and lived in London. The funeral of a young companion is always a touching sight, and brings the perishable nature of earthly things home to us with more startling acuteness. In this case, it was particularly affecting, for Mary was much loved by all who knew her. The coffin was placed in the church, which was crowded, during the evening-service, and the pastor preached a discourse, the text of which was taken from Matt. v. 8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Perfect silence prevailed while it lasted, excepting when broken by the sobs of the congregation; and when it was ended, and the four young girls, clad in white, again bore the coffin from the sacred fane, all those

assembled followed to the grave. In a few minutes, the remaining service was concluded, and all that was mortal of the young and innocent Mary Prescott was solemnly consigned to the earth. All the family from the Manor were there, and returned home subdued and saddened by the mournful sight; and long after did Mrs Elrington recall this simple funeral, when far removed from the vicinity of Wellstead, and when deeper and more lasting sorrows had fallen on her own heart.

CHAPTER IV.

"Oh! the dreams that were softest are faded and flown,
And the hopes that were brightest are vanished and gone."
—LADY FLORA HASTINGS.

A MARKED improvement had taken place in Florence since poor Mary's death. The solemn scenes she had so lately witnessed had made a deep impression on her young heart, and the good effects remained when the first sorrowful

feelings at losing her young playfellow had subsided. She was more docile, more considerate to others, and sometimes, when apt to relapse into her old selfish habits, would check herself, and relinquish quietly the coveted indulgence; yet, after these little instances of self-denial, she was in reality happier than before. She was still the youngest darling of her parents, who marked the change with silent gratification; but she was more their companion, and still the house resounded with her merry laugh, whilst she and Neptune romped as gaily as ever. Agnes, with her thoughtful, earnest character, was as great a contrast as could well be imagined to the little restless creature, who was seldom quiet for two minutes together. In appearance, too, they were as different; while Florence was the very picture of health, full and round in form, with her light-brown hair falling in natural curls round her sunny face, Agnes was more delicately made, of transparent though colourless complexion, and very tall of her age. She was fond of study, and had great natural abilities, and shewed a particular talent for painting. Mr Elrington was proud of her evident genius,

and as no expense was spared in procuring the best masters, she was already quite an artist. Mrs Elrington was a proficient in most accomplishments, and a competent instructress in every way, and she undertook the education of her children herself; and well was she rewarded by the quick progress of Agnes, and Florence also, when her volatile nature could fix itself to her lessons.

July and August had passed away, and September was drawing to a close. On the last day of that month, a party of gentlemen arrived at the Manor, to assist in the destruction of Mr Elrington's pheasants, and much sport was anticipated on the morrow, as he had extensive preserves, and he, as well as his friends, were excellent shots. The next morning the party set out in high spirits, with keepers, dogs, and guns, all in the best order, and a good stock of provisions to allay any hungry symptoms during the arduous day. Agnes and her mother had a long walk that day, and Florence accompanied them on her donkey, with its pretty little side-saddle and red trappings. On she cantered with Neptune in attendance, and then coming back, she would prattle away

for a few minutes, and canter off again. They returned by the avenue of fine old elms, upon whose branches still lingered a few bright golden leaves. The ground was strewed with the once thick foliage, that had so often afforded them grateful shelter on the long sunny days of summer, and everything told that the year was waning to its close. The sun shone brightly, and shed a mellow lustre on the magnificent oaks, the pride of Wellstead, and imparted a lovely hue to the distant woods. In short, it was one of those glorious autumnal days that painters love to gaze on, and poets to describe; and Mrs Elrington afterwards lingered in the pleasure-grounds until late, enjoying the mildness of the season. The gardens were still delightful; the rosery, it is true, had lost its beauty, but there were richly tinted flowers in bloom in their neatly arranged beds, and the brilliant dahlia and stately hollyhock made the shrubberies gay with their various colours; and Willy felt a pardonable vanity when his mistress admired the taste with which he had arranged the different flowers, and ingeniously brought the beauties of each different season into view. At length she turned towards

the house, Florence skipping lightly before, her large straw-hat falling back on her shoulders, and the glow of exercise on her cheeks, looking as bright as the large nosegay of flowers she was carrying in her hand. It was a beautiful picture, and the fond mother thought so as she turned her admiring gaze on the sportive child.

Truly and beautifully has it been said, that the veil which covers futurity has been woven by the hand of mercy. Could the mistress of all this loveliness have foreseen that this was the last time she should ever take pleasure in these beautiful gardens, that never again should she know happiness in that spot, endeared to her by years of domestic bliss and comfort! We know not what a day, or even an hour, may bring forth—and it is better it should be so—or we could none of us enjoy the blessings a gracious God has bestowed on us, but live in miserable anticipations of the evils that beset our daily paths.

They entered the hall. There, amongst a group of servants, who seemed confused and frightened, was Sir Charles Lumsden, one of the shooting-party of the morning, looking deadly pale, and speaking hurriedly to them.

She caught the words, "It must be broken to Mrs Elrington!" A horrible thought flashed across her mind, and, rushing up to him, she gasped out, "Good God, Sir Charles, where is Henry—my husband?" The servants fell back, and Sir Charles, nerving himself to the task, said gently, and with great effort—

"Dear madam, Elrington has met with an accident—I fear, a bad one."

"Where is he? He is dead, is he not?" said the poor wife—"tell me the truth."

"Indeed, he is not dead, but seriously hurt, and I am come to take you to him."

The carriage had been ordered, and came to the door at the moment; they all got in without another word. Going along, Sir Charles, as tenderly as he could, told her that Mr Elrington had fallen over a stump of an old tree in the wood, and the gun in his hand went off accidentally, and wounded him; that they had carried him to the nearest cottage, and sent for a surgeon.

The surgeon arrived as they entered the cottage, but on examining the wound, said there was no hope: he might live some hours, but could not be moved home. Mr Elrington himself

felt that he was mortally hurt, and begged to be left alone with his family. He then, though in great agony, spoke words of comfort to his distracted wife and children, conjuring the latter to love and cherish their mother when he was gone, and thanking her for all her love during the years they had passed together. Mr Allen, the vicar of the parish, who had hastened to the cottage as soon as he heard the dreadful news, was then admitted. They all knelt, whilst he prayed fervently by the dying man, who expressed perfect resignation to the Divine will, and a hope that they might all meet again in another and a better world. He took a solemn leave of his valued friend, and grasped his hand affectionately; and Mr Allen gave him his blessing, and retired to the other room of the cottage, where were the gentlemen who had been out with Mr Elrington, and had assisted in removing him to the cottage. Nurse Prescott stayed with the afflicted family by the bedside of her master.

They watched together through that wretched night, the poor children clinging to each other. He suffered much, and was very restless, and often did they moisten with water his parched

lips and wipe his clammy brow; but towards morning the pain decreased, and he dozed at intervals. But ere the sun rose, Louisa Elrington was a widow, and her children fatherless.

CHAPTER V.

"That rushes through devouring waves,
And, like a guardian-angel, saves
A sinking fellow-creature."—DIBDIN.

KATIE BROADHURST was so happy—her brother George was come home. George was a sailor, and had been away on his first voyage two years; and he was grown so tall, and so brown, that they hardly knew him when he came up unexpectedly to the little gate of Farleigh Rectory. He was the eldest of we scarcely know how many children; so many, that, even with strict economy, Mr Broadhurst found some little difficulty in providing good education and food and clothing for such a number of little people; but they were all brought up to be industrious, and

to help each other, and in some way that difficulty was accomplished, and the little Broadhursts were as healthy and happy a family as any one could wish to see. George had always longed to go to sea, and Mr Broadhurst was fortunate enough, through the interest of a kind friend, to get him entered, after passing a most creditable examination, on board a first-rate ship, under an excellent captain. He had now come home on leave for a short time, and great was the joy of all when he came in late one evening. We fear that great disorder in that usually well-conducted family was the consequence of his appearance; and the petitions to sit up "just half an hour later for George, dear George," were so importunate and so urgent, that it was impossible to refuse them on such an occasion. Katie established herself at once on his knee as the best place, but soon found she must make room for others, who crowded about him, and got up behind his chair, clinging to him in all directions; but at last Mrs Broadhurst insisted upon their giving him liberty to take some refreshment after his journey; and after the first excitement was over, they subsided into something like quiet.

After the little ones were sent to bed, one hour more was passed in happy converse, and George felt how delightful was home as he lay down in his own nice bed, with snowy white curtains. Before he was quite asleep, his mother looked in, as of old, to see if he was comfortable, and gave him one more last kiss before she went herself to bed.

His captain had sent a letter by George to Mr Broadhurst, which he brought down stairs with him the next morning. In it he spoke of him in such high terms, as brought tears of joy into the eyes of his delighted parents. In addition to his general good character, he had, but a short time before, gallantly, and without a moment's hesitation, jumped into the sea, and rescued a seaman who had fallen overboard—a feat which the brave boy had modestly refrained from mentioning, when giving an account of his voyage. Who can wonder now if they all felt proud of their gallant young sailor, and if Katie should think him the dearest object in all the world! She was enthusiastic in her affections, and George became the idol of her worship. Mr and Mrs Broadhurst lived a very retired life, and little Katie, innocent and

happy, had never seen much out of her own village; wonderful, then, did she think this darling brother, who had seen with his own eyes, in foreign countries, the curiosities she had so often read of in her books. Then he played so merrily with the children, and told them such long, funny stories of the monkey which had come over in the ship, and what tricks the sailors played with it, and of the beautiful talking parrot the captain had brought for his mother. Katie had nothing wonderful to tell in return, but the happy day she had spent on Florence's birthday, and all the things she had seen at the Manor; and oh, such lovely gardens! she thought there could be none more beautiful in the world.

