GEORGE MACDONALD

THE SEABOARD PARISH, COMPLETE

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MacDonald G.

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Содержание

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VOLUME I

CHAPTER I. HOMILETIC

Dear Friends,—I am beginning a new book like an old sermon; but, as you know, I have been so accustomed to preach all my life, that whatever I say or write will more or less take the shape of a sermon; and if you had not by this time learned at least to bear with my oddities, you would not have wanted any more of my teaching. And, indeed, I did not think you would want any more. I thought I had bidden you farewell. But I am seated once again at my writing-table, to write for you—with a strange feeling, however, that I am in the heart of some curious, rather awful acoustic contrivance, by means of which the words which I have a habit of whispering over to myself as I write them, are heard aloud by multitudes of people whom I cannot see or hear. I will favour the fancy, that, by a sense of your presence, I may speak the more truly, as man to man.

But let me, for a moment, suppose that I am your grandfather, and that you have all come to beg for a story; and that, therefore, as usually happens in such cases, I am sitting with a puzzled face, indicating a more puzzled mind. I know that there are a great many stories in the holes and corners of my brain; indeed, here is one, there is one, peeping out at me like a rabbit; but alas, like a rabbit, showing me almost at the same instant the tail-end of it, and vanishing with a contemptuous *thud* of its hind feet on the ground. For I must have suitable regard to the desires of my children. It is a fine thing to be able to give people what they want, if at the same time you can give them what you want. To give people what they want, would sometimes be to give them only dirt and poison. To give them what you want, might be to set before them something of which they could not eat a mouthful. What both you and I want, I am willing to think, is a dish of good wholesome venison. Now I suppose my children around me are neither young enough nor old enough to care about a fairy tale, go that will not do. What they want is, I believe, something that I know about—that has happened to myself. Well, I confess, that is the kind of thing I like best to hear anybody talk to me about. Let anyone tell me something that has happened to himself, especially if he will give me a peep into how his heart took it, as it sat in its own little room with the closed door, and that person will, so telling, absorb my attention: he has something true and genuine and valuable to communicate. They are mostly old people that can do so. Not that young people have nothing happen to them; but that only when they grow old, are they able to see things right, to disentangle confusions, and judge righteous judgment. Things which at the time appeared insignificant or wearisome, then give out the light that was in them, show their own truth, interest, and influence: they are far enough off to be seen. It is not when we are nearest to anything that we know best what it is. How I should like to write a story for old people! The young are always having stories written for them. Why should not the old people come in for a share? A story without a young person in it at all! Nobody under fifty admitted! It could hardly be a fairy tale, could it? Or a love story either? I am not so sure about that. The worst of it would be, however, that hardly a young person would read it. Now, we old people would not like that. We can read young people's books and enjoy them: they would not try to read old men's books or old women's books; they would be so sure of their being dry. My dear old brothers and sisters, we know better, do we not? We have nice old jokes, with no end of fun in them; only they cannot see the fun. We have strange tales, that we know to be true, and which look more and more marvellous every time we turn them over again; only somehow they do not belong to the ways of this year—I

was going to say *week*,—and so the young people generally do not care to hear them. I have had one pale-faced boy, to be sure, who will sit at his mother's feet, and listen for hours to what took place before he was born. To him his mother's wedding-gown was as old as Eve's coat of skins. But then he was young enough not yet to have had a chance of losing the childhood common to the young and the old. Ah! I should like to write for you, old men, old women, to help you to read the past, to help you to look for the future. Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed; for, however your souls may be at peace, however your quietness and confidence may give you strength, in the decay of your earthly tabernacle, in the shortening of its cords, in the weakening of its stakes, in the rents through which you see the stars, you have yet your share in the cry of the creation after the sonship. But the one thing I should keep saying to you, my companions in old age, would be, "Friends, let us not grow old." Old age is but a mask; let us not call the mask the face. Is the acorn old, because its cup dries and drops it from its hold—because its skin has grown brown and cracks in the earth? Then only is a man growing old when he ceases to have sympathy with the young. That is a sign that his heart has begun to wither. And that is a dreadful kind of old age. The heart needs never be old. Indeed it should always be growing younger. Some of us feel younger, do we not, than when we were nine or ten? It is not necessary to be able to play at leapfrog to enjoy the game. There are young creatures whose turn it is, and perhaps whose duty it would be, to play at leap-frog if there was any necessity for putting the matter in that light; and for us, we have the privilege, or if we will not accept the privilege, then I say we have the duty, of enjoying their leap-frog. But if we must withdraw in a measure from sociable relations with our fellows, let it be as the wise creatures that creep aside and wrap themselves up and lay themselves by that their wings may grow and put on the lovely hues of their coming resurrection. Such a withdrawing is in the name of youth. And while it is pleasant—no one knows how pleasant except him who experiences it—to sit apart and see the drama of life going on around him, while his feelings are calm and free, his vision clear, and his judgment righteous, the old man must ever be ready, should the sweep of action catch him in its skirts, to get on his tottering old legs, and go with brave heart to do the work of a true man, none the less true that his hands tremble, and that he would gladly return to his chimney-corner. If he is never thus called out, let him examine himself, lest he should be falling into the number of those that say, "I go, sir," and go not; who are content with thinking beautiful things in an Atlantis, Oceana, Arcadia, or what it may be, but put not forth one of their fingers to work a salvation in the earth. Better than such is the man who, using just weights and a true balance, sells good flour, and never has a thought of his own.

I have been talking—to my reader is it? or to my supposed group of grandchildren? I remember—to my companions in old age. It is time I returned to the company who are hearing my whispers at the other side of the great thundering gallery. I take leave of my old friends with one word: We have yet a work to do, my friends; but a work we shall never do aright after ceasing to understand the new generation. We are not the men, neither shall wisdom die with us. The Lord hath not forsaken his people because the young ones do not think just as the old ones choose. The Lord has something fresh to tell them, and is getting them ready to receive his message. When we are out of sympathy with the young, then I think our work in this world is over. It might end more honourably.

Now, readers in general, I have had time to consider what to tell you about, and how to begin. My story will be rather about my family than myself now. I was as it were a little withdrawn, even by the time of which I am about to write. I had settled into a gray-haired, quite elderly, yet active man—young still, in fact, to what I am now. But even then, though my faith had grown stronger, life had grown sadder, and needed all my stronger faith; for the vanishing of beloved faces, and the trials of them that are dear, will make even those that look for a better country both for themselves and their friends, sad, though it will be with a preponderance of the first meaning of the word *sad*, which was *settled*, *thoughtful*.

I am again seated in the little octagonal room, which I have made my study because I like it best. It is rather a shame, for my books cover over every foot of the old oak panelling. But they make

the room all the pleasanter to the eye, and after I am gone, there is the old oak, none the worse, for anyone who prefers it to books.

I intend to use as the central portion of my present narrative the history of a year during part of which I took charge of a friend's parish, while my brother-in-law, Thomas Weir, who was and is still my curate, took the entire charge of Marshmallows. What led to this will soon appear. I will try to be minute enough in my narrative to make my story interesting, although it will cost me suffering to recall some of the incidents I have to narrate.

CHAPTER II. CONSTANCE'S BIRTHDAY

Was it from observation of nature in its association with human nature, or from artistic feeling alone, that Shakspere so often represents Nature's mood as in harmony with the mood of the principal actors in his drama? I know I have so often found Nature's mood in harmony with my own, even when she had nothing to do with forming mine, that in looking back I have wondered at the fact. There may, however, be some self-deception about it. At all events, on the morning of my Constance's eighteenth birthday, a lovely October day with a golden east, clouds of golden foliage about the ways, and an air that seemed filled with the ether of an *aurum potabile*, there came yet an occasional blast of wind, which, without being absolutely cold, smelt of winter, and made one draw one's shoulders together with the sense of an unfriendly presence. I do not think Constance felt it at all, however, as she stood on the steps in her riding-habit, waiting till the horses made their appearance. It had somehow grown into a custom with us that each of the children, as his or her birthday came round, should be king or queen for that day, and, subject to the veto of father and mother, should have everything his or her own way. Let me say for them, however, that in the matter of choosing the dinner, which of course was included in the royal prerogative, I came to see that it was almost invariably the favourite dishes of others of the family that were chosen, and not those especially agreeable to the royal palate. Members of families where children have not been taught from their earliest years that the great privilege of possession is the right to bestow, may regard this as an improbable assertion; but others will know that it might well enough be true, even if I did not say that so it was. But there was always the choice of some individual treat, which was determined solely by the preference of the individual in authority. Constance had chosen "a long ride with papa."

I suppose a parent may sometimes be right when he speaks with admiration of his own children. The probability of his being correct is to be determined by the amount of capacity he has for admiring other people's children. However this may be in my own case, I venture to assert that Constance did look very lovely that morning. She was fresh as the young day: we were early people—breakfast and prayers were over, and it was nine o'clock as she stood on the steps and I approached her from the lawn.

"O, papa! isn't it jolly?" she said merrily.

"Very jolly indeed, my dear," I answered, delighted to hear the word from the lips of my gentle daughter. She very seldom used a slang word, and when she did, she used it like a lady. Shall I tell you what she was like? Ah! you could not see her as I saw her that morning if I did. I will, however, try to give you a general idea, just in order that you and I should not be picturing to ourselves two very different persons while I speak of her.

She was rather little, and so slight that she looked tall. I have often observed that the impression of height is an affair of proportion, and has nothing to do with feet and inches. She was rather fair in complexion, with her mother's blue eyes, and her mother's long dark wavy hair. She was generally playful, and took greater liberties with me than any of the others; only with her liberties, as with her slang, she knew instinctively when, where, and how much. For on the borders of her playfulness there seemed ever to hang a fringe of thoughtfulness, as if she felt that the present moment owed all its sparkle and brilliance to the eternal sunlight. And the appearance was not in the least a deceptive one. The eternal was not far from her—none the farther that she enjoyed life like a bird, that her laugh was merry, that her heart was careless, and that her voice rang through the house—a sweet soprano voice—singing snatches of songs (now a street tune she had caught from a London organ, now an air from Handel or Mozart), or that she would sometimes tease her elder sister about her solemn and anxious looks; for Wynnie, the eldest, had to suffer for her grandmother's sins against her daughter, and came into the world with a troubled little heart, that was soon compelled to flee for refuge to the rock that was higher than she. Ah! my Constance! But God was good to you and to us in you.

"Where shall we go, Connie?" I said, and the same moment the sound of the horses' hoofs reached us.

"Would it be too far to go to Addicehead?" she returned.

"It is a long ride," I answered.

"Too much for the pony?"

"O dear, no—not at all. I was thinking of you, not of the pony."

"I'm quite as able to ride as the pony is to carry me, papa. And I want to get something for Wynnie. Do let us go."

"Very well, my dear," I said, and raised her to the saddle—if I may say *raised*, for no bird ever hopped more lightly from one twig to another than she sprung from the ground on her pony's back.

In a moment I was beside her, and away we rode.

The shadows were still long, the dew still pearly on the spiders' webs, as we trotted out of our own grounds into a lane that led away towards the high road. Our horses were fresh and the air was exciting; so we turned from the hard road into the first suitable field, and had a gallop to begin with. Constance was a good horse-woman, for she had been used to the saddle longer than she could remember. She was now riding a tall well-bred pony, with plenty of life—rather too much, I sometimes thought, when I was out with Wynnie; but I never thought so when I was with Constance. Another field or two sufficiently quieted both animals—I did not want to have all our time taken up with their frolics—and then we began to talk.

"You are getting quite a woman now, Connie, my dear," I said.

"Quite an old grannie, papa," she answered.

"Old enough to think about what's coming next," I said gravely.

"O, papa! And you are always telling us that we must not think about the morrow, or even the next hour. But, then, that's in the pulpit," she added, with a sly look up at me from under the drooping feather of her pretty hat.

"You know very well what I mean, you puss," I answered. "And I don't say one thing in the pulpit and another out of it."

She was at my horse's shoulder with a bound, as if Spry, her pony, had been of one mind and one piece with her. She was afraid she had offended me. She looked up into mine with as anxious a face as ever I saw upon Wynnie.

"O, thank you, papa!" she said when I smiled. "I thought I had been rude. I didn't mean it, indeed I didn't. But I do wish you would make it a little plainer to me. I do think about things sometimes, though you would hardly believe it."

"What do you want made plainer, my child?" I asked.

"When we're to think, and when we're not to think," she answered.

I remember all of this conversation because of what came so soon after.

"If the known duty of to-morrow depends on the work of to-day," I answered, "if it cannot be done right except you think about it and lay your plans for it, then that thought is to-day's business, not to-morrow's."

"Dear papa, some of your explanations are more difficult than the things themselves. May I be as impertinent as I like on my birthday?" she asked suddenly, again looking up in my face.

We were walking now, and she had a hold of my horse's mane, so as to keep her pony close up.

"Yes, my dear, as impertinent as you like—not an atom more, mind."

"Well, papa, I sometimes wish you wouldn't explain things so much. I seem to understand you all the time you are preaching, but when I try the text afterwards by myself, I can't make anything of it, and I've forgotten every word you said about it."

"Perhaps that is because you have no right to understand it."

"I thought all Protestants had a right to understand every word of the Bible," she returned.

"If they can," I rejoined. "But last Sunday, for instance, I did not expect anybody there to understand a certain bit of my sermon, except your mamma and Thomas Weir."

"How funny! What part of it was that?"

"O! I'm not going to tell you. You have no right to understand it. But most likely you thought you understood it perfectly, and it appeared to you, in consequence, very commonplace."

"In consequence of what?"

"In consequence of your thinking you understood it."

"O, papa dear! you're getting worse and worse. It's not often I ask you anything—and on my birthday too! It is really too bad of you to bewilder my poor little brains in this way."

"I will try to make you see what I mean, my pet. No talk about an idea that you never had in your head at all, can make you have that idea. If you had never seen a horse, no description even, not to say no amount of remark, would bring the figure of a horse before your mind. Much more is this the case with truths that belong to the convictions and feelings of the heart. Suppose a man had never in his life asked God for anything, or thanked God for anything, would his opinion as to what David meant in one of his worshipping psalms be worth much? The whole thing would be beyond him. If you have never known what it is to have care of any kind upon you, you cannot understand what our Lord means when he tells us to take no thought for the morrow."

"But indeed, papa, I am very full of care sometimes, though not perhaps about to-morrow precisely. But that does not matter, does it?"

"Certainly not. Tell me what you are full of care about, my child, and perhaps I can help you."

"You often say, papa, that half the misery in this world comes from idleness, and that you do not believe that in a world where God is at work every day, Sundays not excepted, it could have been intended that women any more than men should have nothing to do. Now what am I to do? What have I been sent into the world for? I don't see it; and I feel very useless and wrong sometimes."

"I do not think there is very much to complain of you in that respect, Connie. You, and your sister as well, help me very much in my parish. You take much off your mother's hands too. And you do a good deal for the poor. You teach your younger brothers and sister, and meantime you are learning yourselves."

"Yes, but that's not work."

"It is work. And it is the work that is given you to do at present. And you would do it much better if you were to look at it in that light. Not that I have anything to complain of."

"But I don't want to stop at home and lead an easy, comfortable life, when there are so many to help everywhere in the world."

"Is there anything better in doing something where God has not placed you, than in doing it where he has placed you?"

"No, papa. But my sisters are quite enough for all you have for us to do at home. Is nobody ever to go away to find the work meant for her? You won't think, dear papa, that I want to get away from home, will you?"

"No, my dear. I believe that you are really thinking about duty. And now comes the moment for considering the passage to which you began by referring:—What God may hereafter require of you, you must not give yourself the least trouble about. Everything he gives you to do, you must do as well as ever you can, and that is the best possible preparation for what he may want you to do next. If people would but do what they have to do, they would always find themselves ready for what came next. And I do not believe that those who follow this rule are ever left floundering on the sea-deserted sands of inaction, unable to find water enough to swim in."

"Thank you, dear papa. That's a little sermon all to myself, and I think I shall understand it even when I think about it afterwards. Now let's have a trot."

"There is one thing more I ought to speak about though, Connie. It is not your moral nature alone you ought to cultivate. You ought to make yourself as worth God's making as you possibly can. Now I am a little doubtful whether you keep up your studies at all."

She shrugged her pretty shoulders playfully, looking up in my face again.

"I don't like dry things, papa."

"Nobody does."

"Nobody!" she exclaimed. "How do the grammars and history-books come to be written then?"

In talking to me, somehow, the child always put on a more childish tone than when she talked to anyone else. I am certain there was no affection in it, though. Indeed, how could she be affected with her fault-finding old father?

"No. Those books are exceedingly interesting to the people that make them. Dry things are just things that you do not know enough about to care for them. And all you learn at school is next to nothing to what you have to learn."

"What must I do then?" she asked with a sigh. "Must I go all over my French Grammar again? O dear! I do hate it so!"

"If you will tell me something you like, Connie, instead of something you don't like, I may be able to give you advice. Is there nothing you are fond of?" I continued, finding that she remained silent.

"I don't know anything in particular—that is, I don't know anything in the way of school-work that I really liked. I don't mean that I didn't try to do what I had to do, for I did. There was just one thing I liked—the poetry we had to learn once a week. But I suppose gentlemen count that silly—don't they?"

"On the contrary, my dear, I would make that liking of yours the foundation of all your work. Besides, I think poetry the grandest thing God has given us—though perhaps you and I might not quite agree about what poetry was poetry enough to be counted an especial gift of God. Now, what poetry do you like best?"

