

**FINLEY
MARTHA**

ELSIE'S
CHILDREN

Martha Finley
Elsie's children

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Preface

With this volume, bringing the Story of Elsie and her Children down to the present time, the series closes.

It was not by request of the author's *personal* friends, that either this or any one of the previous volumes was written, but in acquiescence with the demands of the Public – the friends and admirers of Elsie herself; and we know that as child, as young girl, as wife and mother, she has had many friends who have been loath to part with her. May they find neither her nor her children less lovable in this, than in the earlier volumes, and may their society prove sweet, comforting and helpful to many readers and friends both old and new.

M.F.

CHAPTER FIRST

"Of all the joys that brighten suffering earth,
What joy is welcom'd like a new-born child."
— *MRS. NORTON.*

A merry scene in the nursery at Viamede, where the little Travillas are waiting for their morning half hour with "dear mamma." Mammy coming in smiling and mysterious, her white apron thrown over something held carefully in her arms, bids the children guess what it is.

"A new dolly for me?" says Vi; "I'm going to have a birthday to-morrow."

"A kite," ventured Harold. "No, a balloon."

"A tite! a tite!" cried little Herbert, clapping his hands.

"Pshaw! it's nothing but a bundle of clothes mammy's been doing up for one of you girls," said Eddie. "I see a bit of lace or work, or something, hanging down below her apron."

"Is it a new dress for Vi, mammy?" asked Elsie, putting her arm about her sister and giving her a loving kiss.

"Yah, yah; you ain't no whar nigh it yet, chillens," laughed mammy, dropping into a chair, and warding off an attempt on the part of little Herbert to seize her prize and examine it for himself.

"Oh, it's alive," cried Harold, half breathlessly, "I saw it move!" Then as a slight sound followed the movement, "A baby! a baby!" they all exclaim, "O, mammy, whose is it? where did you get it? oh, sit down and show it to us!"

"Why, chillen, I reckon it 'longs to us," returned mammy, complying with the request, while they gathered closely about her with eager and delighted faces.

"Ours, mammy? Then I'm glad it isn't black or yellow like the babies down at the quarter," said Harold, eying it with curiosity and interest.

"So am I too," remarked Violet, "but it's got such a red face and hardly any hair on the top of its head."

"Well, don't you remember that's the way Herbie looked when he first came?" said Eddie.

"And he grew very white in a few weeks," remarked Elsie. "But is it mamma's baby, mammy?"

"Yes, honey, dat it am; sho's yer born, 'nother pet for ole mammy, — de bressed little darlin'," she answered, pressing the little creature to her breast.

The information was received with a chorus of exclamations of delight and admiration.

"Tate a bite of cacker, boy," said Herbert, offering a cracker which he was eating with evident enjoyment.

Mammy explained, amid the good-natured laughter of the older children, that the newcomer had no teeth and couldn't eat anything but milk.

"Oh, poor 'ittle fing!" he said, softly touching its velvet cheek. "Won't 'oo tum and pay wis Herbie?"

"No, it can't play," said Violet, "it can't walk and it can't talk."

"Where's mamma, mammy?" asked Eddie, glancing at the clock; "it's past her time; I wonder too she didn't come to show us the new baby herself."

"She's sick, chile," returned mammy, a grave and anxious look coming into her old eyes.

"Mamma sick?" exclaimed little Elsie, "oh, may I go to her?"

Mammy shook her head. "Not jes now, honey darlin', byme by, when she's bettah."

"Mamma sick?" echoed Violet. "Oh, I'm so, so sorry!"

"Don't fret, chillen, de good Lord make her well again soon," said mammy, with cheerful hopefulness, for she could not bear to see how sad each little face had grown, how the young lips

quivered, and the bright eyes filled with tears; for dearly, dearly, they all loved their sweet, gentle mother.

"Herbie wants mamma," sobbed the baby boy, clinging to his eldest sister.

"Don't cry, pet," Elsie said chokingly, hugging him close and kissing away his tears. "We'll all ask God to make her well, and I'm sure he will."

"Why! why! what's the matter here?" cried a cheery voice, as the door opened and Mr. Travilla stepped into their midst. "What's the matter with papa's darlings?" he repeated, gathering them all into his arms, and caressing each in turn.

"Is mamma, dear mamma, very sick?" they asked, Vi immediately adding in joyous tones,

"No, no, she isn't, or papa wouldn't look so happy."

"I am very happy," he said with emotion, glancing toward the bundle in mammy's lap, "we are both very happy over the new treasure God has given us; and I trust she will soon be well."

"Can we go and speak to her?" they asked.

"After a while," he said, "she is trying to sleep now. What do you all think of the little sister?"

"Sister," cried Elsie. "Oh, that is nice, nice! I thought it was a boy. What's its name, papa?"

"It has none yet."

"I sorry for it," remarked Herbert, gazing with curious interest at the tiny creature, "I sorry for it; cause can't walk, can't talk, can't eat good fings; dot no teef to eat wis. Do, boy, try to eat cacker, cacker dood, Herbie likes," and breaking off a fragment he would have forced it into the wee mouth, if papa and mammy had not interfered for its protection.

"No, no, my son, you would choke it," said Mr. Travilla, gently drawing him away.

"It isn't a boy; it's a girl, Herbie," corrected Harold.

"Oh!" cried Vi, who was gently feeling the top of the tiny head, and she looked aghast at her father, "O, papa, its head's rotten!"

"No, daughter, don't be alarmed," he said smiling slightly, "there's nothing wrong there; all young babies' heads are soft like that on the top."

"Oh, are they?" she said with a sigh of relief, "I was afraid it would spoil soon and we couldn't keep her."

"No, she seems to be all right," he said with a grave and tender smile. "God has been very good to us."

"Yes, papa. Oh such a pretty darling as it is!" said Elsie.

"Yes, indeed," chimed in the others; Vi adding, "and I'm so glad she's a girl: 'cause now we have two sisters, Elsie, just the same as the boys."

"Oh, but we have three now!" said Eddie, laughing good naturedly at Vi's crestfallen look.

"Oh, yes," she acknowledged, then brightening, "but we have three brothers, and you only two; so it's even all around after all, isn't it, papa?"

The children were full of delight over their treasure, and eager to show it to grandpa, grandma, Aunt Rosie, Aunt Wealthy and Aunt May; regretting much that the rest of their friends had left Viamede before the advent of the little stranger.

She proved a frail, gentle little creature, with violet eyes and pale golden hair, so fair and delicate that Lily was the name that most readily suggested itself and the one finally settled upon as really hers.

Lily became a great pet with them all, but Violet claimed a special property in her because as she would say, "The darling came to us almost on my birthday and she's just the sweetest, prettiest birthday present mamma ever gave me."

The weather was growing very warm at Viamede and Aunt Wealthy and the little Duncans found the heat oppressive; so when Lily was three weeks old and the dear mamma able to be up again, looking bright and well, that party bade good-bye and set out on their return to Lansdale.

The Dinsmores and Travillas lingered until the middle of May, when they too set their faces northward, not parting company till very near to Ion and the Oaks.

CHAPTER SECOND

"Envy is but the smoke of low estate,
Ascending still against the fortunate."

— *BROOKE*.

It was dark and raining a little when the carriage turned into the avenue at Ion; but the whole front of the house was ablaze with lights, the hall door stood wide open, and a double line of servants in holiday attire, each sooty face dressed in smiles, stood waiting to welcome the weary travelers home.

There were many hearty shakings and kissings of hands; many fervent ejaculations: "God bless you, Massa and Missus!" "Tank de Lord you's got home again, honey. We's been pinin' for you darlin' and for de sight of de new baby," and with the last words the voices were lowered at a sign from Aunt Chloe, in whose arms the little Lily lay sleeping sweetly.

There was some fretting among the weary little ones, but mamma and nurses were kind and gentle, and a good supper and bed soon cured all their troubles for that night.

Little Elsie was roused from her slumbers by a gentle shake, and starting up in bed, found the sun shining and Vi standing by her side with eager, excited face.

"Come, come to the window!" she cried. "It does seem as if I must be dreaming; it wasn't there before, I'm sure."

"What?" asked Elsie, springing out upon the floor and hurrying after Vi to the window from which she had witnessed the burning of the schoolhouse.

"There!" said Violet, pointing with her finger, "there! can you see it too?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Elsie, clasping her hands in a sort of ecstasy of delight, "oh, aren't papa and mamma good? How did they ever come to think of it! and how could they get it done while they were away?"

"Grandpa, Uncle Horace and Cal," suggested Vi. "Oh, aren't you glad? Aren't you glad, Elsie?"

"I should think so! and the boat is ever so pretty. Let's hurry and get dressed and go down and see it closer."

Rowing and sailing upon the bayou and lakelet had been the children's greatest pleasure at Viamede, their greatest regret in leaving it. Knowing this, their ever indulgent parents had prepared a pleasant surprise for them, causing a small tract of barren land on the Ion estate to be turned into an artificial lake. It was this, shining in the golden beams of the morning sun, and a beautiful boat moored to the hither shore, that had called forth from the lips of the little girls those exclamations of almost incredulous wonder and delight.

"Yes; I'll ring for Dinah," cried Vi, skipping across the room and putting out her hand to lay hold of the bell pull.

"Wait, Vi, our prayers first, you know," said Elsie.

"Oh, yes! I do want to thank God for being so good to us; the pretty lake and boat and all."

"Dear kind parents, safe journey home, too, and oh more things than we can count," added Elsie, as they knelt down side by side.

This duty performed with no irreverent haste, the maid was summoned and a careful toilet made in season to afford them time for a walk before mamma would be ready to see them.

They found their father in the lower veranda talking with the overseer, while Solon stood waiting with Beppo's bridle in his hand, the horse pawing the ground with impatience.

Eddie was there, too, caressing Bruno who seemed as glad to be at home again as any of the rest. Uttering a joyous bark he left his young master and bounded to meet the little girls.

Mr. Travilla turned at the sound and with a kind fatherly smile, held out his hands.

"O papa," they cried running to him, "how good of you to have it made for us!"

"Good-morning, my darlings," he said, giving and receiving caresses, "but what are you talking about?"

