DOTEN LIZZIE

HESPER, THE HOME-SPIRIT

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Содержание

Elizabeth Doten
Hesper, the Home-Spirit / A simple story of household labor and love

PREFACE

In pursuance of one leading idea, has this little work been written: – that of giving to true merit its due. The world is ever ready to celebrate the achievements of its conquering heroes, who, according to the conceptions of mankind, are noble and great, but the patient, persevering heroism of those in humble life, who struggle hard and suffer long, is passed by unnoticed. Many such there are who bear their cross of suffering in silence, and go down to the grave with their hard fought battles and moral victories unhonored and unsung. God and his angels alone take cognizance of such, or it may be, some soul who has known a life experience, sends out a warmly gushing fount of sympathy, to cheer these lone wanderers upon their way. It is not the great and overwhelming sorrows of existence, but the petty, inglorious vexations of daily life, that most severely test the soul's energies. They who can meet such trials with patience and firmness, gradually obtain the mastery, not only over circumstances, but also over themselves and others. It is one of the eternal laws of God that thus it shall be, and sure it is in its fulfilment, as the promise of his word. One thing only is needful for a complete and glorious victory, and that is "the love that never faileth," "that seeketh not its own, but another's good." The working of especial wonders and miracles, the dazzling manifestations of genius, and the great intellectual attainments which cause the world to wonder and admire, belong only to the few, but the power to love is a gift for all, from the highest to the lowest, and the one thing needful is what all may obtain. Mankind, however, are not content with what is so common, but are continually gazing upward for some more glorious manifestation of the Holy Spirit, but not till the "Angels in the House" and "The Home Spirits" are fully known and appreciated, will the celestial beings unveil their lovely countenances and walk with man as of old. When human hearts have learned to live and love aright, then will "the kingdom come." By love alone shall the world become regenerate and redeemed. God speed the day then, when its reign shall be universal and all the nations of the earth shall acknowledge its sway!

E. D.
Plymouth, December, 1858.

"Grant me, O God, a high soft star to be
Calm, still, and bright, to trace my way in heaven,
And shed my light o'er life's tempestuous sea,
While human hearts, like fragile barks are driven
'Mid rocks and hidden shoals.
A soul 'mid glorious souls —
A small, pure star within the glittering band
That high above the clouds, undimmed and grand,
In placid beauty rolls,
To herald on the weary to the land
Where all is rest and peace; to guide the way
To Heaven's unclouded day!"

S. C. E. M.

CHAPTER I.
A WELCOME VISITOR

It was a cool, clear, autumn evening, and the full harvest-moon was pouring down a flood of mellow light upon the hills and vallies, when the worthy Mr. Byers emerged from the village post-office, and made his way as fast as his age and corpulence would permit, in the direction of "Locust Cottage." This was a small, low, red farmhouse, situated in a green nook of the hills, and at present, owned and occupied solely by an excellent quaker lady, widely known as Aunt Nyna. Mr. Byers was evidently in haste, but his progress though labored, was not rapid. His short, thick legs, did not allow of very extended strides, and he went puffing and blowing at every few steps, like a locomotive. The way was, however, in reality, long, and it was with no small satisfaction, after some fifteen or twenty minutes toilsome walk, that he saw a bright light glimmering through the branches of the locusts, from the cottage windows. Pausing one moment to take breath, before entering the green lane which led directly to the cottage, he drew a letter from his pocket, and scrutinized it closely in the moonlight.

"That is certainly from over sea," he muttered to himself, "and just the one she wanted. Lord bless her! how glad she will be!"

Returning it to his pocket again with a smile of the greatest satisfaction, he continued on his way. Instead of entering the cottage at once, as might have been expected after such a hasty walk, he lingered a few moments without. Stealing cautiously beneath one of the low front windows, he drew aside the sweet-brier that shaded it, and looked into the room.

Aunt Nyna sat by her cheerful fire, reading from a large, old-fashioned book, which lay open on the stand before her. The house dog dozed in the chimney corner, the tea kettle was singing on the crane, and the little canary was fast asleep with his head beneath his wing. No sound broke the silence save the monotonous tick of the old clock, faithfully numbering the moments, which to one heart at least were full of blessing. Unconscious that any save the All-seeing Eye was upon her, the good lady read on, until the white muslin handkerchief folded so neatly on her bosom was stirred with emotion, and raising her spectacles upon her forehead, she wiped the tears from her eyes.

"Shedding tears," muttered Mr. Byers. "Right fortunate is it that I'm not there, for it makes a complete simpleton of me to see a woman weep. May be though she is thinking about him, and wonders why he doesn't write. I declare it is a shame to keep her in suspense another moment," and he entered without further delay.

"Good evening, Mrs. Dorothy;" he said with a friendly familiarity.

"Good evening Mr. Byers. I am right glad to see thee, for it is a long time since I beheld the light of thy countenance. Where hast thee been so long?"

"O, all about in spots, and nowhere in particular," replied the old gentleman, as he took his seat in the capacious armchair which was placed for him, and removing his hat wiped the perspiration from his shining crown. "I just thought, Mrs. Dorothy, as it was so pleasant to-night, that I would call over and inquire if you had heard anything from Harry since he left? Let's see – its full three months now, I believe."

"Not one word as yet, Mr. Byers," replied the good lady sorrowfully, "and verily I had no right to expect it before now. I had surely hoped though that thee hadst brought me somewhat. Yet I see I must wait a little longer."

"Yes, Mrs. Dorothy, *a little longer*." There was a merry twinkle in the old man's eye as he spoke, and his hand moved nervously in his coat-pocket, but he looked up quickly at the row of crooked-necked squashes hanging along the wall, and at the bright pewter platters upon the dresser, and composed himself. "I declare, Mrs. Dorothy," he continued, "how snug and comfortable you look here! I like to see a home that *is* a home, though I haven't lived in one for many a year. When my

Hannah was alive I knew what true enjoyment was – but," he added, with solemn earnestness – "as the poet says, 'Now she's dead, and that's all over.'" "Ah me," replied the good lady with a sigh, "what a difference it makes to the whole of life when one we love is taken from us! There's a shadow on everything ever afterwards. I remember when my poor dear husband died I felt – " Here she hesitated, and drew her handkerchief from the black silk bag which lay on the table.

"Mrs. Dorothy," said Mr. Byers, hastily, as he reached for his hat, "are you about to shed tears?"

"Nay, friend, nay," she replied, calmly, and wiping her nose leisurely, she returned the handkerchief to its place. "I was only about to say, that after Mr. Nyna died, I felt that although I would gladly have laid down in the grave with him, that I must live for Harry's sake, and so I lived."

"A very wise conclusion, Mrs. Dorothy, yet one that cannot be successfully carried out under all circumstances."

"Ay, verily, friend; one must needs die at some time. As I was saying, I have lived from that day to this, and I have done all in my power to train up that dear child in the way in which he should go."

"And I have no doubt but what he will 'go it,' Mrs. Dorothy," replied the old gentleman, with the merry twinkle in his eye again. "That is to say, I have no doubt he will continue in the way which you have pointed out to him."

"Verily, I am of that mind myself, Mr. Byers, for he is a good child, and it was no slight trial to part with him." Here her voice became choked.

"He was very helpful to me, and the only company I had." She stretched out her hand again for her handkerchief, and Mr. Byers made a simultaneous movement for his hat. Then, as if by mutual and silent understanding, they both withdrew their hands, and the good lady resumed her knitting.