"Mrs. Hemans's, I think, papa."

"Well, very well, to begin with. 'There is,' as Mr. Carlyle said to a friend of mine—'There is a thin vein of true poetry in Mrs. Hemans.' But it is time you had done with thin things, however good they may be. Most people never get beyond spoon-meat—in this world, at least, and they expect nothing else in the world to come. I must take you in hand myself, and see what I can do for you. It is wretched to see capable enough creatures, all for want of a little guidance, bursting with admiration of what owes its principal charm to novelty of form, gained at the cost of expression and sense. Not that that applies to Mrs. Hemans. She is simple enough, only diluted to a degree. But I hold that whatever mental food you take should be just a little too strong for you. That implies trouble, necessitates growth, and involves delight."

"I sha'n't mind how difficult it is if you help me, papa. But it is anything but satisfactory to go groping on without knowing what you are about."

I ought to have mentioned that Constance had been at school for two years, and had only been home a month that very day, in order to account for my knowing so little about her tastes and habits of mind. We went on talking a little more in the same way, and if I were writing for young people only, I should be tempted to go on a little farther with the account of what we said to each other; for it might help some of them to see that the thing they like best should, circumstances and conscience permitting, be made the centre from which they start to learn; that they should go on enlarging their knowledge all round from that one point at which God intended them to begin. But at length we fell into a silence, a very happy one on my part; for I was more than delighted to find that this one too of my children was following after the truth—wanting to do what was right, namely, to obey the word of the Lord, whether openly spoken to all, or to herself in the voice of her own conscience and the light of that understanding which is the candle of the Lord. I had often said to myself in past

years, when I had found myself in the company of young ladies who announced their opinions—probably of no deeper origin than the prejudices of their nurses—as if these distinguished them from all the world besides; who were profound upon passion and ignorant of grace; who had not a notion whether a dress was beautiful, but only whether it was of the newest cut—I had often said to myself: "What shall I do if my daughters come to talk and think like that—if thinking it can be called?" but being confident that instruction for which the mind is not prepared only lies in a rotting heap, producing all kinds of mental evils correspondent to the results of successive loads of food which the system cannot assimilate, my hope had been to rouse wise questions in the minds of my children, in place of overwhelming their digestions with what could be of no instruction or edification without the foregoing appetite. Now my Constance had begun to ask me questions, and it made me very happy. We had thus come a long way nearer to each other; for however near the affection of human animals may bring them, there are abysses between soul and soul—the souls even of father and daughter—over which they must pass to meet. And I do not believe that any two human beings alive know yet what it is to love as love is in the glorious will of the Father of lights.

I linger on with my talk, for I shrink from what I must relate.

We were going at a gentle trot, silent, along a woodland path—a brown, soft, shady road, nearly five miles from home, our horses scattering about the withered leaves that lay thick upon it. A good deal of underwood and a few large trees had been lately cleared from the place. There were many piles of fagots about, and a great log lying here and there along the side of the path. One of these, when a tree, had been struck by lightning, and had stood till the frosts and rains had bared it of its bark. Now it lay white as a skeleton by the side of the path, and was, I think, the cause of what followed. All at once my daughter's pony sprang to the other side of the road, shying sideways; unsettled her so, I presume; then rearing and plunging, threw her from the saddle across one of the logs of which I have spoken. I was by her side in a moment. To my horror she lay motionless. Her eyes were closed, and when I took her up in my arms she did not open them. I laid her on the moss, and got some water and sprinkled her face. Then she revived a little; but seemed in much pain, and all at once went off into another faint. I was in terrible perplexity.

Presently a man who, having been cutting fagots at a little distance, had seen the pony careering through the wood, came up and asked what he could do to help me. I told him to take my horse, whose bridle I had thrown over the latch of a gate, and ride to Oldcastle Hall, and ask Mrs. Walton to come with the carriage as quickly as possible. "Tell her," I said, "that her daughter has had a fall from her pony, and is rather shaken. Ride as hard as you can go."

The man was off in a moment; and there I sat watching my poor child, for what seemed to be a dreadfully long time before the carriage arrived. She had come to herself quite, but complained of much pain in her back; and, to my distress, I found that she could not move herself enough to make the least change of her position. She evidently tried to keep up as well as she could; but her face expressed great suffering: it was dreadfully pale, and looked worn with a month's illness. All my fear was for her spine.

At length I caught sight of the carriage, coming through the wood as fast as the road would allow, with the woodman on the box, directing the coachman. It drew up, and my wife got out. She was as pale as Constance, but quiet and firm, her features composed almost to determination. I had never seen her look like that before. She asked no questions: there was time enough for that afterwards. She had brought plenty of cushions and pillows, and we did all we could to make an easy couch for the poor girl; but she moaned dreadfully as we lifted her into the carriage. We did our best to keep her from being shaken; but those few miles were the longest journey I ever made in my life.

When we reached home at length, we found that Ethel, or, as we commonly called her, using the other end of her name, Wynnie—for she was named after her mother—had got a room on the ground-floor, usually given to visitors, ready for her sister; and we were glad indeed not to have to carry her up the stairs. Before my wife left, she had sent the groom off to Addicehead for both

physician and surgeon. A young man who had settled at Marshmallows as general practitioner a year or two before, was waiting for us when we arrived. He helped us to lay her upon a mattress in the position in which she felt the least pain. But why should I linger over the sorrowful detail? All agreed that the poor child's spine was seriously injured, and that probably years of suffering were before her. Everything was done that could be done; but she was not moved from that room for nine months, during which, though her pain certainly grew less by degrees, her want of power to move herself remained almost the same.

When I had left her at last a little composed, with her mother seated by her bedside, I called my other two daughters—Wynnie, the eldest, and Dorothy, the youngest, whom I found seated on the floor outside, one on each side of the door, weeping—into my study, and said to them: "My darlings, this is very sad; but you must remember that it is God's will; and as you would both try to bear it cheerfully if it had fallen to your lot to bear, you must try to be cheerful even when it is your sister's part to endure."

"O, papa! poor Connie!" cried Dora, and burst into fresh tears.

Wynnie said nothing, but knelt down by my knee, and laid her cheek upon it.

"Shall I tell you what Constance said to me just before I left the room?" I asked.

"Please do, papa."

"She whispered, 'You must try to bear it, all of you, as well as you can. I don't mind it very much, only for you.' So, you see, if you want to make her comfortable, you must not look gloomy and troubled. Sick people like to see cheerful faces about them; and I am sure Connie will not suffer nearly so much if she finds that she does not make the household gloomy."

This I had learned from being ill myself once or twice since my marriage. My wife never came near me with a gloomy face, and I had found that it was quite possible to be sympathetic with those of my flock who were ill without putting on a long face when I went to see them. Of course, I do not mean that I could, or that it was desirable that I should, look cheerful when any were in great pain or mental distress. But in ordinary conditions of illness a cheerful countenance is as a message of *all's well*, which may surely be carried into a sick chamber by the man who believes that the heart of a loving Father is at the centre of things, that he is light all about the darkness, and that he will not only bring good out of evil at last, but will be with the sufferer all the time, making endurance possible, and pain tolerable. There are a thousand alleviations that people do not often think of, coming from God himself. Would you not say, for instance, that time must pass very slowly in pain? But have you never observed, or has no one ever made the remark to you, how strangely fast, even in severe pain, the time passes after all?

"We will do all we can, will we not," I went on, "to make her as comfortable as possible? You, Dora, must attend to your little brothers, that your mother may not have too much to think about now that she will have Connie to nurse."

They could not say much, but they both kissed me, and went away leaving me to understand clearly enough that they had quite understood me. I then returned to the sick chamber, where I found that the poor child had fallen asleep.

My wife and I watched by her bedside on alternate nights, until the pain had so far subsided, and the fever was so far reduced, that we could allow Wynnie to take a share in the office. We could not think of giving her over to the care of any but one of ourselves during the night. Her chief suffering came from its being necessary that she should keep nearly one position on her back, because of her spine, while the external bruise and the swelling of the muscles were in consequence so painful, that it needed all that mechanical contrivance could do to render the position endurable. But these outward conditions were greatly ameliorated before many days were over.

This is a dreary beginning of my story, is it not? But sickness of all kinds is such a common thing in the world, that it is well sometimes to let our minds rest upon it, lest it should take us altogether at unawares, either in ourselves or our friends, when it comes. If it were not a good thing in the end,

surely it would not be; and perhaps before I have done my readers will not be sorry that my tale began so gloomily. The sickness in Judaea eighteen hundred and thirty-five years ago, or thereabouts, has no small part in the story of him who came to put all things under our feet. Praise be to him for evermore!

It soon became evident to me that that room was like a new and more sacred heart to the house. At first it radiated gloom to the remotest corners; but soon rays of light began to appear mingling with the gloom. I could see that bits of news were carried from it to the servants in the kitchen, in the garden, in the stable, and over the way to the home-farm. Even in the village, and everywhere over the parish, I was received more kindly, and listened to more willingly, because of the trouble I and my family were in; while in the house, although we had never been anything else than a loving family, it was easy to discover that we all drew more closely together in consequence of our common anxiety. Previous to this, it had been no unusual thing to see Wynnie and Dora impatient with each other; for Dora was none the less a wild, somewhat lawless child, that she was a profoundly affectionate one. She rather resembled her cousin Judy, in fact—whom she called Aunt Judy, and with whom she was naturally a great favourite. Wynnie, on the other hand, was sedate, and rather severe—more severe, I must in justice say, with herself than with anyone else. I had sometimes wished, it is true, that her mother, in regard to the younger children, were more like her; but there I was wrong. For one of the great goods that come of having two parents, is that the one balances and rectifies the motions of the other. No one is good but God. No one holds the truth, or can hold it, in one and the same thought, but God. Our human life is often, at best, but an oscillation between the extremes which together make the truth; and it is not a bad thing in a family, that the pendulums of father and mother should differ in movement so far, that when the one is at one extremity of the swing, the other should be at the other, so that they meet only in the point of *indifference*, in the middle; that the predominant tendency of the one should not be the predominant tendency of the other. I was a very strict disciplinarian—too much so, perhaps, sometimes: Ethelwyn, on the other hand, was too much inclined, I thought, to excuse everything. I was law, she was grace. But grace often yielded to law, and law sometimes yielded to grace. Yet she represented the higher; for in the ultimate triumph of grace, in the glad performance of the command from love of what is commanded, the law is fulfilled: the law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. I must say this for myself, however, that, although obedience was the one thing I enforced, believing it the one thing upon which all family economy primarily depends, yet my object always was to set my children free from my law as soon as possible; in a word, to help them to become, as soon as it might be, a law unto themselves. Then they would need no more of mine. Then I would go entirely over to the mother's higher side, and become to them, as much as in me lay, no longer law and truth, but grace and truth. But to return to my children —it was soon evident not only that Wynnie had grown more indulgent to Dora's vagaries, but that Dora was more submissive to Wynnie, while the younger children began to obey their eldest sister with a willing obedience, keeping down their effervescence within doors, and letting it off only out of doors, or in the out-houses.

When Constance began to recover a little, then the sacredness of that chamber began to show itself more powerfully, radiating on all sides a yet stronger influence of peace and goodwill. It was like a fountain of gentle light, quieting and bringing more or less into tune all that came within the circle of its sweetness. This brings me to speak again of my lovely child. For surely a father may speak thus of a child of God. He cannot regard his child as his even as a book he has written may be his. A man's child is his because God has said to him, "Take this child and nurse it for me." She is God's making; God's marvellous invention, to be tended and cared for, and ministered unto as one of his precious things; a young angel, let me say, who needs the air of this lower world to make her wings grow. And while he regards her thus, he will see all other children in the same light, and will not dare to set up his own against others of God's brood with the new-budding wings. The universal heart of truth will thus rectify, while it intensifies, the individual feeling towards one's own; and the man who is most free from poor partisanship in regard to his own family, will feel the most individual tenderness for

the lovely human creatures whom God has given into his own especial care and responsibility. Show me the man who is tender, reverential, gracious towards the children of other men, and I will show you the man who will love and tend his own best, to whose heart his own will flee for their first refuge after God, when they catch sight of the cloud in the wind.

CHAPTER III. THE SICK CHAMBER

In the course of a month there was a good deal more of light in the smile with which my darling greeted me when I entered her room in the morning. Her pain was greatly gone, but the power of moving her limbs had not yet even begun to show itself.

One day she received me with a still happier smile than I had yet seen upon her face, put out her thin white hand, took mine and kissed it, and said, “Papa,” with a lingering on the last syllable.

“What is it, my pet?” I asked.

“I am so happy!”

“What makes you so happy?” I asked again.

“I don’t know,” she answered. “I haven’t thought about it yet. But everything looks so pleasant round me. Is it nearly winter yet, papa? I’ve forgotten all about how the time has been going.”

“It is almost winter, my dear. There is hardly a leaf left on the trees—just two or three disconsolate yellow ones that want to get away down to the rest. They go fluttering and fluttering and trying to break away, but they can’t.”

“That is just as I felt a little while ago. I wanted to die and get away, papa; for I thought I should never be well again, and I should be in everybody’s way.—I am afraid I shall not get well, after all,” she added, and the light clouded on her sweet face.

“Well, my darling, we are in God’s hands. We shall never get tired of you, and you must not get tired of us. Would you get tired of nursing me, if I were ill?”

“O, papa!” And the tears began to gather in her eyes.

“Then you must think we are not able to love so well as you.”

“I know what you mean. I did not think of it that way. I will never think so about it again. I was only thinking how useless I was.”

“There you are quite mistaken, my dear. No living creature ever was useless. You’ve got plenty to do there.”

“But what have I got to do? I don’t feel able for anything,” she said; and again the tears came in her eyes, as if I had been telling her to get up and she could not.

“A great deal of our work,” I answered, “we do without knowing what it is. But I’ll tell you what you have got to do: you have got to believe in God, and in everybody in this house.”

“I do, I do. But that is easy to do,” she returned.

“And do you think that the work God gives us to do is never easy? Jesus says his yoke is easy, his burden is light. People sometimes refuse to do God’s work just because it is easy. This is, sometimes, because they cannot believe that easy work is his work; but there may be a very bad pride in it: it may be because they think that there is little or no honour to be got in that way; and therefore they despise it. Some again accept it with half a heart, and do it with half a hand. But, however easy any work may be, it cannot be well done without taking thought about it. And such people, instead of taking thought about their work, generally take thought about the morrow, in which no work can be done any more than in yesterday. The Holy Present!—I think I must make one more sermon about it—although you, Connie,” I said, meaning it for a little joke, “do think that I have said too much about it already.”

“Papa, papa! do forgive me. This is a judgment on me for talking to you as I did that dreadful morning. But I was so happy that I was impertinent.”

“You silly darling!” I said. “A judgment! God be angry with you for that! Even if it had been anything wrong, which it was not, do you think God has no patience? No, Connie. I will tell you what seems to me much more likely. You wanted something to do; and so God gave you something to do.”

“Lying in bed and doing nothing!”

“Yes. Just lying in bed, and doing his will.”

“If I could but feel that I was doing his will!”

"When you do it, then you will feel you are doing it."

"I know you are coming to something, papa. Please make haste, for my back is getting so bad."

"I've tired you, my pet. It was very thoughtless of me. I will tell you the rest another time," I said, rising.

"No, no. It will make me much worse not to hear it all now."

"Well, I will tell you. Be still, my darling, I won't be long. In the time of the old sacrifices, when God so kindly told his ignorant children to do something for him in that way, poor people were told to bring, not a bullock or a sheep, for that was more than they could get, but a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons. But now, as Crashaw the poet says, 'Ourselves become our own best sacrifice.' God wanted to teach people to offer themselves. Now, you are poor, my pet, and you cannot offer yourself in great things done for your fellow-men, which was the way Jesus did. But you must remember that the two young pigeons of the poor were just as acceptable to God as the fat bullock of the rich. Therefore you must say to God something like this:—'O heavenly Father, I have nothing to offer thee but my patience. I will bear thy will, and so offer my will a burnt-offering unto thee. I will be as useless as thou pleasest.' Depend upon it, my darling, in the midst of all the science about the world and its ways, and all the ignorance of God and his greatness, the man or woman who can thus say, *Thy will be done*, with the true heart of giving up is nearer the secret of things than the geologist and theologian. And now, my darling, be quiet in God's name."

She held up her mouth to kiss me, but did not speak, and I left her, and sent Dora to sit with her.

In the evening, when I went into her room again, having been out in my parish all the morning, I began to unload my budget of small events. Indeed, we all came in like pelicans with stuffed pouches to empty them in her room, as if she had been the only young one we had, and we must cram her with news. Or, rather, she was like the queen of the commonwealth sending out her messages into all parts, and receiving messages in return. I might call her the brain of the house; but I have used similes enough for a while.

After I had done talking, she said—

"And you have been to the school too, papa?"

"Yes. I go to the school almost every day. I fancy in such a school as ours the young people get more good than they do in church. You know I had made a great change in the Sunday-school just before you came home."

"I heard of that, papa. You won't let any of the little ones go to school on the Sunday."

"No. It is too much for them. And having made this change, I feel the necessity of being in the school myself nearly every day, that I may do something direct for the little ones."

"And you'll have to take me up soon, as you promised, you know, papa—just before Sprite threw me."

"As soon as you like, my dear, after you are able to read again."

"O, you must begin before that, please.—You could spare time to read a little to me, couldn't you?" she said doubtfully, as if she feared she was asking too much.

