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LITTLE NETTIE; OR, HOME SUNSHINE

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Little Nettie; or, Home Sunshine:

Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
SATURDAY EVENING'S WORK

"Tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother."—Prov. iv. 3.

Down in a little hollow, with the sides grown full of wild thorn, alder bushes, and stunted cedars, ran the stream of a clear spring. It ran over a bed of pebbly stones, showing every one, as if there had been no water there, so clear it was; and it ran with a sweet soft murmur or gurgle over the stones, as if singing to itself and the bushes as it ran.

On one side of the little stream a worn footpath took its course among the bushes; and down this path, one summer's afternoon, came a woman and a girl. They had pails to fill at the spring: the woman had a large wooden one and the girl a light tin pail; and they drew the water with a little tin dipper, for it was not deep enough to let a pail be used for that. The pails were filled in silence, only the spring always was singing; and the woman and girl turned and went up the path again. After getting up the bank, which was only a few feet, the path still went gently rising through a wild bit of ground, full of trees and low bushes; and not far off, through the trees, there came a gleam of bright light from the window of a house on which the setting sun was shining. Half-way to the house the girl and the woman stopped to rest;

for water is heavy, and the tin pail, which was so light before it was filled, had made the little girl's figure bend over to one side like a willow branch all the way from the spring. They stopped to rest, and even the woman had a very weary, jaded look.

"I feel as if I shall give up some of these days," she exclaimed.

"Oh, no, mother!" the little girl answered, cheerfully. She was panting, with her hand on her side, and her face had a quiet, very sober look; only at those words a little pleasant smile broke over it.

"I shall," said the woman. "One can't stand everything,—for ever."

The little girl had not got over panting yet, but standing there, she struck up the sweet air and words,—

> "'There is rest for the weary,
> There is rest for the weary,
> There is rest for the weary,
> There is rest for you.'"

"Yes, in the grave!" said the woman bitterly. "There's no rest short of that—for mind or body."

"Oh, yes, mother dear. 'For we which have believed do enter into rest.' The Lord Jesus don't make us wait."

"I believe you eat the Bible and sleep on the Bible," said the woman, with a faint smile, taking at the same time a corner of her apron to wipe away a stray tear which had gathered in her eye. "I am glad it rests you, Nettie."

"And you, mother."

"Sometimes," Mrs. Mathieson answered with a sigh. "But there's your father going to bring home a boarder, Nettie."

"A boarder, mother!—What for?"

"Heaven knows!—if it isn't to break my back and my heart together. I thought I had enough to manage before, but here's this man coming, and I've got to get everything ready for him by to-morrow night."

"Who is it, mother?"

"It's one of your father's friends; so it's no good," said Mrs. Mathieson.

"But where can he sleep?" Nettie asked, after a moment of thinking.

Her mother paused.

"There's no room but yours he can have. Barry won't be moved."

"Where shall I sleep, mother?"

"There's no place but up in the attic. I'll see what I can do to fit up a corner for you—if I ever can get time," said Mrs. Mathieson, taking up her pail. Nettie followed her example, and certainly did not smile again till they reached the house. They went round to the front door, because the back door belonged to another family. At the door, as they set down their pails again before mounting the stairs, Nettie smiled at her mother very placidly, and said,

"Don't you go to fit up the attic, mother; I'll see to it in time. I can do it just as well."

Mrs. Mathieson made no answer, but groaned internally, and they went up the flight of steps which led to their part of the house. The ground floor was occupied by somebody else. A little entry-way received the wooden pail of water, and with the tin one Nettie went into the room used by the family. It was her father and mother's sleeping-room, their bed standing in one corner. It was the kitchen apparently, for a small cooking-stove was there, on which Nettie put the tea-kettle when she had filled it. And it was the common living-room also; for the next thing she did was to open a cupboard and take out cups and saucers, and arrange them on a leaf table which stood toward one end of the room. The furniture was wooden and plain; the woodwork of the windows was unpainted; the cups and plates were of the commonest kind; and the floor had no covering but two strips of rag carpeting; nevertheless the whole was tidy and very clean, showing constant care. Mrs. Mathieson had sunk into a chair as one who had no spirit to do anything, and watched her little daughter setting the table with eyes which seemed not to see her. They gazed inwardly at something she was thinking of.

"Mother, what is there for supper?"

