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CHRISTMAS DAY.

Caroline Colville 1857
L. M. C. July 5th 1846.

CHRISTMAS-DAY;

OR,

THE FRIENDS.

A Tale.

THIRD EDITION.

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CHRISTMAS-DAY;

OR,

THE FRIENDS.

CHAPTER I.

SARAH BRUNTON was the only child of kind and good parents, who loved her as only children are generally loved. They desired her well-being, and would have made any sacrifice for her sake: and, more than this, they knew what was the right way to make her happy; and only erred in one respect, in the want of firmness.

Sarah was a very good girl in the main, and was believed by her father and mother to be all that their hearts could desire: and so any one would have thought, who saw her in her happy home, supplied with all

that she could want or wish for, and surrounded by those who were continually thinking how they could give her pleasure. But some of her friends, who were more clear-sighted than her father and mother, were afraid that Sarah would be very unhappy if any of her present advantages were withdrawn; as she had become so accustomed to the enjoyment of them, that she never seemed to think of the possibility of losing them. She used to say, indeed, as many people do, that we must not place our dependence upon any of these things: but she would have been much surprised, at the same time, to have known that she must soon part with any one thing which she had possessed all her life. It would have been both wise and kind to have taught her early that she might perhaps lose her health, or her comfortable home, or, what would be more dreadful still, her parents. Such lessons must be learned some time or other; and it was a pity that such a well-disposed girl as Sarah should not have been taught them in the best way.

She was just twelve years old at the time my story begins. It was Christmas: and it so happened that Christmas-day was her birth-day. It had always been a season of merriment to her, and to all the household. She always had some cousins to stay with her then, whom she loved very much, and nothing but pleasure was thought of for the whole week. Her father lived on a pretty farm in a pleasant country; and we know that a Christmas in the country is a very merry thing. The three cousins who came to stay with Sarah lived in a town about five miles off; and they enjoyed their winter visit to the farm quite as much as when the summer had made the garden sweet and the fields bright and gay. One of these girls was two years older than Sarah, and was her best friend; and I do not wonder at it, for I have seen few girls that I could love so well as Margaret Steward. She was as merry as Sarah herself could wish, but she was not thoughtless. But there is no occasion to describe her here, for it will be seen hereafter what her character was. The two

others were very young; and though they helped to make merry, they were not companions for Sarah and Margaret.

Well! on Christmas morning, when Sarah awoke, it was scarcely light, but she could see the branch of holly she had hung up opposite her bed, and it put her in mind what day it was, and she jumped out of bed to see if the weather was fine. She saw the garden-hedges looking white with frost, and beginning to glitter in the daylight; and she began to think of the long walk they should all have together after church. She ran to call her cousins, and very busy they all were in dressing the parlour with holly before Mr. and Mrs. Brunton came down to breakfast. It was a merry breakfast, and very happy did Sarah feel when her kind father kissed her cold, rosy cheek, and wished her many returns of that day. All was delightful that happy birth-day. The walk along the hard glittering highway, and over the crisped snow in the fields; the merry dining in the parlour, and the much larger party in the

kitchen; the evening games; the late going to bed; the presents that were given to them all—O! Sarah thought it was the best Christmas-day they had ever passed.

“Good-night, my dear,” said her father, “I hope your next birth-day may be as happy.”

“O, papa,” said she, “it will be better still next year, for James and Charles will be here, and you know you promised that when they came we should have a dance. Next year we shall be merrier than ever.”

“Do not make too sure of it,” said Margaret; “we do not know what may happen before next year.”

“Why,” said Sarah, “I have enjoyed every birth-day more than the last, and so it will go on to be, I dare say.”

“I hope it may,” said her father; “but do not make sure of it.”

Sarah thought no more about it, but went on very happily for several months. Fully employed and good-humoured as she was, her days passed quietly away, and the summer came. Her cousins visited her again, and again left her, looking forward to another Christmas-day, when they should meet again.

One day in August, at the time of the harvest, Mr. Brunton came in to tea, hot and tired, from the field, where the last sheaves had been carried. After tea he proposed to his wife and child to take a short walk in the cool of the evening, to refresh them after their day's work ; to which they agreed. They directed their walk towards the river-side ; and the meadows looked so green, and the river so clear and cool in the light of the setting sun, the nightingale poured out her song so sweetly, and the stars began to shew themselves in such a deep blue sky, that the little party soon forgot their fatigue, and sauntered far from home. When the moon had risen they

turned homeward again; but before they left the river-side the meadows were covered with white mist, and the air felt very chilly. They hastened their steps, and soon reached the farm; but not before they began to feel cold, and to repent that they had extended their ramble so far. Sarah and her mother took no harm; but Mr. Brunton, who had been the most heated in the harvest-field, was very unwell the next day with a cold. The day after he was worse, and the surgeon who was sent for was afraid he was going to have a fever. When poor Sarah heard this, she was, for the first time in her life, very unhappy. She wished to be of use to her good father, but knew not how. She sat down beside him, intending to talk to him and amuse him, but so unaccustomed had she been to control her feelings, that the first word of tenderness from him set her tears flowing, and made her hasten from his presence. She could not bear the touch of his feverish hand, or the sight of his heavy eye; and knowing that it would be wrong to distress him

by the sight of her tears, she shut herself up in her own room. While there, she reflected that her poor mother was obliged to bear the whole weight of anxiety. "I know," thought she, "that she must suffer more than I do, and yet she seems cheerful and able to exert herself. If she were to leave my father as I do, what would become of him? Oh! I have done very wrong! I cannot go down again to-night, but to-morrow I will do better. I will stay beside him and nurse him, and I will be cheerful like my dear mother, and perhaps he will soon be well again. Perhaps he will be better even to-morrow morning."