"Certainly, my dear; and I will begin to think about it at once."

It was in part the result of this wish of my child's that it became the custom to gather in her room on Sunday evenings. She was quite unable for any kind of work such as she would have had me commence with her, but I used to take something to read to her every now and then, and always after our early tea on Sundays.

What a thing it is to have one to speak and think about and try to find out and understand, who is always and altogether and perfectly good! Such a centre that is for all our thoughts and words and actions and imaginations! It is indeed blessed to be human beings with Jesus Christ for the centre of humanity.

In the papers wherein I am about to record the chief events of the following years of my life, I shall give a short account of what passed at some of these assemblies in my child's room, in the hope

that it may give my friends something, if not new, yet fresh to think about. For God has so made us that everyone who thinks at all thinks in a way that must be more or less fresh to everyone else who thinks, if he only have the gift of setting forth his thoughts so that we can see what they are.

I hope my readers will not be alarmed at this, and suppose that I am about to inflict long sermons upon them. I am not. I do hope, as I say, to teach them something; but those whom I succeed in so teaching will share in the delight it will give me to write about what I love most.

As far as I can remember, I will tell how this Sunday-evening class began. I was sitting by Constance's bed. The fire was burning brightly, and the twilight had deepened so nearly into night that it was reflected back from the window, for the curtains had not yet been drawn. There was no light in the room but that of the fire.

Now Constance was in the way of asking often what kind of day or night it was, for there never was a girl more a child of nature than she. Her heart seemed to respond at once to any and every mood of the world around her. To her the condition of air, earth, and sky was news, and news of poetic interest too. "What is it like?" she would often say, without any more definite shaping of the question. This same evening she said:

"What is it like, papa?"

"It is growing dark," I answered, "as you can see. It is a still evening, and what they call a black frost. The trees are standing as still as if they were carved out of stone, and would snap off everywhere if the wind were to blow. The ground is dark, and as hard as if it were of cast iron. A gloomy night rather, my dear. It looks as if there were something upon its mind that made it sullenly thoughtful; but the stars are coming out one after another overhead, and the sky will be all awake soon. A strange thing the life that goes on all night, is it not? The life of owlets, and mice, and beasts of prey, and bats, and stars," I said, with no very categorical arrangement, "and dreams, and flowers that don't go to sleep like the rest, but send out their scent all night long. Only those are gone now. There are no scents abroad, not even of the earth in such a frost as this."

"Don't you think it looks sometimes, papa, as if God turned his back on the world, or went farther away from it for a while?"

"Tell me a little more what you mean, Connie."

"Well, this night now, this dark, frozen, lifeless night, which you have been describing to me, isn't like God at all—is it?"

"No, it is not. I see what you mean now."

"It is just as if he had gone away and said, 'Now you shall see what you can do without me.'

"Something like that. But do you know that English people—at least I think so—enjoy the changeful weather of their country much more upon the whole than those who have fine weather constantly? You see it is not enough to satisfy God's goodness that he should give us all things richly to enjoy, but he must make us able to enjoy them as richly as he gives them. He has to consider not only the gift, but the receiver of the gift. He has to make us able to take the gift and make it our own, as well as to give us the gift. In fact, it is not real giving, with the full, that is, the divine, meaning of giving, without it. He has to give us to the gift as well as give the gift to us. Now for this, a break, an interruption is good, is invaluable, for then we begin to think about the thing, and do something in the matter ourselves. The wonder of God's teaching is that, in great part, he makes us not merely learn, but teach ourselves, and that is far grander than if he only made our minds as he makes our bodies."

"I think I understand you, papa. For since I have been ill, you would wonder, if you could see into me, how even what you tell me about the world out of doors gives me more pleasure than I think I ever had when I could go about in it just as I liked."

"It wouldn't do that, though, you know, if you hadn't had the other first. The pleasure you have comes as much from your memory as from my news."

"I see that, papa."

"Now can you tell me anything in history that confirms what I have been saying?"

"I don't know anything about history, papa. The only thing that comes into my head is what you were saying yourself the other day about Milton's blindness."

"Ah, yes. I had not thought of that. Do you know, I do believe that God wanted a grand poem from that man, and therefore blinded him that he might be able to write it. But he had first trained him up to the point—given him thirty years in which he had not to provide the bread of a single day, only to learn and think; then set him to teach boys; then placed him at Cromwell's side, in the midst of the tumultuous movement of public affairs, into which the late student entered with all his heart and soul; and then last of all he cast the veil of a divine darkness over him, sent him into a chamber far more retired than that in which he laboured at Cambridge, and set him like the nightingale to sing darkling. The blackness about him was just the great canvas which God gave him to cover with forms of light and music. Deep wells of memory burst upwards from below; the windows of heaven were opened from above; from both rushed the deluge of song which flooded his soul, and which he has poured out in a great river to us."

"It was rather hard for poor Milton, though, wasn't it, papa?"

"Wait till he says so, my dear. We are sometimes too ready with our sympathy, and think things a great deal worse than those who have to undergo them. Who would not be glad to be struck with *such* blindness as Milton's?"

"Those that do not care about his poetry, papa," answered Constance, with a deprecatory smile.

"Well said, my Connie. And to such it never can come. But, if it please God, you will love Milton before you are about again. You can't love one you know nothing about."

"I have tried to read him a little."

"Yes, I daresay. You might as well talk of liking a man whose face you had never seen, because you did not approve of the back of his coat. But you and Milton together have led me away from a far grander instance of what we had been talking about. Are you tired, darling?"

"Not the least, papa. You don't mind what I said about Milton?"

"Not at all, my dear. I like your honesty. But I should mind very much if you thought, with your ignorance of Milton, that your judgment of him was more likely to be right than mine, with my knowledge of him."

"O, papa! I am only sorry that I am not capable of appreciating him."

"There you are wrong again. I think you are quite capable of appreciating him. But you cannot appreciate what you have never seen. You think of him as dry, and think you ought to be able to like dry things. Now he is not dry, and you ought not to be able to like dry things. You have a figure before you in your fancy, which is dry, and which you call Milton. But it is no more Milton than your dull-faced Dutch doll, which you called after her, was your merry Aunt Judy. But here comes your mamma; and I haven't said what I wanted to say yet."

"But surely, husband, you can say it all the same," said my wife. "I will go away if you can't."

"I can say it all the better, my love. Come and sit down here beside me. I was trying to show Connie—"

"You did show me, papa."

"Well, I was showing Connie that a gift has sometimes to be taken away again before we can know what it is worth, and so receive it right."

Ethelwyn sighed. She was always more open to the mournful than the glad. Her heart had been dreadfully wrung in her youth.

"And I was going on to give her the greatest instance of it in human history. As long as our Lord was with his disciples, they could not see him right: he was too near them. Too much light, too many words, too much revelation, blinds or stupefies. The Lord had been with them long enough. They loved him dearly, and yet often forgot his words almost as soon as he said them. He could not get it into them, for instance, that he had not come to be a king. Whatever he said, they shaped it over again after their own fancy; and their minds were so full of their own worldly notions of grandeur

and command, that they could not receive into their souls the gift of God present before their eyes. Therefore he was taken away, that his Spirit, which was more himself than his bodily presence, might come into them—that they might receive the gift of God into their innermost being. After he had gone out of their sight, and they might look all around and down in the grave and up in the air, and not see him anywhere—when they thought they had lost him, he began to come to them again from the other side—from the inside. They found that the image of him which his presence with them had printed in light upon their souls, began to revive in the dark of his absence; and not that only, but that in looking at it without the overwhelming of his bodily presence, lines and forms and meanings began to dawn out of it which they had never seen before. And his words came back to them, no longer as they had received them, but as he meant them. The spirit of Christ filling their hearts and giving them new power, made them remember, by making them able to understand, all that he had said to them. They were then always saying to each other, 'You remember how;' whereas before, they had been always staring at each other with astonishment and something very near incredulity, while he spoke to them. So that after he had gone away, he was really nearer to them than he had been before. The meaning of anything is more than its visible presence. There is a soul in everything, and that soul is the meaning of it. The soul of the world and all its beauty has come nearer to you, my dear, just because you are separated from it for a time."

"Thank you, dear papa. I do like to get a little sermon all to myself now and then. That is another good of being ill."

"You don't mean me to have a share in it, then, Connie, do you?" said my wife, smiling at her daughter's pleasure.

"O, mamma! I should have thought you knew all papa had got to say by this time. I daresay he has given you a thousand sermons all to yourself."

"Then you suppose, Connie, that I came into the world with just a boxful of sermons, and after I had taken them all out there were no more. I should be sorry to think I should not have a good many new things to say by this time next year."

"Well, papa, I wish I could be sure of knowing more next year."

"Most people do learn, whether they will or not. But the kind of learning is very different in the two cases."

"But I want to ask you one question, papa: do you think that we should not know Jesus better now if he were to come and let us see him—as he came to the disciples so long, long ago? I wish it were not so long ago."

"As to the time, it makes no difference whether it was last year or two thousand years ago. The whole question is how much we understand, and understanding, obey him. And I do not think we should be any nearer that if he came amongst us bodily again. If we should, he would come. I believe we should be further off it."

"Do you think, then," said Connie, in an almost despairing tone, as if I were the prophet of great evil, "that we shall never, never, never see him?"

"That is *quite* another thing, my Connie. That is the heart of my hopes by day and my dreams by night. To behold the face of Jesus seems to me the one thing to be desired. I do not know that it is to be prayed for; but I think it will be given us as the great bounty of God, so soon as ever we are capable of it. That sight of the face of Jesus is, I think, what is meant by his glorious appearing, but it will come as a consequence of his spirit in us, not as a cause of that spirit in us. The pure in heart shall see God. The seeing of him will be the sign that we are like him, for only by being like him can we see him as he is. All the time that he was with them, the disciples never saw him as he was. You must understand a man before you can see and read his face aright; and as the disciples did not understand our Lord's heart, they could neither see nor read his face aright. But when we shall be fit to look that man in the face, God only knows."

"Then do you think, papa, that we, who have never seen him, could know him better than the disciples? I don't mean, of course, better than they knew him after he was taken away from them, but better than they knew him while he was still with them?"

"Certainly I do, my dear."

"O, papa! Is it possible? Why don't we all, then?"

"Because we won't take the trouble; that is the reason."

"O, what a grand thing to think! That would be worth living—worth being ill for. But how? how? Can't you help me? Mayn't one human being help another?"

"It is the highest duty one human being owes to another. But whoever wants to learn must pray, and think, and, above all, obey—that is simply, do what Jesus says."

There followed a little silence, and I could hear my child sobbing. And the tears stood in; my wife's eyes—tears of gladness to hear her daughter's sobs.

"I will try, papa," Constance said at last. "But you *will* help me?"

"That I will, my love. I will help you in the best way I know; by trying to tell you what I have heard and learned about him—heard and learned of the Father, I hope and trust. It is coming near to the time when he was born;—but I have spoken quite as long as you are able to bear to-night."

"No, no, papa. Do go on."

"No, my dear; no more to-night. That would be to offend against the very truth I have been trying to set forth to you. But next Sunday—you have plenty to think about till then—I will talk to you about the baby Jesus; and perhaps I may find something more to help you by that time, besides what I have got to say now."

"But," said my wife, "don't you think, Connie, this is too good to keep all to ourselves? Don't you think we ought to have Wynnie and Dora in?"

"Yes, yes, mamma. Do let us have them in. And Harry and Charlie too."

"I fear they are rather young yet," I said. "Perhaps it might do them harm."

"It would be all the better for us to have them anyhow," said Ethelwyn, smiling.

"How do you mean, my dear?"

"Because you will say things more simply if you have them by you. Besides, you always say such things to children as delight grown people, though they could never get them out of you."

It was a wife's speech, reader. Forgive me for writing it.

"Well," I said, "I don't mind them coming in, but I don't promise to say anything directly to them. And you must let them go away the moment they wish it."

"Certainly," answered my wife; and so the matter was arranged.

CHAPTER IV. A SUNDAY EVENING

When I went in to see Constance the next Sunday morning before going to church, I knew by her face that she was expecting the evening. I took care to get into no conversation with her during the day, that she might be quite fresh. In the evening, when I went into her room again with my Bible in my hand, I found all our little company assembled. There was a glorious fire, for it was very cold, and the little ones were seated on the rug before it, one on each side of their mother; Wynnie sat by the further side of the bed, for she always avoided any place or thing she thought another might like; and Dora sat by the further chimney-corner, leaving the space between the fire and my chair open that I might see and share the glow.

"The wind is very high, papa," said Constance, as I seated myself beside her.

"Yes, my dear. It has been blowing all day, and since sundown it has blown harder. Do you like the wind, Connie?"

"I am afraid I do like it. When it roars like that in the chimneys, and shakes the windows with a great rush as if it *would* get into the house and tear us to pieces, and then goes moaning away into the woods and grumbles about in them till it grows savage again, and rushes up at us with fresh fury, I am afraid I delight in it. I feel so safe in the very jaws of danger."

"Why, you are quite poetic, Connie," said Wynnie.

"Don't laugh at me, Wynnie. Mind I'm an invalid, and I can't bear to be laughed at," returned Connie, half laughing herself, and a little more than a quarter crying.

Wynnie rose and kissed her, whispered something to her which made her laugh outright, and then sat down again.

"But tell me, Connie," I said, "why you are *afraid* you enjoy hearing the wind about the house."

"Because it must be so dreadful for those that are out in it."

"Perhaps not quite so bad as we think. You must not suppose that God has forgotten them, or cares less for them than for you because they are out in the wind."

"But if we thought like that, papa," said Wynnie, "shouldn't we come to feel that their sufferings were none of our business?"

"If our benevolence rests on the belief that God is less loving than we, it will come to a bad end somehow before long, Wynnie."

"Of course, I could not think that," she returned.

"Then your kindness would be such that you dared not, in God's name, think hopefully for those you could not help, lest you should, believing in his kindness, cease to help those whom you could help! Either God intended that there should be poverty and suffering, or he did not. If he did not intend it—for similar reasons to those for which he allows all sorts of evils—then there is nothing between but that we should sell everything that we have and give it away to the poor."

"Then why don't we?" said Wynnie, looking truth itself in my face.

"Because that is not God's way, and we should do no end of harm by so doing. We should make so many more of those who will not help themselves who will not be set free from themselves by rising above themselves. We are not to gratify our own benevolence at the expense of its object—not to save our own souls as we fancy, by putting other souls into more danger than God meant for them."

"It sounds hard doctrine from your lips, papa," said Wynnie.

"Many things will look hard in so many words, which yet will be found kindness itself when they are interpreted by a higher theory. If the one thing is to let people have everything they want, then of course everyone ought to be rich. I have no doubt such a man as we were reading of in the papers the other day, who saw his servant girl drown without making the least effort to save her, and then bemoaned the loss of her labour for the coming harvest, thinking himself ill-used in her death, would hug his own selfishness on hearing my words, and say, 'All right, parson! Every man

for himself! I made my own money, and they may make theirs!' *You* know that is not exactly the way I should think or act with regard to my neighbour. But if it were only that I have seen such noble characters cast in the mould of poverty, I should be compelled to regard poverty as one of God's powers in the world for raising the children of the kingdom, and to believe that it was not because it could not be helped that our Lord said, 'The poor ye have always with you.' But what I wanted to say was, that there can be no reason why Connie should not enjoy what God has given her, although he has not thought fit to give as much to everybody; and above all, that we shall not help those right whom God gives us to help, if we do not believe that God is caring for every one of them as much as he is caring for every one of us. There was once a baby born in a stable, because his poor mother could get no room in a decent house. Where she lay I can hardly think. They must have made a bed of hay and straw for her in the stall, for we know the baby's cradle was the manger. Had God forsaken them? or would they not have been more *comfortable*, if that was the main thing, somewhere else? Ah! if the disciples, who were being born about the same time of fisher-fathers and cottage-mothers, to get ready for him to call and teach by the time he should be thirty years of age—if they had only been old enough, and had known that he was coming—would they not have got everything ready for him? They would have clubbed their little savings together, and worked day and night, and some rich women would have helped them, and they would have dressed the baby in fine linen, and got him the richest room their money would get, and they would have made the gold that the wise men brought into a crown for his little head, and would have burnt the frankincense before him. And so our little manger-baby would have been taken away from us. No more the stable-born Saviour—no more the poor Son of God born for us all, as strong, as noble, as loving, as worshipful, as beautiful as he was poor! And we should not have learned that God does not care for money; that if he does not give more of it it is not that it is scarce with him, or that he is unkind, but that he does not value it himself. And if he sent his own son to be not merely brought up in the house of the carpenter of a little village, but to be born in the stable of a village inn, we need not suppose because a man sleeps under a haystack and is put in prison for it next day, that God does not care for him."

"But why did Jesus come so poor, papa?"

"That he might be just a human baby. That he might not be distinguished by this or by that accident of birth; that he might have nothing but a mother's love to welcome him, and so belong to everybody; that from the first he might show that the kingdom of God and the favour of God lie not in these external things at all—that the poorest little one, born in the meanest dwelling, or in none at all, is as much God's own and God's care as if he came in a royal chamber with colour and shine all about him. Had Jesus come amongst the rich, riches would have been more worshipped than ever. See how so many that count themselves good Christians honour possession and family and social rank, and I doubt hardly get rid of them when they are all swept away from them. The furthest most of such reach is to count Jesus an exception, and therefore not despise him. See how, even in the services of the church, as they call them, they will accumulate gorgeousness and cost. Had I my way, though I will never seek to rouse men's thoughts about such external things, I would never have any vessel used in the eucharist but wooden platters and wooden cups."