"There is nothing. I must make some porridge." And Mrs. Mathieson got up from her chair.

"Sit you still, mother, and I'll make it. I can."

"If both our backs are to be broken," said Mrs. Mathieson, "I'd rather mine would break first." And she went on with her preparations.

"But you don't like porridge," said Nettie. "You didn't eat anything last night."

"That's nothing, child. I can bear an empty stomach, if only my brain wasn't quite so full."

Nettie drew near the stove and looked on, a little sorrowfully.

"I wish you had something you liked, mother! If only I was a little older, wouldn't it be nice? I could earn something then, and I would bring you home things that you liked out of my own money."

This was not said sorrowfully, but with a bright gleam as of some fancied and pleasant possibility. The gleam was so catching, Mrs. Mathieson turned from her porridge-pot, which she was stirring, to give a very heartfelt kiss to Nettie's lips; then she stirred on, and the shadow came over her face again.

"Dear," she said, "just go in Barry's room and straighten it up a little before he comes in—will you? I haven't had a minute to do it, all day; and there won't be a bit of peace if he comes in and it isn't in order."

Nettie turned and opened another door, which let her into a small chamber used as somebody's bed-room. It was all brown like the other, a strip of the same carpet in the middle of the floor, and a small cheap chest of drawers, and a table. The bed had not been made up, and the tossed condition of the bed-clothes spoke for the strength and energy of the person that used them, whoever he was. A pair of coarse shoes were in the middle of the whole; another pair, or rather a pair of half-boots, out

at the toes, were in the middle of the floor; stockings,—one under the bed and one under the table. On the table was a heap of confusion; and on the little bureau were to be seen pieces of wood, half-cut and uncut, with shavings, and the knife and saw that had made them. Old newspapers, and school-books, and a slate, and two kites, with no end of tails, were lying over every part of the room that happened to be convenient; also an ink-bottle and pens, with chalk and resin and a medley of unimaginable things beside, that only boys can collect together and find delight in. If Nettie sighed as all this hurly-burly met her eye, it was only an internal sigh. She set about patiently bringing things to order. First she made the bed, which it took all her strength to do, for the coverlets were of a very heavy and coarse manufacture of cotton and woollen mixed, blue and white; and then gradually she found a way to bestow the various articles in Barry's apartment, so that things looked neat and comfortable. But perhaps it was a little bit of a sign of Nettie's feelings, that she began softly to sing to herself,—

"'There is rest for the weary.'"

"Hallo!" burst in a rude boy of some fifteen years, opening the door from the entry,—"who's puttin' my room to rights?"

A very gentle voice said, "I've done it, Barry."

"What have you done with that pine log?"

"Here it is,—in the corner behind the bureau."

"Don't you touch it, now, to take it for your fire,—mind, Nettie! Where's my kite?"

"You won't have time to fly it now, Barry; supper will be ready in two minutes."

"What have you got?"

"The same kind we had last night."

"*I* don't care for supper." Barry was getting the tail of his kite together.

"But please, Barry, come now; because it will give mother so much more trouble if you don't. She has the things to clear away after you're done, you know."

"Trouble! so much talk about trouble! *I* don't mind trouble. I don't want any supper, I tell you."

Nettie knew well enough he would want it by-and-bye, but there was no use in saying anything more, and she said nothing. Barry got his kite together and went off. Then came a heavier step on the stairs, which she knew; and she hastily went into the other room to see that all was ready. The tea was made, and Mrs. Mathieson put the smoking dish of porridge on the table, just as the door opened and a man came in—a tall, burly, strong man, with a face that would have been a good face enough if its expression had been different and if its hue had not been that of a purplish-red flush. He came to the table and silently sat down as he took a survey of what was on it.

"Give me a cup of tea! Have you got no bread, Sophia?"

"Nothing but what you see. I hoped you would bring home

some money, Mr. Mathieson. I have neither milk nor bread; it's a mercy there's sugar. I don't know what you expect a lodger to live on."

"Live on his board,—that'll give you enough. But you want something to begin with. I'd go out and get one or two things—but I'm so confoundedly tired, I can't."

Mrs. Mathieson, without a word, put on a shawl and went to the closet for her bonnet.

"I'll go, mother! Let me go, please. I want to go," exclaimed Nettie, eagerly. "I can get it. What shall I get, father?"