George was at home a whole month, and took his little brothers and sisters during that time to the county town some miles off, to see some beautiful flowers at a horticultural fête which was held there, and a band of music played in the gardens, which delighted them extremely; and then he procured a skiff, and rowed them on the river that ran at the bottom of the village; sometimes, too, he put up a sail, and they went briskly before the wind, with the

joyous young crew in ecstasies at the miniature resemblance of George's fine large ship on the sea. Hearing, too, there was a menagerie in the neighbourhood, he drove them over to the place where it was staying, and they had the gratification of seeing a real live tiger and a lion, and lioness with cubs, and many other wild beasts; there was an elephant, too, which they thought must be as large and as clever as the famous one in the Zoological Gardens in London, of whose docility they had read such charming histories.

The month passed quickly away, and then George had to rejoin his ship. His father went to the station, and saw him get into the train, which instantly started for London, and felt very dull when he found himself standing alone on the platform without his boy. How they all missed his dear face from the family circle that evening! They tried to be cheerful, but it was too great an effort, and poor little Katie was so miserable, she was ready to cry every minute.

"But, dear papa, when will George be here again, do you think?"

"Perhaps, my love," said her papa, "in about eighteen months or two years' time—possibly sooner."

"Oh! what a long time to wait!"

Mrs Broadhurst was just then called out of the room to a poor woman, who had come to ask for something for her sick husband. She told her that the doctor at Farleigh had ridden very fast down the village, being sent for in great haste to go to Mr Elrington, who was shot in Wellstead woods, and they feared he might be dead before Mr Bennett got there. Greatly shocked at what she heard, Mrs Broadhurst went back to the parlour; and feelings of horror for the accident, and pity for the unhappy family at the Manor, turned their thoughts from the contemplation of their own comparatively slight cause for grieving.

CHAPTER VI.

"Farewell, my home! Oh! in that brief word
What myriad thoughts are clustered—what deep love,
What holy feelings, what hopes, not of earth,
Are wakened by that word—My home! my home!"
—LADY FLORA HASTINGS.

TIME had passed sadly at the Manor. The first dreadful shock of Mr Elrington's sudden and painful death had given place to a quieter but more enduring grief, and the bereaved ones sat in silence and sorrow in their once happy home. A dreary, gusty November had followed the bright days of the preceding month; and the trees, stripped of their clothing, with their naked branches swaying in the blast, seemed to mourn over departed joys. But the desolation without was in unison with the gloomy feelings of those within, and rather soothed them than otherwise; for nothing is more melancholy than the contrast of the balmy air of spring, and the joyous song of birds, when the heart is bleeding from recent

affliction. Agnes looked paler and thinner. She had really felt more intensely than the others, though they had been for a short time quite prostrated by excessive grief; Mrs Elrington so much so, as to be quite incapable of acting, when called upon, after her husband's death to attend to necessary matters of business. But the indulgence of such feeling often brings its own remedy with it, and she was now recovering, whilst Agnes, who had shed but few tears after the first violent burst of hysterical crying, had restrained herself, when she saw the frightful state to which her mother was reduced, and with a strength of mind beyond her age, became her support and comfort. She suffered then the more deeply for this unnatural outward calm, and there was a dull, aching pain at her heart, that seemed never to leave her. Just before Christmas, Mrs Elrington received a letter which she read twice before she could comprehend its import; but when the full meaning of its contents became clear, she turned very white, and letting it drop on the table, covered her face with her hands. Agnes flew to her side, and taking up the letter, read what appeared to paralyse her faculties. They knew

that Mr Elrington had sometime before joined a company in what was considered a first-rate mining speculation, and dazzled by the prospect of speedy wealth, and led on by the representations of a sanguine friend, had not only embarked capital himself, but had become responsible for that friend to a large amount.

For two years everything was most encouraging, and great hopes were entertained of the success of the enterprise; but it had suddenly turned out a failure, and the company broke up, leaving the responsibility of paying the debts incurred to those who had money. Mr Elrington's property in this way was answerable; and so recklessly had the company gone on, and so tremendous was the amount of their debt, that it appeared all his estate would be required to meet the heavy charge. Dreadful was this blow to the widow, coming upon the loss of her beloved husband, but there was no time to waste in useless lamentation. Mrs Elrington wrote and begged her solicitor to make inquiries, and do all he could; but the ruin was too complete, and he informed them that nothing could be saved, excepting her own small fortune of a thousand pounds, which fortunately was

not liable, and could not be touched. The family, then, were almost destitute; and though hitherto surrounded with every comfort and luxury, were now to be thrown upon the wide world, homeless and well-nigh friendless. Matters were conducted with great rapidity. Soon were the fine estates advertised to be sold, and before many weeks had elapsed, Wellstead, with its extensive manors and noble domain, had passed into the hands of a stranger. The new proprietor, a hard, money-getting man, was impatient to enter upon his purchase, and soon made Mrs Elrington sensible that no unnecessary delay in leaving the place would be allowed. The unfortunate widow, scarcely knowing her own plans, at first determined to go to London, to Nurse Prescott's daughter, Annie, now Mrs Butler, who had married a respectable young man, and who let lodgings, having more room in their house than they required. But Neptune, faithful Neptune, they could not leave him with another master, so Robert Prescott kept him at his own cottage, promising to take the greatest care of him till better days should come, when Miss Florence could have him again. She clung round his

neck, and the affectionate animal returned her caresses, and looked up in her face, as if he fully comprehended all that was to happen. Poor fellow, all that night, and many nights after, Robert and his mother were disturbed by his mournful howlings.

But the painful and trying time was come when they must leave that dear home, with all its associations; once more with slow steps and hearts bursting with grief, they wandered through the familiar haunts of their happier hours; and early one dark and dismal winter's morning, the coachman drove them for the last time in the old carriage, with Mrs Elrington's favourite greys, to the railway. She scarcely trusted herself to speak, but with an almost inaudible "Good-bye, Thomas," she drew down her veil, and hurried into the station-house. The servant, with tears in his eyes, respectfully touched his hat, and without a word turned the horses' heads, drove back, and placed the horses in the stable; he shortly afterwards left the old place, preferring to seek another service, rather than stay there after the departure of his beloved mistress.

CHAPTER VII.

"A change came o'er the spirit of my dream."—BYRON.

MRS ELRINGTON wished to increase her small pittance by giving lessons in music, or by teaching generally for a few hours every day, and immediately put advertisements in the newspapers, and made inquiries at different music-shops where, she was told, such employment was likely to be heard of. But it was the dullest season of the year, and London was still empty. Vainly did she look for answers to her advertisements, nor were her inquiries more successful. Once or twice she had nearly procured some pupils, but something always disappointed her hopes. At one place her services were refused, because they did not want a fine lady-governess, and they could not conceive that the well-bred and graceful lady who presented herself, would submit to the patient drudgery of teaching the wilful, spoiled children of the family. All sorts of obstacles started up against

her, and she almost gave up the idea in despair. But something was absolutely necessary to be done, as all they had had to depend upon for the six weeks they had been in their lodgings was the sale of some of Agnes's drawings, which Annie's husband, James Butler, had placed in his window. He kept a small print and stationery shop; and the drawings were so beautifully executed, that he had been fortunate enough to dispose of them all. A gentleman, too, passing by, admired them so much, that he gave an order for some large water-colour paintings, for which he would pay liberally, provided they were finished within a certain time. Agnes, therefore, had been hitherto the support of the family; but the close confinement and indefatigable labour told upon her delicate constitution, and she had a pain in her side, which sometimes forced her to rest awhile before she could resume her occupation. Meanwhile, still waiting for some engagement, Mrs Elrington got a little work from a fancy-shop, and though the remuneration was small, everything was of consequence. On Sundays, they attended a chapel near them, which was usually crowded, as the minister, Mr St Clair, was much

liked as a preacher. They generally went early, and modestly took possession of some of the free seats in the middle of the aisle, and Mr St Clair had often remarked their appearance so much above the position they seemed to occupy, with their deep mourning and melancholy countenances. Much interested, he had wished to address them, but could not find an opportunity. One day, however, they entered later than usual, and found all the seats filled. Mrs Elrington was looking about in some confusion, when he beckoned to the pew-opener to shew them into the pew where were Mrs St Clair and her children. After the service, he went up to Mrs Elrington, and told her he had been pained by seeing them in want of proper accommodation, and begged them to consider that seat as their own in future. He then introduced his wife, and requested to be allowed to call upon them at their lodgings. Such kindness, so delicately offered, could not but be gratefully received, and afterwards they always sat with Mrs St Clair. In a few days, Mr and Mrs St Clair called, and the acquaintance soon ripened into friendship. It was indeed a happy introduction for Mrs Elrington, who, by the recommendation

of these kind and sincere friends, procured several engagements in families of their acquaintance; they insisted, too, upon their passing some part of every Sunday with them, and Florence and the little St Clairs became inseparable companions, whenever they could meet during the week. Once Nurse Prescott had written to Annie, and said that Neptune was well, but somehow he had grown very quiet and moping-like. She sent them up, besides, some violets, the first that bloomed over her dear Mary's grave, and which Florence had planted there. This touching memorial of former days affected them much.