"Why the lake, papa; the lake and the boat."

"Lake?" exclaimed Eddie, "why where?"

"Oh, you couldn't see it from your windows," said Elsie. "Papa, papa, may we go now and look at it?"

"Yes," he said, taking a hand of each. "Larkin, I'll see you again after breakfast. Come, Eddie, my son, you too, and Bruno."

A brisk five minutes' walk brought them to the shore of the lake, a tiny one, scarce a quarter of a mile in circumference, not very deep and the water so clear that the pebbly bottom could be distinctly seen; gold and silver fish, too, gliding hither and thither; while a pretty, gayly painted row-boat lying at the water's edge, rocked gently in the morning breeze.

Eddie hailed the scene with a shout of delight; the little girls danced about gleefully, Vi clapping her hands and asking eagerly if they might get into the boat.

Papa looked at his watch, "Yes, there will be time for a row; one trip around the lake. Step in, all of you, and I will take the oars."

Vi was quite ready and Eddie gallantly handed her in, then turned and offered his hand to Elsie. She demurred. "But mamma! shouldn't we have mamma with us the first time?" and she looked up inquiringly into her father's face.

"Yes, yes, of course!" cried the others making haste to step ashore again, "we want dear mamma with us the very first time."

Papa smiled approval. "Then we will go back," he said, "and after breakfast, if mamma is willing, we will all come and take a row together; the boat is large enough to carry us all at once."

Mamma's consent was readily obtained, for to please her children was her great delight. So shortly after breakfast they all repaired to the lake and rowed round and across it several times, a merry, happy party.

At Roselands the family were gathered about the breakfast table and the principal topic of conversation was the return of the party from Viamede. Calhoun had been to the Oaks the previous evening and learned of their safe arrival.

"We must all go this morning and call upon them," said Mr. Dinsmore.

"We'll divide our forces," said Cal, laughing. "Suppose grandpa, mother and Aunt Enna, go first to the Oaks; and we younger ones to Ion?"

"Very well," replied the old gentleman, "I shall spend an hour with my son, then ride over to see Elsie and her little flock. How many of you young folks want to go to Ion in the first division?"

"I!" "And I!" "And I!" cried one and another.

"But you can't go all at once," returned their grandfather, looking around upon them with an amused smile; "the carriage is roomy, but really you are too many for it. Besides wouldn't there be some danger of overwhelming your cousins?"

"Well, I'm going, let who will stay at home," observed Molly Percival with cool decision. "The boys can ride, I mean Cal, and Art, and Dick and Wal; they all have ponies and the two carriages will hold the rest of us if we crowd a little."

"I'm not going to be bothered with Bob or Betty," said her mother; "they may go with you, or wait till another time."

"Then they'll wait," remarked Isadore Conly, "for I shall wear my best silk suit, and I have no notion of having it tumbled."

"Last year's suit is quite good enough for the occasion," said her mother, "they're only cousins."

"But rich ones, that can afford to dress, and I'll not go a step if I have to look shabby."

"Nor I," chimed in her sister. "So mamma you may as well resign yourself to the situation. It's no good finding fault or objecting," she added with a laugh.

"Take your own way, then," returned her mother indifferently, "but remember there'll be no more new dresses this season."

"Dear me, why aren't we as rich as the Travillas?" pouted Isadore. "I do think things are very unequally divided in this world."

"Never mind; the wheel of fortune often takes a turn," said her mother. "You may have money left you some day (some of your father's relations are still rich), and you may make a grand match."

"How long will it take you girls to don your finery?" ask Cal, pulling out his watch. "We'd better start as soon as we can: the sun will be getting hot."

"I'm done," said Molly, jumping up, "and I'll be ready by the time the carriage can be brought to the door. Come Isa and Virgy, you've eaten enough. Cousin Elsie will be sure to treat us to something good." And she ran gayly from the room.

Molly, just turned thirteen, and already as tall as her mother, was a bright, lively girl, full of fun and frolic. She was not a beauty, but had a clear complexion and fine dark eyes, and good humor and intelligence lent a charm to her face that made it more than ordinarily attractive.

Dick had always been fond of her, and was beginning to take a brotherly pride in her good looks and intellectual gifts.

Enna's feelings toward her were divided between motherly pride and affection on the one hand, and on the other the dread of being made to appear old by the side of so tall a daughter; a dread that made her jealous of Dick also.

The Conly girls, too, were growing fast, giving promise of fair, graceful womanhood, Isadore particularly of great beauty; which her mother fondly hoped would be the means of securing her a wealthy husband; for Mrs. Conly's affections were wholly set upon the things of this life; by her and her sister Enna, wealth and beauty were esteemed the highest good, and their children were trained in accordance with that view; the moral atmosphere of the house being very different from that of Ion, where the lives and conversation of the parents were such as to leave no doubt in the minds of their children, that to them the things of time and sense were as nothing in comparison with those of eternity.

Enna followed her daughter into the dressing-room they used in common.

"Wear the very best you have, Molly," she said, "I don't want you to be looked down upon as a poor relation, or to have it said that the Conlys dress better than my children."

"I'm sure they don't," said Molly, ringing for the maid, "though they'd like to if they could, and are always jealous when grandpa makes me a present."

"Of course they are, and they manage to get more than their fair share, too," acquiesced the mother in a tone of irritation; "but do you see to it that they don't get ahead of you at Ion; remember Elsie is as rich as a Jew, and likes the credit of being generous, so keep on the right side of her, if you want handsome presents."

"I'm sure she is generous and doesn't give only for the credit of it," said Molly.

"Don't give me any impudence," returned her mother sharply. "Rachel," to the maid who just then came in in answer to the bell, "dress Miss Molly first, and be quick about it."

Enna superintended the business in person, and in a way that sorely tried the temper and nerves of both Molly and the maid; the child's sash must be tied and retied, her hat bent this way and that, her collar and brooch changed again and again, till she was ready to cry with impatience; and when at last she started for the door, she was called back, and Rachel ordered to change her slippers for gaiter boots.

"I don't want to wear them!" cried Molly, fairly stamping with impatience. "The heels are so high and narrow, I can't bear them."

"They're just the style and make your foot look beautiful," said her mother, "sit down and let Rachel put them on you."

"Grandpa says they're dangerous, and so does Dr. Barton, too," grumbled Molly.

"Put them on her, Rachel," commanded Enna. "Molly, behave yourself, or you'll stay at home." The child submitted rather sullenly, muttering that she would be late.

Rachel was fastening the second boot, when Isadore and Virginia were heard running down the stairs, calling out that the carriage was at the door.

"There! I knew you'd make me too late!" cried Molly. "Oh, Rachel, do hurry!"

"Yes, Miss Molly, best I kin; dar dat's de las' button."

Up sprang Molly, and away in hot haste. She gained the landing, caught her heel in the carpet on the first step of the next flight, and a wild shriek rang through the house, accompanied by the sound of a heavy body tumbling and rolling down the stairs.

Echoing the scream, Enna rushed out into the upper hall.

Calhoun at the foot of the stairs, was picking Molly up.

"Is she hurt? Is she killed?" asked the mother, "Molly, Molly, how did you come to be so awkward?"

"I wasn't! it was those heels; I knew they'd throw me down some day!" cried the child in tones of mingled anger, fright and pain.

"H'm! you're not killed; haven't even had the temper knocked out of you," remarked Enna, going back to her dressing.

"Poor child, you must be hurt," said Calhoun, laying her gently on a sofa, "but no bones broken, I hope?"

"I – I don't know," sobbed Molly, "it's my back. Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

"Oh, Molly, are you much hurt? shall I go for the doctor?" asked Dick, coming to her side pale with fright. "Mac's right here at the door, ready saddled and bridled, and –"

"Go for the doctor?" interrupted Molly. "No, indeed! It's very good in you, Dick, but I don't want him; I am going to Ion with the rest of you. I'm ready now."

"You don't look much like it; you're as pale as a ghost," he said, Calhoun adding, "You'd better lie still for a while, Molly; Dick or I will take you over this evening, if you find yourself able to go then."

"Thank you, but I'm going now," she answered with decision, getting up and taking Dick's arm.

He helped her to the carriage, where Isadore, Virginia, and some of the younger ones sat waiting, and placed her in it.

She wiped away her tears and tried to smile, while answering the questions and condolences of the others, and the party moved on.

By the time Ion was reached, most of them had nearly forgotten Molly's accident, till Elsie remarked that she was looking pale, and asked if she were quite well.

That brought out the story of her fall.

Elsie heard it with grave concern but asked few questions as Molly seemed annoyed that the subject had been introduced. It was a habit of her mother's to scold her for awkwardness, and the child was sensitive on that point.

When the young people had left and the older members of the Roselands family called, Elsie seized a favorable opportunity to speak of Molly's pale looks and urge the importance of calling in a physician that if there were any reason to apprehend serious results from the fall, measures might be promptly taken to avert the danger.

"She can't have been seriously hurt," returned Enna coldly, "or she wouldn't have been ready to get into the carriage the next minute and ride over here."

"By the way," said her father, "I haven't heard what caused her fall."

"She's an awkward child, always tumbling about," returned Enna reddening.

"Especially since she wears those fashionable boots with the high narrow heels," he remarked. "Had she them on when she fell?"

Enna reluctantly admitted that such was the fact.

"I'll send them into town to-day, with orders that full half the heel shall be taken off," he said with angry decision.

CHAPTER THIRD

"'Tis a goodly scene —
Yon river, like a silvery snake, lays out
His coil i' the sunshine lovingly."

— *HUNT*.

The family at Ion presently fell into the old routine of study, work and play, Elsie resuming the duties of governess; but as the heated term drew on, she and the little ones, especially the babe, began to droop.

"You must go north for the summer," said Dr. Barton, "start as soon as possible and don't return till October."

"Would you recommend the seashore?" asked Mr. Travilla.

"H'm! that might answer very well, but mountain air would, I think, be better."

"Oh then, mamma!" cried Vi, who was present and had been an eager but hitherto silent listener, "won't you accept Aunt Lucy's invitation?"