"I only hope and pray," she continued, "that he may not fall into bad company and evil ways. Verily, it would be much better, Mr. Byers, to hear that he was dead."

"Very much, Mrs. Dorothy."

"But O! to think of such a dreadful thing as hearing of his death!" and there was an obvious tremor in her voice, highly suggestive of tears. She winked and swallowed hard, however, and continued —

"I read my Bible often, Mr. Byers, and – " Here she made a significant pause.

"Yes, yes," said the old gentleman nervously, as he seized the open volume from the stand; "I have no doubt you do. Let's see, where is it, and what is it about?" He drew his time-worn spectacle case from his pocket, and taking out the big, clumsily-bowed glasses, placed them upon his nose.

"It's what the Apostle says about charity, Mr. Byers, and I should think by the way it reads that it was a very good thing."

"Excellent! Excellent, Mrs. Dorothy, when taken in its right sense; for look you, my good woman – " Here Mr. Byers extended his right hand, with the fore finger up, and regarded his auditor over his spectacles with a look of profound wisdom – "it's *love* the apostle means – love of the first quality. A kind of love, Mrs. Dorothy, that won't give up, not break down, nor back out, however much it gets – gets snubbed – excuse the word – or pestered, or imposed upon; but like gutta percha, can be crowded into a very small space, or drawn out to any extent without snapping asunder. It's the very cream of life, Mrs. Dorothy, mingled in with honey and the otto of roses, and we should all be brute beasts without it."

"Yea, verily," responded the good lady, with great earnestness.

"And I can truly say, Mrs. Dorothy, that if these words were all that my Bible contained, I would not part with it for the wealth of the Indies; for is it not a comfort, in this crooked and cross-grained world, to find something that will not fail us? We can't all be Daniels or Isaiahs, or have the wisdom of Solomon or Paul, but the simplest one among us knows how to love. Prophecies shall fail, and knowledge vanish away, but charity *never* faileth. Mrs. Dorothy, I'll thank you for a glass of water." No sooner had the good lady arisen to comply with her visitor's request, than Mr. Byers

drew the letter from his pocket, slipped it between the leaves of the Bible at his favorite chapter, and closing the volume, laid it upon the table.

"Thank you, Mrs. Dorothy. It is not often that I preach a sermon, but when I do, it is because the spirit moves me, as your people say, and this portion of Scripture in particular, always loosens my tongue and puts words into my mouth, whenever I am reminded of it. I would not like to intrude anything more upon your notice at present, but I do wish, my good woman, that after I am gone, you would look at the preceding chapter, and see what an excellent preface it forms to the Apostle's remarks on charity." Mrs. Dorothy reached immediately for the volume, but Mr. Byers laid his hand upon it.

"Not now, if you please. The Apostle first goes on at some length to speak of the supernatural powers and miraculous gifts of the times, which caused the whole world to wonder, and exalted those who were thus favored, almost to the rank of gods. Yet, even while confessing that such things were by all means desirable, and to be sought after most diligently, he says, 'Covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet show I unto you *a more excellent way*.' Then he goes on at once to his unequalled discourse on charity – a simple thing in itself, which you, and I, and the smallest child among us can possess if we will, and which shall make us of more worth in the eyes of God and his angels, than all the professors and doctors, and wonder-workers, that the world ever knew. It is beautiful, Mrs. Dorothy! beautiful!" and the enthusiastic old man rubbed his hands together, with an expression of great inward satisfaction, as he rose to depart.

"I must go now," he continued, glancing at the clock, "for it is about eight, and I have several more calls to make. Doubtless you will hear from Harry before long, so don't be discouraged. Meanwhile, read your Bible and trust in the Lord, and above all things, don't forget to look this very night at the chapter which I mentioned. You will find something there worth thinking about, and excellent to sleep upon."

"Yea, verily, I will, friend," replied the good lady, "and I thank thee much, also, for thy pleasant discourse, although my disappointment at not hearing from Harry has somewhat troubled and confused me."

"And what would you have done, Mrs. Dorothy, if, upon my entrance, I had taken a big letter at once from my pocket, directed in Harry's own hand, with a foreign post-mark upon it?"

"Done, Mr. Byers! I should have shed tears of gratitude and joy over it."

"Very likely; and this is exactly the reason why I should not like to be such a messenger. Good night, Mrs. Dorothy." After the door closed behind him, Mr. Byers did not proceed directly on his way. Once more he stopped beneath the window, and looked through the overshadowing vines into the room. He saw the good lady re-seat herself by the stand, open the sacred volume, and then heard her quick, joyful exclamation of surprise. It was quite enough for him. Smiling; and rubbing his hands with heartfelt satisfaction, he bent his steps down the lane, in search of some other place and opportunity for the exercise of his active benevolence and ready sympathies.

CHAPTER II.
THE "LITTLE WIFE."

"Come hither, Bose," said Aunt Nyna, shortly after the departure of Mr. Byers, "I am minded to talk with thee."

The faithful old house dog, who lay dozing in the chimney corner, opened his eyes sleepily and drew a long breath. He rose up, and shaking his rough coat, came and sat down beside his mistress – rested his fore paws upon her knees, and gazed up into her face with a knowing, expectant look.

"I am mindful that thou art but a poor, dumb beast, without a soul," continued the good lady, "yet nevertheless, as I have no other friend in my loneliness, I would fain speak with thee. Dost thee remember Master Harry, Bose? and dost thee know, too, that here I have a letter from him – the first since he left us three months agone? Look at it, poor creature! It is brim-full of hope and affection, and there are even words of kindly remembrance for thee, which would make thy old heart leap for joy, could they be spoken in his own cheery tone."

She held the closely written sheet before the face of her faithful companion, but he only winked at it with an unconcerned look, as any dog might be expected to do. Suddenly, however, he started up, wagging his tail, scented the letter keenly, and rubbed his head against it, with a quick, low cry.

"Lord bless his dear old heart," exclaimed the good lady, with a gush of tears. "He knows all about it. What wonderful gifts the good Lord has bestowed upon his dumb creatures! and she glanced up reverently, with clasped hands, in silent acknowledgment of the wisdom and goodness of the Creator. Again and again did she read over this welcome missive from the only remaining one of the little band which had once gathered around her. Then she placed it once more as a sacred keep-sake between the lids of the Bible, and folding her hands meekly, leaned back in her chair. Her face was turned towards the window, where she could see the clear moonlight falling upon the hills and corn-fields – the locust trees and vines which grew by the cottage waving in the wind, and far out beyond, the village church, with the little grave-yard about it, and the white stones gleaming in the moonlight. Then the faces of her loved and lost, whose mortal remains lay buried there, seemed to look kindly down upon her with the faces of angels, and as they faded away she sank into a deep and quiet slumber. As she sat thus, the door was gently opened, and a young girl entered – a fair, round-faced girl, with rosy cheeks and bright eyes. She wore a checked handkerchief tied over her head – a little brown sack – a short striped dress – blue stockings fitting very closely to her legs, and stout leather shoes. Bose raised his head quickly, but upon seeing who it was, he got up and wagged his tail as if she were an old acquaintance.

"Good evening, aunty," said the girl in a cheerful tone.

"Bless me!" exclaimed the good lady, starting up – "Why Hesper! is it thou? Verily, I was almost, if not quite asleep. Come to the fire dear child and warm thee. I hope thou hast brought thy work, and will sit with me awhile."