But with all Agnes's industry, and Mrs Elrington's pupils, they suffered many privations, which they felt the more acutely from the winter having been a very severe one. The early spring, too, was cold, and Agnes had a little short cough. Constantly leaning over her drawing, hurt her chest, and her hand would at times tremble so that she could not go on. James Butler had been applied to by a lady, who wanted a young companion and teacher for her two children, and who could sit and read to her when she was nervous, as she was living

alone in the country during the absence of her husband in the West Indies; she had lately come from thence with her little boy and girl, and he was not expected to return for some months. She offered most liberal terms, and Agnes felt anxious to accept the situation, as she should be able materially to assist her mother in her precarious and insufficient income. Mrs Elrington dreaded parting from her child, but would not oppose her wishes, believing it might be for her good, and that pure country air might restore her to health, for she had never been well since she had been in London. They called upon Mrs Dudley, who was much taken with Agnes, her elegant figure and delicate cast of features just suiting the refined taste of that lady, who liked nothing coarse or vulgar near her, and it was agreed that she should accompany her in a few days to her country-house. With many tears, and charges to keep up a frequent correspondence, the mother allowed her child to leave her for the first time since she was born.

Florence's next birthday was at hand; no little merry party was invited to celebrate its return, but the St Clairs arranged that she

should go with their children to see the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, a treat they had long promised them. Mrs Elrington could not make up her mind to join the party of pleasure; but she obtained a day's relaxation from her task of teaching, and was to pass a quiet day with Mrs St Clair, who stayed at home with baby. A little niece of Mrs St Clair's was expected the day before, who had never been in London, and would be just in time to go with them. Agnes had been gone three months; but she sent her sister a pretty little present, with an affectionate letter, wishing her a pleasant day and much happiness. Mrs Elrington and Florence went to their friend's house, and there Florence had a little remembrance from every one—not grand presents, certainly, but all given with kindness, and better than more costly gifts with less of love. And there she found a great surprise and pleasure too, for Mrs St Clair's niece proved to be little Katie Broadhurst. They were so glad to see each other! A happy day the children had at the Crystal Palace; Katie was in perfect raptures, it seemed to her to realise the fairy tales in which she so delighted. Florence so longed for some

beautiful roses she saw, to carry back to her mamma.

"Oh dear! oh dear! if I could only take some of those lovely roses to dear mamma!"

She looked so anxious, and spoke so excitedly, as to attract the attention of an elderly gentleman, who was leisurely surveying the beauties of that charming place. He smiled at her eagerness, and asked where her mamma was, and the two were soon chatting most amicably. He told her he had been abroad many years, and was now looking for some relations he had left in England, and wished he could find a little girl of her age amongst them—he liked children so much. Florence told him her name, which seemed to strike him, and childlike, in a low voice, how her dear papa was dead, and how mamma lived in London, and had no roses that she loved so. Mr St Clair did not much approve of Florence being so explicit to a stranger; but he seemed so amiable, and evidently took such an interest in her little tale, that he did not think it necessary to check her. But it was time to return, and then Mr St Clair was surprised to see him take out a card, and hear him say, giving it to Florence—

"Ask your mamma, Mrs Elrington, if she ever heard that name before. I shall call upon her."

He then shook hands with her, bowed to Mr St Clair, and left them.

CHAPTER VIII.

"And if a tear, that speaks regret
Of happier times, appear,
A glimpse of joy that we have met,
Shall shine, and dry the tear."—COWPER.

THEY had much to tell of the wonders of the far-famed Crystal Palace; and Ellen St Clair and Katie Broadhurst talked of nothing else. Florence was more quiet, and said little, much to Mrs Elrington's surprise; but she seemed happy and contented, and it was plain that she had enjoyed her birthday's entertainment, if not with the thoughtless and untamed spirits of the year before.

She did not speak much of the gentleman she had met with, until they were at home; then

she gave the card to her mamma, with his message. Mrs Elrington no sooner read the name, "Mr Fancourt," than, much agitated, she exclaimed—

"Fancourt! Mr Fancourt! Can it be Uncle Arthur, who was lost? Surely impossible!"

She closely questioned Florence as to the appearance of the gentleman; but there was nothing particular that she had noticed in him, except his complexion, which was rather dark and sallow. She could only repeat what he had told her, and Mrs Elrington retired to her bed much perplexed, and could not rest all night. But the next morning she was obliged to go out to her usual daily teachings, and Florence was left to write to Agnes a full and minute account of yesterday's proceedings. When Mrs Elrington came back, she found Florence's new friend sitting with her; but his intimacy was accounted for when, with much emotion, he assured her that he was the same Uncle Arthur, her mother's brother, whom they had supposed long since dead, and gave her certain proofs of his identity. He had been prisoner in the hands of a savage tribe, from whom he had made his escape, and had had the good-fortune to save

the life of a rich English merchant, with whom he had travelled through wild and half-explored countries. His friend had died, and left him considerable property, and he had just returned to England. He had written to his niece at Wellstead, but received no answer; and was going down to see if he had still any relations left, when the accidental meeting with Florence at Sydenham, and her revelations of family matters, made him almost sure he should discover in her mother, Louisa Elrington, the niece he was in search of. He then gently drew from her the history of her own change from happiness and prosperity to the state in which he found her, and listened with deep interest when she touched upon her husband's death, and the misery they had endured at that time. But now she need no longer suffer, and his other niece Agnes must be sent for, and directly too; she must not remain a dependant on strangers, when her uncle had the means to shelter and protect these dear ones. Mrs Elrington was quite overcome by this kindness, and trembled so much that she could scarcely be kept from fainting; at length, however, tears came to her relief, and she was better. Mrs Butler came up, when Mr

Fancourt rang the bell, frightened to see her so unnerved, and they wished her to lie down, but it could not be thought of until she had written to her darling Agnes a letter dictated by her overflowing heart, concluding by a desire to see her immediately.

How had Agnes passed the three last months? and had the change from confined lodgings to a pleasant country-house benefited her? Not as it might have done, had her time been less taken up in attending to the whims and fancies of one of the most indolent of women, who thought no one had a right to be tired but herself. Mrs Dudley passed most of the day on a couch in her dressing-room, or driving about the beautiful lanes in a low phæton, with the prettiest pair of ponies and the neatest of postilions. She was, or meant to be, very kind to her charming young friend, as she called Agnes, and she was treated in every respect as one of the family; but she, poor girl, was called upon every moment to minister to her comforts, and had not a single hour she could call her own. She had to read whilst Mrs Dudley lounged on the sofa, wrapped in her splendid cashmeres, to play or sing her to sleep, bathe her temples with Eau-de-Cologne; then

Ernestine, the little girl, was to be taught when she chose to attend; and Cecil, the youngest, a fine boy, but utterly spoiled, was to be coaxed, if possible, into learning his letters, but on no account to be compelled to anything he did not fancy. Agnes tried to perform all her various duties, and succeeded so well that Mrs Dudley fretted when she was out of her sight. Cecil, too, had some childish complaint, and had taken such a violent affection for Agnes that he would not let any one else nurse him, or take his medicine from any one but her. One night, Mrs Dudley sent for her, and begged her to sit by her bedside, as she had one of her nervous attacks, and could not be left alone; and this, when Agnes had retired to rest, after passing many hours by Cecil's little crib, weary in body and mind. The poor girl was quite ill and worn out, and was only kept from writing to her mother that she wished to relinquish the situation, by the reflection that she was enabled to provide so many comforts for her and Florence that they needed so much, by the very handsome salary given by Mrs Dudley; for with all her faults of selfishness, she was generous in the extreme, and even loaded Agnes with presents, which her native pride and delicacy

made her shrink from receiving, but which to refuse, she found would greatly annoy her.

Mrs Elrington's letter gave great joy to Agnes; but when she told Mrs Dudley that she must return home, that lady broke out into passionate exclamations, and declared she could not part with her. Agnes's recall, however, being imperative, she prepared at once to leave, and arrived one evening shortly afterwards at Mrs Butler's lodgings, and was pressed to the heart of her tender mother, and covered with kisses by Florence. There, too, she was introduced to her uncle.

CHAPTER IX.

"In life itself she was so still and fair,
That death with gentler aspect withered there."—BYRON.

WHEN they had time to look at Agnes, Mrs Elrington was quite wretched at the change in her in so short a time: her figure, always slender, was now slighter than ever; a hectic flush

was on her cheek; and her deep, earnest eyes shone with startling brilliancy. Mr Fancourt looked at her with a searching glance, for he too well guessed the meaning of that feverish bloom. But he said nothing then, and shortly after took his leave, that they might be alone. They longed to be so, and now Agnes lay in her mother's arms with her head resting on her shoulder; they spoke but little, but wept freely, and it was a relief to them both. Florence went to bed, happy to have her sister again with her, but the others did not follow for some time, and then neither of them slept much, Mrs Elrington being kept awake by anxiety, and Agnes by her troublesome cough. It was painful to see the languor of Agnes the next morning; it seemed as if she had kept up a false appearance of strength, whilst there was a necessity for exertion, and now she sank all at once. Her uncle had the best medical advice, and a celebrated physician was called in, but he gave them little encouragement, though not distinctly saying there was *no* hope. However, perhaps, the climate of Madeira might be of some benefit, and Mr Fancourt instantly caught at the idea. Agnes herself did not think she

should recover, but consented to undertake the voyage, and immediate preparations were made, it being arranged that Nurse Prescott should accompany her; and they were soon on their way to that island, where so many invalids are sent, some perhaps to return from thence with fresh life, others only to die far from their native land, amidst strangers. The voyage, which was favourable, seemed to revive the poor girl, and she was better for some little time after she landed; but the amendment being but temporary, she sank again into a state of extreme weakness, and it became too clear to all about her that her case was hopeless. Her earnest wish was now to return to England, and once more they embarked with heavy hearts, and arrived in England safely towards the end of March. Mr Fancourt had not been with them, remaining in London in Mrs Butler's lodgings; he had bought a pretty little place about twenty miles from town, where he was making several alterations, and was fitting up the house for the reception of Mrs Elrington and her children, who were to live with him. All kinds of mysterious arrangements were going on for their comfort, but

were not yet quite completed. He therefore took a cottage for them in a retired spot amongst the beautiful scenery of the Isle of Wight, and there was Agnes removed, her last resting-place in this world. Calmly did she look forward to her approaching end, and prepare for the change that was near at hand; whilst her mother, already heart-broken, the wound caused by her husband's death scarcely healed, vainly strove for resignation. There were the usual ebbs and flows in her disease, and sometimes she rallied for a few days, and Mrs Elrington clung to these little flattering symptoms even against her own certain convictions. But the expected messenger came at last! It was April, and the day had been showery, those freshening showers in the young spring, between which the birds pour out their melody, and a delicious fragrance seems diffused over all things. Agnes was sitting near the window in her chair, propped with easy pillows, her mother by her side, and Florence on a low stool at her feet. Suddenly there was a beautiful gleam of sunshine; a magnificent rainbow spanned the sky, and flooded the landscape with its glorious light.