"Perhaps, daughter," Elsie said smiling indulgently into the bright little face, "but we will take time to consider what will be best."

"Where is that?" asked the doctor, "Lucy Ross, I suppose, but I've forgotten where they live."

"On the banks of the Hudson a few miles south of Newburgh. The Craggs they call their place, and a beautiful one it is. 'Twas only yesterday I received a letter from Lucy, urging us to come and spend the summer with her."

"I should say go by all means," said the doctor, taking leave.

There were reasons for hesitation on the part of the careful parents of which the physician knew nothing. The young Rosses, all unused to control, were a willful set not likely to exert a beneficial influence over other children; that was the demur.

However the final decision was in favor of the visit, and a few days later they set out upon their journey; Mr. Horace Dinsmore taking charge of them, as business made it inconvenient for Mr. Travilla to leave just at that time.

From New York they passed up the Hudson in a steamboat; the carriage from the Craggs was found in waiting at the landing, and a short drive brought them to the house, which stood high up above the river, in the midst of magnificent mountain scenery.

The Ion children, taught from early infancy to notice the beauties of nature, were in ecstasies of delight, exclaiming anew at every turn in the road, calling each other's, mamma's or grandpa's attention to the sparkling river, the changing shadows on the mountainsides, here a beetling crag, there a waterfall or secluded glen. Having rested the previous night, sleeping soundly at a hotel, they were not wearied with travel but seemed fresher now than when they left their home.

Lucy and her little flock, gathered on the front porch to receive their guests, gave them a warm welcome. The two ladies had lost none of the affection for each other which had been one of the happinesses of their childhood and early youth, and each loved the children of the other for the mother's sake if not for their own. They numbered the same, but Sophie, Lucy's youngest, was now in her fifth year, and Baby Lily was greeted with many expressions and demonstrations of delight.

Lucy excused her husband's absence: he was away on business, she said, but would be at home before night.

"Where's Phil?" asked Eddie, turning to Gertrude.

"Oh, he's at boarding-school, don't you know?" she answered. "He'll be home in vacation; but that doesn't begin for two weeks yet."

Mr. Dinsmore tarried for a few days, then returned to the neighborhood of Philadelphia, where he had left his wife and Rosie, who were visiting their northern relatives.

Miss Fisk was still governess at the Craggs, and when the children had had a week of play together, it was thought best by the mammas, that two hours of each morning should be devoted to lessons.

Knowing Miss Fisk to be not only well educated and refined, but also a conscientious and good woman, Elsie was willing to entrust her children to her care; the more so, because Lily in her feeble state, required much of her own time and attention.

In the midst of a beautiful grove of oaks and maples, on the side of a hill, scarce more than a stone's throw from the mansion, and within full view of its windows, stood a small brick building owned by Mr. Ross, and used as a summer schoolroom for the children.

It was a cool shady spot, enlivened by the songs of the wild birds who built their nests in the trees, and the musical tinkle of a little waterfall that came tumbling down from the heights above not half-a-dozen yards from the door.

Mr. Ross had furnished the room with comfortable and convenient chairs and desks, and Lucy had made it pretty and tasteful with white muslin curtains and neatly papered walls of a soft neutral tint, enlivened by a few gayly colored pictures. Woodwork and floor were stained a rich dark brown, bright soft rugs were scattered here and there; and altogether the place was as inviting as a lady's parlor.

The Ion children were well content to spend here two or three hours of that part of the day when the sun was too hot for them to be exposed to his rays with safety and comfort: the others found lessons made much more agreeable by the companionship of their young guests, and Miss Fisk was glad to take them under her charge, because by their intelligence they added greatly to the interest of her work, while their respectful obedient behavior exerted an excellent influence upon her other pupils.

Before leaving home, Elsie, after careful and prayerful consideration, thought it best to have a plain talk with her older children about the temptations that were likely to assail them during their visit to the Craggs.

They had had some past experience of the ways of Lucy's children, and she knew they had not forgotten it; and reminding them of the Bible declaration, that "evil communications corrupt good manners," she bade them, while refraining as far as possible from judging their little friends, at the same time to carefully avoid following their example in anything they knew to be wrong.

"Mamma," said Vi, "perhaps sometimes we mightn't know if it was wrong!"

"I think you will, daughter, if you take a moment to think; and if you are doubtful, you may be pretty sure it is wrong."

"Mamma, we mustn't tell tales to you?"

"No, dear; but perhaps you can consult me without that; and do not forget that you can always lift up your heart to God for help to know and do the right."

"Yes, mamma," returned the little girl thoughtfully, "and I do believe Elsie will 'most always be there and know what's right."

"I'm not sure," said her sister, with a grave shake of the head, "I wish we could always have mamma by to tell us."

"But mamma cannot be with you always, darlings," Elsie said, regarding them with yearning tenderness, "and so, as your papa and I have often told you, you must learn to think and decide for yourselves; about some things now, and about others as you grow older and wiser. Some things the Bible tells us plainly, and in regard to those we have nothing to do but obey."

CHAPTER FOURTH

"A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame."
– *PROVERBS xxix. 15.*

Lucy, too, had a talk with her children, in which she begged them quite pathetically, not to disgrace her before the expected guests, Mr. Dinsmore especially, who was so very strict in his ideas of how children ought to be brought up, and how they should behave.

They promised readily enough to "behave splendidly" and for a few days did so astonishingly well that, as she laughingly said, "she began to grow frightened lest they were becoming too good to live."

But she need not have been alarmed; the reaction was not long in coming and was sufficient to relieve all apprehension that they were in immediate danger from an overplus of goodness.

It began on the morning after Mr. Dinsmore's departure. Gertrude was late to breakfast, and when reproved by her mother answered in a manner so disrespectful as to quite astonish the young Travillas. They expected to see her banished at once from the table and the room; but her mother only looked grave and said in a tone of displeasure, "Gertrude, I cannot have you speak to me in that way – Don't do it again."

"I don't care; you needn't scold so about every little trifle then," muttered the delinquent in an undertone, pulling the dish of meat toward her, helping herself and spilling the gravy on the clean tablecloth.

Mrs. Ross did not seem to hear, she was spreading a piece of bread with the sweetest and freshest of butter, for Sophie.

"I don't want it, I want waffles!" screamed the child, snatching up the bread the instant it was laid on her plate, and dashing it on to the carpet.

"You are not well this morning, dear, and mamma thinks waffles might make her darling worse," said Lucy in a soothing tone. "Come now be a good baby, and eat the bread. Shall mamma spread another piece?"

"No, no, naughty mamma! I'll jus' frow it on the floor if you do," cried the child, bursting into angry sobs.

"Shall mamma have some toast made for her?" (coaxingly).

"No, no! waffles! and butter on waffles, and 'lasses on butter, and sugar on 'lasses!"

The mother laughed. It seemed to irritate the child still further; and she screamed louder than ever, slid down from her chair and stamped her foot with rage.

Mrs. Ross was deeply mortified at the exhibition. "Pick her up and carry her to the nursery," she said to a servant.

Sophie kicked and struggled, but the girl, – a strong and determined one – carried her away by main force.

"I'm dreadfully ashamed of her, Elsie," Lucy said, turning to her friend; "but she's a nervous little creature and we must try to excuse her."

"A few hearty slaps would reverse the nervous currents and do her an immense amount of good, Mrs. Ross," remarked the governess in her slow, precise way.

"Slaps, Miss Fisk," returned Lucy reddening, "I don't approve of corporal punishment, as *I* have told you more than once. I was never whipped, and I don't intend that any of my children shall be."

"Most assuredly not, madam; but I was recommending it not as a punishment for disobedience or ill temper, but simply as a remedial agent. I have never experienced anything of the kind myself, Mrs. Ross, but have heard it remarked that nervousness occasions greater suffering than what is

generally understood by the term pain; therefore I suggested it as I should the amputation of a diseased member when necessary in order to preserve life."

"Permit me to remark," returned Lucy, "that unmasked advice is seldom acceptable, and now a truce to discussion, if you please. My dear Elsie," turning to Mrs. Travilla, "I beg you to excuse our ill-manners. It strikes me that none of us are behaving quite as we ought this morning. Hal and Archie, what's wrong between you now?" For the two boys, seated side by side, were scowling at each other, and muttering angrily half under their breath.

"Why, ma, he went and took the very piece of meat I just said I was going to have," whimpered Archie, digging his fists into his eyes.

"Well, I don't care," retorted Harry, "I'd as good a right as you, and I was ready first."

"Give him a part of it, can't you?" said his mother.

"Tain't more'n I want myself."

"I won't have it after it's been on his plate," exclaimed both together.

"Boys, I'm ashamed of you!" said Lucy, "I wish your father were here to keep you straight. You don't dare behave so before him. I'm sure your little friends would never act so. Don't you see how your naughtiness astonishes them? Vi, would you talk to your mamma as my children do to me?"

The large blue eyes opened wide upon the questioner in half incredulous, reproachful surprise, then turned upon the beautiful, gentle face of Mrs. Travilla with an expression of ardent affection mingled with admiration and respect. "O Aunt Lucy! could you b'lieve I'd do that to my mamma?"

The very thought of so wounding that tender mother heart was evidently so full of pain to the little one, that Elsie could not refrain from responding to the appeal, "Mamma knows you would not, darling."

"Oh, no, mamma, 'cause I love you!" cried the child, the young face growing bright with smiles.

"Atmospheric influences have often a great deal to do with these things; do you not find it so?" Elsie said, turning to her friend.

"Yes, I have noticed that!" Lucy said, catching gladly at the suggestion: "and the air is certainly unusually oppressive this morning. I feel nervous myself. I think we'll have a gust before night."

The last words were spoken in an undertone, but the quick ear of Gertrude caught them. "Then I shan't go to school," she announced decidedly.

"Nonsense," said her mother, "'twon't be here till afternoon; probably not till night, if at all."

"Now, ma, you're just saying that. Aunt Elsie, do you really think it won't come soon?"

Glancing through the open window at the mountains and the sky, Elsie answered that she saw no present indications of a storm; there was nothing to betoken it but the heat and closeness of the air.

"Are you afraid of thunder, Aunt Elsie?" asked Harry.