"But are we not to serve him with our best?" said my wife.

"Yes, with our very hearts and souls, with our wills, with our absolute being. But all external things should be in harmony with the spirit of his revelation. And if God chose that his Son should visit the earth in homely fashion, in homely fashion likewise should be everything that enforces and commemorates that revelation. All church-forms should be on the other side from show and expense. Let the money go to build decent houses for God's poor, not to give them his holy bread and wine out of silver and gold and precious stones—stealing from the significance of the *content* by the meretricious grandeur of the *continent*. I would send all the church-plate to fight the devil with his own weapons in our overcrowded cities, and in our villages where the husbandmen are housed like swine, by giving them room to be clean and decent air from heaven to breathe. When the people

find the clergy thus in earnest, they will follow them fast enough, and the money will come in like salt and oil upon the sacrifice. I would there were a few of our dignitaries that could think grandly about things, even as Jesus thought—even as God thought when he sent him. There are many of them willing to stand any amount of persecution about trifles: the same enthusiasm directed by high thoughts about the kingdom of heaven as within men and not around them, would redeem a vast region from that indifference which comes of judging the gospel of God by the church of Christ with its phylacteries and hems."

"There is one thing," said Wynnie, after a pause, "that I have often thought about—why it was necessary for Jesus to come as a baby: he could not do anything for so long."

"First, I would answer, Wynnie, that if you would tell me why it is necessary for all of us to come as babies, it would be less necessary for me to tell you why he came so: whatever was human must be his. But I would say next, Are you sure that he could not do anything for so long? Does a baby do nothing? Ask mamma there. Is it for nothing that the mother lifts up such heartfuls of thanks to God for the baby on her knee? Is it nothing that the baby opens such fountains of love in almost all the hearts around? Ah! you do not think how much every baby has to do with the saving of the world—the saving of it from selfishness, and folly, and greed. And for Jesus, was he not going to establish the reign of love in the earth? How could he do better than begin from babyhood? He had to lay hold of the heart of the world. How could he do better than begin with his mother's—the best one in it. Through his mother's love first, he grew into the world. It was first by the door of all the holy relations of the family that he entered the human world, laying hold of mother, father, brothers, sisters, all his friends; then by the door of labour, for he took his share of his father's work; then, when he was thirty years of age, by the door of teaching; by kind deeds, and sufferings, and through all by obedience unto the death. You must not think little of the grand thirty years wherein he got ready for the chief work to follow. You must not think that while he was thus preparing for his public ministrations, he was not all the time saving the world even by that which he was in the midst of it, ever laying hold of it more and more. These were things not so easy to tell. And you must remember that our records are very scanty. It is a small biography we have of a man who became—to say nothing more—the Man of the world—the Son of Man. No doubt it is enough, or God would have told us more; but surely we are not to suppose that there was nothing significant, nothing of saving power in that which we are not told.—Charlie, wouldn't you have liked to see the little baby Jesus?"

"Yes, that I would. I would have given him my white rabbit with the pink eyes."

"That is what the great painter Titian must have thought, Charlie; for he has painted him playing with a white rabbit,—not such a pretty one as yours."

"I would have carried him about all day," said Dora, "as little Henny Parsons does her baby-brother."

"Did he have any brother or sister to carry him about, papa?" asked Harry.

"No, my boy; for he was the eldest. But you may be pretty sure he carried about his brothers and sisters that came after him."

"Wouldn't he take care of them, just!" said Charlie.

"I wish I had been one of them," said Constance.

"You are one of them, my Connie. Now he is so great and so strong that he can carry father and mother and all of us in his bosom."

Then we sung a child's hymn in praise of the God of little children, and the little ones went to bed. Constance was tired now, and we left her with Wynnie. We too went early to bed.

About midnight my wife and I awoke together—at least neither knew which waked the other. The wind was still raving about the house, with lulls between its charges.

"There's a child crying!" said my wife, starting up.

I sat up too, and listened.

"There is some creature," I granted.

"It is an infant," insisted my wife. "It can't be either of the boys."

I was out of bed in a moment, and my wife the same instant. We hurried on some of our clothes, going to the windows and listening as we did so. We seemed to hear the wailing through the loudest of the wind, and in the lulls were sure of it. But it grew fainter as we listened. The night was pitch dark. I got a lantern, and hurried out. I went round the house till I came under our bed-room windows, and there listened. I heard it, but not so clearly as before. I set out as well as I could judge in the direction of the sound. I could find nothing. My lantern lighted only a few yards around me, and the wind was so strong that it blew through every chink, and threatened momently to blow it out. My wife was by my side before I knew she was coming.

"My dear!" I said, "it is not fit for you to be out."

"It is as fit for me as for a child, anyhow," she said. "Do listen."

It was certainly no time for expostulation. All the mother was awake in Ethelwyn's bosom. It would have been cruelty to make her go in, though she was indeed ill-fitted to encounter such a night-wind.

Another wail reached us. It seemed to come from a thicket at one corner of the lawn. We hurried thither. Again a cry, and we knew we were much nearer to it. Searching and searching we went.

"There it is!" Ethelwyn almost screamed, as the feeble light of the lantern fell on a dark bundle of something under a bush. She caught at it. It gave another pitiful wail—the poor baby of some tramp, rolled up in a dirty, ragged shawl, and tied round with a bit of string, as if it had been a parcel of clouts. She set off running with it to the house, and I followed, much fearing she would miss her way in the dark, and fall. I could hardly get up with her, so eager was she to save the child. She darted up to her own room, where the fire was not yet out.

"Run to the kitchen, Harry, and get some hot water. Take the two jugs there—you can empty them in the sink: you won't know where to find anything. There will be plenty in the boiler."

By the time I returned with the hot water, she had taken off the child's covering, and was sitting with it, wrapped in a blanket, before the fire. The little thing was cold as a stone, and now silent and motionless. We had found it just in time. Ethelwyn ordered me about as if I had been a nursemaid. I poured the hot water into a footbath.

"Some cold water, Harry. You would boil the child."

"You made me throw away the cold water," I said, laughing.

"There's some in the bottles," she returned. "Make haste."

I did try to make haste, but I could not be quick enough to satisfy Ethelwyn.

"The child will be dead," she cried, "before we get it in the water."

She had its rags off in a moment—there was very little to remove after the shawl. How white the little thing was, though dreadfully neglected! It was a girl—not more than a few weeks old, we agreed. Her little heart was still beating feebly; and as she was a well-made, apparently healthy infant, we had every hope of recovering her. And we were not disappointed. She began to move her little legs and arms with short, convulsive motions.

"Do you know where the dairy is, Harry?" asked my wife, with no great compliment to my bumps of locality, which I had always flattered myself were beyond the average in development.

"I think I do," I answered.

"Could you tell which was this night's milk, now?"

"There will be less cream on it," I answered.

"Bring a little of that and some more hot water. I've got some sugar here. I wish we had a bottle."

I executed her commands faithfully. By the time I returned the child was lying on her lap clean and dry—a fine baby I thought. Ethelwyn went on talking to her, and praising her as if she had not only been the finest specimen of mortality in the world, but her own child to boot. She got her to take a few spoonfuls of milk and water, and then the little thing fell fast asleep.

Ethelwyn's nursing days were not so far gone by that she did not know where her baby's clothes were. She gave me the child, and going to a wardrobe in the room brought out some night-things, and put them on. I could not understand in the least why the sleeping darling must be indued with little chemise, and flannel, and nightgown, and I do not know what all, requiring a world of nice care, and a hundred turnings to and fro, now on its little stomach, now on its back, now sitting up, now lying down, when it would have slept just as well, and I venture to think much more comfortably, if laid in blankets and well covered over. But I had never ventured to interfere with any of my own children, devoutly believing up to this moment, though in a dim unquestioning way, that there must be some hidden feminine wisdom in the whole process; and now that I had begun to question it, I found that my opportunity had long gone by, if I had ever had one. And after all there may be some reason for it, though I confess I do strongly suspect that all these matters are so wonderfully complicated in order that the girl left in the woman may have her heart's content of playing with her doll; just as the woman hid in the girl expends no end of lovely affection upon the dull stupidity of wooden cheeks and a body of sawdust. But it was a delight to my heart to see how Ethelwyn could not be satisfied without treating the foundling in precisely the same fashion as one of her own. And if this was a necessary preparation for what, should follow, I would be the very last to complain of it.

We went to bed again, and the forsaken child of some half-animal mother, now perhaps asleep in some filthy lodging for tramps, lay in my Ethelwyn's bosom. I loved her the more for it; though, I confess, it would have been very painful to me had she shown it possible for her to treat the baby otherwise, especially after what we had been talking about that same evening.

So we had another child in the house, and nobody knew anything about it but ourselves two. The household had never been disturbed by all the going and coming. After everything had been done for her, we had a good laugh over the whole matter, and then Ethelwyn fell a-crying.

"Pray for the poor thing, Harry," she sobbed, "before you come to bed."

I knelt down, and said:

"O Lord our Father, this is as much thy child and as certainly sent to us as if she had been born of us. Help us to keep the child for thee. Take thou care of thy own, and teach us what to do with her, and how to order our ways towards her."

Then I said to Ethelwyn,

"We will not say one word more about it tonight. You must try to go to sleep. I daresay the little thing will sleep till the morning, and I am sure I shall if she does. Good-night, my love. You are a true mother. Mind you go to sleep."

"I am half asleep already, Harry. Good-night," she returned.

I know nothing more about anything till I in the morning, except that I had a dream, which I have not made up my mind yet whether I shall tell or not. We slept soundly—God's baby and all.

CHAPTER V. MY DREAM

I think I will tell the dream I had. I cannot well account for the beginning of it: the end will appear sufficiently explicable to those who are quite satisfied that they get rid of the mystery of a thing when they can associate it with something else with which they are familiar. Such do not care to see that the thing with which they associate it may be as mysterious as the other. For although use too often destroys marvel, it cannot destroy the marvellous. The origin of our thoughts is just as wonderful as the origin of our dreams.

In my dream I found myself in a pleasant field full of daisies and white clover. The sun was setting. The wind was going one way, and the shadows another. I felt rather tired, I neither knew nor thought why. With an old man's prudence, I would not sit down upon the grass, but looked about for a more suitable seat. Then I saw, for often in our dreams there is an immediate response to our wishes, a long, rather narrow stone lying a few yards from me. I wondered how it could have come there, for there were no mountains or rocks near: the field was part of a level country. Carelessly, I sat down upon it astride, and watched the setting of the sun. Somehow I fancied that his light was more sorrowful than the light of the setting sun should be, and I began to feel very heavy at the heart. No sooner had the last brilliant spark of his light vanished, than I felt the stone under me begin to move. With the inactivity of a dreamer, however, I did not care to rise, but wondered only what would come next. My seat, after several strange tumbling motions, seemed to rise into the air a little way, and then I found that I was astride of a gaunt, bony horse—a skeleton horse almost, only he had a gray skin on him. He began, apparently with pain, as if his joints were all but too stiff to move, to go forward in the direction in which he found himself. I kept my seat. Indeed, I never thought of dismounting. I was going on to meet what might come. Slowly, feebly, trembling at every step, the strange steed went, and as he went his joints seemed to become less stiff, and he went a little faster. All at once I found that the pleasant field had vanished, and that we were on the borders of a moor. Straight forward the horse carried me, and the moor grew very rough, and he went stumbling dreadfully, but always recovering himself. Every moment it seemed as if he would fall to rise no more, but as often he found fresh footing. At length the surface became a little smoother, and he began a horrible canter which lasted till he reached a low, broken wall, over which he half walked, half fell into what was plainly an ancient neglected churchyard. The mounds were low and covered with rank grass. In some parts, hollows had taken the place of mounds. Gravestones lay in every position except the level or the upright, and broken masses of monuments were scattered about. My horse bore me into the midst of it, and there, slow and stiff as he had risen, he lay down again. Once more I was astride of a long narrow stone. And now I found that it was an ancient gravestone which I knew well in a certain Sussex churchyard, the top of it carved into the rough resemblance of a human skeleton—that of a man, tradition said, who had been killed by a serpent that came out of a bottomless pool in the next field. How long I sat there I do not know; but at last I saw the faint gray light of morning begin to appear in front of me. The horse of death had carried me eastward. The dawn grew over the top of a hill that here rose against the horizon. But it was a wild dreary dawn—a blot of gray first, which then stretched into long lines of dreary yellow and gray, looking more like a blasted and withered sunset than a fresh sunrise. And well it suited that waste, wide, deserted churchyard, if churchyard I ought to call it where no church was to be seen—only a vast hideous square of graves. Before me I noticed especially one old grave, the flat stone of which had broken in two and sunk in the middle. While I sat with my eyes fixed on this stone, it began to move; the crack in the middle closed, then widened again as the two halves of the stone were lifted up, and flung outward, like the two halves of a folding door. From the grave rose a little child, smiling such perfect contentment as if he had just come from kissing his mother. His little arms had flung the stones apart, and as he stood on the edge of the grave next to me, they remained outspread from the action for a moment, as if blessing the sleeping people.

Then he came towards me with the same smile, and took my hand. I rose, and he led me away over another broken wall towards the hill that lay before us. And as we went the sun came nearer, the pale yellow bars flushed into orange and rosy red, till at length the edges of the clouds were swept with an agony of golden light, which even my dreamy eyes could not endure, and I awoke weeping for joy.

This waking woke my wife, who said in some alarm:

“What is the matter, husband?”

So I told her my dream, and how in my sleep my gladness had overcome me.

“It was this little darling that set you dreaming so,” she said, and turning, put the baby in my arms.

CHAPTER VI. THE NEW BABY

I will not attempt to describe the astonishment of the members of our household, each in succession, as the news of the child spread. Charlie was heard shouting across the stable-yard to his brother:

"Harry, Harry! Mamma has got a new baby. Isn't it jolly?"

"Where did she get it?" cried Harry in return.

"In the parsley-bed, I suppose," answered Charlie, and was nearer right than usual, for the information on which his conclusion was founded had no doubt been imparted as belonging to the history of the human race.

But my reader can easily imagine the utter bewilderment of those of the family whose knowledge of human affairs would not allow of their curiosity being so easily satisfied as that of the boys. In them was exemplified that confusion of the intellectual being which is produced by the witness of incontestable truth to a thing incredible—in which case the probability always is, that the incredibility results from something in the mind of the hearer falsely associated with and disturbing the true perception of the thing to which witness is borne.

Nor was the astonishment confined to the family, for it spread over the parish that Mrs. Walton had got another baby. And so, indeed, she had. And seldom has baby met with a more hearty welcome than this baby met with from everyone of our family. They hugged it first, and then asked questions. And that, I say, is the right way of receiving every good gift of God. Ask what questions you will, but when you see that the gift is a good one, make sure that you take it. There is plenty of time for you to ask questions afterwards. Then the better you love the gift, the more ready you will be to ask, and the more fearless in asking.

The truth, however, soon became known. And then, strange to relate, we began to receive visits of condolence. O, that poor baby! how it was frowned upon, and how it had heads shaken over it, just because it was not Ethelwyn's baby! It could not help that, poor darling!

"Of course, you'll give information to the police," said, I am sorry to say, one of my brethren in the neighbourhood, who had the misfortune to be a magistrate as well.

"Why?" I asked.

"Why! That they may discover the parents, to be sure."

"Wouldn't it be as hard a matter to prove the parentage, as it would be easy to suspect it?" I asked. "And just think what it would be to give the baby to a woman who not only did not want her, but who was not her mother. But if her own mother came to claim her now, I don't say I would refuse her, but I should think twice about giving her up after she had once abandoned her for a whole night in the open air. In fact I don't want the parents."

"But you don't want the child."

"How do you know that?" I returned—rather rudely, I am afraid, for I am easily annoyed at anything that seems to me heartless—about children especially.

"O! of course, if you want to have an orphan asylum of your own, no one has a right to interfere. But you ought to consider other people."

"That is just what I thought I was doing," I answered; but he went on without heeding my reply —

"We shall all be having babies left at our doors, and some of us are not so fond of them as you are. Remember, you are your brother's keeper."

"And my sister's too," I answered. "And if the question lies between keeping a big, burly brother like you, and a tiny, wee sister like that, I venture to choose for myself."

"She ought to go to the workhouse," said the magistrate—a friendly, good-natured man enough in ordinary—and rising, he took his hat and departed.

This man had no children. So he was—or was not, so much to blame. Which? *I* say the latter.

Some of Ethelwyn's friends were no less positive about her duty in the affair. I happened to go into the drawing-room during the visit of one of them—Miss Bowdler.

"But, my dear Mrs. Walton," she was saying, "you'll be having all the tramps in England leaving their babies at your door."

"The better for the babies," interposed I, laughing.

"But you don't think of your wife, Mr. Walton."

"Don't I? I thought I did," I returned dryly.

"Depend upon it, you'll repent it."

"I hope I shall never repent of anything but what is bad."

"Ah! but, really! it's not a thing to be made game of."

"Certainly not. The baby shall be treated with all due respect in this house."

"What a provoking man you are! You know what I mean well enough."

"As well as I choose to know—certainly," I answered.