"No, aunty," she replied, as she knelt down by the fire and rubbed her little ruddy hands together, "I have come to you in trouble, and must fly away home again as soon as possible."

"Trouble, Hesper?" repeated the good lady with a look of concern, "what is it?"

"Why, you see, aunty, just before dark, as father was at work in the mill, a large bar of iron fell upon his foot, and crushed it badly. He was so faint he could not stand, and Capt. Clark brought him home in his wagon."

"Dear! dear! that is a great pity! And dids't thou send for the doctor, Hesper?"

"No; mother wished to, and so did I, but father would not listen to us. He said doctors always charged so much that it was like giving them the bread out of the children's mouths. Poor Mose has been hard at work all day, and now he must take father's place to-night."

"To-night! what for?"

"Why, yes; you know that Mose works days and father nights. Mose was just about leaving, when father hurt him, and as Mr. Brown, the overseer, said that he must have a man in his place, Mose was obliged to stay."

"Poor Mose! it is really too bad," said Aunt Nyna, sorrowfully. "He begins to stoop and look almost as old as his father. He has altogether too much hard labor for one so young. How old is he, Hesper?"

"He was seventeen last month."

"Only seventeen! poor soul! and he does as much work as any man, without fretting or finding fault either."

"No; he never says one complaining word, and is just as ready to lend me a helping hand about the house, when he comes home, as if he had done nothing at all. I wish he *did* talk more, for sometimes, when father complains and finds so much fault, and all the time Mose is so good and patient, I long to throw my arms about his neck and tell him how much I love him. But then we children are not used to doing such things, and I am afraid he would think me a very silly girl. So I do what is next best – I knit stockings for him, mend his old jacket as well as I can, and have his supper all nice and hot for him when he comes home."

"Heaven help thee, Hesper!" piously ejaculated the old lady, "thou hast many trials, but thou may'st be sure while trying so hard to do well, that God will bless thee."

"He does bless me, aunty, for I have a thousand things to make me happy. But I mustn't stop to talk with you any longer. I only ran over to see if you could spare me a few of your green wormwood leaves to bruise into a salve for father's foot, as mother says if he won't have a doctor, that is the best thing which can be done for him."

"Well, I suppose it is," said Aunt Nyna, "Though I verily fear he will repent it sorely if he does not have proper care in the first place." She took down her old shawl from the peg in the corner, and wrapping it about her, they went out into the little garden in the rear of the cottage. The moon shown so brightly they could easily find the bed of herbs, in the centre of which grew the great wormwood root.

"I had almost forgotten to tell thee, Hesper," said Aunt Nyna, as they were gathering the leaves, "that I have had a letter from Harry."

"From Harry!" exclaimed the girl, in a tone of joyful surprise. She let go of the plant at once, and sitting down flat upon the ground, looked up to the good lady with an expression of eager expectation.

"Yea, darling! a letter from Harry, this very night; and he said – well he said so much that I scarce know what first to tell thee."

"Was he well and happy, aunty? and does he remember us all, and mean to come back so soon as he is able?"

"Yes; all that and more: but very particularly he says – 'Tell my little wife,' just as he always called you Hesper – 'that I don't like the looks of the Chinese ladies at all, and that I think more of her every day I live. That I shall work hard to earn all the money I can, and when I come back shall take her – if she is willing – to be my little wife in reality.'"

Hesper laughed merrily – "that is just like Harry," she said. "But, aunty," she added in a graver tone, "father said, a short time ago, that he didn't like it at all that Harry should call me his little wife. He said it was only putting foolish notions into children's heads, which would get there soon enough without any assistance. Mother told him that she didn't see any particular harm in it, and I never shall forget how he looked, or what his words were when he answered." "'Susan,' said he, 'perhaps *you* think so, for every woman who has made a fool of herself, is perfectly willing that another should do so. Now-a-days, the boys and girls are brought up to think, that to get married is all they live for, and that if they can cheat one another into it, they are remarkably fortunate; but when a few years have passed by, and the cares of the world are fairly upon them, they will wish they were in their

graves, with all that belong to them.' Mother looked very sad when he said this, and I saw her slyly wipe the tears from her eyes. It made me feel so sorrowful that I didn't know what to do, and so, when there was a good chance, I stole up into my chamber, and kneeling down I prayed with all my heart, that I might die before I was old enough to marry, or if I could live, that I might be kept from doing anything so wrong and foolish."

"Nay, my child," said the good woman, with much earnestness, "that is not right. I am sorry to say that thy father always looks on the dark side of life, but verily, there is a bright one also. It may be that he is right in thinking that the young people have very foolish notions about such things, now-a-days, but that is mostly the fault of their elders. Every sensible father and mother should tell their children, so soon as they are old enough to understand, of the great duties that life has in store for them – that they are growing up to be men and women – it may be, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and therefore they should keep their bodies pure, sound and healthy, and store their minds with useful knowledge, so they may be able to act faithfully and wisely in whatsoever situation they may be placed. Then there would not be so many mistaken marriages as there are now, and those who do marry, would be far happier. Yea, Hesper, I am not afraid to say to thee, young as thou art, that it is a solemn thing to become a wife, and God grant thou may'st never take that step, without thinking well about it in the first place."

"No, aunty," replied Hesper, with a serious countenance and a decided shake of her head, "I never shall marry. I am sorry Harry ever called me his little wife, and you must write to him not to do so any longer, for I never shall be *his* wife or any one's? I only want to be a good woman, and stay at home and take care of father and mother."

"Well, child, thou hast indeed a thoughtful head, but thee knows little as yet of the world, and the experiences of life. I only pray that thy heart may ever keep in its child-like purity, and be preserved from the blight and mildew of misplaced affection."

Thus they went on talking, as they slowly gathered the leaves, without thinking how fast time flew, until they had obtained a sufficient quantity.

"Dear me, aunty," exclaimed Hesper, as she rose up to depart, "I am afraid I have quite spoiled one of your beautiful herbs, for I have trampled directly over it, and should not have thought it anything more than grass, had it not been for its strong and pleasant fragrance."

"O, there is no harm done," said Aunt Nyna, "it is only my camomile root, which is not easily hurt, for, like a good Christian, the more it is trampled upon, the greater is the fragrance and the better it grows."

"Why, what a good-natured thing!" said Hesper, laughing. "I must carry some of the leaves home with me to put under my pillow. Then I may dream of it, and perhaps grow just like it."

As they passed along through the garden, aunt Nyna gathered some fine, ripe peaches, and gave them to Hesper for her mother. "How is thy mother to-night?" she asked.

"O, she doesn't seem to get any better, and sometimes I think," continued the girl sorrowfully, "that she never will."

"Aye, well, it isn't best to be discouraged," said aunt Nyna, cheerfully, though at the same time she felt that the poor girl had great reason to be so.

The fact was, that Hesper's mother had been ill for a long time, and during the last six months, had been confined entirely to her bed. Hesper was only fifteen years of age, and quite small at that, but being the only daughter in a large and poor family, she had been obliged to think and care for others early. Until the past year she had attended school, and learned very fast, but now, the sickness of her mother made it necessary for her to remain at home. Her loving heart and cheerful disposition made her as quick to learn in one place as another, and she soon became quite an accomplished little house-keeper. All the neighbors wondered at her readiness and ability, and her aunt Betsey, who was very particular and hard to please, declared that Hesper would make a real nice woman, if she lived long enough.