"Lightning, you silly boy," corrected Gertrude, "nobody's afraid of thunder."

"Yes, you are," he retorted. "You just ought to see, Ed, how scared she gets," and Harry laughed scornfully.

Gertrude was ready with an indignant retort, but her mother stopped her. "If you are really brave, Gertrude, you can have an excellent opportunity to show it when the storm comes." Then to Harry, "Let your sister alone, or I'll send you from the room."

The gust, a very severe one, came in the afternoon. Before it was fairly upon them, Lucy, herself pale with terror, had collected her children in a darkened room and seated them all on a feather-bed, where they remained during the storm, half stifled by the heat, the little ones clinging to their mother, hiding their heads in her lap and crying with fear.

Elsie and her children formed a different group; the mother the central figure here also, her darlings gathered closely about her, in her dressing-room – at a safe distance from the open windows – watching with awed delight, the bursting of the storm clouds over the mountain-tops, the play of the lightning, the sweep of the rain down from the heights into the valleys and river below, listening to the crash and roar of the thunder as it reverberated among the hills, one echo taking it up after

another, and repeating it to the next, till it sounded like the explosions of many batteries of heavy artillery, now near at hand, now farther and farther away.

"Mamma, isn't it grand?" exclaimed Eddie, in one of the brief pauses in the wild uproar of the elements.

"Yes," she said, "the thunder of his power who can understand?"

"Is it God, mamma? does God make it?" asked little Herbert.

"Yes, dear; 'when he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasuries.'"

"We needn't be 'f'aid, mamma?"

"No, darling, no; for God is our Father; He loves us and will take care of us."

The storm was very violent while it lasted, but soon passed away; the sun shone out, and a beautiful rainbow spanned the eastern sky above the mountain-tops.

Elsie's children clapped their hands in ecstasy, and ran to call their little friends to enjoy the sight with them. Mrs. Ross followed, looking so pale and exhausted, that Elsie inquired with concern if she were ill.

"Oh, it was the storm!" she said, "wasn't it fearful? I was sure the house would be struck and some of us killed. Weren't you frightened?"

"No," Elsie said, with a kindly reassuring smile, "I presume my nerves are stronger than yours, and I am not naturally timid in regard to thunder and lightning. Besides, I know so well that he who guides and controls it is my Father and my Friend. Come, look at his bow of promise."

The children were in a group about the window, gazing and admiring.

"Let's ask mamma for the story of it," Vi was saying.

"The story of it?" repeated Archie Ross.

"Yes; don't you know? about Noah and the flood."

"I never heard it."

"Oh, Archie, it's in the Bible; grandma told it to us once," exclaimed his sister Gertrude.

"I didn't hear it, anyhow," persisted the boy, "do, Vi, coax Aunt Elsie to tell it."

The petition was readily granted. Mrs. Travilla was an inimitable story-teller, and Lucy, whose knowledge of Scripture history was but superficial, listened to the narrative with almost as much interest and pleasure as did the children.

"I would give anything for your talent for story-telling, Elsie," she said at its conclusion.

"Oh, another! another! Please tell us another?" cried a chorus of young voices.

Mrs. Travilla drew out her watch, and holding it up with a smile, "Not just now, my dears," she said, "see it is almost tea-time, and," she added playfully, "some of us have need to change our dresses and smooth our tangled tresses."

"That is true," said Lucy, rising hastily, "and I expect my husband home. I must send the carriage off at once to the depot; for the train is nearly due."

Thereupon a cry was raised among the Rosses as they flew after their mother, "I want to go for papa!" "and I!" "It's my turn, I say, and I will go!" "No, you shan't, for it's mine."

CHAPTER FIFTH

"She fed me first to God;
Her words and prayers were my young spirit's dew."
– *PIERPONT*.

"Hallo! this looks like welcome; every one of you been crying!" Mr. Ross said, catching up Sophie in his arms, and glancing about upon his group of children, after an affectionate greeting to his wife, and a cordially kind one to their guest.

"What's the trouble? so sorry papa was coming home, eh?"

"No, no, that wasn't it, papa," they cried, crowding around him, each eager to claim the first caress, "it wasn't that, but we wanted to go for you, and mamma wouldn't let us."

"Yes," said Lucy, "they all wanted to go and as that couldn't be, and no one would give up to the others, I kept them all at home."

"Quite right," he said, gravely, "I'm afraid you hardly deserve the pretty gifts I have brought."

"Oh, yes, yes, papa, we'll be good next time! Indeed we will! Mamma, coax him!"

"Yes, do let them have them, Phil," urged his wife, "where would be the use of keeping the things back after spending your money for them?"

"To teach them a good lesson. I'm afraid both you and I are foolishly indulgent, Lucy."

"Oh, they'll be good next time."

"This once then, but only this once, unless they keep their word," he said, producing his gifts – a book or toy for each of his own children, and a package of sweetmeats which he divided among all present.

He had brought a new dog home with him, but no one but Eddie had noticed it yet. He was stroking and patting it, saying, "Poor fellow, what kind of a dog are you?"

"A French poodle," said Mr. Ross, coming up to them, "A good watch dog, and excellent for scaring up the wild ducks for the sportsmen. Do you and papa keep up the shooting lessons, master Eddie?"

"Yes, sir; papa has always said he meant to make me as good a shot as himself, and mamma says it was never his way to give up till a thing's thoroughly done," returned the boy, proudly.

"And you don't equal him as a shot yet, eh?"

"No, sir! no, indeed! Why, even cousin Cal Conly – a big man – can't shoot as well as papa."

"What an ugly dog!" exclaimed the other children, gathering round.

"What did you buy it for, papa?" asked Gertrude.

"Not for beauty, certainly," laughed Mr. Ross, stroking and patting the shaggy head of the dog, who was covered with curly hair of a dirty white, mottled with dull brown, "but for worth which is far better. Isn't it, Ranger?"

A wag of his bushy tail, was Ranger's only reply.

"Will he bite?" asked little Herbert, shrinking back as the newcomer turned toward him.

"Tramps and burglars; but not good children," replied Mr. Ross. "You needn't be afraid of him, my little man."

Through the evening there was a great deal of romping between the children and the new dog, but little Elsie seemed unusually quiet, scarcely stirring from her mother's side. She was suffering with toothache, but kept her trouble to herself; principally, because she had a great dread of the dentist's instruments.

But in the night the pain grew so severe that she could not keep from crying and groaning. She did not want to wake any one, so buried her face in the pillow to smother the sound of her sobs;

but presently a gentle hand touched her caressingly, and mamma's sweet voice asked, "What ails my little daughter?"

"O mamma I did not mean to wake you!" cried the little girl sitting up with her hand pressed to her cheek, "but the pain was so bad I couldn't help making a noise."

"My poor dear little girl! did you think your mother would want to sleep when her child was in pain?" Elsie said, clasping her in her arms. "No, indeed! so do not try to bear any pain alone another time."

Mamma's loving sympathy was very sweet; the pain was soon relieved, too, by some medicine she put into the tooth, and presently all was forgotten in sound refreshing sleep.

Elsie came into her mamma's dressing-room the next morning, along with the others, looking as bright and well as was her wont, yet with the boding fear that something would be said to her about having the troublesome tooth extracted.

However to her relief the subject was not broached at all; they had their usual reading and prayer, recitation of texts and talk with mamma about the lessons contained in them, and then the breakfast bell summoned them to their morning meal.

The tooth was quiet for a few days, then ached again for several hours harder than ever.

"O mamma, mamma, what shall I do?" sobbed the child in the midst of her pain.

"Couldn't my little girl pluck up courage enough to have it out?" asked the mother tenderly.

"O mamma, don't say I must! please don't; I'm so frightened at the very thought!"

"Ah, if I could only bear it for you, my darling! but you know I cannot."

"No, dear mamma, and I couldn't be so selfish as to let you, if you could. But must I have it out?"

"I have not said so; I should far rather my dear daughter would say must to herself."

"Ought I, mamma?"

"Ought you not? The tooth has become only a source of pain and trouble to you; if left it will cause the others to decay, and decayed teeth injure the health. Health is one of God's best gifts and it is our duty to use every means in our power to preserve it."

"Yes, mamma, but oh, I'm so afraid!" cried the child, trembling and weeping.

"My darling, resolve to do your duty with God's help, and he will fulfill his promise to you. 'As thy days so shall thy strength be.'"

Little Elsie had long ago given her heart to Jesus; love to him was the ruling motive of her life, and to please and honor him she was ready to do or endure anything. "I will try, mamma," she said, "and you too will ask God to help me?"

Mamma gave the promise, sealing it with a very tender kiss.

Mr. Ross was going down to New York the next morning, and it was soon arranged that his wife, Mrs. Travilla and little Elsie, should accompany him.

Mrs. Ross had some shopping to do, but would first take the two Elsies to her dentist, so that the little girl's trial might be over as soon as possible and she able to enjoy some sight-seeing afterward. Baby Lily was better and could be safely entrusted for the day to Aunt Chloe's faithful care.

The plan was concealed from the Ross children because, as their mother said, "it was the only way to have any peace." So they were allowed to sleep until the travelers had taken an early breakfast and gone.

The little Travillas, however, were up and saw the departure, bidding a cheerful good-bye to "mamma and sister Elsie," sending wistful, longing looks after the carriage as it rolled away, but making no complaint that they were left behind.

"Poor dear Elsie!" Vi said with tears in her eyes, "it's just dreadful that she must have that tooth extricated."

"Extracted," corrected Eddie. "Vi, you seem to forget what mamma says: – that you should never use a big word unless you are sure you have it right; or when a little one would do as well."

"What little one?"

"Pulled."

"Couldn't it be pulled and not come out?"

"Well then you might say pulled out."

"I like the other word best," persisted Vi. "But we needn't be particular about words when Elsie's going to be so dreadfully hurt."

Herbert burst out crying at that.

"Why Herbie what ails you?" asked Vi, putting her arms round his neck and giving him a kiss.

"I don't want the mans to hurt my Elsie," sobbed the little fellow, "maybe dey'll kill her."