This lady was one of my oldest parishioners, and took liberties for which she had no other justification, except indeed an unhesitating belief in the superior rectitude of whatever came into her own head can be counted as one. When she was gone, my wife turned to me with a half-comic, half-anxious look, and said:

"But it would be rather alarming, Harry, if this were to get abroad, and we couldn't go out at the door in the morning without being in danger of stepping on a baby on the door-step."

"You might as well have said, when you were going to be married, 'If God should send me twenty children, whatever should I do?' He who sent us this one can surely prevent any more from coming than he wants to come. All that we have to think of is to do right—not the consequences of doing right. But leaving all that aside, you must not suppose that wandering mothers have not even the attachment of animals to their offspring. There are not so many that are willing to part with babies as all that would come to. If you believe that God sent this one, that is enough for the present. If he should send another, we should know by that that we had to take it in."

My wife said the baby was a beauty. I could see that she was a plump, well-to-do baby; and being by nature no particular lover of babies as babies—that is, feeling none of the inclination of mothers and nurses and elder sisters to eat them, or rather, perhaps, loving more for what I believed than what I saw—that was all I could pretend to discover. But even the aforementioned elderly parishioner was compelled to allow before three months were over that little Theodora—for we turned the name of my youngest daughter upside down for her—"was a proper child." To none, however, did she seem to bring so much delight as to our dear Constance. Oftener than not, when I went into her room, I found the sleepy, useless little thing lying beside her on the bed, and her staring at it with such loving eyes! How it began, I do not know, but it came at last to be called Connie's Dora, or Miss Connie's baby, all over the house, and nothing pleased Connie better. Not till she saw this did her old nurse take quite kindly to the infant; for she regarded her as an interloper, who had no right to the tenderness which was lavished upon her. But she had no sooner given in than the baby began to grow dear to her as well as to the rest. In fact, the house was ere long full of nurses. The staff included everyone but myself, who only occasionally, at the entreaty of some one or other of the younger ones, took her in my arms.

But before she was three months old, anxious thoughts began to intrude, all centering round the question in what manner the child was to be brought up. Certainly there was time enough to think of this, as Ethelwyn constantly reminded me; but what made me anxious was that I could not discover the principle that ought to guide me. Now no one can tell how soon a principle in such a case will begin, even unconsciously, to operate; and the danger was that the moment when it ought to begin to operate would be long past before the principle was discovered, except I did what I could now to find it out. I had again and again to remind myself that there was no cause for anxiety; for that I

might certainly claim the enlightenment which all who want to do right are sure to receive; but still I continued uneasy just from feeling a vacancy where a principle ought to have been.

CHAPTER VII. ANOTHER SUNDAY EVENING

During all this time Connie made no very perceptible progress—in the recovery of her bodily powers, I mean, for her heart and mind advanced remarkably. We held our Sunday-evening assemblies in her room pretty regularly, my occasional absence in the exercise of my duties alone interfering with them. In connection with one of these, I will show how I came at length to make up my mind as to what I would endeavour to keep before me as my object in the training of little Theodora, always remembering that my preparation might be used for a very different end from what I purposed. If my intention was right, the fact that it might be turned aside would not trouble me.

We had spoken a good deal together about the infancy and childhood of Jesus, about the shepherds, and the wise men, and the star in the east, and the children of Bethlehem. I encouraged the thoughts of all the children to rest and brood upon the fragments that are given us, and, believing that the imagination is one of the most powerful of all the faculties for aiding the growth of truth in the mind, I would ask them questions as to what they thought he might have said or done in ordinary family occurrences, thus giving a reality in their minds to this part of his history, and trying to rouse in them a habit of referring their conduct to the standard of his. If we do not thus employ our imagination on sacred things, his example can be of no use to us except in exactly corresponding circumstances —and when can such occur from one end to another of our lives? The very effort to think how he would have done, is a wonderful purifier of the conscience, and, even if the conclusion arrived at should not be correct from lack of sufficient knowledge of his character and principles, it will be better than any that can be arrived at without this inquiry. Besides, the asking of such questions gave me good opportunity, through the answers they returned, of seeing what their notions of Jesus and of duty were, and thus of discovering how to help the dawn of the light in their growing minds. Nor let anyone fear that such employment of the divine gift of imagination will lead to foolish vagaries and useless inventions; while the object is to discover the right way—the truth—there is little danger of that. Besides, there I was to help hereby in the actual training of their imaginations to truth and wisdom. To aid in this, I told them some of the stories that were circulated about him in the early centuries of the church, but which the church has rejected as of no authority; and I showed them how some of them could not be true, because they were so unlike those words and actions which we had the best of reasons for receiving as true; and how one or two of them might be true—though, considering the company in which we found them, we could say nothing for certain concerning them. And such wise things as those children said sometimes! It is marvellous how children can reach the heart of the truth at once. Their utterances are sometimes entirely concordant with the results arrived at through years of thought by the earnest mind—results which no mind would ever arrive at save by virtue of the child-like in it.

Well, then, upon this evening I read to them the story of the boy Jesus in the temple. Then I sought to make the story more real to them by dwelling a little on the growing fears of his parents as they went from group to group of their friends, tracing back the road towards Jerusalem and asking every fresh company they knew if they had seen their boy, till at length they were in great trouble when they could not find him even in Jerusalem. Then came the delight of his mother when she did find him at last, and his answer to what she said. Now, while I thus lingered over the simple story, my children had put many questions to me about Jesus being a boy, and not seeming to know things which, if he was God, he must have known, they thought. To some of these I had just to reply that I did not understand myself, and therefore could not teach them; to others, that I could explain them, but that they were not yet, some of them, old enough to receive and understand my explanation; while others I did my best to answer as simply as I could. But at this point we arrived at a question put by Wynnie, to answer which aright I considered of the greatest importance. Wynnie said:

“That is just one of the things about Jesus that have always troubled me, papa.”

"What is, my dear?" I said; for although I thought I knew well enough what she meant, I wished her to set it forth in her own words, both for her own sake, and the sake of the others, who would probably understand the difficulty much better if she presented it herself.

"I mean that he spoke to his mother—"

"Why don't you say *mamma*, Wynnie?" said Charlie. "She was his own mamma, wasn't she, papa?"

"Yes, my dear; but don't you know that the shoemaker's children down in the village always call their mamma *mother*?"

"Yes; but they are shoemaker's children."

"Well, Jesus was one of that class of people. He was the son of a carpenter. He called his mamma, *mother*. But, Charlie, *mother* is the more beautiful word of the two, by a great deal, I think. *Lady* is a very pretty word; but *woman* is a very beautiful word. Just so with *mamma* and *mother*. *Mamma* is pretty, but *mother* is beautiful."

"Why don't we always say *mother* then?"

"Just because it is the most beautiful, and so we keep it for Sundays—that is, for the more solemn times of life. We don't want it to get common to us with too much use. We may think it as much as we like; thinking does not spoil it; but saying spoils many things, and especially beautiful words. Now we must let Wynnie finish what she was saying."

"I was saying, papa, that I can't help feeling as if—I know it can't be true—but I feel as if Jesus spoke unkindly to his mother when he said that to her."

I looked at the page and read the words, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" And I sat silent for a while.

"Why don't you speak, papa?" said Harry.

"I am sitting wondering at myself, Harry," I said. "Long after I was your age, Wynnie, I remember quite well that those words troubled me as they now trouble you. But when I read them over now, they seemed to me so lovely that I could hardly read them aloud. I can recall the fact that they troubled me, but the mode of the fact I scarcely can recall. I can hardly see now wherein lay the hurt or offence the words gave me. And why is that? Simply because I understand them now, and I did not understand them then. I took them as uttered with a tone of reproof; now I hear them as uttered with a tone of loving surprise. But really I cannot feel sure what it was that I did not like. And I am confident it is so with a great many things that we reject. We reject them simply because we do not understand them. Therefore, indeed, we cannot with truth be said to reject them at all. It is some false appearance that we reject. Some of the grandest things in the whole realm of truth look repellent to us, and we turn away from them, simply because we are not—to use a familiar phrase—we are not up to them. They appear to us, therefore, to be what they are not. Instruction sounds to the proud man like reproof; illumination comes on the vain man like scorn; the manifestation of a higher condition of motive and action than his own, falls on the self-esteeming like condemnation; but it is consciousness and conscience working together that produce this impression; the result is from the man himself, not from the higher source. From the truth comes the power, but the shape it assumes to the man is from the man himself."

"You are quite beyond me now, papa," said Wynnie.

"Well, my dear," I answered, "I will return to the words of the boy Jesus, instead of talking more about them; and when I have shown you what they mean, I think you will allow that that feeling you have about them is all and altogether an illusion."

"There is one thing first," said Connie, "that I want to understand. You said the words of Jesus rather indicated surprise. But how could he be surprised at anything? If he was God, he must have known everything."

"He tells us himself that he did not know everything. He says once that even *he* did not know one thing—only the Father knew it."

"But how could that be if he was God?"

"My dear, that is one of the things that it seems to me impossible I should understand. Certainly I think his trial as a man would not have been perfect had he known everything. He too had to live by faith in the Father. And remember that for the Divine Sonship on earth perfect knowledge was not necessary, only perfect confidence, absolute obedience, utter holiness. There is a great tendency in our sinful natures to put knowledge and power on a level with goodness. It was one of the lessons of our Lord's life that they are not so; that the one grand thing in humanity is faith in God; that the highest in God is his truth, his goodness, his rightness. But if Jesus was a real man, and no mere appearance of a man, is it any wonder that, with a heart full to the brim of the love of God, he should be for a moment surprised that his mother, whom he loved so dearly, the best human being he knew, should not have taken it as a matter of course that if he was not with her, he must be doing something his Father wanted him to do? For this is just what his answer means. To turn it into the ordinary speech of our day, it is just this: 'Why did you look for me? Didn't you know that I must of course be doing something my Father had given me to do?' Just think of the quiet sweetness of confidence in this. And think what a life his must have been up to that twelfth year of his, that such an expostulation with his mother was justified. It must have had reference to a good many things that had passed before then, which ought to have been sufficient to make Mary conclude that her missing boy must be about God's business somewhere. If her heart had been as full of God and God's business as his, she would not have been in the least uneasy about him. And here is the lesson of his whole life: it was all his Father's business. The boy's mind and hands were full of it. The man's mind and hands were full of it. And the risen conqueror was full of it still. For the Father's business is everything, and includes all work that is worth doing. We may say in a full grand sense, that there is nothing but the Father and his business."

"But we have so many things to do that are not his business," said Wynnie, with a sigh of oppression.

"Not one, my darling. If anything is not his business, you not only have not to do it, but you ought not to do it. Your words come from the want of spiritual sight. We cannot see the truth in common things—the will of God in little everyday affairs, and that is how they become so irksome to us. Show a beautiful picture, one full of quiet imagination and deep thought, to a common-minded man; he will pass it by with some slight remark, thinking it very ordinary and commonplace. That is because he is commonplace. Because our minds are so commonplace, have so little of the divine imagination in them, therefore we do not recognise the spiritual meaning and worth, we do not perceive the beautiful will of God, in the things required of us, though they are full of it. But if we do them we shall thus make acquaintance with them, and come to see what is in them. The roughest kernel amongst them has a tree of life in its heart."

"I wish he would tell me something to do," said Charlie. "Wouldn't I do it!"

I made no reply, but waited for an opportunity which I was pretty sure was at hand, while I carried the matter a little further.

"But look here, Wynnie; listen to this," I said, "'And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.' Was that not doing his Father's business too? Was it not doing the business of his Father in heaven to honour his father and his mother, though he knew that his days would not be long in that land? Did not his whole teaching, his whole doing, rest on the relation of the Son to the Father and surely it was doing his Father's business then to obey his parents—to serve them, to be subject to them. It is true that the business God gives a man to do may be said to be the peculiar walk in life into which he is led, but that is only as distinguishing it from another man's peculiar business. God gives us all our business, and the business which is common to humanity is more peculiarly God's business than that which is one man's and not another's—because it lies nearer the root, and is essential. It does not matter whether a man is a farmer or a physician, but it greatly matters whether he is a good son, a good husband, and so on. O my children!" I said, "if the world

could but be brought to believe—the world did I say?—if the best men in the world could only see, as God sees it, that service is in itself the noblest exercise of human powers, if they could see that God is the hardest worker of all, and that his nobility are those who do the most service, surely it would alter the whole aspect of the church. Menial offices, for instance, would soon cease to be talked of with that contempt which shows that there is no true recognition of the fact that the same principle runs through the highest duty and the lowest—that the lowest work which God gives a man to do must be in its nature noble, as certainly noble as the highest. This would destroy condescension, which is the rudeness, yes, impertinence, of the higher, as it would destroy insolence, which is the rudeness of the lower. He who recognised the dignity of his own lower office, would thereby recognise the superiority of the higher office, and would be the last either to envy or degrade it. He would see in it his own—only higher, only better, and revere it. But I am afraid I have wearied you, my children."

"O, no, papa!" said the elder ones, while the little ones gaped and said nothing.

"I know I am in danger of doing so when I come to speak upon this subject: it has such a hold of my heart and mind!—Now, Charlie, my boy, go to bed."

But Charlie was very comfortable before the fire, on the rug, and did not want to go. First one shoulder went up, and then the other, and the corners of his mouth went down, as if to keep the balance true. He did not move to go. I gave him a few moments to recover himself, but as the black frost still endured, I thought it was time to hold up a mirror to him. When he was a very little boy, he was much in the habit of getting out of temper, and then as now, he made a face that was hideous to behold; and to cure him of this, I used to make him carry a little mirror about his neck, that the means might be always at hand of showing himself to him: it was a sort of artificial conscience which, by enabling him to see the picture of his own condition, which the face always is, was not unfrequently operative in rousing his real conscience, and making him ashamed of himself. But now the mirror I wanted to hold up to him was a past mood, in the light of which the present would show what it was.

"Charlie," I said, "a little while ago you were wishing that God would give you something to do. And now when he does, you refuse at once, without even thinking about it."

"How do you know that God wants me to go to bed?" said Charlie, with something of surly impertinence, which I did not meet with reproof at once because there was some sense along with the impudence.

"I know that God wants you to do what I tell you, and to do it pleasantly. Do you think the boy Jesus would have put on such a face as that—I wish I had the little mirror to show it to you—when his mother told him it was time to go to bed?"

And now Charlie began to look ashamed. I left the truth to work in him, because I saw it was working. Had I not seen that, I should have compelled him to go at once, that he might learn the majesty of law. But now that his own better self, the self enlightened of the light that lighteneth every man that cometh into the world, was working, time might well be afforded it to work its perfect work. I went on talking to the others. In the space of not more than one minute, he rose and came to me, looking both good and ashamed, and held up his face to kiss me, saying, "Goodnight, papa." I bade him good-night, and kissed him more tenderly than usual, that he might know that it was all right between us. I required no formal apology, no begging of my pardon, as some parents think right. It seemed enough to me that his heart was turned. It is a terrible thing to run the risk of changing humility into humiliation. Humiliation is one of the proudest conditions in the human world. When he felt that it would be a relief to say more explicitly, "Father, I have sinned," then let him say it; but not till then. To compel manifestation is one surest way to check feeling.

My readers must not judge it silly to record a boy's unwillingness to go to bed. It is precisely the same kind of disobedience that some of them are guilty of themselves, and that in things not one whit more important than this, only those things happen to be *their* wish at the moment, and not Charlie's, and so gain their superiority.

CHAPTER VIII. THEODORA'S DOOM

Try not to get weary, respected reader, of so much of what I am afraid most people will call tiresome preaching. But I know if you get anything practicable out of it, you will not be so soon tired of it. I promise you more story by and by. Only an old man, like an old horse, must be allowed to take very much his own way—go his own pace, I should have said. I am afraid there must be a little more of a similar sort in this chapter.

On the Monday morning I set out to visit one or two people whom the severity of the weather had kept from church on the Sunday. The last severe frost, as it turned out, of the season, was possessing the earth. The sun was low in the wintry sky, and what seemed a very cold mist up in the air hid him from the earth. I was walking along a path in a field close by a hedge. A tree had been cut down, and lay upon the grass. A short distance from it lay its own figure marked out in hoar-frost. There alone was there any hoar-frost on the field; the rest was all of the loveliest tenderest green. I will not say the figure was such an exact resemblance as a photograph would have been; still it was an indubitable likeness. It appeared to the hasty glance that not a branch not a knot of the upper side of the tree at least was left unrepresented in shining and glittering whiteness upon the green grass. It was very pretty, and, I confess, at first, very puzzling. I walked on, meditating on the phenomenon, till at length I found out its cause. The hoar-frost had been all over the field in the morning. The sun had been shining for a time, and had melted the frost away, except where he could only cast a shadow. As he rose and rose, the shadow of the tree had shortened and come nearer and nearer to its original, growing more and more like as it came nearer, while the frost kept disappearing as the shadow withdrew its protection. When the shadow extended only to a little way from the tree, the clouds came and covered the sun, and there were no more shadows, only one great one of the clouds. Then the frost shone out in the shape of the vanished shadow. It lay at a little distance from the tree, because the tree having been only partially lopped, some great stumps of boughs held it up from the ground, and thus, when the sun was low, his light had shone a little way through beneath, as well as over the trunk.