"I sometimes think," said Hesper, "that mother might get better if she didn't worry so much about poor little Johnny; but she lies there in bed, and watches him as he eats his bread and milk in the chimney corner, or sits with his playthings on the floor, and she sighs often, as she says – 'Poor child! what would become of you if I should be taken away!' O, it makes my heart ache, and I feel as though I should cry."

"It is sad, very sad," said aunt Nyna.

"Mother says," continued Hesper, "that for many years she kept thinking he would come out bright at last, but there's no use hoping for that any longer. Although he is ten years old now, yet he cannot speak a single word, and is just as much pleased with his little playthings, as when he was an infant. Poor Johnny," she added, thoughtfully, "he is a simple child, but I know he loves me, and if mother should die, I would sooner beg from door to door, than see him suffer."

As they were talking together, they passed out through the garden gate, and continued down the lane, till they came to the bridge over the brook. Here with many a word of affection and encouragement, they parted. Aunt Nyna returned to her cottage, and Hesper scampered up the winding road by the old wind-mill, in the direction of her home.

CHAPTER III.
HESPER AND HER FATHER

Mr. Greyson, the father of Hesper, sat in his high-backed chair, looking pale and very much distressed. His foot rested upon a pillow in the chair before him, and he groaned as if in great pain. The fire had gone out on the hearth, and the only light in the room was from a tall candle which flickered and flared, making great dancing shadows on the wall, and gleaming fitfully across the face of the sick woman who lay upon the bed. Simple Johnny, the poor child of whom we have spoken, sat in the chimney corner, sobbing and crying as though his heart would break.

"Hush, hush!" said his father impatiently; but the poor child vainly strove to suppress his grief. It was but for a moment, and then it burst forth afresh. One could not wonder much, however, when the cause was known. The little porringer of bread and milk which Hesper had given him just before she went out, by an unlucky slip was overturned upon the hearth, and Fido – a little black dog, with drooping ears and white feet – was lapping it up in greedy haste. This was indeed a serious misfortune. The supper of the children usually consisted of bread and milk, and as it was portioned out in equal shares, therefore what was lost could not be easily replaced. His supper, moreover, was one of the great events in this poor child's daily experience. His porringer of bread and milk, his wooden horse and tin soldiers, with now and then a run in the fields to gather flowers, made up his whole round of enjoyment. The loss of a richly freighted ship could not have more seriously affected a prosperous merchant, than did that overturned porringer of bread and milk to this poor, simple child.

"Do hush, Johnny dear!" said his mother in a gentle tone, when she saw how much it worried her husband. But the child could not be pacified.

"Strange!" said his father impatiently, "that he couldn't have been taught to mind better. If he had been constantly under *my* eye for ten years, it would have been different." His wife sighed heavily as she sank down again upon her pillow, but made no reply. Just then, in came Hesper, all out of breath with running.

"Well," said her father, "I hope you have stayed long enough. I wonder if you ever think of anybody but yourself when you are away."

Hesper did not reply. Her father did not like to be answered when he was impatient, and he was uncommonly so to-night.

"I have a nice parcel of leaves," she said pleasantly, as she unrolled her apron and displayed them.

"Well, well," he replied, "put them down, and stop that child's crying as soon as possible, or send him to bed."

To Johnny, his father's last words, which he perfectly understood, were a most unwelcome sound, and he cried louder than ever.

"Poor fellow!" said Hesper, as she discovered the cause of his grief – "no wonder he cries. He has lost nearly all of his supper. How luckily things do happen sometimes," she thought to herself. "Here I have been so busy that I had quite forgotten my own supper; now Johnny shall share it, and right welcome." She poured the greater part of the milk out of her own bowl into the porringer, and as she gave it into his hand the glad smile which lit up the troubled countenance of the poor child, and shone through his tears, was worth more to her than victuals and drink. The next thing she did was to kindle a fire and prepare the salve. When it was ready she spread it upon a nice linen cloth, and laid it on the hearth, while she unbound her father's foot, for it had been bathed and wrapped up nicely, before. Her little sympathising heart was full of compassion for him the moment she beheld it. No wonder he groaned and was so impatient!

"May be," thought Hesper, "I should make a much more noisy complaint if it were myself." She handled it very carefully, but her father worried and fretted so, that her hands trembled violently, and she was afraid that she was hurting far more than helping him.

"There," said he, when she had finished, "I'm glad you are done. I don't believe it will do one bit of good."

Hesper was quite disheartened, but she said nothing. She moved the little pine table up to the fire, placed the candle upon it, and sat down to her work. She was making a shirt, of stout, coarse cloth, for Mose. It was the first time she had ever attempted to make one, and she was doing it now by her mother's direction. It was nearly finished, and her fingers flew very fast, for she thought that when her aunt Betsey came in next morning – as no doubt she would – she would show it to her, and tell her she had made it all herself. She was not afraid to do so, for she knew that she had taken pains enough to please even aunt Betsey.

Mr. Greyson sat very still, with his head laid back in his chair, and his eyes almost closed. Hesper supposed he was asleep, but he was not. He was watching her and thinking very earnestly about her. So much had his mind been occupied by work and family cares of late, that he had scarce bestowed a thought upon her. Now, when he saw how small she was, and then remembered how much she did every day, he wondered that it was possible. Then, too, she looked so cheerful and good-natured, with her hair parted so smoothly on her forehead, and her face bent down to her work, all glowing with pleasant thoughts. His heart was drawn towards her, and he began to be sorry for the impatient words he had spoken. Then he observed, also, her little, short, faded frock, and he wondered how long she had worn, and where she had obtained it. Certainly he had not bought her a dress for more than a year, and where she had obtained that one was a mystery. He did not know that she had often sat up late at night to patch and mend it, and that when, at last, the waist and sleeves had given out entirely, she was obliged to put on her little brown sack and wear it constantly, to cover all deficiencies. His own trials had seemed so great that he had little sympathy to spare for his children. This poor girl, therefore, had been obliged to bear her own little cross of self-denial in silence, while the saddening influences of her father's gloomy disposition, cast a continual shadow across her sunshine.

She had not the slightest idea at present, however, that he was observing her; for while her fingers flew so swiftly, her mind was busy with plans for the future. At precisely half-past nine the shirt was completed, and as she held it up, she viewed it with the greatest satisfaction. Had it been the most exquisite piece of embroidery, it could not have afforded her a more heartfelt pleasure. She folded it up neatly, and then turned her attention to Johnny. The happy little fellow had eaten every drop of his bread and milk, and then fallen asleep. His head rested wearily against the wall, and just then there was such a beautiful and peaceful expression to his countenance, that Hesper felt unwilling to disturb him.

"May be," she thought, "he is dreaming of the angels, and what a pity it will be for me to bring him back from their blessed company." She lightly raised the golden ringlets from his round, fair cheeks, and regarded him with a look of intense interest. To this thoughtful girl there had always been an unfathomable mystery in the silence which brooded over the soul of her unfortunate brother. She felt, without understanding, that there was something, away down in the depths of his being, quietly waiting its own due time for utterance, and until that time came, he must remain a simple, inexperienced child. At times, a strange feeling of wonder and religious awe would come over her, as she regarded him, for an almost angelic expression would sweep across his countenance, and in his large, blue eyes, there would be such a deep and tender light, that it almost made her weep. She looked upon him as something holy, and in return, the child attached himself to her with an affection which knew no change or diminution. To-night he had sat up unusually late for him, and now his slumber was so deep and quiet, that she found it very difficult to arouse him. He did not resist her, however, as she raised him up tenderly and undressed him; for he was so heavy with sleep he could scarce stand, and really did not know when Hesper tucked up his bed and gave him a good-night

kiss. The poor girl herself was very tired, but she had one more duty to perform, which to her was always pleasant. She drew up the little table, and taking a book from the drawer, seated herself upon the side of her mother's bed.