"Oh, no, they won't! mamma will never let them do that. They'll only take away the naughty tooth that hurts her so."

"Come let's go and walk round the garden," said Eddie, taking Herbie's hand, "mamma said we might."

The breakfast bell called them in to find the Rosses making a perfect bedlam in their anger and disappointment at being left behind by their parents. Sophie was screaming and stamping with rage, the boys and Kate were whimpering and scolding, and Gertrude walking about with flashing eyes, was saying "I'll never forgive mamma for this, no I never will; for she'd promised to take me along next time she went to the city."

Violet, Eddie, and Harold hearing these words, looked at each other in horrified silence. "How could she speak so of her own mother?"

Miss Fisk came in, in her quiet, deliberate way and stood looking for a moment from one to another of her pupils in a sort of amazed, reproving silence that presently had the effect of quieting them down a little. Then she spoke.

"Young ladies and young gentlemen, I am astonished! especially at your expressions and behavior, Miss Gertrude Ross. How you can permit yourself to indulge in such invectives against parents so extremely indulgent as Mr. and Mrs. Ross, I cannot conceive."

Sophie whose screams had sunk to sobs, now permitted the servant to lift her to her high chair, Kate and the boys slunk shamefacedly into their seats at the table, and Gertrude, muttering something about "people not keeping their promises," followed their example.

"Come, sit down, my dears," Miss Fisk said, turning to Violet and her brothers; "the tempest seems to have nearly subsided and I hope will not resume its violence."

Herbie was clinging to Vi in a frightened way, sobbing "I want mamma!" and Harold's eyes too were full of tears. It took coaxing and soothing to restore their equanimity and then the breakfast proceeded, everybody seeming to grow brighter and more good humored with the satisfying of the appetite for food.

Vi was a merry little creature, a veritable bit of sunshine wherever she went, and under the influence of her bright looks and ways, sweet rippling laughter and amusing speeches, the whole party at length grew quite merry: especially after Miss Fisk had announced that there were to be no lessons that day but instead a picnic in the woods.

CHAPTER SIXTH

"By sports like these are all their cares beguil'd,
The sports of children satisfy the child."
– *GOLDSMITH.*

"Good! good!" cried the children. "Oh, delightful! But where are we going?"

"To the grove adjacent to the schoolhouse," replied the governess. "We could not find a lovelier spot, and its proximity to the mansion renders it most eligible."

"Proximity, eligible, adjacent; what do you mean by those words, Miss Fisk?" asked Gertrude, a little contemptuously.

"I desire you to consult one of our standard lexicographers. You will then be far more likely to retain the definitions in your memory," returned the governess, ignoring the tone of her pupil.

Gertrude shrugged her shoulders, with impatience, muttering audibly, "I wish you'd talk like other people, and not like a dictionary."

"You quarrel with my phraseology, because you do not understand it," observed Miss Fisk, nonchalantly, "which is very irrational, since were I never to employ, in conversing with you, words beyond your comprehension, you would lose the advantage of being induced to increase your stock of information by a search for their meaning."

"If that's what you do it for, you may as well give it up at once," returned Gertrude, "for I don't care enough about your meaning to take half that trouble."

"Miss Gertrude, permit me to remark that you are lacking in respect to your instructress," returned Miss Fisk, reddening.

"Do you mean that it is convenient, because of being so near this house, Miss Fisk?" asked Eddie respectfully.

"Yes, convenient and safe; on which account both Mrs. Travilla and Mrs. Ross stipulated that our picnic for to-day should be held there."

"Well, let's go right away," said Gertrude, jumping up and pushing back her chair.

"Immediately, Miss Ross," corrected the governess. "Right away is exceedingly inelegant."

"How tiresome!" muttered Gertrude. Then aloud to Violet, as the governess left the room, "I say, Vi, does your mamma reprove you for saying right away?"

"I don't remember that I ever said it. Mamma – "

"Said it?" interrupted Gertrude, with a twinkle of fun in her eye, "why don't you say 'used the expression'? my dear," mimicking Miss Fisk's tones, "you should never condescend to make use of a sixpenny word, when a fifty cent one would express your sentiments fully as correctly, or perchance even more so."

Vi could not help joining in the laugh with which Gertrude concluded, though feeling rather ashamed of herself, as she seemed to see the grave look of disapproval mamma would have given her if present.

"Oh, Gertrude," she said, "we oughtn't to – "

"Yes, we ought," returned Gertrude, as they ran out of the room together; "mamma always laughs when I take off old finikin Fisk. She wouldn't have me talk like her for the world. Would your mamma wish you to?"

"No, but she never says – "

"Right away? No, of course not; she says 'immediately' or 'at once' or something that sounds nice. Well, so will I when I'm grown up."

Miss Fisk was on the porch taking an observation of the weather, the children crowding about her, and clamoring to be allowed to set out immediately for the grove. The day was fine, and there seemed every indication that it would continue so.

"Yes," said the governess, "you may request your maids to see that you are suitably arrayed for the occasion, and as promptly as possible, and we will repair to the appointed place; taking our departure hence in precisely thirty minutes."

The children were ready and impatiently waiting, when Miss Fisk came down from her room, "suitably arrayed for the occasion."

They set out at once, the whole party in high good humor, the boys carrying their balls, marbles, and fishing rods, the girls their dolls and a set of toy dishes, to play tea-party with. Miss Fisk had a bit of fancy work and a book, and two servants brought up the rear with camp-chairs, an afghan and rugs to make a couch for the little ones when they should grow sleepy. Luncheon was in course of preparation by the cook, and was to be sent by the time the young picnickers were likely to feel an appetite for it.

The boys took the lead, bounding on some distance ahead, with Ranger in their midst. They were in no mood just then for sitting still, so depositing their fishing tackle in the schoolhouse, went roving about in search of more active amusement than that of catching trout.

"That'll be good fun when we want to sit down and rest," said Eddie.

"Oh, I see a bird's nest, and I'm going to have it!" exclaimed Archie, beginning to climb a tree.

"Oh don't," cried Harold, "mamma says it's very cruel and wicked to rob the poor little birds."

"Pooh! you're a baby!" answered Archie, half breathlessly, pulling himself up higher and yet higher. "There, I'll have it in a minute," reaching out his hand to lay hold of the branch that held the nest.

Ranger was barking loudly at the foot of the tree, Harry and Eddie were calling to Archie to "Take care!" and he hardly knew how it was himself, but he missed the branch, lost his hold of the tree, and fell, lighting upon Ranger's back.

The boy gave a scream, the dog a yelp, and the rest of the party came running to ask what was the matter.

Archie picked himself up, looking quite crestfallen, and the fright of the others was turned to laughter, as they discovered that he had received no damage beyond a slight scratch on his hand and a rent in his jacket.

Miss Fisk, making him promise not to repeat the experiment, went back to her seat under the trees and the book she had brought from the house for her own enjoyment.

The morning passed without any further incident worth recording, the children amusing themselves with various quiet plays, the girls keeping house, each under her own particular tree, and exchanging visits; the boys catching trout, which they sent to the house to be cooked for dinner. They wanted to make a fire and cook them themselves, but Miss Fisk wisely forbade it.

She would have had the meal served in the schoolhouse, but yielded to the clamor for an outdoor repast. Several desks were brought out into the shade of the trees, a dainty table-cloth spread over them and the party presently sat down to a delightful collation, to which they brought keen appetites.

Ranger had disappeared. They missed him as they were leaving the table.

"Where can he have gone?" Harry was saying, when Vi cried out, "Oh yonder he is! and he has a dear little bird in his mouth! Oh you wicked, cruel dog!" And running to him she tried to take it from him.

Be dropped it and snapped at her, Eddie jerking her back just in time to save her from his teeth, while Archie, who was very fond of Vi, struck the dog a blow with a stick, crying furiously, "You just do that again, sir, and I'll kill you!"

Ranger then flew at him, but the boy avoided the attack by jumping nimbly behind a tree.

The other children were screaming with fright, and a catastrophe appeared imminent, but one of the maids came running with some tempting morsels for Ranger which appeased his wrath, and the danger was averted.

Ranger's attention being absorbed with the satisfying of his appetite, the children now looked about for the bird. It was not quite dead, but soon breathed its last in Vi's lap with her tears dropping fast upon it.

"Oh don't, Vi!" said Archie, "I can't bear to see you feel so sorry. And the bird isn't being hurt now, you know; 'twon't ever be hurt any more; will it, Ed?"

"No," said Harry, "we might as well let the dog have it."

"No, no!" said Eddie, "it would just encourage him to catch another."

"So it would," said Gertrude, "let's make a grand funeral and bury it at the foot of a tree. If we only knew now which one it used to live on."

The motion was about to be carried by acclamation, but Vi entered a decided protest. "No, no, I want to keep it."

"But you can't, Vi," remonstrated Eddie, "dead things have to be buried, you know."

"Not the skin and feathers, Eddie; they do stuff them sometimes and I'll ask mamma to let me have this one done."

"Oh what's the use?" expostulated Gertrude; "it's only a common robin."

"But I love it; the poor dear little thing! and mamma will let me, I know she will," returned Vi, wiping away her tears as though comforted by the very thought.

The other children wandered off to their play leaving her sitting where she was, on a fallen tree, fondling the bird; but Archie soon came back and seated himself by her side.

"Such a pity; isn't it?" he said, "I hate that Ranger, don't you, Vi?"

"No-o I hope not, Archie," she answered doubtfully: "folks kill birds to eat them and may be 'tain't any worse for dogs," she added, with a fresh burst of tears. "Poor little birdie; and may be there are some young ones in the nest that have no mamma now to feed or care for them."

"That old Ranger! and he snapped at you too. Here he comes again. I'll kill him!" cried the boy, with vehemence. "Oh no, I know what I'll do! Here Ranger! here Ranger!" and starting up he rushed away in a direction to take him farther from the schoolhouse and the rest of his party.

He had spied in the distance a farmer's boy, a lad of fourteen, with whom he had some slight acquaintance. "Hallo, Jared Bates!" he shouted.