She lay awake a long time that night, and the more she thought about her father, the more she hoped he would not be long ill. She never remembered him to have been so ill before, certainly; but she had seen him unwell, and he always recovered in a very few days, and so he would now, she really believed. She would not make herself so unhappy any more. She determined that

she would get up very early, and be as useful as she could ; and having made this resolution, she fell asleep, and slept till six o'clock.

When she went out of her room, she was surprised to see Mr. Maurice, the surgeon, going down stairs from her father's room. She ran down, and overtook him as he was going into the parlour. Her mother was with him, and poor Sarah was shocked to see how pale and anxious she looked. She looked as if she had been up all night; and they both spoke in a very low voice, as if they were afraid of disturbing somebody. Sarah could not hear what they said, and she could not ask what was the matter. They talked a long time, and then Mr. Maurice sat down to write a letter, and her mother went out of the room again, and seemed not to have seen her.

Poor Sarah ran to Mr. Maurice, and said,
" Oh ! do tell me what is the matter. I am

sure there is something very much the matter. Is my father worse?"

"Your father is very ill, my dear," said he, "but we do not yet know how ill. In a few hours he may be much better again; but I am writing to ask Dr. Wallis to come and see him, and when he comes we shall know better."

"But will he die? Do you think he will die? Does my mother think he will die?"

"I hope not," said Mr. Maurice, "but his fever is very much increased. Your mother knows that he is in danger. You must have seen from her countenance how very anxious she is. She is now alone with him, and has been with him all night; and a terrible night it has been for her."

"O! let me go to them," said Sarah; "my father will let me nurse him. I am sure I can wait upon him, and we will all

beg my mother to take some rest, or she will be ill too."

"My dear," said Mr. Maurice, "your mother cannot leave him. He will not know you, for he is delirious, and he cannot bear to lose sight of your mother. Go to her, and see what you can do to help her. You will be able to do much, I dare say: and try to keep up her spirits and your own too. I will return soon to meet Dr. Wallis, and perhaps we may do him good. Perhaps in a few hours our anxiety may be almost over."

After Mr. Maurice had left the house, Sarah remained alone a little while. She felt as if her heart would break. She thought, if her kind father died, she must die too. She could not cry, but she stood trembling, and almost choked with grief. What could she do? Was there no help? Yes; there was help, if Sarah had known where to find it. She had been taught, that she ought to pray to God in joy and in

sorrow; that she ought to thank Him for all the blessings He had given her; and that, in times of grief, she ought to trust in Him. But though she knew this, and persuaded herself that she believed it, she had not thought enough about it. She had often repeated, "Our Father, who art in heaven;" but she had not really thought of God as a kind parent. If she had, she would now have asked what she wanted of Him with as much confidence as she felt when she made a request to that father whose sickness was now the cause of her sorrow. She felt (and it was not a right feeling) as if her mind was too much disturbed for the *effort* of prayer. She knew that it was right to pray in sorrow, but she had no idea of the relief and comfort it would have brought to her.

After a while, she crept up stairs to her father's room, and was going to open the door, when she heard a voice which she knew must be his; but, Oh, how unlike his usually gentle tone! He spoke loud; and

then again his voice sunk to a low muttering, but he was still not quiet. "I cannot bear to go in," thought Sarah: "he will not know me; and that will be worse than all. But my mother can bear it," thought she again; "she *must* bear it; and I will help her, and not leave her to all the sorrow of this miserable day without any comfort." She softly opened the door, and went in. She found the room darkened, and, at first, could not see her father, but she still heard his low delirious muttering. She stole to the side of the bed opposite to her mother, and took his hand. He knew her not, and his hand was burning; and, as her eyes became more accustomed to the darkness, she saw how ill he looked. He was restless, and incessantly attempting to rise; but his wife's calm voice seemed to have power to control him for the moment. Sarah sank down by the bed-side, and began to weep, at first, quietly; but her sorrow increasing, she soon sobbed violently: and her mother, making allowance for her undisciplined feelings, left her

to herself for a while, with the hope that her full heart would relieve itself, and that she would recover her calmness. But her emotion becoming more and more violent, at length evidently disturbed the sick man. Mrs. Brunton spoke tenderly to her, and tried to turn her thoughts by employing her. But Sarah could not recover herself, and was, at length, gently dismissed by her mother, who said she might return when she had become calm.

“ Oh! what shall I do?” said she. “ I am useless; I am worse than useless; I am a trouble to my good mother. My poor father too—how often has he taken me in his arms, and tried to amuse me, when I have been ill! How he has tried to ease me! and how patiently has he sat beside me for hours, out of his pure love to me! And I, who owe him so much, cannot even sit beside him, cannot do a single thing for him, through my own fault.”

She began to think whether her mother

could keep up her strength and spirits under such fatigue as she was now undergoing. The servants were not such as could supply the place of a nurse in a sick room, and she knew of no one in the neighbourhood who could be trusted with such a charge; and she could not bear the idea of an entire stranger being her mother's assistant at such a time. Suddenly a bright idea struck her.—“Margaret will come!” said she; “Margaret will take the place which should have been mine if I had deserved it. I will write to her directly, and Dr. Wallis will take the letter when he returns to town.”