Agnes looked up, and with a heavenly radiance beaming from her eyes, murmured, "Mamma, Florence, it is brighter still where I am going!"

A few minutes after, she felt an inclination to sleep; softly did her mother and sister place the cushions, and gently laid they her head on them. She closed her eyes, and placed her hand within her mother's; and was soon calmly sleeping, with a sweet smile playing on her lips. An hour they sat watching, fearing to move lest they might disturb the sleeper. Nurse Prescott opened the door; and with hushed step she advanced, and looked on the sleeping girl: her hand was still clasped in her mother's, the smile was still on her lips, but her pure spirit had passed gently and quietly away from earth for ever.

For weeks after, Mrs Elrington and Florence remained in the little cottage, and over the grave of Agnes did the former shed bitter tears. She listened not to comfort, and her wounded spirit refused all consolation; but at length prayer, that sure source to which the believer flies in his deepest anguish, gave relief to her overburdened heart. Peace, heavenly peace, came to her with healing on its wings, and she

bowed humbly to the Hand that had chastened her, and was enabled to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." The evening before they left the island, they all visited the churchyard, and knelt down in prayer by the mound that covered her remains. With lingering feet, they at last turned towards home; they were silent, save nurse, who murmured, "She was an angel—too good for this world, and God has taken her to himself."

Arrived in London, they stayed a few days at Mrs Butler's; and on the eve of Florence's birthday, when the heat of London was intense, Mrs Elrington, with her sole surviving child, went down to Mr Fancourt's new place, Danston, that gentleman and Mrs Prescott being already there. It was nearly dark when they stopped at a charming lodge overgrown with sweetbrier and honeysuckle. A pleasant-looking young woman, with a child in her arms, curtsied and opened the gate, and in a few minutes they were warmly welcomed by their uncle.

CHAPTER X.

"Be you content to lend your patience to us,
And we shall jointly labour with your soul
To give it due content."—SHAKSPEARE.

THE next morning, Florence stole out of bed very early and opened the window; but there was a thick mist on the ground, that sure sign of a fine day in summer, and she could only see some dim outlines of flower-beds on the lawn beneath. She was forced to wait an hour before she could satisfy her curiosity, and when she again peeped forth, a delightful scene burst upon her. There were beds of all shapes and sizes filled with lovely roses, the closely shaven grass between glittering with dewdrops. Limes in full bloom scented the air, and beyond was a park dotted with clumps of horse-chestnuts and elm, with a few oaks scattered here and there, while a small river wound through it, on whose banks stood a magnificent oriental plane, with its broad dark leaf and

deep cooling shade. Lightly skipping down stairs, she found her uncle already there, who warmly wished her the compliments of the day. They breakfasted in a cheerful room, with a sunny south aspect, and French windows opening down to the ground. The whole was shaded by a light verandah, on the iron trellis of which trailed the sweet-scented clematis, rose, and jessamine. After breakfast, Mr Fancourt took her on his knee, and said, smiling, "Little pet, you have not had a birthday gift; what would you like best?"

"Do you really mean, dear uncle, what I would like best?"

"Yes, what would you like best as a birthday present?"

The poor child felt quite distressed, but could not ask for anything. Her uncle seemed to enjoy her confusion, and at last said with an odd look, "Well, if *I* must choose for you, I hope you will like your old uncle's gift. Come in," he added, hearing a tap at the door. The door opened, and Robert Prescott appeared, leading in Neptune—her own Neptune! She gave a cry, slid down from her uncle's knees, and clasping her arms round his curly neck, cried,

"Neptune, dear Neptune!" Neptune, too, recognising her voice, put up his great paws, and licked his young mistress over and over again. Mrs Elrington was much moved, and turning to Robert for an explanation, was told that he was in the service of Mr Fancourt, and lived at the lodge with his wife, who had opened the gate for them the night before; and that his master had ordered him to bring Neptune as a surprise to Miss Florence. Florence at length remembered her uncle, and flew to thank him; but he only said, "There, I knew what gift you would like best to-day; but now, go and find out a nice large tree, where you and your little friends can have tea by and by, whilst mamma and I take a little walk in the park before they come."

Mr and Mrs St Clair had promised to bring Ellen and the baby, now a fine chubby little fellow, to spend the day with Florence; Katie Broadhurst was again in London with them, and was to be left at Danston for a week, when her darling brother, George, who had just returned from his second cruise, would come and take her home. Florence tripped

off, followed, as of old, by Neptune, and was making her way to a pretty greenhouse, when, at the turn of a walk, she met—who do you think?—Willy, with a bouquet of roses, as nearly as possible like that he had formerly presented to her on her birthday at Wellstead.

"O Willy, Willy, how came you here?—Oh! I am *so* glad to see you!"

"And I, too, Miss Florence. Dear me, how you *are* grown to be sure! Master said I was to surprise you, or I should have come before to see you and my good mistress."

"But do you really live here?"

"Yes. I could not bear the new folks, though it was all very grand there; and Mr Fancourt asked if I should like to be his gardener, and make the place as Mrs Elrington would like it."

"And did you make those rose-beds?"

"Yes, Miss Florence, just to please her; and she is to order it all, and the garden is to be under her management, and right glad I shall be. But if dear Miss Agnes could have seen it! Well, well, God knows what is best!" and brushing his sleeve across his eyes, he pretended to be busy tying up some pinks. Meanwhile, Mr Fancourt and his niece walked

through the park, under the shady trees, and Mrs Elrington remarked the pretty church and spire, with the neatly kept burial-ground close by, which they entered by a turnstile. Some of the little graves were planted with white roses. Seeing she was interested, and seemed to linger there, he proposed going into the church. It was nicely fitted up, and as neat within as on the outside; and looking up, she saw a small tablet inscribed—

IN MEMORY OF

AGNES,

DAUGHTER OF

HENRY AND LOUISA ELRINGTON.

DIED APRIL 22, 18—,

AGED 16 YEARS.

"The maid is not dead, but sleepeth."

They walked slowly back, and found their friends had arrived. The young people had wandered away, and nurse had taken charge of baby, and carried him off to her own dominions; but Mr and Mrs St Clair were sitting in the

verandah, calmly and gratefully enjoying the beauties of nature so lavishly strewn around. Florence introduced Willy to Ellen and Katie, and then they went into the kitchen-garden, where there was a walk bordered on each side by flowers, of which Willy said they might gather as many as they liked, and that he had planted them on purpose to save his treasured beds on the lawn from being despoiled. Under a warm south wall was a row of bee-hives, and one of glass, through which they could see the busy little creatures work. They were delighted with this; and Florence promised herself much pleasure in watching their habits, and resolved to ask her mamma to get her a book about bees.

By the by, we must not forget to say that Katie had bought her a nice little book full of interesting stories, and Ellen a small Tunbridge-ware box, with sealing-wax of different colours; and that both were very much admired. Then Neptune was so beautiful. Ellen had so often heard Florence talk of him, that he was like an old acquaintance; and little Charlie rode on his back, nurse holding him on, whilst the others put garlands of flowers round his neck, and led

him about with a string. Baby crowed and laughed, and pulled Neptune's curls, but he was so good-natured that he never attempted to bite him. After dinner, they went into the park, with Willy to take care of them by the water. On the banks grew pretty yellow flags and bunches of blue forget-me-nots, and Willy had to gather such a quantity of them, that they might take them in to Mrs St Clair. Neptune got very hot, and panted, with his great red tongue hanging out of his mouth, and often plunged into the water, swimming about for sticks which they threw in for him. At last, he was tired of the play, and having brought one out, and laid it at Florence's feet, he gave his shaggy coat a great shake, and sprinkled the water all over them. Then how they scampered off, with Neptune at their heels, and how fat, round, little Katie again tumbled over, in her endeavours to escape him. All this was capital fun, and gave them splendid appetites for tea, which they found ready laid out on a table on the grass, with a beautifully iced cake in the middle, and little baskets of strawberries and raspberries by each plate, with delicious cream. Nurse and baby were there, and Neptune

had a large bowl of bread and milk all to himself, which he lapped up with great delight. It was so pleasant sitting there under the trees, near a little cote filled with ringdoves, with their bright eyes and soft feathers, and their never-ceasing coo, coo, cooing all the time. The elder ones of the party were at some distance from the happy little group, Mrs Elrington looking on, with a full but thankful heart. Mrs St Clair, whose warm sympathies had been with her in her severe trials, took her hand, and said gently, "God has blessings in store for all his children."