"Well, what's wantin'?" and Jared stood still, drawing the lash of his carter's whip slowly between his fingers. "Hurry up now, for I've got to go back to my team. Whose dog's that?" as Ranger came running up and saluted him with a sharp, "Bow, wow, wow!"

"Ours," said Archie, "and I'm mad at him 'cause he killed a bird and tried to bite Vi Travilla, when she went to take it from him."

"Like enough," returned Jared, grinning. "But what about it?"

"I thought may be you'd like to have him."

"So I would, what'll you sell him for?"

"Ten cents."

"I hain't got but two."

"Haven't you, Jared? truly, now?"

"No, nary red, 'cept them," and diving into his pantaloons' pocket, Jared produced a handful of odds and ends – a broken knife, a plug of tobacco, some rusty nails, a bit of twine, etc., – from which he picked out two nickels. "There, them's um, and they's all I got in the world," he said gravely, passing them over to Archie.

"Well, it's very cheap," observed the latter, pocketing the cash, "but you can have him. Good-bye," and away he ran back to the spot where he had left Vi.

"You're a green 'un!" laughed Jared, looking after him; then whistling to the dog to follow, he went on his way.

CHAPTER SEVENTH

"But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."

– 2 COR. ix. 6.

All the children, Gertrude excepted, were gathered on the front porch, Vi with the dead bird in her hands, when the carriage drove up with the returning travelers.

There was a glad chorus of welcome, and most of the young faces were bright and happy. Elsie's troop had nothing but smiles, caresses and loving words for her, and tender, anxious inquiries about "Sister Elsie; if the tooth were out?" "if the dentist hurt her much?"

"It was hard to bear," she said, "but the doctor was very kind, and tried not to hurt her. And, oh, mamma had made her such a lovely present, for being brave and willing to have her tooth out." And she took a beautiful little gold watch and chain from her bosom, and held them up to their admiring gaze.

"Oh, I'm so glad, so glad! Dear mamma, how good of you!" cried Vi, without a touch of envy embracing first her sister, and then her mother.

Eddie and the two younger ones seemed equally pleased, and "sister Elsie" allowed each in turn to closely inspect, her treasure.

In the meantime, Mr. and Mrs. Ross had been busy bestowing caresses and small gifts upon their children, who received them with noisy glee mingled with some reproaches because they had been left at home.

"Come, come, no complaints," said their father; "I think you have fared well; – a holiday, a picnic, and these pretty presents. Where's Gertrude?"

"Sure enough, where is she?" asked Lucy, looking round from one to another.

"She's mad because you did not take her along," remarked Harry, "she says you didn't keep your promise."

"Dear me, I'd forgotten all about it!" exclaimed Mrs. Ross. "I should have taken her though, but there wasn't time to get her up and dressed."

"Gertrude! Gertrude!" called Mr. Ross, in tones of authority, "Gertrude, come here and show yourself."

At that the child came slowly out from the hall – whence she had been watching the scene through the crack behind the door – looking red and angry.

"What's the matter with you?" asked her father, with some displeasure in his tones.

"Nothing, I'm not crying."

"Nor pouting either, I suppose? What's it all about."

"Mamma promised to take me along the next time she went to the city."

"Perhaps she will the next time."

"But this was the next time, because she promised it when she went before and took Kate."

"Well, such promises are always conditional; she took no one this time (but me), and there was a good reason why."

Gertrude smiled slightly, then laughed outright, as she glanced up into his face, saying, "I thought it was you, papa, that took mamma."

"Oh! now, you begin to look something like the little girl I'm used to hearing called Gertrude Ross; the one I like to buy presents for; the other one that was here just a moment ago, gets nothing bought with my money."

"See here," said her mother, and with a cry of delight Gertrude sprang forward and caught from her hand a watch and chain very nearly the counterparts of those little Elsie was displaying to her sister and brothers.

"Oh, joy, joy!" she cried, dancing up and down, "thank you, mamma! Thank you, papa! I'd rather have this than a dozen visits to New York. See, Kate, isn't it a beauty?"

"Yes," returned her sister sullenly; "but I don't see why you should have a watch and I only this ring; you're hardly more than a year older than I am and not a bit better girl"

"Come, come, don't pout, Kitty," said her father, stroking her hair; "your time will come. Harry's and Archie's too, and even little Sophie's," he added, catching the household pet up in his arms, to give her a hug and kiss.

It was not until after tea that Mr. Ross missed his dog. "Where's Ranger?" he asked of one of the servants.

"Dade, sir, I don't know," she answered. "Sure he went to the picnic wid the rest of the childer, an' it's meself as hasn't seen him since."

"Harry," stepping out on the porch where the children, except the very little ones, who had already been sent up to bed, were sitting listlessly about, too weary with the day's sports to care for anymore active amusement, "where's Ranger?"

"Ranger?" cried Harry with a start, "why sure enough, I haven't seen him since he came home! and I don't think he came with us either."

"No, he didn't," said several young voices.

"I wonder where he can be," pursued Harry. "Shall I go and look for him, papa?"

Mr. Ross was about to say yes, when his eye fell upon the face of his youngest son who, he noticed, looked very red and somewhat troubled. "What do you know about it, Archie?" he asked; "can you tell us what has become of Ranger?"

"He behaved very bad indeed, papa," stammered the boy; "he killed a dear little bird and tried to bite Vi, and me too – and I sold him."

The truth was out and Archie heaved a sigh of relief.

"Sold him?" repeated his father in a tone of mingled surprise and displeasure.

"Yes, sir: to Jared Bates, for two cents. Here they are: I s'pose they belong to you," said the little fellow tugging at his pocket.

"For two cents!" exclaimed Mr. Ross laughing in spite of himself. "You'll never grow rich, my boy, making such bargains as that. But see here," he added, growing grave again, "whose dog was it?"

"I – I thought it was ours, papa."

"Ours? Yours to play with, but only mine to sell or give away. You'll have to go to Jared tomorrow, return his two cents, and tell him the dog is mine, and you sold what did not belong to you."

"Oh where's my bird?" cried Violet, reminded of it by this little episode. "I laid it down to look at Elsie's watch, and oh it's gone! Mamma, mamma, I'm so sorry!"

"I am too, dear, for your sake," the mother said, putting an arm about her and kissing the wet cheek, for the tears had begun to flow again. "Was it the bird Ranger killed?"

"Yes, mamma, I was going to ask you to get it stuffed for me."

"Some cat has got it, no doubt," said Mr. Ross. "But don't cry: it couldn't hurt it, you know, after it was dead."

"If it only had a heaven to go to," sobbed Vi

"Perhaps it has," said the gentleman kindly. "I really don't think," turning to Mrs. Travilla, "that the Bible says anything to the contrary; it seems to me to simply leave the matter in doubt."

"I know," she answered thoughtfully, "that it is the generally accepted belief that there is no hereafter for the lower animals; yet it has occurred to me, too, that the Bible does not positively assert it; and some of the poor creatures have such a suffering life in this world that it makes my heart ache to think there is no other for them"

"Papa," asked Archie, "don't you think Ranger deserved to be sold for killing that bird and trying to bite Vi?"

"That's a question you should have propounded before selling him, that and another; 'May I sell him.'"

"I wish you'd let Phelim go and buy him back," remarked the boy, looking very uncomfortable at the thought of having to do the errand himself.

"No, sir," returned the father decidedly, "the mischief you have done you must undo yourself. Ah, Harry, go and ask if any letters came to-day."

"I asked," said Gertrude. "There was just one; from Phil," and she drew it from her pocket and handed it to her father.

"What does he say?" Mrs. Ross inquired when he had glanced over it.

"Not much, except that he's to be here to-morrow, and wants the carriage sent to the depot for him," he answered, handing it to her.

"Good!" said Gertrude, with much satisfaction. "We always have more fun when Phil's at home."

"Except when he picks a quarrel with you or some of us," remarked Harry.

"For shame, Hal!" said his mother. "The quarrels, if there are any, are as likely to be begun by you, as any one else."

Lucy was proud and fond of her first-born, and always ready to shield him from blame. He was in his mother's eyes as the king, who could do no wrong, but to others a spoiled child, a wilful, headstrong, domineering boy.

Yet he was not without his good qualities, brave, frank, affectionate, and generous to a fault, many hearts besides those of his doting parents were drawn to him in sincere affection; Elsie's among the rest; yet she dreaded exposing her little sons to Phil's influence; Edward especially as nearer Phil's age, and because, though much improved by good training, his natural disposition was very similar. But she had not seen Philip for two years, and hoped he might have changed for the better.

It seemed so at first. He was a bright, handsome youth, and came home in fine spirits, and with a manner full of affection for parents, brothers and sisters. She did not wonder at Lucy's fond pride in her eldest son.

"Phil," said his mother, following him into his room that night, "you have made a good impression, and I'm very anxious you shouldn't spoil it; so do try to keep on your good behavior while the Travillas stay."

"I intend to, Mrs. Ross," he returned, with a laugh. Elsie, little Elsie's been my little lady love since the first time my eyes lighted on her, and I know that if I want to secure the prize, I've got to keep on the right side of her father and mother."

Lucy laughed. "You are beginning early, Phil," she said. "I advise you not to say a word of your hopes in their hearing, for ten years to come."

"Trust me for managing the thing, ma," he returned, nodding his head wisely. "But do you s'pose now, they'd be so outrageously unreasonable as to expect a fellow to be quite perfect?" he queried, striking a match and lighting a cigar.

"Phil! Phil! throw that away!" she said, trying to snatch it from him.

He sprang nimbly aside, "No, you don't, ma! Why shouldn't I smoke as well as my father? Ministers smoke too, and lots of good people."

"But you're too young to begin yet, and I know your Aunt Elsie would be horrified. She'd think you a very fast boy and hurry away with her children, lest they should be contaminated by your bad example."

"Well," he answered, puffing away, "I'll not let her or them know I ever indulge. I'll only smoke up here and at night, and the smell will be all off my breath by morning."

"I wish you'd give it up entirely. Where did you ever learn it?"

"Comes natural; guess I inherited the taste. But nearly all the fellows at school do it – on the sly."

"Ah, Phil, I'm afraid you're a sad fellow!" Lucy said, shaking her head reprovably; but he could see the smile shining in her fond, admiring eyes, and lurking about the corners of her mouth.