She sat down and wrote an earnest request to her cousin to come that very day; and she knew that Margaret would not refuse her request, if it was possible to grant it. She felt a little relieved by having done something, and went over the house, seeking some other employment. She saw one of the servants going to make something for her father to take: she knew she could

do this ; so she took it out of the servant's hand, and sent her up to her mother again. She took her cookery to the room-door herself, but dared not ask to go in again, and her mother did not invite her. But when Dr. Wallis and Mr. Maurice came again, her mother saw her in the parlour, kissed her, and thanked her for what she had done. But now poor Sarah could find no more comfort in employing herself. She went about the house, to prevent noise, and stood for a long time at her father's door, and counted the hours till Margaret could come or send a letter.

About seven o'clock in the evening, she heard the sound of wheels, and eagerly ran to the door, where her good cousin met her. Margaret was grieved to see her pale cheeks and swollen eyes, and tried gently to cheer her. She persuaded her to walk a little while in the garden ; and there poor Sarah told all her griefs, and all her self-reproaches. But Margaret's countenance was so serene, her voice so sweet, and her

words so comforting, that Sarah felt calmer than she had done all day, and was ready, with a cheerful countenance, to make tea for her mother, whose place in the sick room Margaret supplied for a while.

For three or four days Mr. Brunton continued to get worse, and, at last, Sarah lost all hope of his recovery. She was not allowed to be in his room for many minutes at a time, for he was always delirious; and her mother thought that a sight so terrible to Sarah's uncontrolled feelings would injure her health. Margaret was the support of them all. Part of every day she spent by her uncle's bed-side, and part she employed in comforting Sarah. She did not flatter her with the hope that her father would recover, for she knew that was not likely; but she tried to lighten the blow which she saw was impending. She spoke to her of her father's piety, and of the promises the Gospel makes to the faithful. She spoke of death as a sleep, as a release from care; of the grave as a quiet resting-

place, as a couch of ease, compared with the bed of pain. And when she saw that the most dreaded feeling was that of separation, she spoke of the time when they might meet to part no more; of the happiness of that reunion; of the joy which might attend that meeting, if the right means were used to obtain it. Sometimes she represented, in a way which made Sarah's heart glow, the comfort she might be to her mother; she shewed in how many ways she might cheer and gratify her; and, humbled as Sarah felt by the experience of her own inability, she yet admitted the idea that she might become all that Margaret represented. But her tranquillity vanished whenever her cousin quitted her. She had been too little used to such thoughts to make their influence lasting, and many an hour was spent in restless and unavailing grief.

In a few days, all was over. The blow had been struck, and Margaret had exerted her powers, not unsuccessfully, to calm the

grief of her aunt and cousin. Sarah was allowed to see the last remains of a parent she had loved so much, and she found nothing terrible in the sight. Her feelings subsided into calmness, when she gazed upon the placid face, the eyes closed as in sleep, and almost a smile upon the countenance; and if the touch of the cold hand made her shudder for a moment, the recollection that that frame which had been racked with pain when she last saw it, was now reposing in that stillness in which the weary rest, brought comfort to her mind. Her tears flowed more and more calmly; till, at last, they ceased.

She followed her father to his long home; and in the church, and at the grave, heard words which she had often heard before, but which she seemed not to have understood, so powerful a feeling did they now excite in her altered mind. She heard, first, of the decay of the body—"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust;" then of death, as a state where the wicked cease from trou-

bling, and the weary are at rest; then of the resurrection, when we shall not all sleep, but shall all be changed—when the new and glorious body shall put on incorruption and immortality, and death shall be swallowed up in victory.

The evening was beautiful; and Margaret persuaded her aunt and Sarah to stroll into the fields, when the labourers were all gone home, and every thing was still except the birds' evening song. They walked not in silence, but talked much of past times—of many an evening ramble with him who was gone; of many an act of kindness done by his hand; and many an expression of affection which had fallen from his lips. Sarah began to speak of the future—of what she intended to do for her mother's comfort; of the pleasure it would be to them to complete the plans and to fulfil the intentions which her father had formed. She spoke of the affection they should feel for his favourite haunts in the neighbourhood; of the good they might do to the poor whom

he had assisted ; and the care they might take of the animals which had been fed from his hand.

Her mother shook her head, and told her that they might perhaps be obliged to leave their farm. Nothing was certain about it, she said ; but it was best to prepare for whatever they might have to do.

Sarah was silent. She had never thought of the possibility of leaving that beloved place where all her happy years had been spent, and which was now more than ever endeared to her by the memory of her father. She could not believe that it would be so, and began to speak on some other subject.

CHAPTER II.

A FEW days after the funeral of Mr. Brunton, Sarah's mother told her that they must not only leave their pleasant home, but that they must forego many comforts, and submit to many deprivations; as their circumstances were so much straitened, that strict economy was necessary.

Sarah thought that she could submit to any thing, if they could but remain at the farm: but it was impossible.

The painful effort of removal was soon over, and they were settled in a very small house, with one servant, in the town where Margaret lived. Sarah began, at first, with great cheerfulness, to discharge the little

household duties which were now imposed upon her: but, in a few days, she felt that it was very irksome to give up her time and attention to such common business when she wanted to be studying, or walking, or doing any thing else which suited her taste better; and Sarah had not yet learned to make sacrifices like these with cheerfulness and good-humour.