My reader needs not be afraid; I am not going to "moralise this spectacle with a thousand similes." I only tell it him as a very pretty phenomenon. But I confess I walked on moralising it. Any new thing in nature—I mean new in regard to my knowledge, of course—always made me happy; and I was full of the quiet pleasure it had given me and of the thoughts it had brought me, when, as I was getting over a stile, whom should I see in the next field, coming along the footpath, but the lady who had made herself so disagreeable about Theodora. The sight was rather a discord in my feeling at that moment; perhaps it would have been so at any moment. But I prepared myself to meet her in the strength of the good humour which nature had just bestowed upon me. For I fear the failing will go with me to the grave that I am very ready to be annoyed, even to the loss of my temper, at the urgings of ignoble prudence.

"Good-morning, Miss Bowdler," I said.

"Good-morning, Mr. Walton," she returned "I am afraid you thought me impertinent the other week; but you know by this time it is only my way."

"As such I take it," I answered with a smile.

She did not seem quite satisfied that I did not defend her from her own accusation; but as it was a just one, I could not do so. Therefore she went on to repeat the offence by way of justification.

"It was all for Mrs. Walton's sake. You ought to consider her, Mr. Walton. She has quite enough to do with that dear Connie, who is likely to be an invalid all her days—too much to take the trouble of a beggar's brat as well."

"Has Mrs. Walton been complaining to you about it, Miss Bowdler?" I asked.

"O dear, no!" she answered. "She is far too good to complain of anything. That's just why her friends must look after her a bit, Mr. Walton."

"Then I beg you won't speak disrespectfully of my little Theodora."

"O dear me! no. Not at all. I don't speak disrespectfully of her."

"Even amongst the class of which she comes, 'a beggar's brat' would be regarded as bad language."

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure, Mr. Walton! If you *will* take offence—"

"I do take offence. And you know there is One who has given especial warning against offending the little ones."

Miss Bowdler walked away in high displeasure—let me hope in conviction of sin as well. She did not appear in church for the next two Sundays. Then she came again. But she called very seldom at the Hall after this, and I believe my wife was not sorry.

Now whether it came in any way from what that lady had said as to my wife's trouble with Constance and Theodora together, I can hardly tell; but, before I had reached home, I had at last got a glimpse of something like the right way, as it appeared to me, of bringing up Theodora. When I went into the house, I looked for my wife to have a talk with her about it; but, indeed, it always necessary to find her every time I got home. I found her in Connie's room as I had expected. Now although we were never in the habit of making mysteries of things in which there was no mystery, and talked openly before our children, and the more openly the older they grew, yet there were times when we wanted to have our talks quite alone, especially when we had not made up our minds about something. So I asked Ethelwyn to walk out with me.

"I'm afraid I can't just this moment, husband," she answered. She was in the way of using that form of address, for she said it meant everything without saying it aloud. "I can't just this moment, for there is no one at liberty to stay with Connie."

"O, never mind me, mamma," said Connie cheerfully. "Theodora will take care of me," and she looked fondly at the child, who was lying by her side fast asleep.

"There!" I said. And both, looked up surprised, for neither knew what I meant. "I will tell you afterwards," I said, laughing. "Come along, Ethel."

"You can ring the bell, you know, Connie, if you should want anything, or your baby should wake up and be troublesome. You won't want me long, will you, husband?"

"I'm not sure about that. You must tell Susan to watch for the bell."

Susan was the old nurse.

Ethel put on her hooded cloak, and we went out together. I took her across to the field where I had seen the hoary shadow. The sun had not shone out, and I hoped it would be there to gladden her dear eyes as it had gladdened mine; but it was gone. The warmth of the sun, without his direct rays, had melted it away, as sacred influences will sometimes do with other shadows, without the mind knowing any more than the grass how the shadow departed. There, reader! I have got a bit of a moral in about it before you knew what I was doing. But I was sorry my wife could see it only through my eyes and words. Then I told her about Miss Bowdler, and what she had said. Ethel was very angry at her impertinence in speaking so to me. That was a wife's feeling, you know, and perhaps excusable in the first impression of the thing.

"She seems to think," she said, "that she was sent into the world to keep other people right instead of herself. I am very glad you set her down, as the maids say."

"O, I don't think there's much harm in her," I returned, which was easy generosity, seeing my wife was taking my part. "Indeed, I am not sure that we are not both considerably indebted to her; for it was after I met her that a thought came into my head as to how we ought to do with Theodora."

"Still troubling yourself about that, husband?"

"The longer the difficulty lasts, the more necessary is it that it should be met," I answered. "Our measures must begin sometime, and when, who can tell? We ought to have them in our heads, or they will never begin at all."

"Well, I confess they are rather of a general nature at present—belonging to humanity rather than the individual, as you would say—consisting chiefly in washing, dressing, feeding, and apostrophe, varied with lullabying. But our hearts are a better place for our measures than our heads, aren't they?"

"Certainly; I walk corrected. Only there's no fear about your heart. I'm not quite so sure about your head."

"Thank you, husband. But with you for a head it doesn't matter, does it?"

"I don't know that. People should always strengthen the weaker part, for no chain is stronger than its weakest link; no fortification stronger than its most assailable point. But, seriously, wife, I trust your head nearly, though not quite, as much as your heart. Now to go to business. There's one thing we have both made up our minds about—that there is to be no concealment with the child. God's fact must be known by her. It would be cruel to keep the truth from her, even if it were not sure to come upon her with a terrible shock some day. She must know from the first, by hearing it talked of—not by solemn and private communication—that she came out of the shrubbery. That's settled, is it not?"

"Certainly. I see that to be the right way," responded Ethelwyn.

"Now, are we bound to bring her up exactly as our own, or are we not?"

"We are bound to do as well for her as for our own."

"Assuredly. But if we brought her up just as our own, would that, the facts being as they are, be to do as well for her as for our own?"

"I doubt it; for other people would not choose to receive her as we have done."

"That is true. She would be continually reminded of her origin. Not that that in itself would be any evil; but as they would do it by excluding or neglecting her, or, still worse, by taking liberties with her, it would be a great pain. But keeping that out of view, would it be good for herself, knowing what she will know, to be thus brought up? Would it not be kinder to bring her up in a way that would make it easier for her to relieve the gratitude which I trust she will feel, not for our sakes—I hope we are above doing anything for the sake of the gratitude which will be given for it, and which is so often far beyond the worth of the thing done—"

"Alas! the gratitude of men
Hath oftener left me mourning,"

said Ethel.

"Ah! you understand that now, my Ethel!"

"Yes, thank you, I do."

"But we must wish for gratitude for others' sake, though we may be willing to go without it for our own. Indeed, gratitude is often just as painful as Wordsworth there represents it. It makes us so ashamed; makes us think how much more we *might* have done; how lovely a thing it is to give in return for such common gifts as ours; how needy the man or woman must be in whom a trifle awakes so much emotion."

"Yes; but we must not in justice think that it is merely that our little doing seems great to them: it is the kindness shown them therein, for which, often, they are more grateful than for the gift, though they can't show the difference in their thanks."

"And, indeed, are not aware of it themselves, though it is so. And yet, the same remarks hold good about the kindness as about the gift. But to return to Theodora. If we put her in a way of life

that would be recognisant of whence she came, and how she had been brought thence, might it not be better for her? Would it not be building on the truth? Would she not be happier for it?"

"You are putting general propositions, while all the time you have something particular and definite in your own mind; and that is not fair to my place in the conference," said Ethel. "In fact, you think you are trying to approach me wisely, in order to persuade, I will not say *wheedle*, me into something. It's a good thing you have the harmlessness of the dove, Harry, for you've got the other thing."

"Well, then, I will be as plain as ever I can be, only premising that what you call the cunning of the serpent—"

"Wisdom, Harry, not cunning."

"Is only that I like to give my arguments before my proposition. But here it is—bare and defenceless, only—let me warn you—with a whole battery behind it: it is, to bring up little Theodora as a servant to Constance."

My wife laughed.

"Well," she said, "for one who says so much about not thinking of the morrow, you do look rather far forward."

"Not with any anxiety, however, if only I know that I am doing right."

"But just think: the child is about three months old."

"Well; Connie will be none the worse that she is being trained for her. I don't say that she is to commence her duties at once."

"But Connie may be at the head of a house of her own long before that."

"The training won't be lost to the child though. But I much fear, my love, that Connie will never be herself again. There is no sign of it. And Turner does not give much hope."

"O Harry, Harry, don't say so! I can't bear it. To think of the darling child lying like that all her life!"

"It is sad, indeed; but no such awful misfortune surely, Ethel. Haven't you seen, as well as I, that the growth of that child's nature since her accident has been marvellous? Ten times rather would I have her lying there such as she is, than have her well and strong and silly, with her bonnets inside instead of outside her head."

"Yes, but she needn't have been like that. Wynnie never will."

"Well, but God does all things not only well, but best, absolutely best. But just think what it would be in any circumstances to have a maid that had begun to wait upon her from the first days that she was able to toddle after something to fetch it for her."

"Won't it be like making a slave of her?"

"Won't it be like giving her a divine freedom from the first? The lack of service is the ruin of humanity."

"But we can't train her then like one of our own."

"Why not? Could we not give her all the love and all the teaching?"

"Because it would not be fair to give her the education of a lady, and then make a servant of her."

"You forget that the service would be part of her training from the first; and she would know no change of position in it. When we tell her that she was found in the shrubbery, we will add that we think God sent her to take care of Constance. I do not believe myself that you can have perfect service except from a lady. Do not forget the true notion of service as the essence of Christianity, yea, of divinity. It is not education that unfits for service: it is the want of it."

"Well, I know that the reading girls I have had, have, as a rule, served me worse than the rest."

"Would you have called one of those girls educated? Or even if they had been educated, as any of them might well have been, better than nine-tenths of the girls that go to boarding-schools, you must remember that they had never been taught service—the highest accomplishment of all. To that everything aids, when any true feeling of it is there. But for service of this high sort, the education

must begin with the beginning of the dawn of will. How often have you wished that you had servants who would believe in you, and serve you with the same truth with which you regarded them! The servants born in a man's house in the old times were more like his children than his servants. Here is a chance for you, as it were of a servant born in your own house. Connie loves the child: the child will love Connie, and find her delight in serving her like a little cherub. Not one of the maids to whom you have referred had ever been taught to think service other than an unavoidable necessity, the end of life being to serve yourself, not to serve others; and hence most of them would escape from it by any marriage almost that they had a chance of making. I don't say all servants are like that; but I do think that most of them are. I know very well that most mistresses are as much to blame for this result as the servants are; but we are not talking about them. Servants nowadays despise work, and yet are forced to do it—a most degrading condition to be in. But they would not be in any better condition if delivered from the work. The lady who despises work is in as bad a condition as they are. The only way to set them free is to get them to regard service not only as their duty, but as therefore honourable, and besides and beyond this, in its own nature divine. In America, the very name of servant is repudiated as inconsistent with human dignity. There is *no* dignity but of service. How different the whole notion of training is now from what it was in the middle ages! Service was honourable then. No doubt we have made progress as a whole, but in some things we have degenerated sadly. The first thing taught then was how to serve. No man could rise to the honour of knighthood without service. A nobleman's son even had to wait on his father, or to go into the family of another nobleman, and wait upon him as a page, standing behind his chair at dinner. This was an honour. No notion of degradation was in it. It was a necessary step to higher honour. And what was the next higher honour? To be set free from service? No. To serve in the harder service of the field; to be a squire to some noble knight; to tend his horse, to clean his armour, to see that every rivet was sound, every buckle true, every strap strong; to ride behind him, and carry his spear, and if more than one attacked him, to rush to his aid. This service was the more honourable because it was harder, and was the next step to higher honour yet. And what was this higher honour? That of knighthood. Wherein did this knighthood consist? The very word means simply *service*. And for what was the knight thus waited upon by his squire? That he might be free to do as he pleased? No, but that he might be free to be the servant of all. By being a squire first, the servant of one, he learned to rise to the higher rank, that of servant of all. His horse was tended, this armour observed, his sword and spear and shield held to his hand, that he might have no trouble looking after himself, but might be free, strong, unwearied, to shoot like an arrow to the rescue of any and every one who needed his ready aid. There was a grand heart of Christianity in that old chivalry, notwithstanding all its abuses which must be no more laid to its charge than the burning of Jews and heretics to Christianity. It was the lack of it, not the presence of it that occasioned the abuses that coexisted with it. Train our Theodora as a holy child-servant, and there will be no need to restrain any impulse of wise affection from pouring itself forth upon her. My firm belief is that we should then love and honour her far more than if we made her just like one of our own."

"But what if she should turn out utterly unfit for it?"

"Ah! then would come an obstacle. But it will not come till that discovery is made."

"But if we should be going wrong all the time?"

"Now, there comes the kind of care that never troubles me, and which I so strongly object to. It won't hurt her anyhow. And we ought always to act upon the ideal; it is the only safe ground of action. When that which contradicts and resists, and would ruin our ideal, opposes us, then we must take measures; but not till then can we take measures, or know what measures it may be necessary to take. But the ideal itself is the only thing worth striving after. Remember what our Lord himself said: 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.'"

"Well, I will think about it, Harry. There is time enough."

“Plenty. No time only not to think about it. The more you think about it the better. If a thing be a good thing, the more you think about it the better it will look; for its real nature will go on coming out and showing itself. I cannot doubt that you will soon see how good it is.”

We then went home. It was only two days after that my wife said to me—

“I am more than reconciled to your plan, husband. It seems to me delightful.”

When we reentered Connie’s room, we found that her baby had just waked, and she had managed to get one arm under her, and was trying to comfort her, for she was crying.

CHAPTER IX. A SPRING CHAPTER

More especially now in my old age, I find myself "to a lingering motion bound." I would, if I might, tell a tale day by day, hour by hour, following the movement of the year in its sweet change of seasons. This may not be, but I will indulge myself now so far as to call this a spring chapter, and so pass to the summer, when my reader will see why I have called my story "The Seaboard Parish."

I was out one day amongst my people, and I found two precious things: one, a lovely little fact, the other a lovely little primrose. This was a pinched, dwarfish thing, for the spring was but a baby herself, and so could not mother more than a brave-hearted weakling. The frost lay all about it under the hedge, but its rough leaves kept it just warm enough, and hardly. Now, I should never have pulled the little darling; it would have seemed a kind of small sacrilege committed on the church of nature, seeing she had but this one; only with my sickly cub at home, I felt justified in ravening like a beast of prey. I even went so far in my greed as to dig up the little plant with my fingers, and bear it, leaves and all, with a lump of earth about it to keep it alive, home to my little woman—a present from the outside world which she loved so much. And as I went there dawned upon me the recollection of a little mirror in which, if I could find it, she would see it still more lovely than in a direct looking at itself. So I set myself to find it; for it lay in fragments in the drawers and cabinets of my memory. And before I got home I had found all the pieces and put them together; and then it was a lovely little sonnet which a friend of mine had written and allowed me to see many years before. I was in the way of writing verses myself; but I should have been proud to have written this one. I never could have done that. Yet, as far as I knew, it had never seen the light through the windows of print. It was with some difficulty that I got it all right; but I thought I had succeeded very nearly, if not absolutely, and I said it over and over, till I was sure I should not spoil its music or its meaning by halting in the delivery of it.

"Look here, my Connie, what I have brought you," I said.

She held out her two white, half-transparent hands, took it as if it had been a human baby and looked at it lovingly till the tears came in her eyes. She would have made a tender picture, as she then lay, with her two hands up, holding the little beauty before her eyes. Then I said what I have already written about the mirror, and repeated the sonnet to her. Here it is, and my readers will owe me gratitude for it. My friend had found the snowdrop in February, and in frost. Indeed he told me that there was a tolerable sprinkling of snow upon the ground:

"I know not what among the grass thou art,
  Thy nature, nor thy substance, fairest flower,
  Nor what to other eyes thou hast of power
To send thine image through them to the heart;
But when I push the frosty leaves apart,
  And see thee hiding in thy wintry bower,
  Thou growest up within me from that hour,
And through the snow I with the spring depart.

I have no words. But fragrant is the breath,
  Pale Beauty, of thy second life within.
There is a wind that cometh for thy death,
  But thou a life immortal dost begin,
Where, in one soul, which is thy heaven, shall dwell
Thy spirit, beautiful Unspeakable!"

"Will you say it again, papa?" said Connie; "I do not quite understand it."

"I will, my dear. But I will do something better as well. I will go and write it out for you, as soon as I have given you something else that I have brought."

"Thank you, papa. And please write it in your best Sunday hand, that I may read it quite easily."

I promised, and repeated the poem.

"I understand it a little better," she said; "but the meaning is just like the primrose itself, hidden up in its green leaves. When you give it me in writing, I will push them apart and find it. Now, tell me what else you have brought me."

I was greatly pleased with the resemblance the child saw between the plant and the sonnet; but I did not say anything in praise; I only expressed satisfaction. Before I began my story, Wynnie came in and sat down with us.

"I have been to see Miss Aylmer, this morning," I said. "She feels the loss of her mother very much, poor thing."

"How old was she, papa?" asked Connie.

"She was over ninety, my dear; but she had forgotten how much herself, and her daughter could not be sure about it. She was a peculiar old lady, you know. She once reproved me for inadvertently putting my hat on the tablecloth. 'Mr. Shafton,' she said, 'was one of the old school; he would never have done that. I don't know what the world is coming to.'"

My two girls laughed at the idea of their papa being reproved for bad manners.

"What did you say, papa?" they asked.

"I begged her pardon, and lifted it instantly. 'O, it's all right now, my dear,' she said, 'when you've taken it up again. But I like good manners, though I live in a cottage now.'"

"Had she seen better days, then?" asked Wynnie.