Slowly and wearied ly the mother laid off her things; as quickly the child put hers on.

"What shall I get, father?"

"Well, you can go down the street to Jackson's, and get what your mother wants: some milk and bread; and then you'd better fetch seven pounds of meal and a quart of treacle. And ask him to give you a nice piece of pork out of his barrel."

"She can't bring all that!" exclaimed the mother; "you'd better go yourself, Mr. Mathieson. That would be a great deal more than the child can carry, or I either."

"Then I'll go twice, mother: it isn't far; I'd like to go. I'll get it. Please give me the money, father."

He cursed and swore at her for answer. "Go along, and do as you are bid, without all this chaffering! Go to Jackson's, and tell him you want the things, and I'll give him the money to-morrow. He knows me."

Nettie knew he did, and stood her ground.

Her father was just enough in liquor to be a little thick-headed and foolish.

"You know I can't go without the money, father," she said, gently; "and to-morrow is Sunday."

He cursed Sunday and swore again, but finally put his hand in his pocket and threw some money across the table to her. He was just in a state not to be careful what he did, and he threw her crown-pieces where, if he had been quite himself, he would have given shillings. Nettie took them without any remark, and her basket, and went out.

It was just sundown. The village lay glittering in the light that would be gone in a few minutes; and up on the hill the white church, standing high, showed all bright in the sun-beams, from its sparkling vane at the top of the spire down to the lowest step at the door. Nettie's home was in a branch road, a few steps from the main street of the village, that led up to the church at one end of it. All along that street the sunlight lay, on the grass, and the roadway, and the side-walks, and the tops of a few elm trees. The street was empty; it was most people's supper-time. Nettie turned the corner and went down the village. She went slowly: her little feet were already tired with the work they had done that day, and back and arms and head all seemed tired too. But Nettie never thought it hard that her mother did not go instead of letting her go; she knew her mother could not bear to be seen in the village in the old shabby gown and shawl she wore; for Mrs.

Mathieson had seen better days. And besides that, she would be busy enough as it was, and till a late hour, this Saturday night. Nettie's gown was shabby too—yes, very shabby, compared with that almost every other child in the village wore; yet somehow Nettie was not ashamed. She did not think of it now, as her slow steps took her down the village street; she was thinking what she should do about the money. Her father had given her two or three times as much, she knew, as he meant her to spend; he was a good workman, and had just got in his week's wages. What should Nettie do? Might she keep and give to her mother what was over? it was, and would be, so much wanted! and from her father they could never get it again. He had his own ways of disposing of what he earned, and very little indeed went to the wants of his wife and daughter. What might Nettie do! She pondered, swinging her basket in her hand, till she reached a corner where the village street turned off again, and where the store of Mr. Jackson stood. There she found Barry bargaining for some things he at least had money for.

"Oh, Barry, how good!" exclaimed Nettie; "you can help me carry my things home."

"I'll know the reason first, though," answered Barry. "What are you going to get?"

"Father wants a bag of corn-meal, and a piece of pork, and some treacle; and you know I can't carry them all, Barry. I've got to get bread and milk besides."

"Hurrah!" said Barry; "now we'll have fried cakes! I'll tell you

what I'll do, Nettie—I'll take home the treacle, if you'll make me some to-night for supper."

"Oh, I can't, Barry! I've got so much else to do, and it's Saturday night."

"Very good—get your things home yourself, then."

Barry turned away, and Nettie made her bargains. He still stood by, however, and watched her. When the pork and the meal and the treacle were bestowed in the basket, it was so heavy she could not manage to carry it. How many journeys to and fro would it cost her?

"Barry," she said, "you take this home for me, and if mother says so, I'll make you the cakes."

"Be quick, then," said her brother, shouldering the basket, "for I'm getting hungry."

Nettie went a few steps farther on the main road of the village, which was little besides one long street, and not very long either, and went in at the door of a very little dwelling, neat and tidy like all the rest. It admitted her to the tiniest morsel of a shop—at least there was a long table there which seemed to do duty as a counter; and before, not behind it, sat a spruce little woman sewing. She jumped up as Nettie entered. By the becoming smartness of her calico dress and white collar, the beautiful order of her hair, and a certain peculiarity of feature, you might know before she spoke that the little baker was a Frenchwoman. She spoke English quite well, but rather slowly.