"Read quite low," said her mother, "so as not to disturb your father." They both thought he was asleep, but he heard every word they said. Hesper read on very slowly and thoughtfully, till she came to the words, "Charity never faileth." Aunt Nyna had spoken to her of this particular chapter while they were together in the garden, and therefore she had selected it. "Mother," she said, as she laid down the book, "I think love *does* fail, sometimes, for I have tried very hard to love and please father, but he never likes anything that I do." Her mother sighed deeply, and the tears came into her eyes, as she looked up in the face of the good child.

"It don't mean *that*, Hesper. Love often fails in what it attempts. But it *does* mean, that under all difficulties or discouragements, true love never fails or grows weary, but remains the same forever and ever. It is just like God himself."

"Then," said Hesper, as she glanced towards her father, "I will not mind it much if he doesn't love me, for it will make me very happy if in one little thing I can be like God."

"Your father wasn't always so, Hesper," said her mother, as the tears streamed down her pale cheeks. She turned her face over into her pillow, and while Hesper was finishing the chapter, she thought of the first years of their wedded life. Then her husband was strong and healthy, and they had a little cottage of their own, with holly-hocks blooming by the door, and roses at the window. Next came long years of suffering and sorrow, when both were broken down in health and spirits, and they had not bread enough to fill the little hungry mouths that cried out for it. No wonder he became gloomy and sad, and said at times that his children would be better off in their graves. It was no uncommon thing. Thousands of poor men had felt just so before him. Only the brave heart of a Christian can bear poverty cheerfully.

Hesper had finished reading some time, and sat waiting for her mother to speak, but as she did not, she supposed she was asleep. "Good night, mother," she whispered, for it was a comfort to the tender-hearted child to speak the words, even though they were not heard. Her mother raised her head.

"Good night," she replied, and putting her arms about Hesper's neck, she kissed her.

Mr. Greyson turned away his face quickly, for he was heart-stricken at what he had heard, and he could not bear to see their mutual love. The next moment Hesper passed him on her way to her chamber, and he longed to call her back and speak kindly, but something, he knew not what, restrained him.

It was not till the poor girl sank down upon her pillow, that she was conscious of being very weary. Her head ached with thinking, and her limbs with long continued action; but it was a sweet consolation to know that she had done all her duty. The moon shone in at the little window near the foot of her bed, and as she looked out, she could see the top of "Cottage Hill" covered with neat white houses and finely cultivated gardens. Beyond this was the "Rolling Mill," where her father and Mose worked. The noise of the machinery could be heard at a great distance, and day and night the red flames were pouring constantly from the tops of the tall chimnies. As Hesper was watching this, a thought came to her suddenly. "Why!" she exclaimed, as she started to her feet in an instant – "Poor Mose hasn't had a morsel of supper!" In a few moments she was dressed and went softly down stairs. Her father still sat in his great chair with his eyes closed, but even then he was not asleep. She stole very gently into the pantry, and wrapped up some broad slices of bread and meat which were left from her father's supper. Then she warmed some tea and poured into it the last drop of milk from her own bowl, of which, as yet, she had not tasted. When all was ready she wrapped her mother's great shawl about her, and carefully unbolted the door.

"Hesper," said her father, "where are you going?"

She was very sorry he had heard her, for she feared he would not allow her to go out so late at night.

“Only to carry Mose some supper, if you please, sir,” she said very meekly. “Poor Mose! I am afraid he will faint before morning, if he does not have some.”

“That is right; you are a good girl, Hesper,” he said in a pleasant tone.

O, how those few, gently spoken words made her heart throb, and with what joyful tears in her eyes did she spring from the door-step! Never had she known him to speak so kindly before, and her whole affectionate nature was drawn towards him in a moment.

CHAPTER IV.
MOSE

Hesper was quite at a loss what to do, when she came to the great door of the Rolling Mill. The dress of the workmen – the red light shining on their faces – the dazzling brightness from the furnaces, and the deep, gloomy blackness of the more remote parts of the building, all appeared so wild and strange, that she dared not enter. Every few moments the doors of the furnaces would be raised, and a large, glowing mass of red hot iron taken out, which was drawn quickly between rollers of various sizes. Great showers of sparks flew in all directions, and the voices of the workmen had a strange, unnatural sound as they shouted to one another amid the roar and din of the ponderous machinery. Hesper quite despaired of ever finding Mose amid all this confusion, and she longed to see some one of whom she could inquire.

"What's that, over in the corner yonder?" said one of the workmen to another, pointing towards Hesper.

"Well," said his companion, after a moment's pause, "I am not quite certain, but if it wasn't so late, I should take it to be a little girl."

"Some stray child, I suppose," said the first – "I'll go speak to her."

"Do you wish for anything, my little maid?" he asked kindly.

"Please, sir," said Hesper, curtseying, "can you tell me where my brother, Moses Greyson is?"

"I will see," he replied, and he went to Mr. Brown, the overseer.

"Follow me, my little lady," said Mr. Brown, "and I will point him out to you. The poor fellow was pretty well tired, and I told him he had better rest awhile."

They went out of the mill, and passed along the borders of the stream, by which the machinery was turned.

"There he is, yonder," said Mr. Brown, and as Hesper looked in the direction in which he pointed, she saw Mose sitting upon a log near the mill-dam. She thanked Mr. Brown as he left her, and then stole up softly behind her brother. He had an old coat thrown over his shoulders – his elbows rested upon his knees, and his face was covered with his hands.

"Poor fellow," thought Hesper, "how tired and hungry he must be!" She gathered up her great shawl, and then clasped her arm closely about his neck.

"What are you thinking about, Mose?" she said cheerfully, as she laid her warm cheek against his.

"Why Hesper!" he exclaimed, in perfect astonishment, "in the name of all that is wonderful how came you here."

"To bring you some supper, Mose," she replied, as she displayed her little tin pail, and roll of bread and meat.

"That is just like you," said Mose. "You are the most thoughtful girl in the world." There was such a choking sensation in his throat, he could not say another word. If he hadn't been a great boy he would have cried outright. A few moments before, he was feeling perfectly wretched for he thought that everybody in the world had forgotten him. But even then, that dear, good girl, was trudging all alone over the hills, to bring him some supper, and now was sitting upon the log beside him, with her sweet little face close to his. "Who wouldn't love such a sister," he thought, and he longed to say so, but just then he dared not trust his voice to speak.

"Do eat it now," said Hesper, "and drink the tea while it is hot, it will do you so much good." He did not wait for a second invitation, but ate and drank with a good relish, for he was faint with hunger.

"There," he said, as he swallowed the last morsel, "that has done my very heart good, and I cannot tell you how much better I feel than I did ten minutes ago. I am glad you came just as you

did, Hesper, for I was thinking that if I should jump into the stream here, all my troubles would soon be over, and I should rest forever."

"O Mose! Mose! what a dreadful thing!" exclaimed Hesper.