Margaret, who saw them every day, was often grieved by the expression of gloom which clouded her countenance; and yet more often did it go to her mother's heart to observe the many tears which were shed, and sometimes the words of discontent which she indulged in, when any trifling sacrifice was to be made.

Every body knows that these little trials are painful; but they may be made improving, and may be much lightened by good-temper and activity. When Sarah had prepared her mother's breakfast, how much for the comfort of both it would have been,

if she had sat down to it with a cheerful countenance! But she was generally gloomy, and sometimes in tears. If she had with activity set about her work after breakfast, she might have been able to devote a large portion of every day to her mother's comfort, or to her own pursuits. But, instead of this, she lingered over her meal, or over the fire, till she had lost much time and all inclination for exertion.

Her kind mother was deeply disappointed to find that that daughter whom she had so carefully watched over, and for whom she had done so much, was not only no support to her in her affliction, but an additional sorrow. She thought much on what ought to be done; and she wisely decided to give her plenty of employment, to promote her friendship with Margaret as much as possible, and to endeavour, by firmness and kindness, to bring her round to a proper state of mind. Margaret wished the same, but she saw with pain that Sarah's moody reserve grew from day to

day, and that no cheerful conversation, no gentle kindness, no endeavours to promote her innocent pleasure, were of any avail to rouse her.

Margaret's eldest brother was a clergyman who lived in the same town. He had a very excellent library, and Sarah had permission to make use of any of his books, but she did not avail herself of it. She could not settle her thoughts to reading, which in former times had been her delight: but she really acted now as if she would make no use of her remaining advantages, because some which she used to enjoy were hers no longer.

In the mean time, Christmas-day, which was also her birth-day, drew near; and her mother and Margaret agreed in thinking that some forcible impression might be made on her mind on that day, which would bring so many vivid recollections of past times; and they determined to unite their efforts to awaken her con-

science, and her once strong affection for her mother.

Sarah, too, was thinking of the approach of this day, and thinking of it with unmixed dread. She remembered the enjoyments of past years, and her fearless anticipations of pleasure for the approaching birth-day. She felt deeply the loss of her kind father; and a blush of shame passed over her cheek, when she felt the conviction that she grieved yet more for their change of fortune—that her little daily troubles had made her more unhappy than the death of the kindest of parents. She felt how her own temper was changed, and bitter was her self-reproach.

These melancholy reflections kept her awake the night before her birth-day, and she lay weeping for hour after hour. At last, wearied with grief, she fell asleep, and awoke late the next morning with heavy eyes and an aching head; and, feeling that her morning duties were unperformed, she

hastily dressed herself, and went down stairs, where she found her mother busy preparing the breakfast which her selfish daughter ought to have prepared for her. Sarah expected not a reproof, and received none, but was silent from shame; and the meal passed in gloom on her part, and in ineffectual endeavours on her mother's to support a conversation.

At church, where all others seemed to join in a service of joy and gratitude, for a blessing great to all, but more especially to those who are wounded in spirit, Sarah's countenance shewed any thing but gratitude. She was touched, indeed, deeply touched, by what she heard; but she thought that words of rejoicing were not for her, who was suffering so deeply: and she wondered when she caught a view of her mother's sweet countenance, not only tranquil, but joyful. She gladly accepted Margaret's invitation to take a long walk after church. The bright sun, the cold brisk wind, and the glittering hedges, would

have raised the spirits of one even more depressed than Sarah. Her countenance brightened, and her pace quickened involuntarily, as she saw the troops of people who were going forth into the country to enjoy that happy day, the happiest of the year.

When they had turned aside from the highway into a sunny lane, Margaret spoke to her of its being her birth-day, of the number of years she had completed: but Sarah stopped her. "Oh! do not speak to me of that," said she, "it makes me miserable."

"And why?" said Margaret.

"Why?" said Sarah, "do you ask why? Recollect what last year was; what every past year has been; and tell me if I can be happy to-day."

"Not so happy as usual, perhaps," said Margaret; "but every Christian ought to

be grateful and cheerful on this day, and you perhaps more than most. You have lost a father whom you loved. The loss is great; but how much greater would it have been, if your father had not been a Christian? and if you had not now Christian hopes to support you during your temporary separation from him? You have lost your fortune, and with it many comforts and pleasures; but He, of whom this day particularly reminds us, has given us consolations under this, and under all unhappy circumstances. This is all you have lost, and think how"—

"Oh, Margaret! I have lost more, much more," cried the unhappy Sarah. "I have lost my own self-esteem; I have lost my mother's approbation; and if you had not read the kindest of hearts, I should have lost your friendship. Margaret, I am very, very unhappy. Do not talk to me of the comforts of religion. I have known nothing about them lately. My mind has not been fit to think of them. I used to

love to talk to my father about these things, but since his death I have been restless and miserable; and I dare not comfort myself with any of the promises written in the Gospel, because I am not one of those persons to whom they are addressed. What good do I do to any body? What am I but a trouble to my dear mother, while I ought to be what I see you are? Another year is gone, and Oh! how much have I gone back this last year!"

"Do not say 'gone back,' dear Sarah," said Margaret: "rather say in the way to improve. I know what your feelings are, and I understand what those faults are which you deplore so grievously. Your temper appears to yourself to have become soured by sorrow; but the fact is, that in former times your temper was never tried. Every thing was done for your comfort, and every body strove to please you: and as your time was employed according to your tastes, and as your tastes themselves were well directed, you were cheerful and

happy. Now you have many irksome duties to perform, and they try your temper and spirits. This is not to be wondered at. Do not yield to the trial; resist the temptation; and you may be happier than ever you have been."