"I want two loaves of bread, Mrs. August, and a pint of milk,

if you please."

"How will you carry them, my child? you cannot take them all at the time."

"Oh yes, I can," said Nettie, cheerfully. "I can manage. They are not heavy."

"No, I hope not," said the Frenchwoman; "it is not heavy, my bread! but two loaves are not one, no more. Is your mother well?"

She then set busily about wrapping the loaves in paper and measuring out the milk. Nettie answered, her mother was well.

"And you?" said the little woman, looking at her sideways. "Somebody is tired this evening."

"Yes," said Nettie, brightly; "but I don't mind. One must be tired sometimes. Thank you, ma'am."

The woman had put the loaves and the milk carefully in her arms and in her hands, so that she could carry them, and looked after her as she went up the street.

"One must be tired sometimes!" said she to herself, with a turn of her capable little head. "I should like to hear her say 'One must be rested sometimes;' but I do not hear that."

So perhaps Nettie thought, as she went homeward. It would have been very natural. Now the sun was down, the bright gleam was off the village; the soft shades of evening were gathering, and lights twinkled in windows. Nettie walked very slowly, her arms full of the bread. Perhaps she wished her Saturday's work was all done, like other people's. All I can tell you is, that as she went along through the quiet deserted street, all alone, she broke

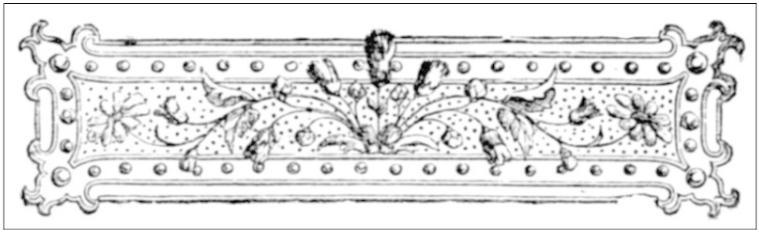
out softly singing to herself the words,—

> "No need of the sun in that day
> Which never is followed by night;"

and that when she got home she ran upstairs quite briskly, and came in with a very placid face, and told her mother she had had a pleasant walk—which was perfectly true.

"God bless you, child!" said her mother; "you are the very rose of my heart!"

There was only time for this little dialogue, for which Mr. Mathieson's slumbers had given a chance. But then Barry entered, and noisily claimed Nettie's promise. And without a cloud crossing her sweet brow, she made the cakes, and baked them on the stove, and served Barry until he had enough; nor ever said how weary she was of being on her feet. There were more cakes left, and Mrs. Mathieson saw to it that Nettie sat down and ate them; and then sent her off to bed, without suffering her to do anything more; though Nettie pleaded to be allowed to clear away the dishes. Mrs. Mathieson did that, and then sat down to darns and patches on various articles of clothing, till the old clock of the church on the hill tolled out solemnly the hour of twelve all over the village.



CHAPTER II.
SUNDAY'S REST

"This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."—Psalm cxviii, 24.

Nettie's room was the only room on that floor besides her mother's and Barry's. It was at the back of the house, with a pleasant look-out over the trees and bushes between it and the spring. Over these the view went to distant hills and fields, that always looked pretty in all sorts of lights, Nettie thought. Besides that, it was a clean, neat little room; bare, to be sure, without even Barry's strip of rag carpet; but on a little black table lay Nettie's Bible and Sunday-school books; and each window had a chair; and a chest of drawers held all her little wardrobe and a great deal of room to spare besides; and the cot-bed in one corner was nicely made up. It was a very comfortable-looking room to Nettie.

"So this is the last night I shall sleep here!" she thought as she went in. "To-morrow I must go up to the attic. Well, I can pray there just the same; and God will be with me there just the same."

It was a comfort; but it was the only one Nettie could think of in connection with her removal. The attic was no room, but only a little garret used as a lumber-place; not boarded up nor plastered at all; nothing but the beams and the side boarding for the walls, and nothing but the rafters and the shingles between it and the

sky. Besides which, it was full of lumber of one sort and another. How Nettie was to move up there the next day, being Sunday, she could not imagine; but she was so tired that as soon as her head touched her pillow she fell asleep, and forgot to think about it.