"She was a farmer's daughter, and a farmer's widow. I suppose the chief difference in her mode of life was that she lived in a cottage instead of a good-sized farmhouse."

"But what is the story you have to tell us?"

"I'm coming to that when you have done with your questions."

"We have done, papa."

"After talking awhile, during which she went bustling a little about the cottage, in order to hide her feelings, as I thought, for she has a good deal of her mother's sense of dignity about her,—but I want your mother to hear the story. Run and fetch her, Wynnie."

"O, do make haste, Wynnie," said Connie.

When Ethelwyn came, I went on.

"Miss Aylmer was bustling a little about the cottage, putting things to rights. All at once she gave a cry of surprise, and said, 'Here it is, at last!' She had taken up a stuff dress of her mother's, and was holding it in one hand, while with the other she drew from the pocket—what do you think?"

Various guesses were hazarded.

"No, no—nothing like it. I know you *could* never guess. Therefore it would not be fair to keep you trying. A great iron horseshoe. The old woman of ninety years had in the pocket of the dress that she was wearing at the very moment when she died, for her death was sudden, an iron horseshoe."

"What did it mean? Could her daughter explain it?"

"That she proceeded at once to do. 'Do you remember, sir,' she said, 'how that horseshoe used to hang on a nail over the chimneypiece?' 'I do remember having observed it there,' I answered; 'for once when I took notice of it, I said to your mother, laughing, "I hope you are not afraid of witches, Mrs. Aylmer?" And she looked a little offended, and assured me to the contrary.' 'Well,' her daughter went on, 'about three months ago, I missed it. My mother would not tell me anything about it. And here it is! I can hardly think she can have carried it about all that time without me finding it out, but I don't know. Here it is, anyhow. Perhaps when she felt death drawing nearer, she took it from somewhere where she had hidden it, and put it in her pocket. If I had found it in time, I would have put it in her coffin.' 'But why?' I asked. 'Do tell me the story about it, if you know it.' 'I know it quite

well, for she told me all about it once. It is the shoe of a favourite mare of my father's—one he used to ride when he went courting my mother. My grandfather did not like to have a young man coming about the house, and so he came after the old folks were gone to bed. But he had a long way to come, and he rode that mare. She had to go over some stones to get to the stable, and my mother used to spread straw there, for it was under the window of my grandfather's room, that her shoes mightn't make a noise and wake him. And that's one of the shoes,' she said, holding it up to me. 'When the mare died, my mother begged my father for the one off her near forefoot, where she had so often stood and patted her neck when my father was mounted to ride home again.'"

"But it was very naughty of her, wasn't it," said Wynnie, "to do that without her father's knowledge?"

"I don't say it was right, my dear. But in looking at what is wrong, we ought to look for the beginning of the wrong; and possibly we might find that in this case farther back. If, for instance, a father isn't a father, we must not be too hard in blaming the child for not being a child. The father's part has to come first, and teach the child's part. Now, if I might guess from what I know of the old lady, in whom probably it was much softened, her father was very possibly a hard, unreasoning, and unreasonable man—such that it scarcely ever came into the daughter's head that she had anything else to do with regard to him than beware of the consequences of letting him know that she had a lover. The whole thing, I allow, was wrong; but I suspect the father was first to blame, and far more to blame than the daughter. And that is the more likely from the high character of the old dame, and the romantic way in which she clung to the memory of the courtship. A true heart only does not grow old. And I have, therefore, no doubt that the marriage was a happy one. Besides, I daresay it was very much the custom of the country where they were, and that makes some difference."

"Well, I'm sure, papa, you wouldn't like any of us to go and do like that," said Wynnie.

"Assuredly not, my dear," I answered, laughing. "Nor have I any fear of it. But shall I tell you what I think would be one of the chief things to trouble me if you did?"

"If you like, papa. But it sounds rather dreadful to hear such an *if*" said Wynnie.

"It would be to think how much I had failed of being such a father to you as I ought to be, and as I wished to be, if it should prove at all possible for you to do such a thing."

"It's too dreadful to talk about, papa," said Wynnie; and the subject was dropped.

She was a strange child, this Wynnie of ours. Whereas most people are in danger of thinking themselves in the right, or insisting that they are whether they think so or not, she was always thinking herself in the wrong. Nay more, she always expected to find herself in the wrong. If the perpetrator of any mischief was inquired after, she always looked into her own bosom to see whether she could not with justice aver that she was the doer of the deed. I believe she felt at that moment as if she had been deceiving me already, and deserved to be driven out of the house. This came of an over-sensitiveness, accompanied by a general dissatisfaction with herself, which was not upheld by a sufficient faith in the divine sympathy, or sufficient confidence of final purification. She never spared herself; and if she was a little severe on the younger ones sometimes, no one was yet more indulgent to them. She would eat all their hard crusts for them, always give them the best and take the worst for herself. If there was any part in the dish that she was helping that she thought nobody would like, she invariably assigned it to her own share. It looked like a determined self-mortification sometimes; but that was not it. She did not care for her own comfort enough to feel it any mortification; though I observed that when her mother or I helped her to anything nice, she ate it with as much relish as the youngest of the party. And her sweet smile was always ready to meet the least kindness that was offered her. Her obedience was perfect, and had been so for very many years, as far as we could see. Indeed, not since she was the merest child had there been any contest between us. Now, of course, there was no demand of obedience: she was simply the best earthly friend that her father and mother had. It often caused me some passing anxiety to think that her temperament, as well as her devotion to her home, might cause her great suffering some day; but when those thoughts came, I just gave her

to God to take care of. Her mother sometimes said to her that she would make an excellent wife for a poor man. She would brighten up greatly at this, taking it for a compliment of the best sort. And she did not forget it, as the sequel will show. She would choose to sit with one candle lit when there were two on the table, wasting her eyes to save the candles. “Which will you have for dinner to-day, papa, roast beef or boiled?” she asked me once, when her mother was too unwell to attend to the housekeeping. And when I replied that I would have whichever she liked best—“The boiled beef lasts longest, I think,” she said. Yet she was not only as liberal and kind as any to the poor, but she was, which is rarer, and perhaps more important for the final formation of a character, carefully just to everyone with whom she had any dealings. Her sense of law was very strong. Law with her was something absolute, and not to be questioned. In her childhood there was one lady to whom for years she showed a decided aversion, and we could not understand it, for it was the most inoffensive Miss Boulderstone. When she was nearly grown up, one of us happening to allude to the fact, she volunteered an explanation. Miss Boulderstone had happened to call one day when Wynnie, then between three and four was in disgrace—*in the corner*, in fact. Miss Boulderstone interceded for her; and this was the whole front of her offending.

“I *was* so angry!” she said. “‘As if my papa did not know best when I ought to come out of the corner!’ I said to myself. And I couldn’t bear her for ever so long after that.”

Miss Boulderstone, however, though not very interesting, was quite a favourite before she died. She left Wynnie—for she and her brother were the last of their race—a death’s-head watch, which had been in the family she did not know how long. I think it is as old as Queen Elizabeth’s time. I took it to London to a skilful man, and had it as well repaired as its age would admit of; and it has gone ever since, though not with the greatest accuracy; for what could be expected of an old death’s-head, the most transitory thing in creation? Wynnie wears it to this day, and wouldn’t part with it for the best watch in the world.

I tell the reader all this about my daughter that he may be the more able to understand what will follow in due time. He will think that as yet my story has been nothing but promises. Let him only hope that I will fulfil them, and I shall be content.

Mr. Boulderstone did not long outlive his sister. Though the old couple, for they were rather old before they died, if, indeed, they were not born old, which I strongly suspect, being the last of a decaying family that had not left the land on which they were born for a great many generations—though the old people had not, of what the French call sentiments, one between them, they were yet capable of a stronger and, I had almost said, more romantic attachment, than many couples who have married from love; for the lady’s sole trouble in dying was what her brother *would* do without her; and from the day of her death, he grew more and more dull and seemingly stupid. Nothing gave him any pleasure but having Wynnie to dinner with him. I knew that it must be very dull for her, but she went often, and I never heard her complain of it, though she certainly did look fagged—not *bored*, observe, but fagged—showing that she had been exerting herself to meet the difficulties of the situation. When the good man died, we found that he had left all his money in my hands, in trust for the poor of the parish, to be applied in any way I thought best. This involved me in much perplexity, for nothing is more difficult than to make money useful to the poor. But I was very glad of it, notwithstanding.

My own means were not so large as my readers may think. The property my wife brought me was much encumbered. With the help of her private fortune, and the income of several years (not my income from the church, it may be as well to say), I succeeded in clearing off the encumbrances. But even then there remained much to be done, if I would be the good steward that was not to be ashamed at his Lord’s coming. First of all there were many cottages to be built for the labourers on the estate. If the farmers would not, or could not, help, I must do it; for to provide decent dwellings for them, was clearly one of the divine conditions in the righteous tenure of property, whatever the human might be; for it was not for myself alone, or for myself chiefly, that this property was given to me; it was for those who lived upon it. Therefore I laid out what money I could, not only in getting

all the land clearly in its right relation to its owner, but in doing the best I could for those attached to it who could not help themselves. And when I hint to my reader that I had some conscience in paying my curate, though, as they had no children, they did not require so much as I should otherwise have felt compelled to give them, he will easily see that as my family grew up I could not have so much to give away of my own as I should have liked. Therefore this trust of the good Mr. Boulderstone was the more acceptable to me.

One word more ere I finish this chapter.—I should not like my friends to think that I had got tired of our Christmas gatherings, because I have made no mention of one this year. It had been pretermitted for the first time, because of my daughter's illness. It was much easier to give them now than when I lived at the vicarage, for there was plenty of room in the old hall. But my curate, Mr. Weir, still held a similar gathering there every Easter.

Another one word more about him. Some may wonder why I have not mentioned him or my sister, especially in connection with Connie's accident. The fact was, that he had taken, or rather I had given him, a long holiday. Martha had had several disappointing illnesses, and her general health had suffered so much in consequence that there was even some fear of her lungs, and a winter in the south of France had been strongly recommended. Upon this I came in with more than a recommendation, and insisted that they should go. They had started in the beginning of October, and had not returned up to the time of which I am now about to write—somewhere in the beginning of the month of April. But my sister was now almost quite well, and I was not sorry to think that I should soon have a little more leisure for such small literary pursuits as I delighted in—to my own enrichment, and consequently to the good of my parishioners and friends.

CHAPTER X. AN IMPORTANT LETTER

It was, then, in the beginning of April that I received one morning an epistle from an old college friend of mine, with whom I had renewed my acquaintance of late, through the pleasure which he was kind enough to say he had derived from reading a little book of mine upon the relation of the mind of St. Paul to the gospel story. His name was Shepherd—a good name for a clergyman. In his case both Christian name and patronymic might remind him well of his duty. David Shepherd ought to be a good clergyman.

As soon as I had read the letter, I went with it open in my hand to find my wife.

"Here is Shepherd," I said, "with a clerical sore-throat, and forced to give up his duty for a whole summer. He writes to ask me whether, as he understands I have a curate as good as myself—that is what the old fellow says—it might not suit me to take my family to his place for the summer. He assures me I should like it, and that it would do us all good. His house, he says, is large enough to hold us, and he knows I should not like to be without duty wherever I was. And so on Read the letter for yourself, and turn it over in your mind. Weir will come back so fresh and active that it will be no oppression to him to take the whole of the duty here. I will run and ask Turner whether it would be safe to move Connie, and whether the sea-air would be good for her."

"One would think you were only twenty, husband—you make up your mind so quickly, and are in such a hurry."

The fact was, a vision of the sea had rushed in upon me. It was many years since I had seen the sea, and the thought of looking on it once more, in its most glorious show, the Atlantic itself, with nothing between us and America, but the round of the ridgy water, had excited me so that my wife's reproof, if reproof it was, was quite necessary to bring me to my usually quiet and sober senses. I laughed, begged old grannie's pardon, and set off to see Turner notwithstanding, leaving her to read and ponder Shepherd's letter.

"What do you think, Turner?" I said, and told him the case. He looked rather grave.

"When would you think of going?" he asked.

"About the beginning of June."

"Nearly two months," he said, thoughtfully. "And Miss Connie was not the worse for getting on the sofa yesterday?"

"The better, I do think."

"Has she had any increase of pain since?"

"None, I quite believe; for I questioned her as to that."

He thought again. He was a careful man, although young.

"It is a long journey."

"She could make it by easy stages."

"It would certainly do her good to breathe the sea-air and have such a thorough change in every way—if only it could be managed without fatigue and suffering. I think, if you can get her up every day between this and that, we shall be justified in trying it at least. The sooner you get her out of doors the better too; but the weather is scarcely fit for that yet."

"A good deal will depend on how she is inclined, I suppose."

"Yes. But in her case you must not mind that too much. An invalid's instincts as to eating and drinking are more to be depended upon than those of a healthy person; but it is not so, I think with regard to anything involving effort. That she must sometimes be urged to. She must not judge that by inclination. I have had, in my short practice, two patients, who considered themselves *bedlars*, as you will find the common people in the part you are going to, call them—bedridden, that is. One of them I persuaded to make the attempt to rise, and although her sense of inability was anything but feigned, and she will be a sufferer to the end of her days, yet she goes about the house without much

inconvenience, and I suspect is not only physically but morally the better for it. The other would not consent to try, and I believe lies there still."

"The will has more to do with most things than people generally suppose," I said. "Could you manage, now, do you think, supposing we resolve to make the experiment, to accompany us the first stage or two?"

"It is very likely I could. Only you must not depend upon me. I cannot tell beforehand. You yourself would teach me that I must not be a respecter of persons, you know."

I returned to my wife. She was in Connie's room.

"Well, my dear," I said, "what do you think of it?"

"Of what?" she asked.

"Why, of Shepherd's letter, of course," I answered.

"I've been ordering the dinner since, Harry."

"The dinner!" I returned with some show of contempt, for I knew my wife was only teasing me. "What's the dinner to the Atlantic?"

"What do you mean by the Atlantic, papa?" said Connie, from whose roguish eyes I could see that her mother had told her all about it, and that *she* was not disinclined to get up, if only she could.

"The Atlantic, my dear, is the name given to that portion of the waters of the globe which divides Europe from America. I will fetch you the Universal Gazetteer, if you would like to consult it on the subject."

"O papa!" laughed Connie; "you know what I mean."

"Yes; and you know what I mean too, you squirrel!"

"But do you really mean, papa," she said "that you will take me to the Atlantic?"

"If you will only oblige me by getting Well enough to go as soon as possible."

The poor child half rose on her elbow, but sank back again with a moan, which I took for a cry of pain. I was beside her in a moment.

"My darling! You have hurt yourself!"

"O no, papa. I felt for the moment as if I could get up if I liked. But I soon found that I hadn't any back or legs. O! what a plague I am to you!"

"On the contrary, you are the nicest plaything in the world, Connie. One always knows where to find you."

She half laughed and half cried, and the two halves made a very bewitching whole.

"But," I went on, "I mean to try whether my dolly won't bear moving. One thing is clear, I can't go without it. Do you think you could be got on the sofa to-day without hurting you?"

"I am sure I could, papa. I feel better today than I have felt yet. Mamma, do send for Susan, and get me up before dinner."

When I went in after a couple of hours or so, I found her lying on the conch, propped up with pillows. She lay looking out of the window on the lawn at the back of the house. A smile hovered about her bloodless lips, and the blue of her eyes, though very gray, looked sunny. Her white face showed the whiter because her dark brown hair was all about it. We had had to cut her hair, but it had grown to her neck again.

"I have been trying to count the daisies on the lawn," she said.

"What a sharp sight you must have, child!"

"I see them all as clear as if they were enamelled on that table before me."

I was not so anxious to get rid of the daisies as some people are. Neither did I keep the grass quite so close shaved.

"But," she went on, "I could not count them, for it gave me the fidgets in my feet."

"You don't say so!" I exclaimed.

She looked at me with some surprise, but concluding that I was only making a little of my mild fun at her expense, she laughed.

"Yes. Isn't it a wonderful fact?" she said.

"It is a fact, my dear, that I feel ready to go on my knees and thank God for. I may be wrong, but I take it as a sign that you are beginning to recover a little. But we mustn't make too much of it, lest I should be mistaken," I added, checking myself, for I feared exciting her too much.

But she lay very still; only the tears rose slowly and lay shimmering in her eyes. After about five minutes, during which we were both silent,—

"O papa!" she said, "to think of ever walking out with you again, and feeling the wind on my face! I can hardly believe it possible."

"It is so mild, I think you might have half that pleasure at once," I answered..

And I opened the window, let the spring air gently move her hair for one moment, and then shut it again. Connie breathed deep, and said after a little pause,—

"I had no idea how delightful it was. To think that I have been in the way of breathing that every moment for so many years and never thought about it!"

"It is not always just like that in this climate. But I ought not to have made that remark when I wanted to make this other: that I suspect we shall find some day that the loss of the human paradise consists chiefly in the closing of the human eyes; that at least far more of it than people think remains about us still, only we are so filled with foolish desires and evil cares, that we cannot see or hear, cannot even smell or taste the pleasant things round about us. We have need to pray in regard to the right receiving of the things of the senses even, 'Lord, open thou our hearts to understand thy word;' for each of these things is as certainly a word of God as Jesus is the Word of God. He has made nothing in vain. All is for our teaching. Shall I tell you what such a breath of fresh air makes me think of?"