Her friend, raising her eyes, suffused with tears, and pressing her hand in return, answered in the same low tone, "He has been good to me —the *bitterness* of sorrow is past."

"Come, Ellen," said Mr St Clair; "the dearest friends must part. It is time to get ready, or we shall lose the train; your mamma is putting on her bonnet."

Ellen ran upstairs, and was soon equipped for her journey. The carriage came to the door; Mrs St Clair was handed in by Mr Fancourt; baby, fast asleep, was placed on her lap; then followed Mr St Clair; another hurried kiss, and

then Ellen got in, grasping an immense nosegay, and large piece of cake for the little St Clairs at home.

"Well, Florence," said her uncle, patting her cheek, "I hope you have enjoyed your birthday!"

"Yes, indeed, dearest uncle, it is the most delightful one I ever spent."

Florence is now eleven years old, and we leave her, believing that her early troubles have had a salutary effect upon her naturally impetuous and rather selfish disposition; and trusting that, under the blessing of a gracious God, and the judicious training of her affectionate mother, she will grow up as amiable as her friends could wish her to be; and that, in the practice of the little kindnesses or everyday charities of life, she may become a blessing to all around her.

And that tender mother, so sorely tried—may not such severe discipline have been necessary to wean her heart from idolising earthly treasures, and to lead her to place her whole trust in Him who never willingly afflicts His creatures? Her sorrows were sent, not to bereave her of happiness,

but to fill her with real and permanent good. "Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

A WINTER POSY.

A WINTER POSY;

OR,

ANNIE'S CHRISTMAS WEEK IN LONDON.

Chapter I.—What Annie Heard.

THE FAIRY TALE.

"Mamma, will you tell me a story?—just till Aunt Mary comes in, and I will be so quiet! Now, do, dear mamma," said little Annie.

"Very well. Bring over my work-basket, and you can take your knitting, while I tell you a real Fairy Tale.

"Fanny was dancing about in the fields one

day, gathering all the pretty flowers she could see—dog-roses, queen-of-the-meadow, and blue geraniums. By and by, she got tired, and sat down to amuse herself in making a wreath of them; and a very tasteful wreath it was, I assure you; and so it seemed to Fanny's eye, who thought the contrast between the pure white roses and bright blue geraniums quite unequalled. Fanny was always a very happy little girl, but she was especially so when she was alone on a clear sunny day like this, among the green fields; her bright thoughts seemed to keep her pleasant company. Suddenly, however, a new thought passed through her mind as she looked at her pretty flowers, and she sighed, and closed her eyes to think of it. She sat very still for a long time, till she sighed again, and murmured, 'I wish—I wish I could see the fairies! Oh, they must be beautiful!'

"Then a soft, low singing fell on her ear, as gentle as the summer zephyr, and she sat still, enchanted, scarcely daring to breathe. Sweetly and gently the music fell, though strange and unearthly in its charm, as it seemed to wind round Fanny's heart. Gradually, she came to hear it more distinctly, till she could distinguish

words, too, like the distant tinkling of a silver bell—

'From the fairies' glowing home
In the pleasant Fancyland,
Singing joyfully we roam,
Blessing all this mortal strand.

We whisper to the budlets
To wake up into flowers,
And we throw a perfume o'er them,
Caught from the sunny hours.'

Then Fanny opened her eyes, and she saw some little beings standing beside her, so graceful, and beautiful, and bright, that she thought they must be angels; and they smiled on her so gently, and spoke so kindly, that Fanny did not feel in the least afraid of them. They told her that they were going to take her to their queen's palace, if she chose, for now that she had entered the kingdom of the fairies, she was entitled to go there. Fanny rubbed her eyes, looked hard at them, and said, 'Am I, then, in Fairyland?'

'Yes you are,' they answered; and they smiled so sweetly, that the little girl loved them, and smiled back again as she asked—

'But I thought you did not allow mortals in?'

'We do not like them all, neither the rude nor envious ones; but you entered so gently, that we cannot be angry with you, dear little girl. Remember what we tell you—*gentleness owns great power.*'

"Fanny did not know how she had entered, whether gently or not; but she felt very glad that she was there beside such beautiful fairies. Then she said, 'But will not your queen be angry?'

'O no! She is a great and powerful queen; but so good and so kind to us all! We may take any one we choose into her palace.'

"Fanny arose to go with her new friends, and she was so much absorbed with them, that she hardly noticed that all the country seemed different from what it was a few minutes ago.

'And what is the name of your queen?'

'She is called Idealina, the All-beautiful, the glorious Queen of Fancyland, the greatest dominion among the fairies.'

'You have different countries, then, here, too?'

'O yes; but ours is the greatest and richest, and our queen the best of all. Yon country

lying in the far west is called Dreamland, a very great kingdom, too.'

'And what do the fairies do here? Are they always idle?'

'Idle! O no, that would be miserable! We have all something to do—something in your world to watch over. We three are Flower-fairies. We were in the meadows whispering to the young buds when we saw you. The Rose-fairy is the queen amongst us—that is, she is the principal, and directs us what to do.'

'So the fairies are divided that way, are they?'

'O yes. We have always order amongst us. There are the Water-fairies—and some of them are Brook-fairies, River-fairies, Lake-fairies, or Sea-fairies. And these watch over the waters, and direct their course; and they sing their merry songs as they work, and when you mortals hear them, you say: "Listen, how sweetly the stream is murmuring!" or, "How musically the waves are rippling on the beach!" But you never see the fairy songsters, who sing on their wondrous and lovely lays, unwearied and unheeding change. And then there are the Winter-fairies'——

'Oh, these cannot be pretty!' interrupted Fanny.

'Not pretty? They are the most beautiful of us all. There is the Snow-fairy, that throws her beautiful feathery mantle over the earth, to protect it from the ravages of the Winter-king. There is the Icicle-fairy, who hangs bright pendent crystals in glittering wreaths around the brow of the mountain spring. And then there is the beautiful Frost-fairy, that in the cold mornings whitens the grass, and makes it thick and stiff with diamond spray, or paints strange, graceful trees, and ferns and flowers, upon the pavement-stone, or writes with icy fingers on the window-pane strange messages from this our glorious world. But here is our queen's home, the glorious Palace of the Imagination.'

'Is that the palace?' exclaimed Fanny, lost in astonishment.

'Yes, it is our palace, and this is a festival-day, and our queen will be more gorgeous than usual. She has abolished the Seasons for the time.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'That she allows Winter and Summer,

Spring and Autumn fairies to serve her together.'

"Fanny scarcely heard; she was gazing in blank amazement at the wondrous pile before her. It seemed to reach even to the skies, where the snow-white marble edifice was lost in a thousand domes and minarets, light and graceful, with their golden pinnacles sparkling in the beaming sunshine. Fanny could have gazed at it for hours, but her companions hurried her in.

"They entered a vast and spacious hall, where slender pillars of alabaster upreared their heads to the glittering roof. Brilliant flowers, in forms and groups most graceful, were scattered all around, filling the balmy air with their mild perfumes, and hundreds of tiny fairies flitted to and fro in mirthful groups, or in single speed, as messengers from their queen. Fanny thought she dreamed, it was all so gloriously beautiful and unparalleled. She rubbed her eyes, but that made no change. She was just about to ask which was the queen, when her fairy guides, as if they knew her thoughts, smilingly led her to a crimson curtain that stretched from wall to wall, and hung from the roof down to the floor

in massive folds. They swung back the curtains wide, and Fanny passed in.

"Can human tongue describe the brightness and the splendour that broke upon this favoured mortal's eye! It seemed to her but the brightness and the glory of a dream, for the Actual had never before presented such scenes to Fanny's sight, and she heaved a wondering sigh, of the deepest and most perfect joy, in the present time.—This, then, was the Queen Idealina, the All-beautiful, in her own magnificent palace, as the glorious monarch of Fancyland. She stood and gazed for some time awe-struck, but gradually her eye awoke to the several beauties around, and took in some of the details of the novel scene. At the further end of the mighty hall was a dreamy cloud of the most delicate mist, reaching far up the distant wall, and surmounted by a throne of beaten gold, glittering with jewels of every clime and hue; rich rubies shed their sanguine glow by the side of the rainbow-opal; bright emeralds gleamed in verdant dyes, next tearful pearls of Ormuz; and diamonds threw their leaping rays over the modest sapphire's gleam, all in one glowing, and perfect, and unconfused whole. But *on* the

throne—speak not of *it* beside *her*, the Peerless, the All-beautiful. Our language can scarce describe her. A rosy cloud of evening threw its mellowing light half over the robe of snow, and from its rich, warm folds arose a neck and a face, in form so perfect, in feature so noble, in expression so refined and high, that it seemed there was not a line that could be improved. Above the clear-cut, snowy brow there rested a bright tiara of diamond sheen, that threw its lightening rays from its silver settings, and shed a light around, as of the moon in her splendour. Behind the throne, and forming an arch from its summit on each side to the ground, beamed a glowing rainbow, bright in the primal hues. A glittering tapestry of the richest frost network filled up the space on that distant wall, and yet, though frost, not cold. Around the foot of the throne were ranged the minor powers—queens also, bright and fair. After Fanny had somewhat satisfied her ardent gaze with the bright Idealina, she cast her eyes over the palace. She saw that the hall was divided into three portions by the richest of Corinthian pillars, carved in pure alabaster. The centre division, which stretched directly from where

she stood towards the throne, was higher and more spacious than the rest, and roofed with clear-cut crystal, through which the day and the sky above shone bright: the smaller and side divisions were surmounted by domes of alabaster, supported by graceful Corinthian capitals. Great windows with stained-glass pictures threw a soft light through the aisles, and lit up the ivory, where, in the spaces between the windows, the artist had caught and imprisoned the floating beauties in his brain. Here was a scene in ancient story, where the very figures seemed to start and move; there, a fierce hurricane in the dark midnight, where terror told its tale as truthfully as beauty else had done; yonder, a smiling landscape, where the trees and brook seemed living; while in the deep recesses stood dreamy marble statues, truthfully beautiful, that seemed to live, to breathe. And the fairies' feet moved on over the rich mosaic floor, where bright artistic gems were set in glowing gold. And soft music echoed through that vast hall, that, in its rich, sweet breathings, melted and wound round Fanny's inmost heart, as in swelling tones its deepened voice filled the wide, glassy

dome, or anon in dying cadence its tones crept back to silence. And Fanny had stood still all this time, enwrapt in a perfect whirl of gladness, her never-wearying eyes reaching ever forward to the mysterious Beauty throned in this resplendent state.