"Oh, come now, ma, I'm not so bad; not the worst fellow in the world. I wouldn't do a mean thing."

"No, of course not," she said, kissing him good-night, and leaving him with a parting, "Don't forget to say your prayers, Phil."

Mr. and Mrs. Ross were not Christian parents; careful and solicitous about the temporal welfare of their children, they gave little thought to their spiritual needs. Lucy taught them, in their infancy, to say their prayers before lying down to rest at night, as they grew older sent them to Sunday-school, took them to church on pleasant Sabbath mornings, when it was convenient, and she felt inclined to go herself, and provided each one with a copy of the Bible.

This was about the extent of the religious training they received; and it was strongly counteracted by the worldly atmosphere of their home, the worldly example set them by their parents, and the worldly maxims and precepts constantly instilled into their young minds.

From these, they learned to look upon the riches, honors and pleasures of earth as the things to be most earnestly coveted, most worthy of untiring efforts to secure.

Life at the Crag was a strange puzzle to the Ion children: no blessing asked at the table, no gathering of the family morning or evening for prayer or praise or the reading of God's word.

"Mamma, what does it mean?" they asked; "why doesn't Uncle Ross do as papa does?"

Elsie scarce knew how to answer them. "Don't let us talk about it, dears," she said: "but whatever others may do, let us serve God ourselves and seek his favor above everything else; for 'in his favor is life' and his loving kindness is better than life."

CHAPTER EIGHTH

"To each his sufferings: all are men
Condemn'd alike to groan;
The tender for another's pain,
The unfeeling for his own."

– GRAY.

The weather was delightful: because of Phil's return the children were excused altogether from lessons and nearly every day was taken up with picnics, riding, driving and boating excursions up and down the river.

They were never allowed to go alone on the water or behind any horse but "Old Nan," an old slow moving creature that Phil said "could not be persuaded or forced out of a quiet even trot that was little better than a walk, for five consecutive minutes."

The mothers were generally of the party; – Lily continuing so much better that Elsie could leave her, without anxiety, in the faithful care of her old mammy – and always one or two trusty servants were taken along.

One day Philip got permission to take old Nan and the phaeton and drive out with the two older girls, Gertrude and Elsie.

They were gone several hours and on their return, while still some miles from home were overtaken by a heavy shower, from which they took refuge in a small log-house standing a few yards back from the road.

It was a rude structure built in a wild spot among the rocks and trees, and evidently the abode of pinching poverty; but everything was clean and neat, and the occupants, an elderly woman reclining in a high-backed wooden rocking-chair with her feet propped up on a rude bench, and a young girl who sat sewing by a window overlooking the road, wore an air of refinement, and spoke English more correctly and with a purer accent than sometimes is heard in the abodes of wealth and fashion.

The door stood wide open and the moment Philip drew rein, the girl at the window called to them to come in out of the wet, and directed the lad to shelter his horse and phaeton underneath a shed at the side of the house.

Gertrude ran lightly in with a laugh and jest, Elsie following close at her heels.

The girl rose and setting out two unpainted wooden chairs, invited them to be seated, remarking as she resumed her work, that the shower had come up very suddenly, but she hoped they were not wet.

"Not enough to hurt us," said Gertrude.

"Hardly at all, thank you," I said Elsie. "I hope our mammas will not be alarmed about us, Gerty."

"I don't think they need be so long as there's no thunder and lightning," answered Gertrude. "Ah, see how it is pouring over yonder on the mountain, Elsie!"

The pale face of the woman in the rocking-chair, evidently an invalid, had grown still paler and her features worked with emotion.

"Child! child!" she cried, fixing her wild eyes on Elsie, "who – who are you?"

"They're the young ladies from the Craggs, mother," said the girl soothingly.

"I know that, Sally," she answered peevishly, "but one's a visitor, and the other one called her Elsie, she's just the age and very image of – child, what is your family name?"

"Travilla, madam," the little girl replied, with a look of surprise.

"Oh, you're her daughter; yes, of course I might have known it. And so she married him, her father's friend and so many years older."

The words were spoken as if to herself and she finished with a deep drawn sigh.

This woman had loved Travilla – all unsuspected by him, for he was not a conceited man – and there had been a time when she would have almost given her hopes of heaven for a return of her affection.

"Is it my mother you mean? did you know her when she was a little girl?" asked Elsie, rising and drawing near the woman's chair.

"Yes; if she was Elsie Dinsmore, and lived at Roselands – how many years ago? let me see; it was a good many; long before I was married to John Gibson."

"That was mamma's name and that was where she lived; with her grandpa, while her papa was away in Europe so many years," returned the little Elsie; then asked with eager interest, "But how did you happen to know her? did you live near Roselands?"

"I lived there; but I was a person of no consequence; only a poor governess," remarked the woman in a bitter tone; an expression of angry discontent settling down upon her features.

"Are you Miss Day?" asked Elsie, retreating a step or two with a look as if she had seen a serpent.

Her mother had seldom mentioned Miss Day to her, but from her Aunts Adelaide and Lora she had heard of her many acts of cruelty and injustice to the little motherless girl committed to her care.

"I was Miss Day; I'm Mrs. Gibson now. I was a little hard on your mother sometimes, as I see you've been told; but I'd a great deal to bear; for they were a proud, haughty family – those Dinsmores. I was not treated as one of themselves, but as a sort of upper servant, though a lady by birth, breeding and education," the woman remarked, her tone growing more and more bitter as she proceeded.

"But was it right? was it just and generous to vent your anger upon a poor little innocent girl who had no mother and no father there to defend her?" asked the child, her soft eyes rilling with tears.

"Well maybe not; but it's the way people generally do. Your mother was a good little thing, provokingly good sometimes; pretty too, and heiress, they said, to an immense fortune. Is she rich still? or did she lose it all by the war?"

"She did not lose it all, I know," said Elsie, "but how rich she is I do not know; mamma and papa seldom talk of any but the true riches."

"Just like her, for all the world!" muttered the woman. Then aloud and sneeringly, "Pray what do you mean by the true riches?"

"Those which can never be taken from us; treasure laid up in heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and thieves break not through to steal."

The sweet child voice ceased and silence reigned in the room for a moment, while the splashing of the rain upon the roof could be distinctly heard.

Mrs. Gibson was the first to speak again. "Well I'd like to have that kind, but I'd like wonderfully well to try the other a while first."

Elsie looked at the thin, sallow face with its hollow cheeks and sunken eyes, and wished mamma were there to talk of Jesus to this poor woman, who surely had but little time to prepare for another world.

"Is your mother at the Craggs?" asked Mrs. Gibson turning to her again.

Elsie answered in the affirmative, adding that they had been there for some time and would probably remain a week or two longer.

"Do you think she would be willing to come here to see me?" was the next question, almost eagerly put.

"Mamma is very kind and I am sure she will come if you wish to see her," answered the child.

"Then tell her I do; tell her I, her old governess, am sick and poor and in great trouble."

Tears rolled down her cheeks and for a moment her eyes rested upon her daughter's face with an expression of keen anguish. "She's going blind," she whispered in Elsie's ear, drawing the child toward her, and nodding in the direction of Sally, stitching away at the window.

"Blind! oh how dreadful!" exclaimed the little girl in low moved tones, the tears springing to her eyes. "I wish she could go to Doctor Thomson."

"Doctor Thomson! who is he?"

"An oculist: he lives in Philadelphia. A friend of mamma's had something growing over her eyes so that she was nearly blind, and he cut it off and she can see now as well as anybody."

"I don't think that is the trouble with Sally's; though of course I can't tell. But she's always had poor sight, and now that she has to support the family with her needle, her eyes are nearly worn out."

Sally had been for several minutes making vain attempts to thread a needle.

Elsie sprang to her side with a kindly, eager, "Let me do it, won't you?"

It was done in a trice and the girl thanked her with lips and eyes.

"It often takes me full five or ten minutes," she said, "and sometimes I have to get mother to do it for me."

"What a pity! it must be a great hindrance to your work."

"Yes, indeed, and my eyes ache so that I can seldom sew or read for more than an hour or two at a time. Ah, I'm afraid I'm going to lose my sight altogether."

The tone was inexpressibly mournful, and Elsie's eyes filled again.

"Don't fret about it," she said, "I think – I hope you can be cured."

The rain had nearly ceased, and Philip, saying the worst was over, and they were in danger of being late at dinner, hurried the girls into the phaeton.

"What was that woman whispering to you?" asked Gertrude, as soon as they were fairly off.

Elsie looked uncomfortable. "It was something I was to tell mamma," she replied.

"But what is it?"

"I'm afraid she wanted to keep it a secret from you, Gerty, or she would have spoken out loud."

"I think you're very mean and disobliging," retorted Gertrude, beginning to pout.

"No, she isn't," said Philip pompously, "she's honorable, and one of the few females who can keep a secret. But I overheard it, Elsie, and feel pretty sure that the reason she whispered it, was to keep the poor girl from hearing. It's very natural she shouldn't want her to know she's afraid her sight's leaving her."

"Oh, yes; I suppose that was it!" returned Elsie. "But you were very wise to think of it, Phil."

"Don't flatter him," said Gertrude; "he thinks a great deal too much of himself, already."

Dinner was just ready when they reached home, and their mammas were on the porch looking for them.

"So there you are at last! what detained you so long?" said Mrs. Ross.

"Went further than we intended; and then the rain, you know," said Philip.

"And, oh, we had an adventure!" cried the girls, and hastened to tell it.

Mrs. Travilla had not forgotten her old governess, and though no pleasant recollection of her lingered in her memory, neither was there any dislike or revengeful feeling there. She heard of her sorrows with commiseration and rejoiced in the ability to alleviate them.

"That Mrs. Gibson!" exclaimed Lucy, "I've seen her many a time at the door or window, in driving past, and have often thought there was something familiar in her face, but never dreamed who she was. That hateful Miss Day! as I used to call her; Elsie, I wouldn't do a thing for her, if I were you. Why she treated you with absolute cruelty."