The next thing was the bright morning light rousing her, and the joyful thought that it was Sunday morning. A beautiful day it was. The eastern light was shining over upon Nettie's distant hills with all sorts of fresh, lovely colours, and promise of what the coming hours would bring. Nettie looked at them lovingly, for she was very fond of them, and had a great many thoughts about those hills. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people;"—that was one thing they made her think of. She thought of it now as she was dressing, and it gave her the feeling of being surrounded with a mighty and strong protection on every side. It made Nettie's heart curiously glad, and her tongue speak joyful things; for when she knelt down to pray she was full of thanksgiving.

The next thing was that, taking her tin pail, Nettie set off down to the spring to get water to boil her kettle. It was so sweet and pleasant—no other spring could supply nicer water. The dew brushed from the bushes and grass as she went by; and from every green thing there went up a fresh dewy smell, that was reviving. The breath of the summer wind, moving gently, touched her cheek and fluttered her hair, and said God had given a beautiful day to the world; and Nettie thanked Him in her heart, and went on rejoicing. Sunday was Nettie's holiday, and Sunday school and

church were her delight. And though she went in all weathers, and nothing would keep her, yet sunshine is sunshine, and she felt so this morning. So she gaily filled her pail at the spring and trudged back with it to the house. The next thing was to tap at her mother's door.

Mrs. Mathieson opened it, in her night-gown; she was just up, and looked as if her night's sleep had been all too short for her.

"Why, Nettie! is it late?" she said, as Nettie and the tin pail came in.

"No, mother; it's just good time. You get dressed, and I'll make the fire ready. It's beautiful out, mother!"

Mrs. Mathieson made no answer, and Nettie went to work with the fire. It was an easy matter to put in some paper and kindle the light wood; and when the kettle was on, Nettie went round the room, softly setting it to rights as well as she could; then glanced at her father, still sleeping.

"I can't set the table yet, mother."

"No, child; go off, and I'll see to the rest.—If I can get folks up, at least," said Mrs. Mathieson, somewhat despondingly.

Sunday morning that was a doubtful business, she and Nettie knew. Nettie went to her own room to carry out a plan she had. If she could manage to get her things conveyed up to the attic without her mother knowing it, just so much labour and trouble would be spared her, and her mother might have a better chance of some rest that day. Little enough, with a lodger coming that evening! To get her things up there,—that was all Nettie would

do to-day; but that must be done. The steep stairs to the attic went up from the entry-way, just outside of Nettie's door. She went up the first time to see what room there was to bestow anything.

The little garret was strewn all over with things carelessly thrown in merely to get them out of the way. There was a small shutter window in each gable. One was open, just revealing the utter confusion, but half showing the dust that lay on everything. The other window, the back one, was fairly shut up by a great heap of boxes and barrels piled against it. In no part was there a clear space or a hopeful opening. Nettie stood aghast for some moments, not knowing what to do. "But if I don't, mother will have to do it," she thought. It nerved her little arm, and one thought of her invisible Protector nerved her heart, which had sunk at first coming up. Softly she moved and began her operations, lest her mother downstairs should hear and find out what she was about before it was done. Sunday too! But there was no help for it.

Notwithstanding the pile of boxes, she resolved to begin at the end with the closed window; for near the other there were things she could not move: an old stove, a wheelbarrow, a box of heavy iron tools, and some bags of charcoal, and other matters. By a little pushing and coaxing, Nettie made a place for the boxes, and then began her task of removing them. One by one, painfully, for some were unwieldy and some were weighty, they travelled across in Nettie's arms, or were shoved and turned over and across the floor, from the window to a snug position under

the eaves, where she stowed them. Barry would have been a good hand at this business, not to speak of his father; but Nettie knew there was no help to be expected from either of them, and the very thought of them did not come into her head. Mr. Mathieson, provided he worked at his trade, thought the "women folks" might look after the house; Barry considered that when he had got through the heavy labours of school, he had done his part of the world's work. So Nettie toiled on with her boxes and barrels. They scratched her arms; they covered her clean face with dust; they tried her strength; but every effort saved one to her mother, and Nettie never stopped except to gather breath and rest.

The last thing of all under the window was a great old chest. Nettie could not move it, and she thought it might stay there very conveniently for a seat. All the rest of the pile she cleared away, and then opened the window. There was no sash—nothing but a wooden shutter fastened with a hook. Nettie threw it open. There, to her great joy, behold, she had the very same view of her hills, all shining in the sun now. Only this window was higher than her old one and lifted her up more above the tops of the trees, and gave a better and clearer and wider view of the distant open country she liked so much. Nettie was greatly delighted, and refreshed herself with a good look out and a breath of fresh air before she began her labours again. That gave the dust a little chance to settle too.