"But her fairy friends touched her lightly, and said, 'Come;' and she followed them, dreamily and unwittingly. They raised the crimson curtains, and a rich breath of perfume followed their steps, as they passed out through the second hall and the giant porch, into the open air, and then Fanny came to herself, and asked, 'Where are we going now? Why do you leave the queen?'

'Oh, we are going to take you to our garden; for you know we are Flower-fairies, and, besides, the queen is to give audience to-day. There is a petition to be presented to her, that the inhabitants of Dreamland may be prevented from mixing with us, and naming themselves by our names; and you will like the garden!'

'I am sure I will. But what is your flower?'

'I am the White Lily, and this is the Violet, and here is the Hyacinth. Don't you see we have each a flower of our own on our breasts?'

'So you have! Well, I did not notice it before.'

"So they led her into the garden, and a bright place it was. There seemed no end to it; and though Fanny, with her bright companions, danced for hours along beautiful avenues of rich tall trees, that bent over beds of the richest flowers, they came never to wall or limit. Many a leaping fountain, and tall statue, and ghostly grotto did Fanny gaze at in silent wonder; and oft in dreamy reverie she stood, where sparkling diamonds danced from their brimming fount, amid the tall stalactites of a sounding cave, where the glad drops united in gently murmuring rivulets, that tinkled along their bright beds, beneath the shadow of rich, brilliant flowers. Nature and art vied with each other, in this garden of the queen's. And gladly sped on Fanny's moments, till, pleasantly fatigued, they sat them down to rest in a bower of roses.

'Oh, how I should like to live here!' said Fanny.

'That is only because it is new to you; you would not like it long so well!' said her companion, smiling.

'How?' said Fanny, staring; 'are you not happy?'

'Yes, we are very, very happy; but then we are fairies, and this is our native country, and we have all our duties to do, to keep us from the curse of idleness.'

'But it must be so pleasant to live here, without any quarrels, and no enemies.'

"The White Lily shook her head.

'What! have you enemies here too?'

'Not exactly—and yet—— Well, I will tell you. Do you see yon dark castle on yonder hill?'

'Yes, quite clearly.'

'That is the Hill of Prejudice, and the building is Critic Castle, and a cruel race of beings live there, that shoot long arrows, tipped with a dark black poison, at many of the mortals that enter our palace. There is hardly a mortal that leaves our castle completely unhurt, at least if they carry away anything with them.'

'And do they all die?'

'O no; not at all. I have heard of one or two dying from repeated and severe wounds, but such is very rare. Yet the arrows generally stick fast, and gall them sore. Many are bold enough or clever enough to evade the aim of the

shower from Critic Castle; or, when the arrows do reach them, they pull them out merrily, and feel little pain. That is the right way; and we are so sorry to see many of our friends droop and pine with their wounds, or at least get terrified away from our palace-doors, where they are so gladly welcomed. These enemies in Critic Castle try all they can to injure us too, along with our friends; but, thanks to our fairy-nature, we can withstand them.'

'See!' said Fanny, 'there is a fairy looking for something among the grass.'

'O no! That is Roscina, the Dew-fairy, scattering dewdrops from her urn upon the grass and flowers. She has been already at the palace, so it is time for the evening meeting. Come away quick.'

'Gladly.'

'Roscina is one of the Sky-fairies.'

'Are there fairies for the sky too?'

'Yes. There are the Cloud-fairy, the Mist-fairy, the Rain-fairy, the Rainbow-fairy, and a great many more. Did you not see the Rainbow-fairy twining the ends of the rainbow over the queen's throne?'

'Yes,' said Fanny

'We are almost at the gate now, and it is time, for it is sunset already. Remember, Fanny, you can choose anything you like out of the palace or the garden. Any mortals who enter can carry out their choice—so prepare for it; our queen will tell you so herself.'

'My—my choice?' stammered Fanny.

'Yes, your choice. Why not? Callimachus came here long, long ago, and chose those pillars which he called Corinthian. Timotheus has entered our halls too, and borne away the spirit of our chording music. Michael Angelo has been here, Homer, Shakespeare, and many others, but'—— And they once more dashed aside the crimson curtain.

"The scene was the same, yet changed. Glow-worms beamed in the deep window recesses; fireflies sparkled about in the queen's misty footstool, and Will-o'-the-wisps held their lanterns round the foot of the throne. Dewdrops gleamed amid the flowers that twined around the pillars. It seemed that the beauties she had before thought incomparable, were now enhanced by the silent glow of evening. Then sweetly arose the beautiful but unearthly note of the nightingale; it swelled, it warbled in

ecstatic trills; it ceased, and beaming out in the centre of the hall, there leaped a wreath of dazzling light, playing and sparkling through crystal prisms; it beamed upon the queen's diamond coronet, and it shed a silver lustre; it played upon the jewels of her throne, and they shot forth their many-coloured hues. Fanny looked up to the glassy vault: it was now dark blue, and the stars above were sparkling brighter than she had ever seen them before; she looked towards the queen, and she felt thrillingly elevated above her common life. Oh, Idealina, the All-beautiful, throned in the Imagination Palace, how glorious is thy throne, how ethereal art thou!

'Now, Fanny, now,' said the Hyacinth, 'make your petition!'

'Now, Fanny, now, what do you choose?' asked the Violet.

'Now, Fanny, now!' echoed all around.

Fanny was confused. 'I choose?' asked she.

'Yes, Fanny, yes,' said a thousand whispering voices.

"Fanny closed her eyes to think—not long. She soon collected herself, and starting forward, she exclaimed, 'I will choose! I will choose!'

"Her eyelids opened—but the palace was gone, the lights were dark, the fairies had disappeared, and she was alone in the twilight meadow, with her wreath of wild-flowers lying fading at her feet. There was no sound but the evening wind moaning through the wood, and the distant lowing of the homebound cattle; no gems save where the evening-star lit up the dewdrops on the grass."

"And so it was only a dream after all?" said Annie disappointedly; for she had been sitting almost breathlessly listening to her mother, gazing up in her face, forgetting her knitting, and everything else. "So it was only a dream?"

"Perhaps not; all that I know is, that Fanny found herself where she was in the morning."

"Perhaps it was real. Did she ever go again?"

"I never heard, but I know that she often received messages of love from the streams and flowers, and even the Frost-fairies."

"Would she never see Queen Idealina again?"

"I cannot tell; it is likely she would wish to

go again.—But there is the bell ringing; that will be Aunt Mary."

So it was. And Annie sat very still, working and thinking about the fairy palace till it was time to go to bed. She fell asleep, with her head filled with fairy dreams, not forgetting however, to hang up her stocking by the hearth, for to-morrow was Christmas-day!

Chapter II.—What Annie Saw.

THE CHRISTMAS-TREE.

The gray morning was struggling to conquer the darkness and the mists of Christmas-night, and had gained the length of a dusky twilight, when Annie's blue eyes opened wonderingly, and her curly head was lifted up from her warm pillow.

"Heigh-ho!" she sighed, as she rubbed hard at her eyes—"heigh-ho! I'm sleepy; and it's too early to get up yet—it's dark." Then she yawned, and down she dropped once more upon

her pillow, and rolled her blankets close and warm. But in one moment, up she got again, threw the blankets to the foot of the bed, and jumped into the middle of the floor with the greatest bravery.

"Well, I declare, this is Christmas-morning, and I had nearly forgot! What a foolish creature I was, to be sure, and my stocking hanging waiting for me!"

There it was, white and long, and queerly shaped, not dangling (it was too full for that), but hanging from the string where she had pinned it the night before. Annie stood for some time in her long white night-gown, with nothing but her little bare red toes peeping out, looking at this wonderful stocking.