"Well," he said, laughing, "I didn't really mean to. I was only thinking about it. But I don't feel so now. I want to talk to you, Hesper, now that I have the chance – I long to lay open my whole heart to you, but I am afraid you will think me very selfish if I do."

"No, no Mose," said Hesper, "I can never think that of you, for when I have seen *you* so good and patient, it has given *me* greater courage to persevere. You seem nearer to me, Mose, than any of the others, because you and I have a great many hard things to bear. But aunt Nyna tells me that if we are patient, we shall be all the stronger and better for it when we grow older, and I believe it, for she has met with a great many sorrows in life, and yet there is no one more cheerful."

"Well," said Mose proudly, "if a little girl like you has so much courage, I am sure I ought to, but when I see the advantages that other boys possess I can't help longing for something better. I want to *know* more – I want to see more of the world, and I want to earn money enough to make us all comfortable, for it is killing me to drudge along so day after day, merely to get food and clothing, and not have one moment for thought or enjoyment. Hesper, it is too hard, though I never said so before."

"I wish I knew what you *could* do," said Hesper, sorrowfully. He drew an old book from his pocket. It looked very much worn and tumbled. The covers were loose, and the leaves soiled and torn down at the corners. It was the old Geography he had formerly studied in school. "Look here," he continued, "every moment of my leisure time I have spent over this old book, until I can repeat almost the whole of it. Now, Hesper, if I could only go to sea, I could do all I wish. I long to be away on the broad ocean, where I can grow strong and healthy. I think of it all day and dream of it at night. Sometimes, when I have done work, I have gone away by myself far along the beach, where the waves came rolling in from the open sea. There I have seen the great merchant ships pass by with their sails all set, and their flags streaming in the breeze. I have watched them till they have been lost, quite lost in the distance, and then, as I have thought of the different ports to which they were bound, of the wonderful cities and strange people they visited, I have indulged in so many useless longings, that sometimes I have wept like a child. O, Hesper! if it were only possible!" Hesper was astonished, for she had never heard Mose say so much before. But he had quite taken her heart into his own, and now she felt there was nothing in the world so desirable as that Mose should go to sea. She did not once think of the sad loss it would be to the family, or of her own loneliness. It was enough that he *wanted* to go, and she felt that he *must*.

"I believe it *is* possible," she said with the utmost confidence, though she was sure she couldn't tell why. Mose shook his head sorrowfully – "I don't see how, said he – father is not strong as he used to be – mother is sick, and Fred and Charlie are too young to do anything useful. I feel that I *must* stay at home, though I should die at my post. Besides, there is no one to help me."

Hesper was silent, but her heart was full of sympathy. She glanced down at the foam-covered stream as it fell over the dam and dashed boldly over every obstacle. Then she raised her eyes to the cloudless heavens, where the stars were shining brightly and the full moon looked kindly down upon her.

"*God* will help us," she said earnestly. Mose looked steadily in her face, and then as he, too, glanced upward, the same feeling of hopefulness and child-like confidence in the fatherly care of God came over him.

"Yes, God will help us," he responded, "and we will trust in Him."

That was enough – their hearts were at rest. Had they been older, the doubts and skepticism which often come with riper years, might have intervened to dim the brightness of their cheerful faith; but as it was, their child-like hearts leaned with unwavering confidence upon this great staff of hope, in the full assurance that it would not fail them.

"Good night," whispered Hesper, as she held up her cheek for a parting kiss.

“Good night,” replied Mose, as he gave it, and the next moment she was gone.

CHAPTER V.
THE GREYSONS AND GRIMSBYS

The Greysons lived in a long, low, double house, situated near the seashore, with nothing around it to render it attractive or agreeable. The other part was occupied by a family named Grimsby. The father was in California, and the mother went out washing. She was exceedingly sensitive on this point, however, and was so much afraid the neighbors would think less of her on account of it, that she never missed an opportunity of telling them they were no better than herself – that every cent she had, she earned honestly, and that was what everybody couldn't say. Some were foolish enough to reply, but they usually suffered for it, as Mrs. Grimsby's tongue was the terror of the whole neighborhood. She was quite sure, she said, that the time would come when she should be able to look down on those who despised her now, and make them feel it an honor to have their children associate with hers.

Juliana, the oldest of the family, was a great, slovenly girl – idle and disagreeable. Her long, black hair, of which she had a great profusion, was always in a heap, her dress torn and dirty, her stockings out at the heels, and to finish her appearance, she wore a pair of her mother's shoes which were much too large for her. It was very easy to tell at what time Juliana arose in the morning, for the great shoes could be heard clattering down the stairs and shuffling through the entry. Then too, the quarrelling was louder, the baby cried oftener, and Mrs. Grimsby scolded at the top of her voice.

There were also two boys in this family, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, who were a little older than Fred and Charlie Greyson. Their mother said they would prove themselves worthy of their name, for two such boys couldn't be found anywhere, and in this last particular the neighbors perfectly agreed with her. As there was no public school within several miles, Hesper's two brothers were obliged to remain at home, and as might have been expected of two little fellows, six and eight years of age, having nothing particular to do, they were very restless and uneasy. Their father had no time to attend to them, their mother was sick, and Hesper was always so busy that it was quite impossible for her either to amuse or instruct them. Accordingly they spent the greater part of their time in the back-yard where they kept a pair of beautiful white rabbits, which they had named Billy and Bunny. There was also a pigstye on their side of the yard, and in it a pig, so small and black that the children called him Coaly, and made quite a pet of him. Coaly was a knowing pig, and even Mose and Hesper liked occasionally to make him a visit.

The opposite side of the yard belonged to the Grimsbys. George kept ducks and Benny had a goat. There was but little grass for the poor creature to subsist upon, for the yard was small, and at all seasons there was always a large pile of wood or chips lying there, besides which, the boys had scooped out a broad, deep hole, to make a duck pond. Mrs. Grimsby threw all her slops and broken victuals into the yard, and when she washed at home she hung her clothes there. This was always sure to end in a great quarrel with the boys, who complained that she never minded where she went, but upset everything and spoiled all they did, just as though nobody had a right there but herself.

Directly across the middle of the yard, forming a line of division between the two families, was planted a double row of sun-flowers, which had grown up very tall and close. This had been done by the young Grimsbys who were extremely jealous of the Greysons, and had often accused them of stealing. Even their mother had thrown out broad hints at times, to Hesper, about missing her wood and chips, which almost broke the poor girl's heart, and roused her father's indignation to the highest pitch. It so happened at one time, that she came in to make a complaint when Mr. Greyson was at home. She had scarcely commenced however, when to the great terror of the children, their father rose up, and with a look and tone that could not be mistaken, he commanded her to take herself out of his premises directly, or he would assist her in a way that might not be very pleasing. Mrs. Grimsby

did not wait to finish her sentence, but beat a hasty retreat, and never ventured in again unless fully assured of the enemy's absence.

The yard, however, was the great scene of action. Notwithstanding all Hesper's persuasions and entreaties, Fred and Charlie would resent every injury, and sometimes provoke assaults. In fact the Greysons and Grimsbys were continually at war. Fred was a high-spirited boy, and it was entirely useless for Hesper to reason with him.

"You wouldn't talk so about it, if it was yourself," he would answer. "If they let out our rabbits, we will untie their goat, and if they worry Coaly we will let off their duck pond."