There was a good deal to do yet before she could have a place

clear for her bed, not to speak of anything more. However, it was done at last, the floor brushed up, all ready, and the top of the chest wiped clean; and next Nettie set about bringing all her things up the stairs and setting them here, where she could. Her clothes, her little bit of a looking-glass, her Bible and books and slate, even her little washstand, she managed to lug up to the attic, with many a journey and much pains. But it was about done before her mother called her to breakfast. The two lagging members of the family had been roused at last, and were seated at the table.

"Why, what have you been doing, child? how you look!" said Mrs. Mathieson.

"How do I look?" said Nettie.

"Queer enough," said her father.

Nettie laughed, and hastened to another subject: she knew if they got upon this there would be some disagreeable words before it was over. She had made up her mind what to do, and now handed her father the money remaining from her purchases.

"You gave me too much, father, last night," she said, simply; "here is the rest."

Mr. Mathieson took it and looked at it.

"Did I give you all this?"

"Yes, father."

"Did you pay for what you got, besides?"

"Yes."

He muttered something which was very like an oath in his

throat, and looked at his little daughter, who was quietly eating her breakfast. Something touched him unwontedly.

"You're an honest little girl," he said. "There! you may have that for yourself." And he tossed her a shilling.

You could see, by a little streak of pink colour down each of Nettie's cheeks, that some great thought of pleasure had started into her mind. "For myself, father?" she repeated.

"All for yourself," said Mr. Mathieson, buttoning up his money with a very satisfied air.

Nettie said no more, only ate her breakfast a little quicker after that. It was time, too; for the late hours of some of the family always made her in a hurry about getting to Sunday school; and the minute Nettie had done, she got her bonnet—her Sunday bonnet—the best she had to wear—and set off. Mrs. Mathieson never let her wait for anything at home *that* morning.

This was Nettie's happy time. It never troubled her that she had nothing but a sun-bonnet of white muslin, nicely starched and ironed, while almost all the other girls that came to the school had little straw bonnets trimmed with blue and pink, and yellow and green ribbons; and some of them wore silk bonnets. Nettie did not even think of it; she loved her Sunday lesson, and her Bible, and her teacher, so much; and it was such a pleasant time when she went to enjoy them all together. It was only a little way she had to go, for the road where Mrs. Mathieson lived, after running down a little farther from the village, met another road which turned right up the hill to the church; or Nettie could take

the other way, to the main village street, and straight up that. Generally she chose the forked way, because it was the emptiest.

Nettie's class in the Sunday school was of ten little girls about her own age; and their teacher was a very pleasant and kind gentleman, named Mr. Folke. Nettie loved him dearly; she would do anything that Mr. Folke told her to do. Their teacher was very apt to give the children a question to answer from the Bible, for which they had to look out texts during the week. This week the question was, "Who are happy?" and Nettie was very eager to know what answers the other girls would bring. She was in good time, and sat resting and watching the boys and girls and teachers as they came in, before the school began. She was first there of all her class; and she watched so eagerly to see those who were coming, that she did not know Mr. Folke was near till he spoke to her. Nettie started and turned.

"How do you do?" said her teacher, kindly. "Are you quite well, Nettie, this morning?" For he thought she looked pale and tired. But her face coloured with pleasure, and a smile shone all over it, as she told him she was very well.

"Have you found out who are the happy people, Nettie?"

"Yes, Mr. Folke; I have found a verse. But I knew before."

"I thought you did. Who are they, Nettie?"

"Those who love Jesus, sir."

"Ay. In the Christian armour, you know, the feet are 'shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.' With the love of Jesus in our hearts, our feet can go over rough ways and hardly

feel that they are rough. Do you find it so?"

"Oh yes, sir!"

He said no more, for others of the class now came up; and Nettie wondered how he knew, or if he knew, that she had a rough way to go over. But his words were a help and comfort to her. So was the whole lesson that day. The verses about the happy people were beautiful. The seven girls who sat on one side of Nettie repeated the blessings told of in the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, about the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers. Then came Nettie's verse. It was this:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.