"I am sure Santa Claus must be an early riser—he has been here already. I wonder if he comes down the chimney. I declare, I am almost afraid to open it; but here goes," and determinedly she commenced the important quest. But first she felt it all over. There was something at the top very soft, and then there was a hard square block, and another soft bundle, and a round thing like an orange, and—

and—— But the fingers were already at work, picking out the wonderful contents. First, the soft thing at the top was taken, and carefully spread out. What was this? She laid it out on the hearth-rug, and there it was, the neatest little boa imaginable, and softer than any of the soft furs Annie had ever seen, warmer even than pussy's back. "What a dear, pretty, soft, warm boa!" Next. "This is hard! Oh, a book, a red story-book—Todd's *Simple Sketches*. What a nice little book! Oh, I am so glad! But what next?" The very thing that Annie wanted—a full-sized, bright blue merino frock for her doll. "Rolled so tightly up, too—could you believe it? Here is a great piece of cake and an orange, and in the toes, raisins, and almonds, and *sweeties*, too. Kind Santa Claus, I give you a thousand thanks, and will be happy to see you again as often as you like! Well, my stocking is empty now, and well filled it has been. I never knew my stocking could hold so much. It never did hold so much before!" And she took it up, and looked at it again. "Not done yet? Something more! What a darling!—what a dear, pretty, little penknife!" And the young lady kissed the

pretty mother-of-pearl handle of this much-wished-for penknife. "But I must be off to give mamma her Christmas-kiss;" and off she ran, and her little bare toes pattered on the cold waxcloth passage till they disappeared once more below the warm blankets in mamma's bed. After all the kissing was over, Annie flung herself about in perfect joy, exclaiming, "Oh, I am so happy!" Then she had another look over her armful of gifts, and caressed her boa anew. "How nice and warm this is, mamma!"

"Yes; that is chinchilla fur, which, you know, is very soft. But run now, and get dressed; it is nearly time for breakfast, and afterwards we will go and call upon some of my friends."

"And at night, mamma, remember!"

"Where are you going?" said Aunt Mary.

"I am going to a party at Mrs Dixon's, to see a Christmas-tree—a real Christmas-tree!" So she skipped off, got dressed, and was down to the parlour again very soon. In a very short time, she went up to her mamma with a face full of news, but this time it was not about the presents. "O mamma, only think: the Frost-fairy from Fancyland has been here

this morning, painting on the window-pane. Oh, it was so beautiful! and I looked close to see if I could read anything, but it vanished away as soon as I looked near it."

"Yes, my dear, this is a clear frosty morning: look at the pavement, too, how pretty it is!"

"How lovely! I will go and see it nearer;" and she dashed through the lobby, opened the street-door, and, after looking at the stones for a few minutes, flew in again with bright red cheeks. The door swung to, but something had arrested Annie's steps. What could it be? Why, it was nothing but a square parcel, not very large, tied up in white paper, that was lying on the lobby-table. It was only a parcel. Yes, but there was something more, which has not yet been spoken of, and that was the address on the outside: "*To Miss Annie Palmer*," &c. She seized it in both hands, and opening it upon the breakfast-table, disclosed, all bright and glittering, a *Peter Parley's Annual!* Nobody knew who had placed it in the passage, but Aunt Mary suggested that Santa Claus might have laid it there, when he saw that he could not get it into her stocking.

Annie's day passed swiftly on, with sundry

visits, and pieces of cake and shortbread, and evening arrived to warn her to get dressed for her Christmas-party. That time passed on, too; and exactly at a quarter before six by the parlour time-piece, she skipped into the room to shew off her bright white dress to her Aunt Mary. Again was her eye arrested, for on the table there lay the prettiest necklace that could be. She looked at it long, and wished much to go forward and touch it, it was so beautiful. She looked up; her aunt was smiling at her.

"Do you think it would meet round your neck?"

"My neck? O aunt, it is not for me! How good you are—how good you all are to me!" exclaimed she, as the bright necklace was clasped below her equally bright curls.

It was a large party Mrs Dixon's, and a merry one too. There were a great number of young ladies in white, and pink, and blue, with long sashes, about Annie's own age; and a corresponding number of young gentlemen in white vests and trousers, or fine kilts—all Fanny Dixon's friends. Then there were some younger folks still, of the stature of Lucy Dixon, and a few young ladies, who, along with Miss

Dixon, were to superintend the whole proceedings. There was such a beautiful misletoe tied right under the chandelier, and all the pictures were decked with holly, and every face with smiles; and after tea, they had such fine games—Blind-man's Buff, and the Traveller, and half-a-dozen others; and then they danced and sung with the greatest spirit. Annie did not at first know why the misletoe was hung up, till she saw the mishap that befell others; then she tried to keep away, but——

The clock struck eight, and a stillness fell over the merry group. They were soon made to stand up in pairs, and were slowly marched out of the room. Where were they going? They could not see just now at least, for they were in such a dark, dark passage. On they crept; then there was a halt, a whisper, a silver bell, and the curtain rose, or rather the door opened, and they saw—what *do* you think? They found themselves entering a great bright room, in the centre of which stood such a large, shining, beautiful tree—the Christmas-tree! Ribbons and beads, boxes and confections, toys and jewels, glittered and shone in the sparkling light of dozens of waxen-tapers of every hue. Dolls, and roses, and

stars were sprinkled like a shower of many-coloured snow over this very best of all Christmas-trees, and Annie began to wonder if Fanny could have seen a Christmas-tree in the fairy palace, for she did not think there could be anything more beautiful. There, on the top, was a beautiful waxen angel, draped in azure crape, with silvery wings, holding in one hand a tall, white-silk flag, bearing golden stars sparkling round the golden letters, "Merry Christmas." In her other hand, she gathered six strings of diamonds, that held in its proper place, beneath her and around her, a beautiful wreath of roses. There were huge nut-shells, and cradled babies within, and flags, and bags of sweetmeats and raisins; there were pretty roses, that, when shaken, would open their petals to let a smiling Cupid leap out, and fly about in the joy of freedom, at the end of a silken cord. But below the tree, resting in its shade, was such a beautiful little cottage—snow and frost upon its roof and door-step; but within, the light burned cheerfully, as it was seen through the red curtains; there were bright green curtains on the upper windows, and blue ones on the end rooms. Upon the ground-floor, one of the red

curtains seemed half drawn back, and a little face was peering out, while beyond it you saw a little table, with dishes upon it. And the little face looked out still, while Annie wondered why, until she discovered a man and a dog coming round the end of the house, and then she knew why the curtain was thus raised. Then there was music, and the children danced, hand-in-hand, round the tree, and saw all the fine things; but Annie thought nothing so pretty as this little cottage in the dark shadow of the tree. Then came a loud knock to the door, and the children stood still, and in walked two of the queerest figures you ever saw. The first was an old woman, with a steeple-hat, and a white cap underneath; her nose and chin were very nearly meeting; she had on a great red cloak, all lined and edged with fur, with a great white frill all up the front of it. She had immense fur-gloves on, and fur-boots too, above dark-blue stockings, which were seen distinctly below her short brown petticoat. She had a funny-shaped basket in her hand, filled with little rolls of white paper, which she held to each of the company in their turn, and let them choose one each. What could they be for? Well, the time

she is going round, let us take a look at her companion, who seems to be even older than she is. Above his fur-boots he wore tight-fitting leggings, which were covered to the knee by a large fur-cloak edged with pine-cones. A strange cap, made of Iceland moss, covered his head, but not his long silver locks, that lay waving on his shoulder. His brow was dark and shrivelled, and contrasted strongly with the long white beard that hid the under part of his face. When all the children had been served by the old woman, she turned round and said, "Father Christmas, I am ready!" in such a funny cracked voice that everybody laughed. Then the old man came forward with a large staff in one of his thick woollen gloves, and a large, very large pair of scissors in the other. He adjusted his spectacles, coughed loudly, and said to the boy next him, "Open your paper," and he opened it and looked, and Father Christmas stepped forward and cut down from the tree a handsome trumpet. The little fellow was admiring his prize, when the next was called on, and that little girl soon rejoiced in the possession of a beautiful doll. And round he came, while Annie was so interested in him and his gifts,

that she almost forgot her own existence, and was quite startled when it came to her turn. She trembled, she did not know why; but she could not see what was on her slip, until Father Christmas gave her the very little cottage under the tree, with the bright shining curtains, and the little garden along with it. Annie was perfectly astonished; she had wondered *who* would get it, but she never thought of it for herself; but there it was safe, and hers.

"You had better take care, my dear," said Miss Dixon; "do not move it too much, for there is a candle in it. It would be safer to lay it on this table till you go away."

So Annie laid it down, but did not take her eyes off it. Then Fanny Dixon got the flying angel at the top; and Lucy got a box of cows and sheep; and everybody was pleased and happy.

"Dance again, my dears, dance again!" squeaked the old woman.

So they danced round again in great glee, as well as they could, with their boxes and dolls. Then the old woman came round again with her basket, and they all got another slip of paper. This time, the prizes were all sweetmeats

and raisins, &c., and a merry round it was, I assure you. Then they danced round the dismantled tree, and picked off the little bits of ribbon, and laughed to their hearts' content; and then they were taken to another room, and saw such a beautiful magic lantern. Annie had never seen one before, and she was much delighted. But as soon as it was over, she ran to look at her little cottage. It was dark within it; the gaslight glared harshly upon it; the man and the dog were still motionless at the gate—altogether, she was much disappointed. Miss Dixon smilingly told her that the poor people must have gone to bed, after the day's work; but if she put a little candle in to-morrow night, she would see them again. Then Annie smiled too, and went tripping home over the slippery streets, in the very best of humours with herself and everybody else, but most of all with her happy Christmas-day.

Chapter III.—What Annie Did.

DISOBEDIENCE PUNISHED.

Next morning, Miss Annie arose a little tired, a little late, and, it must be confessed, a little cross; but the sight of her yesterday's presents brought back her naturally good temper. The day passed on without any famous advcntures; and in the evening, after she had lighted up and admired her little cottage, she was just about petitioning her mamma for another story, when she suddenly exclaimed, "Mamma, I forgot to ask you—Will you allow me to go to-morrow to slide upon the ice, along with the Dixons? They say the water is quite frozen over now, and is quite safe. Will you? O mamma, do!"