Through that palisade of sun-flower stalks many a word of defiance was spoken which received an oyster shell for a reply, and many a challenge was given which ended in a desperate conflict. The Grimsbys being the oldest, were usually triumphant, and the Greysons would come off with scratched faces and bloody noses. When Hesper wept and their sick mother rose from her pillow to entreat and reason with them, as she only knew how to do, they would promise that they would try to do better; but at the next outbreak Fred's excuse would be, "mother, I did try, but I couldn't help it."

This was the greatest trial of Hesper's life. She would send them into the yard to get them out of the way, and would often have to bring them back again, to keep them out of trouble. At last she appealed to her father.

"Let them fight their own battles," he said. "If our boys get beaten it will teach them a good lesson, but if they beat the Grimsbys, they will keep on their own premises."

What could she do? her heart ached and her tears flowed freely, but she said no more. Poor children! they little thought how cruel it was to grieve so good a sister.

There was one other member of the Grimsby family, towards whom Hesper's whole heart went out in one great flood of affection. This was little Tommy – an infant not a year old. There was something in his little innocent face and soft dark eyes, which appealed to her warmest sympathies. He was a neglected child, and therefore was often troublesome. His mother, with her daily employment, could not attend to him, and Juliana would not. Before his mother came home from work, he would get tired and hungry, and would scream with all his might. Juliana, by scolding, and shaking, and by various other unreasonable methods, endeavored to still him, but finding it useless, she would tumble him into his cradle or lay him down in the entry and run away up stairs. She well knew that if she did this Hesper would take care of him, for she never could bear to hear him cry. Little Johnny, too, was very fond of him, and they would play together for hours. It was very interesting to see how the poor simple child and the feeble infant loved one another.

"They are very much alike," Mrs. Greyson would say, as she watched them. "One is an infant in mind, and the other in body. God help my poor boy! He will never know what it is to grow in knowledge and wisdom, till he is born unto a better life." There was one person, however, who did not agree with her in this, and that one was Mr. Byers. He lived in an old tenant house, not far from the Greysons, where he occupied two rooms by himself, and did his own house work. He supported himself by doing light work, in the way of gardening and other odd jobs, as people chose to employ him, and at night he wrote little facetious articles or short sermons for the daily papers, which were usually very acceptable. He had taken a great fancy to simple Johnny, for he said there was more in that child than people imagined, and if the poor innocent could only put his silent thoughts into words, he would say some things that would astonish the world. Often when he was at work in the fields, simple Johnny would come to visit him, holding a corn-basket over his head as a protection from the sun, for the singular child had taken a great dislike to wearing a hat. Mr. Byers would help him through the fence with his basket, and provide him a seat on some old log or a large stone. Then he would go about his work again, while the child watched his progress with silent interest. Now and then the good old man would stop to gather a few berries or wild flowers for his little friend, or sing him a merry old song, with which the child seemed to be particularly delighted. Mr. Byers was very fond of children generally, and nothing delighted him more than, after his day's work was over, to

wander along the seashore with a whole troop of little ones around him, joining in their sports, or telling them stories of such a marvellous and amusing character, that the children always listened with the deepest interest. At such times he usually carried Mrs. Grimsby's baby in his arms, for he took a particular fancy to infants, and truly speaking, if nature had gifted Mr. Byers with another pair of arms, he would certainly have borrowed another baby, for he held to the maxim, that "the more of a good thing the better." Simple Johnny clung to the skirt of his coat, and the rest of the company followed promiscuously, as they pleased.

In his presence alone could the young Greysons and Grimsbys remain for any length of time, upon amicable terms, and if any disagreement did occur, which could not be settled by moral suasion, he had such a summary manner of seizing the offender by the convenient parts of his garments, and threatening him with a dip in the water, that they were very careful not to provoke his indignation. George Grimsby, however, being usually the largest boy of the party, had the audacity to question in his mind whether this threat would ever be put into execution. Accordingly, one night, he waxed so bold that in his play he threw Fred Greyson's cap into the water and tumbled Johnny into a mud-hole. Quick as thought Mr. Byers laid the baby upon a heap of sea weed, and seizing George by the collar, sprang upon a big rock near by, with wonderful agility. In he plunged him at once, and, to use familiar terms, he soused him up and down and swaddled him about like a big dish cloth. Then, standing him upon his feet, and giving him a smart shaking to start the circulation again, he ordered him off home in such a decided manner that George obeyed without a moment's hesitation. Mr. Byers was greatly exhausted with this performance, nevertheless he reflected upon it with great satisfaction. Out of this, however, grew a long continued feud between the worthy gentleman and Mrs. Grimsby, to which time alone was able to afford the least modification.

CHAPTER VI.
AUNT BETSEY

Aunt Betsey was sister to Hesper's father. Her husband was comfortably situated, and they had no children. They lived in a large, old-fashioned house, where everything was convenient, and there was no one to trouble them. She was one of the most precise, prudent, pains-taking women in the world, and was also very peculiar. Every part of her house was as neat as possible, and she never allowed any one, not even her husband, to change the place of a single thing. On the floor of her sitting room was a handsome, home-made carpet, of aunt Betsey's own manufacture. The hearth rug, also, was her handiwork, and from its originality, is worthy of particular description. The pattern was a great yellow flower-pot, containing a huge bouquet on a dark ground. In the centre of the flowers was a monstrous white rose, and around it a profusion of leaves, buds and blossoms, among which might also be seen a bird, a butterfly, and a bunch of cherries. She was very proud of this, first, because she had planned and made it all herself; and second, because it had won a prize at an Industrial Exhibition, several years previous.

In this room, directly across the wall overhead, was a great wooden beam, such as is often seen in old-fashioned houses. In this beam was inserted a stout iron hook, and upon this hook hung a large cage, containing several canaries. The reason why this cage was placed so high, was because aunt Betsey was also very fond of cats, and kept quite a number. She allowed them to sleep on her rug, to chase each other about the room and frolic over the tables and chairs just as they pleased; but when some of them came bounce into her work basket and upset everything, she would scold in good earnest. Besides her birds and cats she also kept a great many flowers, and her plants were the admiration of the whole village. On account of the leaves and dirt she kept them all in her kitchen. The windows were towards the south, and in the winter she kept a fire burning all night, lest they should freeze. Her flower-stand was constructed in the form of a pyramid, each shelf being filled with rare plants, while upon the very top was a splendid cactus in full bloom. People said that aunt Betsey had nothing to do but to make herself comfortable and happy, but she thought quite differently. What with her birds, cats, flowers and housework, she was always busy. All the time she could spare from these she devoted to fancy needle-work, which consisted of bead-bags and purses, needle-books and pin-cushions, lamp-mats and embroidery. She was also engaged upon a satin bed-quilt, which had occupied her at intervals for several years. It was made from bits of satin, cut into a diamond shape, not more than an inch across; these were basted upon paper, and then the edge of a sufficient number sewed together in the form of a star. There were stars of all colors, filled in between with others of black satin. Even to aunt Betsey this seemed an almost endless undertaking, but she was determined to persevere, for she was quite sure that when it was completed it would win the first prize at the Exhibition.

One morning, as she sat by her open window, busily engaged in matching her stars together, she chanced to see aunt Nyna coming up the street, leading simple Johnny, who, as usual, carried Fido under his arm, while Bose followed behind.

"Good morning," she said, as they came near, "What's the news?"

"Good morning," replied aunt Nyna, "I have just been down to see thy brother, and find him much worse."

"Worse! why, what's the matter?"