Sarah shook her head. Sorrow was new to her; and she thought, as many people do in her situation, that she should never be happy again.

Margaret continued—"As for what you say of the promises of Scripture not being applicable to you, I trust you will find yourself mistaken. Think of the invitation, *Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* Let this comfort you. My dear girl, *you* are weary: your heart aches with heaviness. Throw off your burden of grief. Cast all your cares upon Him who careth for you. He does care for you. He does pity you. He now knows what are your sorrowing thoughts. Turn to Him, and he will give you rest."

Sarah only answered by her tears.

By this time they had reached the churchyard where her father was buried, and where Margaret had purposely directed their walk. Feeling as Sarah then did, the sight of the grave overpowered her. She wept on that spot where was buried, as she said, all her happiness. Margaret suffered her to indulge her feelings till she was calm, and then gently reminded her how wrong it was to repine for any loss, however great, and especially when she had so many blessings left. "Do you forget your mother," said she, "that kind mother who has watched over you for so many years? and who loves you with as warm an affection as his who is gone? Rather think what he himself would say if he could now speak to you. Would it not be, 'Sarah, love your mother and take care of her, and do for her what I would have done. Support your own health and spirits, and seek for cheerfulness from your employments, that you may in some measure supply the

loss which your mother has sustained. If you wish to see me once more, if you have any desire that we should meet again in happiness, diligently discharge the duties, the very important duties which have devolved upon you. You must seek help, and I have taught you to seek it where none ever ask in vain.' Tell me, Sarah," continued her friend, "would not these be his words?"

Sarah's glowing cheeks and tearful eye shewed that Margaret had made a successful appeal to her conscience and to her affections. She poured out her feelings to her kind friend : she told her all her repentance, her wishes, her fears, and her resolutions.

Margaret listened with pleasure, and affectionately soothed and encouraged her. She moderated her eagerness, and assisted her to lay many plans for her future guidance.

Sarah was eager to do too much at once ;

and Margaret, who foresaw that such excitement could not last, and that her spirits must occasionally flag, and that her impetuous efforts would disappoint themselves, offered her assistance and advice whenever any thing should go wrong, and more particularly begged of her no longer to keep her feelings, whether sorrowful or otherwise, locked up in her own breast, but to confide them to that mother who had a claim upon her for every mark of confidence and affection.

Sarah eagerly assured her that only her affection for that kind parent had prevented her from entrusting to her every thought of her heart.

Margaret believed her, and kindly pointing out to her the path she ought to pursue, encouraged and cheered her.

They returned, Sarah's heart full of hopes and fears, and her head full of vague ideas of what would in future be her duty, and

of what she might accomplish towards promoting her mother's peace. But not so vague were the impressions of what her past errors had been, what her mother's forbearance, and Margaret's friendship. They returned when the sun was already declining in the fleecy sky. The church bells were heard chiming at a distance over the fields, and the robin hopped merrily in the glistening path before them. Sarah's heart beat with many emotions, and she determined to tell her mother all that had passed.

Margaret left them to themselves that evening, which was spent in conversation more frank, more affectionate, and more cheering, than any that had passed for many long weeks.

"Last Christmas-day," said her mother, as they were retiring to rest, "you were warned not to look forward with too much confidence of enjoyment to another year. I now encourage you to hope that this day

twelvemonth may find you improved and happy."

How Sarah fulfilled her designs, what success attended them, and what was her state on the arrival of the next Christmas-day, we shall learn hereafter.

CHAPTER III.



BY the assistance of Mrs. Brunton and Margaret, Sarah fixed a plan for her daily employment, which was practicable and rational. The morning was of course to be in part devoted to her household occupations. The rest of the day was to be divided between study, walking, and such favourite pursuits as suited her age and tastes. Margaret particularly advised her to walk a part of every day; and when her mother was more inclined to stay at home, Margaret was always ready and always willing to be her companion. Together they rambled over the fields, or climbed the hills, and the pure fresh air never failed to raise Sarah's spirits when they were inclined to flag; and we cannot won-

der that they were sometimes, when we remember that she was brought up in the country, where she half lived upon fresh air and sunshine. Now she lived in a narrow street, where the sun was scarcely ever seen; and, when it was, there was nothing prettier for it to shine upon than the red chimney tops. These walks soon became Sarah's great delight; for Margaret had much that was interesting to say, and knew all the prettiest walks, and she sometimes took her to see poor families whom she knew. Sarah wondered how it was that she had never been in the way of seeing such before. Many beggars had been relieved at her father's door, and she had given away money very often to those who appeared to want it; but she had never been accustomed to seek out the poor, like Margaret; and she was sorry she had not, when she saw how this good cousin was beloved by the families whom she had assisted in various ways.

Margaret was not rich, scarcely more so

than Sarah, perhaps. But there can be much charity where there is little money ; and Sarah, seeing how much good might be done by a warm heart and industrious hands, began to wish to enjoy the same pleasures which she saw were so dear to her friend, but lamented that she had no time.

Margaret said nothing, believing that, if a strong motive was offered, time would be found ; and she wished every exertion of the kind to proceed from herself.

One day, they visited a cottage where there was a large family of children, well brought up, but in great poverty. Two of the girls were grown up, and earned a little by different employments : but Margaret asked why they were both at home, and thought it a pity that one of them should not go out to service.