Mamma did not look very willing certainly, neither was she; and she said, "She did not think it was quite safe yet, for it was not all frozen over. Then there were other dangers—Annie might fall and hurt herself severely, or get lost, or"——

"But, mamma, I would be so very careful. May I not go?"

"I really do not think I can allow you to go to-morrow."

"Well, mamma," said Annie mournfully, "I heard Miss Dixon say she was just going to see them, for she was afraid to go on. I might at least go with her, to see the skaters, though I would like much better to go on."

"I daresay you may, if you are sure Miss Dixon is going."

"O yes, mamma."

"And you will not go upon the ice?"

"No, I will not, if you don't wish it."

"Well, you may go with Miss Dixon, if she can be troubled with you."

"Thank you, mamma; I will be so careful."

The next day came, and at the appointed time she was at Mrs Dixon's house. Lucy, Fanny, her brother George, and her cousin Jane were going, but Miss Dixon was engaged otherwise, and could not go; indeed, she had never wished to go, and had only meant to do so, to please the children.

Annie felt very sorry, and very much perplexed.

She knew her mamma thought she was going with Miss Dixon, and that she would not have allowed her at all unless. On the other hand, there was the promised pleasure, the clear cold day, and the merry companions; then she would be just as careful as if Miss Dixon had been with her; she would not go on the ice, but wait till her friends came away; and she would be as safe as if she were at home. So she reasoned. She said she would go, but yet——

The children were soon at the edge of the frozen sheet, and Annie was with them.

"Come, Annie; don't be frightened; take my hand, and come away on," said George Dixon.

"No, no; mamma said I was not to go on the ice."

"Not go on the ice! Nonsense! Come away. Who would come beside the ice and not go on?"

"But mamma said she thought it was not safe yet."

"It's as safe as the ground here is. Look at the people sliding almost to the very middle."

"But there is a big hole there."

"Well, but can't you keep out of the big hole? You need not go into it, unless you

like. Come, Fanny and Jane, and pull her on."

"No, no," said Annie, shrinking back. "But you go on; I will wait here for you."

"But you will be starved to death."

"O no. But don't be very long. I will look at the people."

Annie did not like to tell them that her mamma had thought their eldest sister was to be with them. The other children moved slowly off, very sorry that Annie did not accompany them, yet all unwilling to lose their expected treat. But little Lucy said she would stay with Annie; and the two girls walked up and down, watching their friends sliding, who did not go very far away. But at last Lucy grew tired, and promising to join her again soon, ran off to her sister. Then Annie stood alone, and watched the merry parties on the white floor, and the skaters whirling past, all in a strange dark moving mass, and Annie wished so much that her mamma had allowed her to go on, for she could slide a little. Then she began to feel her toes and fingers very cold, notwithstanding her warm clothing, and she wished so much she could take just one slide to warm

her. But where were the others? She looked in every direction, but she could not see them, or at least she could not distinguish them amid the moving mass of people. Then she thought it would not be so wicked or so dangerous just to go on the edge to warm her toes; but she drove away that thought, and walked about fast, to try and bring some heat into her frozen limbs. Oh! when would they come back? She felt as if they had been away for hours, she was so tired standing. How much she wished now that she had not disobeyed her mamma! she was very tired, and her feet were benumbed, and her fingers too; so she ventured on very near the edge, and tried her skill upon a small piece of ice that seemed very smooth and bright. She slid very pleasantly for a few minutes, and she was already beginning to feel a little more comfortable, when—such a knock! such a fall! An unpractised skater had, in his awkward attempts, tripped, and knocked poor Annie over with him. It was a heavy fall, and he had broken a small hole in the ice. Annie got up, her face and nose streaming with blood. Nobody took any notice of her except one or two passers-by, who said, "Poor

thing!" and walked on. She felt very sore and bruised, and she was trying to get back to land again, when in went one of her feet into the hole the unlucky skater had broken. It was not deep, but it was so cold and startling! Annie was so excited, that she thought she would die as she rushed up the bank to the place where she had been standing before. She sat down, and tried to ease her wounds. One of her cheeks had a bad cut from the broken ice, beside the bleeding nose; her ankle was slightly sprained also, and, dripping with that icy water, she was freezing with cold, very faint and hungry, and so sick at heart! When would the Dixons come again to take her home? and she looked and strained her eyes in vain to see them. How much she wished she had not come! "And mamma will be so comfortable at home, beside a nice warm fire, and perhaps thinking of me!" sobbed Annie. At last she saw a face she knew; it was Willie Irvine, a boy she had seen at the Christmas-party.

"Oh! do you know where the Dixons are?" asked she eagerly.

"They are gone home now, I fancy;" and his words sent a fearful chill to Annie's heart.

"They were seeking you about half an hour ago; and when they could not find you, they thought you had gone home;" and he whistled as he went sliding past.

Annie looked after him in despair, and sobbed out, "And I don't know the way home; in London, too! I don't know even the name of the street where Aunt Mary lives. Oh, what shall I do? what shall I do? O mamma!" and she sobbed afresh. The frost pinched her wounded cheek, and, faint with hunger and cold, Annie arose, murmuring, "I can try, at least. I remember some of the turns of the streets on the way to Mrs Dixon's; and if I am once there, I am safe;" but her ankle ached so sadly, and she was so tired and heavy, that her progress was very slow; and when she got away from the crowd of the people, she did not remember the exact turns, and at last she lost herself altogether. What could she do? and she leaned upon a railing in front of a baker's shop, to rest her aching ankle. And she tried to think, but the tears of pain that blinded her eyes made her unable to do so, and she stood alone and wept. She was quite unable to walk any further. At last she

remembered that often, when she was hungry in her walks, the baker that her mother dealt with had kindly given her a roll or a biscuit; but she did not think that that was in a small village-town, where almost every one knew one another, and that this was great London; yet she entered, and slowly and hesitatingly went up to the counter.

"Would you give me one roll—only one roll, I am so hungry?" said Annie beseechingly.

"No—go away!" said the shopkeeper gruffly. Annie turned away, and the tear of misery once more gushed to her eye, when the master of the shop, observing by her dress that she must be a young lady, asked, "Why have you no money?"

"I have lost my way, and I—I;" and the tears burst forth afresh.

"Here," said he, and he gave her two such beautiful rolls as she had never seen before. She raised her swollen lids towards him as she thanked him, and went out. They were so good! But they were scarcely finished, when Annie thought again, What was she to do?—where was she to find her mamma? And her ankle and her cheek beat with pain, and the rolls had not warmed her; and the heavy winter

dusk was falling fast over the great city where Annie wandered—alone !—alone in London, that wondrous place that she had heard so much of! How she had rejoiced in the prospect of seeing it, when Aunt Mary had invited her mamma and her to spend their Christmas-week in her city home ; and now in it, she was so weary—weary ! She dragged her heavy limbs along one street and up another ; she was too tired to go any further ; she looked round her—she was in a quiet street, and she saw the home-lights gleaming through warm curtains and blinds, and thought of her own home, with her mamma sitting waiting for her. She sat down upon a door-step, and wept most bitterly. She prayed to God to take care of her, for she knew not how to help herself: her wounded cheek smarted with the sharp frost, and she had lost all power over her fingers ; she was quite faint and dreary. Then the thought came over her, "She might die ! She had often heard of people dying from cold. O mamma, mamma !" she cried, but no one heard her ; then, again, she besought God for help. Her sobbing ceased, the tears upon her cheek were congealing into

ice, as Annie sunk down on the dark door-step, in this silent spot of the mighty London, asleep! a deep, strange, troubled sleep! Her being seemed almost taken from her, and she felt as she was sinking downwards, away, away, away downwards into vacancy!

Annie again felt life, and a delicious sense of comfort and delight pervaded her whole frame. She knew nothing, and yet she felt herself changed. She was asleep, yet she was happy. A gladdening, dreamy feeling of pleasure thrilled through every vein, and downy warmth stole through her once chilled body; warm, balmy air seemed to float by her, and the sound of gentle rustling of passing robes. A warm kiss dwelt on her brow, and slowly and gradually her senses returned to her, as she dreamily opened her eyes. — She was at home, in her own warm room, with her mamma and her Aunt Mary bending over her couch. She gazed at them wonderingly, but soon remembrance came back before her; she knew what she had done; she found herself at home —forgiven!

But how had she got home? Question followed

question, and the tale came out. When the Dixons, after their vain search, had returned home, and found no news of Annie, they sent to her mamma to see if she were there. Of course she was not, and George and Fanny, with many self-reproaches, had accompanied Mrs Palmer and the servant in their search. Vain search it seemed to be ! But at last, strangely enough, they met the baker's boy who brought their bread both to Aunt Mary and Mrs Dixon's. When he knew whom they were seeking, he remembered the little girl who had come in so timidly into his master's shop to ask for a roll. He said he thought he had seen her before, but had not known where. From his description, it was just Annie. Mrs Palmer was pale with terror, but she promptly took measures to find her daughter, and separated the little party to widen the search. She had not strayed far. They found her as she had fallen asleep on the cold stone.

It was long till she arose again from the couch they had laid her on that night. Fever and cold oppressed her, and she was very, very weak. It was many days after the New Year, and all its festivities had passed and gone, that

Annie was able to have another sight of the great city. Yet she was not very dreary during her long illness; the Dixons often came to see her, and Fanny read her nice new books, her Christmas presents; and her mamma was always beside her. Annie told her her dreary tale with many tears, and many promises of amendment, which have since been well kept. Many kind friends came to see her and amuse her during her weary illness; so that, notwithstanding the painful lesson she had learned, she long remembered with pleasure her Christmas-week at London.

THE END.