"Why, two or three days since, he hurt his foot very badly, and I suppose he went out again too soon, for he has worried it into such a state that now he is quite sick."

"Mercy me! Do tell!" said aunt Betsey. "Well they are always in trouble. Almost every day I drop in there, just by way of encouragement and to tell them how things ought to go, but of late I

have been so busy with my bed-quilt I haven't had time for anything else. Well, I suppose that now I must go or they will think hard of me."

"So I would for poor Hesper's sake," said aunt Nyna. "She has just as much as she can attend to, and it is hard work where there is so much to do and nothing to do with. I am taking Johnny home with me to keep him awhile, and if thou wouldst just take the other two boys a few days, it would be a great help to Hesper."

"Mercy me!" exclaimed aunt Betsey, raising her hands in astonishment, "I should as soon think of taking two wild Indians into my house – besides I should never get my bed-quilt done in the world."

"Well, and what if thee shouldn't? It would be of little consequence compared to helping the poor girl."

"Really!" replied aunt Betsey, very tartly, "I should like to know!" She commenced sewing again very diligently, without looking up or speaking another word, so aunt Nyna turned away.

"There, I am glad she's gone!" said aunt Betsey. "Somehow or other I never could bear that woman, with her theeing and thouing." She tried to settle down to her work and feel as quiet and comfortable as before, but her conscience troubled her sorely.

"Well, if I must, I must," she said at last, starting up. "I'll go and bring them home with me, and bear it like a martyr." She rolled up her bits of satin, drove all her cats out of the room, and then put on her bonnet and shawl.

"It won't do," she said, "to go into such a family empty-handed, though where their wants are so many, it seems almost entirely useless to give them anything."

She gathered together some broken victuals – tied up a bundle of old cast-off garments, and with this under her arm, she set out.

CHAPTER VII.
A FAIR ATTEMPT

"O Fred! Here comes aunt Betsey, with a great budget," said Charlie, who was looking out of the window. "Let's hide under the bed till she is gone. She never stays long;" and without another word under they went.

"What do you want to hide for?" asked Hesper.

"O, because we know she don't like us," and Fred drew his head back quickly, for she was just opening the door.

"Well-a-day, Hesper!" said aunt Betsey, with a doleful countenance, "I hear you are in trouble again, and I have come down to see what I can do for you. How is your father, this morning? I declare I never knew he had hurt him till just now. Where is he?"

"In there," said Hesper, pointing to the little bed-room where Mose and Johnny usually slept. "He has been restless all night, but he is asleep now."

"Well, then I won't disturb him, for I am so hurried with work that I can't stop a minute. I left everything in a heap and came down directly, when I heard of your trouble. I declare I am all out of breath with hurrying," and she threw herself into a chair by the bed.

"Well, Susan," she said to Hesper's mother, "I should think you would get all tired out with being sick so long, but I think Hesper looks almost as frail as you, and I shouldn't wonder at all if she should give out."

"I am afraid she will," said her mother, and she sighed deeply.

"O, no!" replied Hesper, cheerfully, "I haven't the least idea of it. I didn't sleep much last night, and am rather tired to-day, but I don't feel sick at all."

"Well," said aunt Betsey, "there's no use in undertaking too much, and I have really come down with the intention of doing something to help you."

Here she hesitated, for she really dreaded to make the proposition.

"You, Charlie;" whispered Fred – "if I should catch at her foot how she would jump."

The thought of aunt Betsey's surprise quite overcame Charlie, and in spite of his efforts he could not restrain a laugh.

"Mercy me!" exclaimed aunt Betsey. "What's that?" and she looked directly under the bed. Her expressions of wonder, and the angry manner in which she eyed them over her spectacles, was perfectly irresistible, and laughing with all their might, they crept out.

"Well, I declare!" said she, "you act as though you weren't half civilized, and I almost repent of my resolution. As I was just saying to Hesper, I came down to take you home with me, to spend a few days. It will be a great relief to your mother and sister, for I know you are bad boys, and are dreadfully troublesome."

The boys were sober in a moment. Fred looked at Charlie and Charlie at Fred, but neither of them spoke a word. Now that aunt Betsey had given the invitation, she was quite determined they should go.

"Well, what is the matter?" said she, "I don't want you to work for me. I only want you to behave yourselves, if you can, and I will do all I can to please you. You shall have some apples to roast, and if your Uncle Nathan is willing, I will give you one of his great pumpkins for a jack-o'lantern."

It was evident that she had touched the right chord, for the boys assented immediately. Hesper was much pleased, and began to prepare them as soon as possible. Soon all was ready, and they set out, with the parting injunction from Hesper, to be good boys.

It was so quiet and peaceful after they were gone, and Hesper's mind was so much relieved, that after making some gruel for her father's dinner, she sat down in the great rocking chair, and in a

few moments was fast asleep. Poor Hesper was almost sick. Mose watched her from day to day, and when he saw her cheek grow pale, his heart failed him. He sat very often upon the old log by the mill-dam, but it was not to think over his own troubles. They were all forgotten in his care for Hesper, and knowing not what else to do, he prayed for her most earnestly.

CHAPTER VIII.
POOR SUCCESS

Aunt Betsey did not find the boys so much of a hindrance as she had expected. They sat very quietly by the fire, looking at the pictures in a book of Natural History, while she continued sewing upon her bed-quilt as before. She soon had occasion though, to stir up the fire, and as she did so, she spied a great muddy foot-mark directly across the white rose in the centre of her rug. “O dear!” she exclaimed, “did I ever see such dirty children?” She was just beginning to scold, when she checked herself, for she thought that she was most to blame, for not telling them to clean their feet well when they came in. Charlie said he was very sorry, and Fred proposed that they should go out and scrape their boots directly. Meanwhile Aunt Betsey took the rug into the kitchen, and after a little drying and brushing it looked as well as ever.

“Well,” said she, “it isn’t so bad after all, and if I don’t meet with anything worse, I’ll not complain.”

When she went back she found that the boys after they had cleaned their boots, had left them in the entry, which pleased her very much. She gave them some apples to roast, and then she concluded to go down to her husband’s store of an errand.

“Be very careful,” said she, as she went out, “and behave yourselves properly till I come back.” When the boys had roasted their apples, they set them aside to cool, and began to play with the cats.

“Fred,” said Charlie, “shouldn’t you think that Aunt Betsey would be afraid that her cats would eat the birds?”

“O no,” said Fred, “for they hang so high they cannot get at them.”

“But,” continued Charlie, whose curiosity was always wide awake, “I wonder what the birds would do if they should see this old grey cat close to the cage?”

“Let’s try;” said Fred. “I’ll hold her tight,” and the “next moment he was standing up in a chair, under the cage, with the cat in his arms.

“I can’t reach,” said he. So he got down and looked about for something higher. Now that he had undertaken, he was quite determined to see the result of the experiment. While Charlie looked out for Aunt Betsey, Fred rolled the dining table into the middle of the floor, placed a chair on top, and then climbed up again with the cat. Of course the birds fluttered about in a great fright, and as might have been expected, the cat sprang at them. In his struggle to hold the cat, Fred lost his footing. He grasped at the cage to save himself, but the hook gave way, and down they all came together. Charlie opened the door and rushed out into the entry, followed by all of the cats. At first he thought he would take his cap and start for home immediately, and then he concluded to go back and see what had become of Fred. There he sat among the ruins looking very much bewildered.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.