Their mother sighed, as she answered, that the second girl, who was clever, and

likely to make a good servant, had applied for a place, only a week before, to a lady in the neighbourhood, who liked what she saw of the girl, except the poverty of her dress. "We could not help that," said the poor woman: "but we have put together what we can spare, and we have written to a sister of mine, to ask her if she can lend us a little for the first quarter, and then my girl could pay her out of her wages. But we have just heard that it is too late: for the lady is going to live some miles off; and she says, that, if she cannot meet with a servant within three days, she must hire one in the town where she is going to live, though she had much rather take one from her own neighbourhood."

"And does the lady know," said Margaret, "why your daughter was so dressed?"

"Why, Miss," said the girl, "I did not tell her any thing about it, because I did not see how it was to be helped; and it cannot be helped now," said she, with tears

in her eyes. "It would have been a good place, where I should have learned a great deal, and been made fit to take any place afterwards."

Margaret and Sarah talked a great deal during the rest of their walk about this poor girl, and the possibility of getting over her difficulties. Sarah was for going directly to the lady, and begging her to pay the girl's wages in advance. But Margaret represented, that the lady might object to doing this for a servant whom she did not know. "And besides," said she, "it would be much better for Betsy to go to her place free from any such obligation to her mistress. And then again, we do not know what this lady's temper may be; and she may perhaps make a bad use of the hold she would have over her servant, and disregard the respect we ought all to shew to our servants' feelings, especially when they are under any particular obligation to us. No," said she, thoughtfully, "if we can manage it otherwise, it will be

better. You know, the woman said, that they had scraped a little together themselves. Now, my kind brothers are always willing to help me in these things; and if they will lend us a little money till the first quarter's wages are paid, we might manage the business."

"But will there be time to have the things made?" said Sarah. "They must be done in three days, you know."

"True," said Margaret. "Let us turn back directly, and see what my brothers can do; and if they will help us, we will set to work directly ourselves, and, with Betsy's help, and her mother's and sister's, they can be done, I should think."

They walked quickly home; and Margaret's brothers, who were very fond of her, and had great confidence in her prudence, too, about matters like this, readily promised the help she wanted. They could not afford to give so much money, but they

thought they could *lend* it, without any further inconvenience than a little self-denial, which they had been long accustomed to practise.

It was soon settled with the cottagers what was necessary to be done, the materials bought, and all hands set to work. The clothes wanted were few and unexpensive, but they were made neat and comfortable. The lady gladly engaged Betsy when the first objection was removed, and the cottage family was made very happy, and still more grateful, by the exertions of Sarah and Margaret.

Sarah *did* find time for this work of benevolence. She rose two hours earlier for those three days; and Margaret agreed, as they were so pressed for time, to give up their daily walks. "In a common case," she said, "I would rather not make a sacrifice of what is so good for health and spirits as a daily walk, but for once we must."

Margaret's little sisters worked too, though they could not do a great deal; and Mrs. Brunton found time in the evenings to help them, and rejoiced to see how Sarah's energies were excited, and how cheerful she looked, forgetting her griefs, while tasting, for the first time, the pleasures of active benevolence. She was a little tired before she had done her work, too, for she had been used to take up her needle more for pleasure than from necessity: but she forgot her fatigue, when she saw Betsy, neatly dressed, going to her new place.

Sarah and her cousin had walked that way in the hope of meeting her, and saying a few kind words to her before they parted. The grateful girl said many thankful words to them, and her manner shewed yet more how happy she was.

As soon as her first quarter's wages were paid, she returned to Margaret and her brothers the sum they had lent her; and

contrived, in time, not only to repay her father and mother, but to send them occasionally a little help besides.

Sarah had learned a great deal in these three days. She had learned that cheerfulness is to be found in active, benevolent employment: she had learned that the busiest may find, may almost make time for assisting those who want it: she experienced the pleasure of seeing the eyes glisten and the cheeks glow with warm welcome at her approach to the dwelling of those to whom she had been a friend in their need: and she saw, with greater pleasure than all, that she had caused much comfort and satisfaction to her mother. These pleasant feelings made her wish to repeat the exertion, and she asked Margaret's advice what to do next.

Margaret admitted her as a partner in many of her little plans; and these employments were not only pleasant at the time, but left a sweet consciousness of right

exertion behind them. She was soon convinced that she spent too much time in sleep; and, by rising an hour earlier, she was not only enabled to prepare every thing for her mother well and comfortably, but to obtain a little valuable and uninterrupted time for her new pursuits. She was rather inclined, sometimes, to neglect her less agreeable duties, and, more than once, her mother was obliged to remind her, that necessary business was not to be slighted even for works of benevolence. Sometimes, too, her old melancholy feelings returned, and, for a few hours, she would be so like what she was before the last important birth-day, that her mother feared she would relapse into her old habits. But a few hours' quiet, a conversation with her mother, a walk with Margaret, were generally able to bring her round again; and the effects of her altered temper and her increased activity were seen in her healthy cheek, her light step, and her ready smile. And not only did she become more willing to discharge her duties, but her duties them-

selves became less irksome, as habit made her more accustomed to their performance.

She felt that she ought to be improving her mind ; that her present years were very important ; and that, if not made use of, they would be lost for ever. Her mother was aware of this too, and made many efforts and many sacrifices for her improvement. She was able to teach much herself, and she allowed Sarah to learn of some masters who attended Margaret. Margaret's eldest brother, the clergyman whom I have before mentioned, was of great use to them both. He directed their studies, took great pains with them, and let them make use of his library.