"She was sometimes unjust and unkind," said Mrs. Travilla, smiling at her friend's vehemence, "but probably my sensitiveness, timidity and stupidity, were often very trying."

"No such thing! – if you will excuse me for contradicting you – everybody that knew you then, would testify that you were the sweetest, dearest, most patient, industrious little thing that ever was made."

Elsie laughed and shook her head, "Ah, Lucy, you always flattered me; never were jealous even when I was held up to you as a pattern an evidence that yours was a remarkably sweet disposition. Now, tell me, please, if you know anything about these Gibsons?"

"Not much; they came to that hut years ago, evidently very poor, and quite as evidently – so report says – having seen better days. The husband and father drank deeply, and the wife earned a scanty support for the family by sewing and knitting; that is about all I know of them, except that several of their children died of scarlet fever within a few days of each other, soon after they came to the neighborhood, and that a year ago last winter, the man, coming home very drunk, fell into a snow-drift, and next day was found frozen to death. I was told at that time they had only two children – a son who was following in his father's footsteps, and this daughter."

"Poor woman!" sighed Elsie, "she is sorely tried and afflicted. I must go to her at once."

"Do, mamma, and get a doctor for her," said little Elsie; "she looked so sick and miserable."

Mrs. Ross offered her carriage, and the shower having cooled the air, Elsie went, shortly after the conclusion of the meal.

CHAPTER NINTH

"I'll not chide thee;
Let shame come when it will, I do not call it."
– *SHAKESPEARE*.

"I never saw such a likeness in my life!" said Mrs. Gibson looking after the phaeton as it drove away; "she's the very image of her mother. I could just have believed it was the very little Elsie Dinsmore I used to teach more than twenty years ago."

"She's lovely!" exclaimed Sally with enthusiasm. "Mother, did you see what a pretty watch she had?"

"Yes," gloomily; "some folks seem to have nothing but prosperity, and others nothing but poverty and losses and crosses. They're as rich as Croesus and we have hardly enough to keep us from starving."

"Better times may come," said Sally, trying to speak hopefully, "Tom may reform and go to work. I do think, mother, if you'd try to –"

"Hush! I'm a great deal better to him than he deserves."

It was some moments before Sally spoke again, then it was only to ask, "Will you have your dinner now, mother?"

"No; there's nothing in the house but bread and potatoes, and I couldn't swallow either. Dear me what a table they used to set at Roselands! enough to tempt the appetite of an epicure."

"I must rest my eyes a little. I can't see any longer," said the girl, laying down her work and going to the door.

"It's just dreadful," sighed her mother, "but don't get out of heart; these people will help us and it is possible some skilful oculist may understand your case and be able to help you."

The girl's eyes were fixed upon the distant mountain-tops where, through a rift in the clouds the sun shone suddenly out for a moment. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills whence cometh my help," she murmured softly to herself. Then from a full heart went up a strong cry, "O God, my Father, save me, I beseech thee, from this bitter trial that I so dread! Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. Oh, help me to be content with whatsoever thou shalt send!"

"Sally, you're standing there a long time." It was the mother's querulous voice again.

The girl turned toward her, answering in a patient tone. "Yes, mother, it rests my eyes to look at the sky and the mountains or any distant object."

"You'd better get yourself something to eat. It must be six or eight hours at least since breakfast."

An hour later Sally, again busied with her sewing, by the window, lifted her head at the sound of wheels and exclaimed in a low tone, "There is the same carriage again! It has stopped and a lady is getting out of it."

But turning her head she perceived that her mother, who was now lying on the bed, had fallen asleep. Dropping her work, she stepped quickly to the door in time to prevent a rap.

She recognized the lady at once from her likeness to her namesake daughter, and holding out her hand with a joyful admiring smile said, "Mrs. Travilla, is it not? Thank you for coming. I am so glad, and mother will be so delighted to see you; but she is sleeping just now."

She had spoken softly, and Elsie answered in the same subdued tone, as she took the offered hand, then stepped in and sat down in a chair the girl hastened to set for her, "That is well; we must not wake her."

A long talk followed in which Elsie by her ready tact and sweet sympathy, free from the slightest approach to patronage, drew from the girl the story of their sorrows, privations and fears for the future.

Her mother had been gradually failing for some time, though she really did not know what was the nature of the disease. For a while they had contrived by their united efforts to make the two ends meet, but now that all depended upon her, with her poor sight, it was no longer possible.

"How are your eyes affected?" asked Elsie.

"The sight is dim; I can scarcely see to set my stitches: I have great difficulty in threading a needle: I always had. I could never read fine print, never read through a long sentence without shutting my eyes for an instant or looking off the book. It has always been an effort to see, and now I am forced to use my eyes so constantly they grow worse and pain me very much. At times a mist comes over them so that I cannot see at all until I rest them a little. Indeed I often seem to be going blind and I'm afraid I shall," she added, with a tremble in her tones, a tear rolling down her cheek. But she hastily wiped it away.

"My poor child, I hope not," Elsie said, laying a hand softly on hers; "there have been wonderful cures of diseased eyes. You must go to an oculist."

"The expense would be far beyond our means."

"You must let me assume that. No, don't shake your head. I have abundant means. The Lord has given me far more of this world's goods than I ought to use for myself or my family and I know it is because he would have me be his almoner."

The girl wept for joy and thankfulness.

"Oh, how kind you are!" she cried. "I believe the Lord sent you and that my sight will be spared; for I have prayed so that it might; – that he would send me help somehow. But mother, how can she do without me?"

"I will see that she has medical advice, nursing, everything she needs."

Sally tried to speak her thanks but tears and sobs came instead.

The sound woke Mrs. Gibson. "Elsie Dinsmore!" she cried in feeble but excited tones, with difficulty raising herself to a sitting posture. "I should have known you anywhere."

"I cannot say the same; you are much changed," Elsie said, going to the bedside and taking the thin feverish hand in hers.

"Yes, I've grown an old woman, while you are fresh and young; and no wonder, for your life has been all prosperity; mine nothing but trouble and trial from beginning to end."

"O, mother dear, we have had a great many mercies," said Sally; "and your life is not ended. I hope your good times are yet to come."

"Well, maybe so, if Mrs. Travilla can help us to the medical aid we need, and put us in the way of earning a good living afterward."

"I shall do my best for you in both respects," Elsie said kindly, accepting a chair Sally set for her near the bed.

"I knew you would; you were always generous," remarked her ci-devant governess; "prompt too in bestowing your favors. But it is easy to be generous with a large and well-filled purse."

"Very true," Elsie answered with a smile. "And now what can I do for you? Ah I had forgotten. Mrs. Ross, hearing you were ill, and knowing that to the sick something sent by a neighbor was often more relished than home food, however nice, put a basket of dainties into the phaeton."

Stepping to the door, she signed to the servant, who immediately brought in a hamper of provisions such as had not been seen under that roof for many months. Mrs. Gibson's eyes glistened at sight of a basket of fine fresh fruit and a bowl of delicious custard.

"I will go now and call again to-morrow," Elsie said, as the man carried away the empty hamper. Grasping Sally's hand cordially in parting, she left something in it.

"Mother!" cried the girl, breathlessly, holding it up to view, "it's a check for a hundred dollars!"

"'Tisn't possible! let me see!" cried Mrs. Gibson laying down the spoon with which she was eating raspberries and custard, and holding out her hand for the check.

"Yes, so it is! what a godsend! I didn't think even she was so generous. But dear me, she's rolling in wealth, and it's no more to her, or even as much as ten cents would be to you or me."

"Oh, mother!" said Sally, reproachfully, "we have no claim on her; and if she has a good deal of money, she must have hundreds of calls for it."

"No claim on her? why people take care of old servants, and a governess ought to be considered of a good deal more account."

"Tom mustn't know about this, mother."

"No, indeed! the greater part of it would soon go for liquor or at the gambling table, if he did. Here give it to me, and I'll hide it under my pillow."

The saucer of berries was scarcely disposed of, before a second visitor arrived.

Dr. Morton was considered the most skilful practitioner in the neighborhood. Mrs. Travilla meeting him on the way in returning to the Crags, had begged him to take charge of Mrs. Gibson's case, and also to look at Sally's eyes; engaging to settle his bill herself.

On his way home he called at the Crags with his report. The mother, he said, was very much out of health, but not incurable; he had promised to send her some medicine. A month or two at the seashore would do her good; perhaps restore her entirely."

"Then she must go," said Elsie, "I will at once see what arrangements can be made. But now, what of the girl, doctor?"

"She seems in pretty good health."

"But her eyes?"

"The nerve is affected; there is no help for her."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite. I have paid a good deal of attention to the eye, and I assure you a case like hers is incurable."

"Then you decline to attempt to do anything for her?"

"I do, Mrs. Travilla, because there is absolutely nothing to be done."

"Poor girl, how sorry I am for her! blindness must be so terrible," Lucy remarked to her friend after the doctor had gone.

"Yes," Elsie answered thoughtfully, "but I do not give up hope for her yet."

"Dr. Morton is considered very skilful."

"Still he may be mistaken, and I shall not rest till I have made every effort to save her sight."

Little Elsie and her sister had already become deeply interested in poor Sally, and were laying plans to help her.

"What can we do, Elsie?" queried Vi, in an under tone, drawing her sister aside.

"She'll want clothes; she had on a very old faded calico dress."

"And not a bow or pin; just an old linen collar around her neck," remarked Gertrude, joining them; "and her dress was ever so old-fashioned and patched besides."

"Let's put our pocket money together, and buy her a new dress," proposed Vi.

"And make it for her," added Elsie; "it hurts her eyes to sew, and you know Dinah could fit it. Mamma had her taught the trade, and says she fits and sews very nicely."

"Oh, what's the use of giving our money?" exclaimed Gertrude, impatiently. "We want it ourselves, and your mamma has such loads and loads of money; hasn't she, Eddie?" turning to him, as he stood near.

"I don't know," he answered; "she never told us she had; she never talks much about money, except to tell us it all belongs to God, who only lends it to us."

"And that we must give it to the poor and needy," said Vi.

"Because 'it is more blessed to give than to receive,'" added Elsie.

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