Margaret, being older than Sarah, and having had more advantages, of course she was the forwarder of the two : but Sarah had excellent abilities, and could work so hard when she had sufficient motive, that she soon almost overtook her friend. But, praiseworthy as Sarah's diligence now was,

she sometimes let her spirit of emulation carry her too far;—so far, that she even lost her temper with Margaret when she could not surpass her.

In the next chapter, I will mention one instance, the last in which she was so much to blame; for she suffered too severely for it to allow herself to be so unguarded again.

CHAPTER IV.

A LARGE manufactory had been lately established in the town where they lived, and in this manufactory was some curious machinery, on a new plan. Mr. Steward thought that this would be a sight which would both amuse and improve them, and obtained permission for his sister, and Sarah, and the little ones, to see the whole process of the manufacture. He told them, that he wished them to observe particularly the construction of the machinery, that they might afterwards write an account of it, which he thought they might very well do, as he had previously given them some instruction on the subject, and would now explain whatever they did not comprehend.

They listened and observed attentively, and both took great pains to write down their account clearly and fully. Sarah, as I have said, was too apt to wish to outdo Margaret, because, though she loved her very much, her vanity made her too fond of being praised for diligence and cleverness. Her mother was that evening writing to a friend, and her letter was a very long one, so that Sarah had plenty of time for her task, and was not a little proud of what she had written.

The next morning her mother was obliged to go out rather in a hurry; and, before she went, she requested Sarah to seal up and direct her letter, and carry it to the post-office, as she went to Mr. Steward's. Just before the time that Sarah was to go to take her lesson, Margaret came in to call for her; and Sarah made haste to seal up the letter, and then put it in her pocket, and went to put on her things.

It so happened that her mother came in

again unexpectedly, while she was up stairs ; and seeing on the table a sheet of paper folded like a letter, and taking for granted that this was her own letter, she sealed and directed it ; and, as she had her bonnet on, went herself with it to the post-office.

Margaret knew nothing of all this, as she was reading in the next room till Sarah should be ready.

Sarah came down stairs, and ran into the parlour for her sheet of paper ; and, to her great surprise, could not find it. She searched every place in vain, and questioned the servant and Margaret, who could neither of them give any account of it. She still hoped that in time she might find it, and therefore she tried to overcome the ill-humour she was inclined to indulge. But when Margaret had produced her account, and when Sarah heard Mr. Steward bestow much praise upon it, and when she felt sure that hers would have won still greater praise, she could not refrain from

shedding tears of mortification. The more she gave way to them, the more her ill-humour increased; and at last she ventured to say that she believed Margaret was in possession of her paper, and had hidden it through envy.

Margaret said no more than simply to declare her innocence; and her brother, who had not for many years known her say an untruth, readily believed her. He desired Sarah to go home and try to recover herself; and he added, that he did not wish to see her there again, till she had acknowledged her injustice, and made an apology to Margaret.

When Sarah heard from her mother how all this had happened, she was indeed ashamed, and her mind was too ingenuous to suffer her to be easy while the injury was unacknowledged. She went instantly to Margaret. The apology was made and accepted in a moment, and all was soon forgotten by Margaret. But it was long

before Sarah forgot her fault, or the shame and sorrow it caused her: and this shame and sorrow were very useful in putting her on her guard very often when she was inclined to lose her temper.

Margaret was one of the teachers of a Sunday-school belonging to their parish; and Sarah, seeing the great pleasure which she derived from her office, wished also to become a teacher. Margaret never flattered Sarah; and often, when she expressed this wish, her answer was, that though the office was one of great advantage and pleasure, yet great steadiness of temper and much patience were required to do justice to the children.

“Then,” said Sarah, “I am not yet fit for it: but, dear Margaret, will you promise that, when you think me capable, you will let me join you?”

Margaret readily promised; and this was an additional motive with Sarah to improve.

She was indeed changed much in every respect, and her improvement was likely to continue; for she had powerful motives, the most powerful possible: for she had of late become much better acquainted with the Scriptures than formerly; and, to her own surprise and satisfaction, found the study of them become more interesting. She learned from them how much was expected of her. And if sometimes she felt painfully how different she was from what she ought to be, at others she was made happy by the promises there made to virtuous exertion;—an exertion she was now conscious of making. But, above all, she there found to whom, and in what manner, she was to apply for assistance in her labours to improve, and on whose blessing she might rely, if she sought His favour. She had never before felt the happiness and support of dependence upon God. The feeling of security in the unfailing care of a kind Father was almost as new as delightful to her; and she sometimes felt as if she could never be anxious or unhappy

gain, with such an invariable support. The more she felt comforts like these, the more she wished to communicate them to others younger than herself and in possession of fewer advantages. She looked forward eagerly to the time when she might be admitted among the teachers of the Sunday-school.

Many weeks thus passed away quietly and cheerfully; and the friendship of these good girls became more and more a source of pleasure to them. Mrs. Brunton recovered, in a great degree, her usual cheerfulness of spirits; and it is not to be wondered at that she did, for one of the most delightful of all satisfactions was hers,—the increasing and strengthening virtue of her child.

The time at length arrived, when Sarah's services were accepted at the school. She did not at first find so much pleasure in her employment as she had expected. As she was the last comer, she was set over

the lowest class, and, consequently, the most ignorant. The children were most of them very young; and those who were not were more troublesome still, from being more confirmed in their ignorance. Many of them were only learning their letters, and some were very slow at learning them too. Some of the youngest could scarcely be made to fix their attention at all; some were noisy and restless; and none of them seemed to take the pleasure in learning which Sarah thought every one must feel. But she did not give up in consequence of these drawbacks, but judiciously and kindly endeavoured to fix their attention, and to establish her own authority. She made it a reward for those who were industrious to hear her read some plain portion of Scripture, which she knew would interest them, and concerning which she talked to them afterwards, and induced them to ask her questions, and to say what they liked. Her little scholars soon grew fond of her, and if not as fond of their lessons, they took pains with them, and were pleased

with her approbation. The alphabet was soon learned by them all; and when once they began to read words, their progress was considerable.

When Sarah was obliged to part with the girls who had made progress enough to be admitted into the next class, she felt a high satisfaction in having assisted them over the first and most difficult part of what they had to learn. Margaret approved her method of teaching; her mother was pleased to see her employing herself so usefully; and Sarah felt very happy to be able to communicate the most important kind of knowledge, which she had had great opportunities of acquiring, and of which she daily felt the value more and more. She was conscious of learning a great deal herself also, by becoming more familiar with many passages of Scripture, and by being obliged to think much about them, in order to explain them to her scholars. She sometimes regretted that she had not more time to devote to her favou-

rite pursuits ; but it might be well for her that she had not.

In consequence of her mother's straitened circumstances, much time was of course devoted to household business, which was still very irksome to Sarah ; but if she had not been obliged to give some attention to these things, she might have become too exclusively attached to her most agreeable occupations.

By this time her fourteenth birth-day was approaching ; and different indeed was it likely to be from any former one. Her outward circumstances were much the same, it is true, as the year before ; but how changed was every thing within ! How different were her feelings at her early waking that important morning ! How earnest were her thanksgivings to that God who had been about her path and bed ! who had lifted up the light of his countenance upon her ! How affectionate was her mother's kiss that happy morning !

And how touching, and how well understood, the few tears which she shed in bestowing her blessing on her altered child!

After breakfast, Margaret and her brothers and sisters came to offer their good wishes. They were all affectionate: but there was something besides in Margaret's countenance;—an expression of pleasure and congratulation, which was understood by Sarah alone, and went to her heart.—“What a blessing,” thought she, “has the friendship of this kind and good girl been to me! What might I have now been without her? and what can I ever do to repay such friendship?”

Every thing reminded her this day of the alteration which had taken place since the last Christmas. At church she had the pleasure of seeing the attentive behaviour of her own Sunday class, and the interest they took in the beautiful service for that day. She was aware of the change

of her own feelings also in that holy place. She no longer wondered at the peace and joy of her mother's countenance; for she felt that both the weary and heavy laden may there find rest, and the peaceful and happy a higher enjoyment than any thing beside can bestow.

During the customary ramble which they all took, they met Betsy and her family, who looked comfortable and happy, as every one should on that day. Betsy had been allowed to spend a few days with her family, and they were then going to the town to call on Sarah and Margaret, to give them the pleasure of knowing that Betsy was likely to remain in her good place, and that she was happy there. Here was a high satisfaction for these good girls, fairly won by their own exertions.

It was agreed that the whole party should dine at Mr. Steward's house: and this kind friend, whom Sarah had inte-

rested much by her exertions of the past year, did every thing he could for her gratification. New plans were laid for new studies; other charitable acts were suggested, in which all might have a share; plans were arranged for more frequent walks in company, and for many pleasant things besides. Many too were the games, and various the amusements in which they all joined this evening; and Sarah felt with pleasure that she was the object of much affection, and that she had done something to deserve their love.

After their return home, Sarah and her mother sat by their fire, in cheerful conversation, for an hour before they retired to rest.

“Do you remember, Sarah,” said Mrs. Brunton, “what were the last words I said to you this day twelvemonth? Did not I prophesy truly? Are you not improved and happy?”

“O yes!” said Sarah, “you were right, though I saw so little prospect of happiness at that time, that I could not believe you. I am indeed happy,” she continued, “more so than I ever was before, even in our sweet home, and with my dear father. But it does grieve me sometimes to think what he must have felt for me; so many fears, so many anxieties he must have had! And he was taken from us too before I was able to shew my affection for him in a way which only could gratify his pious heart.”

“Do not grieve for that,” said her mother; “you were young, and too little controlled. You always shewed that you felt much affection for a parent who deserved all that the most dutiful child could give. And, remember, my dear, that the time may come, *will* come, I trust, when you will meet again; and he may then rejoice in the child whom he so affectionately loved. You may have many years before you, and I hope the

improvement of the past year has shewn you what may be done by virtuous exertion."

"And by the assistance of friends, such as I am blessed with," exclaimed Sarah. "Do not praise me, my dear mother; for what has been done is your work and Margaret's, with the blessing of God, and not mine."

"It is indeed by God's blessing, my love. His blessing is indeed every thing to us. We are now, in the eyes of the world, circumstanced exactly as we were last year; but how great is the difference within! As for future years, let us look forward with hope, and without anxiety. Whether our outward situation be prosperous or not, we may always be happy in dependence on an unchanging Friend: and to His care, my dear child, I, with perfect confidence, commend you."

We will here bid adieu, for the present,

to this mother and daughter. If this account of the friendship of Sarah and Margaret should be found to interest those for whom it was intended, they may, perhaps, hear more concerning the Friends hereafter.

FINIS.

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