"It comes to me," said Connie, "like forgiveness when I was a little girl and was naughty. I used to feel just like that."

"It is the same kind of thing I feel," I said—"as if life from the Spirit of God were coming into my soul: I think of the wind that bloweth where it listeth. Wind and spirit are the same word in the Greek; and the Latin word *spirit* comes even nearer to what we are saying, for it is the wind as *breathed*. And now, Connie, I will tell you—and you will see how I am growing able to talk to you like quite an old friend—what put me in such a delight with Mr. Shepherd's letter and so exposed me to be teased by mamma and you. As I read it, there rose up before me a vision of one sight of the sea which I had when I was a young man, long before I saw your mamma. I had gone out for a walk along some high downs. But I ought to tell you that I had been working rather hard at Cambridge, and the life seemed to be all gone out of me. Though my holidays had come, they did not feel quite like holidays—not as holidays used to feel when I was a boy. Even when walking along those downs with the scents of sixteen grasses or so in my brain, like a melody with the odour of the earth for the accompaniment upon which it floated, and with just enough of wind to stir them up and set them in motion, I could not feel at all. I remembered something of what I had used to feel in such places, but instead of believing in that, I doubted now whether it had not been all a trick that I played myself—a fancied pleasure only. I was walking along, then, with the sea behind me. It was a warm, cloudy day —I had had no sunshine since I came out. All at once I turned—I don't know why. There lay the gray sea, but not as I had seen it last, not all gray. It was dotted, spotted, and splashed all over with drops, pools, and lakes of light, of all shades of depth, from a light shimmer of tremulous gray, through a half light that turned the prevailing lead colour into translucent green that seemed to grow out of its depths—through this, I say, to brilliant light, deepening and deepening till my very soul was stung by the triumph of the intensity of its molten silver. There was no sun upon me. But there were breaks in the clouds over the sea, through which, the air being filled with vapour, I could see the long lines of the sun-rays descending on the waters like rain—so like a rain of light that the water seemed to plash up in light under their fall. I questioned the past no more; the present seized upon me, and I knew that

the past was true, and that nature was more lovely, more awful in her loveliness than I could grasp. It was a lonely place: I fell on my knees, and worshipped the God that made the glory and my soul."

While I spoke Connie's tears had been flowing quietly.

"And mamma and I were making fun while you were seeing such things as those!" she said pitifully.

"You didn't hurt them one bit, my darling—neither mamma nor you. If I had been the least cross about it, as I should have been when I was as young as at the time of which I was thinking, that would have ruined the vision entirely. But your merriment only made me enjoy it more. And, my Connie, I hope you will see the Atlantic before long; and if one vision should come as brilliant as that, we shall be fortunate indeed, if we went all the way to the west to see that only."

"O papa! I dare hardly think of it—it is too delightful. But do you think we shall really go?"

"I do. Here comes your mamma—I am going to say to Shepherd, my dear, that I will take his parish in hand, and if I cannot, after all, go myself, will find some one, so that he need be in no anxiety from the uncertainty which must hang over our movements even till the experiment itself is made."

"Very well, husband. I am quite satisfied."

And as I watched Connie, I saw that hope and expectation did much to prepare her.

CHAPTER XI. CONNIE'S DREAM

Mr. Turner, being a good mechanic as well as surgeon, proceeded to invent, and with his own hands in a great measure construct, a kind of litter, which, with a water-bed laid upon it, could be placed in our own carriage for Connie to lie upon, and from that lifted, without disturbing her, and placed in a similar manner in the railway carriage. He had laid Connie repeatedly upon it before he was satisfied that the arrangement of the springs, &c., was successful. But at length she declared that it was perfect, and that she would not mind being carried across the Arabian desert on a camel's back with that under her.

As the season advanced, she continued to improve. I shall never forget the first time she was carried out upon the lawn. If you can imagine an infant coming into the world capable of the observation and delight of a child of eight or ten, you will have some idea of how Connie received the new impressions of everything around her. They were almost too much for her at first, however. She who had been used to scamper about like a wild thing on a pony, found the delight of a breath of wind almost more than she could bear. After she was laid down she closed her eyes, and the smile that flickered about her mouth was of a sort that harmonised entirely with the two great tears that crept softly out from under her eyelids, and sank, rather than ran, down her cheeks. She lay so that she faced a rich tract of gently receding upland, plentifully wooded to the horizon's edge, and through the wood peeped the white and red houses of a little hamlet, with the square tower of its church just rising above the trees. A kind of frame was made to the whole picture by the nearer trees of our own woods, through an opening in which, evidently made or left for its sake, the distant prospect was visible. It was a morning in early summer, when the leaves were not quite full-grown but almost, and their green was shining and pure as the blue of the sky, when the air had no touch of bitterness or of lassitude, but was thoroughly warm, and yet filled the lungs with the reviving as of a draught of cold water. We had fastened the carriage umbrella to the sofa, so that it should shade her perfectly without obscuring her prospect; and behind this we all crept, leaving her to come to herself without being looked at, for emotion is a shy and sacred thing and should be tenderly hidden by those who are near. The bees kept very *beesy* all about us. To see one huge fellow, as big as three ordinary ones with pieces of red and yellow about him, as if he were the beadle of all bee-dom, and overgrown in consequence—to see him, I say, down in a little tuft of white clover, rolling about in it, hardly able to move for fatness, yet bumming away as if his business was to express the delight of the whole creation —was a sight! Then there were the butterflies, so light that they seemed to tumble up into the air, and get down again with difficulty. They bewildered me with their inscrutable variations of purpose. "If I could but see once, for an hour, into the mind of a butterfly," I thought, "it would be to me worth all the natural history I ever read. If I could but see why he changes his mind so often and so suddenly —what he saw about that flower to make him seek it—then why, on a nearer approach, he should decline further acquaintance with it, and go rocking away through the air, to do the same fifty times over again—it would give me an insight into all animal and vegetable life that ages of study could not bring me up to." I was thinking all this behind my daughter's umbrella, while a lark, whose body had melted quite away in the heavenly spaces, was scattering bright beads of ringing melody straight down upon our heads; while a cock was crowing like a clarion from the home-farm, as if in defiance of the golden glitter of his silent brother on the roof of the stable; while a little stream that scampered down the same slope as the lawn lay upon, from a well in the stable-yard, mingled its sweet undertone of contentment with the jubilation of the lark and the business-like hum of the bees; and while white clouds floated in the majesty of silence across the blue deeps of the heavens. The air was so full of life and reviving, that it seemed like the crude substance that God might take to make babies' souls of—only the very simile smells of materialism, and therefore I do not like it.

"Papa," said Connie at length, and I was beside her in a moment. Her face looked almost glorified with delight: there was a hush of that awe upon it which is perhaps one of the deepest kinds of delight. She put out her thin white hand, took hold of a button of my coat, drew me down towards her, and said in a whisper:

"Don't you think God is here, papa?"

"Yes, I do, my darling," I answered.

"Doesn't *he* enjoy this?"

"Yes, my dear. He wouldn't make us enjoy it if he did not enjoy it. It would be to deceive us to make us glad and blessed, while our Father did not care about it, or how it came to us. At least it would amount to making us no longer his children."

"I am so glad you think so. I do. And I shall enjoy it so much more now."

She could hardly finish her sentence, but burst out sobbing so that I was afraid she would hurt herself. I saw, however, that it was best to leave her to quiet herself, and motioned to the rest to keep back and let her recover as she could. The emotion passed off in a summer shower, and when I went round once more, her face was shining just like a wet landscape after the sun has come out and Nature has begun to make gentle game of her own past sorrows. In a little while, she was merry—merrier, notwithstanding her weakness, than I think I had ever seen her before.

"Look at that comical sparrow," she said. "Look how he cocks his head first on one side and then on the other. Does he want us to see him? Is he bumptious, or what?"

"I hardly know, my dear. I think sparrows are very like schoolboys; and I suspect that if we understood the one class thoroughly, we should understand the other. But I confess I do not yet understand either."

"Perhaps you will when Charlie and Harry are old enough to go to school," said Connie.

"It is my only chance of making any true acquaintance with the sparrows," I answered. "Look at them now," I exclaimed, as a little crowd of them suddenly appeared where only one had stood a moment before, and exploded in objurgation and general unintelligible excitement. After some obscure fluttering of wings and pecking, they all vanished except two, which walked about in a dignified manner, trying apparently to seem quite unconscious each of the other's presence.

"I think it was a political meeting of some sort," said Connie, laughing merrily.

"Well, they have this advantage over us," I answered, "that they get through their business whatever it may be, with considerably greater expedition than we get through ours."

A short silence followed, during which Connie lay contemplating everything.

"What do you think we girls are like, then, papa?" she asked at length. "Don't say you don't know, now."

"I ought to know something more about you than I do about schoolboys. And I think I do know a little about girls—not much though. They puzzle me a good deal sometimes. I know what a great-hearted woman is, Connie."

"You can't help doing that, papa," interrupted Connie, adding with her old roguishness, "You mustn't pass yourself off for very knowing for that. By the time Wynnie is quite grown up, your skill will be tried."

"I hope I shall understand her then, and you too, Connie."

A shadow, just like the shadow of one of those white clouds above us, passed over her face, and she said, trying to smile:

"I shall never grow up, papa. If I live, I shall only be a girl at best—a creature you can't understand."

"On the contrary, Connie, I think I understand you almost as well as mamma. But there isn't so much to understand yet, you know, as there will be."

Her merriment returned.

"Tell me what girls are like, then, or I shall sulk all day because you say there isn't so much in me as in mamma."

"Well, I think, if the boys are like sparrows, the girls are like swallows. Did you ever watch them before rain, Connie, skimming about over the lawn as if it were water, low towards its surface, but never alighting? You never see them grubbing after worms. Nothing less than things with wings like themselves will satisfy them. They will be obliged to the earth only for a little mud to build themselves nests with. For the rest, they live in the air, and on the creatures of the air. And then, when they fancy the air begins to be uncivil, sending little shoots of cold through their warm feathers, they vanish. They won't stand it. They're off to a warmer climate, and you never know till you find they're not there any more. There, Connie!"

"I don't know, papa, whether you are making game of us or not. If you are not, then I wish all you say were quite true of us. If you are then I think it is not quite like you to be satirical."

"I am no believer in satire, Connie. And I didn't mean any. The swallows are lovely creatures, and there would be no harm if the girls were a little steadier than the swallows. Further satire than that I am innocent of."

"I don't mind that much, papa. Only I'm steady enough, and no thanks to me for it," she added with a sigh.

"Connie," I said, "it's all for the sake of your wings that you're kept in your nest."

She did not stay out long this first day, for the life the air gave her soon tired her weak body. But the next morning she was brighter and better, and longing to get up and go out again. When she was once more laid on her couch on the lawn, in the midst of the world of light and busy-ness, in which the light was the busiest of all, she said to me:

"Papa, I had such a strange dream last night: shall I tell it you?"

"If you please, my dear. I am very fond of dreams that have any sense in them—or even of any that have good nonsense in them. I woke this morning, saying to myself, 'Dante, the poet, must have been a respectable man, for he was permitted by the council of Florence to carry the Nicene Creed and the Multiplication Table in his coat of arms.' Now tell me your dream."

Connie laughed. All the household tried to make Connie laugh, and generally succeeded. It was quite a triumph to Charlie or Harry, and was sure to be recounted with glee at the next meal, when he succeeded in making Connie laugh.

"Mine wasn't a dream to make me laugh. It was too dreadful at first, and too delightful afterwards. I suppose it was getting out for the first time yesterday that made me dream it. I thought I was lying quite still, without breathing even, with my hands straight down by my sides and my eyes closed. I did not choose to open them, for I knew that if I did I should see nothing but the inside of the lid of my coffin. I did not mind it much at first, for I was very quiet, and not uncomfortable. Everything was as silent as it should be, for I was ten feet and a half under the surface of the earth in the churchyard. Old Sogers was not far from me on one side, and that was a comfort; only there was a thick wall of earth between. But as the time went on, I began to get uncomfortable. I could not help thinking how long I should have to wait for the resurrection. Somehow I had forgotten all that you teach us about that. Perhaps it was a punishment—the dream—for forgetting it."

"Silly child! Your dream is far better than your reflections."

"Well, I'll go on with my dream. I lay a long time till I got very tired, and wanted to get up, O, so much! But still I lay, and although I tried, I could not move hand or foot. At last I burst out crying. I was ashamed of crying in my coffin, but I couldn't bear it any longer. I thought I was quite disgraced, for everybody was expected to be perfectly quiet and patient down there. But the moment I began to cry, I heard a sound. And when I listened it was the sound of spades and pickaxes. It went on and on, and came nearer and nearer. And then—it was so strange—I was dreadfully frightened at the idea of the light and the wind, and of the people seeing me in my coffin and my night-dress, and tried to persuade myself that it was somebody else they were digging for, or that they were only

going to lay another coffin over mine. And I thought that if it was you, papa, I shouldn't mind how long I lay there, for I shouldn't feel a bit lonely, even though we could not speak a word to each other all the time. But the sounds came on, nearer and nearer, and at last a pickaxe struck, with a blow that jarred me all through, upon the lid of the coffin, right over my head.

"'Here she is, poor thing!' I heard a sweet voice say.

"'I'm so glad we've found her,' said another voice.

"'She couldn't bear it any longer,' said a third more pitiful voice than either of the others. 'I heard her first,' it went on. 'I was away up in Orion, when I thought I heard a woman crying that oughtn't to be crying. And I stopped and listened. And I heard her again. Then I knew that it was one of the buried ones, and that she had been buried long enough, and was ready for the resurrection. So as any business can wait except that, I flew here and there till I fell in with the rest of you.'

"I think, papa, that this must have been because of what you were saying the other evening about the mysticism of St. Paul; that while he defended with all his might the actual resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of those he came to save, he used it as meaning something more yet, as a symbol for our coming out of the death of sin into the life of truth. Isn't that right, papa?"

"Yes, my dear; I believe so. But I want to hear your dream first, and then your way of accounting for it."

"There isn't much more of it now."

"There must be the best of it."

"Yes; I allow that. Well, while they spoke—it was a wonderfully clear and connected dream: I never had one like it for that, or for anything else—they were clearing away the earth and stones from the top of my coffin. And I lay trembling and expecting to be looked at, like a thing in a box as I was, every moment. But they lifted me, coffin and all, out of the grave, for I felt the motion of it up. Then they set it down, and I heard them taking the lid off. But after the lid was off, it did not seem to make much difference to me. I could not open my eyes. I saw no light, and felt no wind blowing upon me. But I heard whispering about me. Then I felt warm, soft hands washing my face, and then I felt wafts of wind coming on my face, and thought they came from the waving of wings. And when they had washed my eyes, the air came upon them so sweet and cool! and I opened them, I thought, and here I was lying on this couch, with butterflies and bees flitting and buzzing about me, the brook singing somewhere near me, and a lark up in the sky. But there were no angels—only plenty of light and wind and living creatures. And I don't think I ever knew before what happiness meant. Wasn't it a resurrection, papa, to come out of the grave into such a world as this?"

"Indeed it was, my darling—and a very beautiful and true dream. There is no need for me to moralise it to you, for you have done so for yourself already. But not only do I think that the coming out of sin into goodness, out of unbelief into faith in God, is like your dream; but I do expect that no dream of such delight can come up to the sense of fresh life and being that we shall have when we get on the higher body after this one won't serve our purpose any longer, and is worn out and cast aside. The very ability of the mind, whether of itself, or by some inspiration of the Almighty, to dream such things, is a proof of our capacity for such things, a proof, I think, that for such things we were made. Here comes in the chance for faith in God—the confidence in his being and perfection that he would not have made us capable without meaning to fill that capacity. If he is able to make us capable, that is the harder half done already. The other he can easily do. And if he is love he will do it. You should thank God for that dream, Connie."

"I was afraid to do that, papa."

"That is as much as to fear that there is one place to which David might have fled, where God would not find him—the most terrible of all thoughts."

"Where do you mean, papa?"

"Dreamland, my dear. If it is right to thank God for a beautiful thought—I mean a thought of strength and grace giving you fresh life and hope—why should you be less bold to thank him when

such thoughts arise in plainer shape—take such vivid forms to your mind that they seem to come through the doors of the eyes into the vestibule of the brain, and thence into the inner chambers of the soul?”

CHAPTER XII. THE JOURNEY

For more than two months Charlie and Harry had been preparing for the journey. The moment they heard of the prospect of it, they began to prepare, accumulate, and pack stores both for the transit and the sojourn. First of all there was an extensive preparation of ginger-beer, consisting, as I was informed in confidence, of brown sugar, ground ginger, and cold water. This store was, however, as near as I can judge, exhausted and renewed about twelve times before the day of departure arrived; and when at last the auspicious morning dawned, they remembered with dismay that they had drunk the last drop two days before, and there was none in stock. Then there was a wonderful and more successful hoarding of marbles, of a variety so great that my memory refuses to bear the names of the different kinds, which, I think, must have greatly increased since the time when I too was a boy, when some marbles—one of real, white marble with red veins especially—produced in my mind something of the delight that a work of art produces now. These were carefully deposited in one of the many divisions of a huge old hair-trunk, which they had got their uncle Weir, who could use his father's tools with pleasure if not to profit, to fit up for them with a multiplicity of boxes, and cupboards, and drawers, and trays, and slides, that was quite bewildering. In this same box was stowed also a quantity of hair, the gleanings of all the horse-tails upon the premises. This was for making fishing-tackle, with a vague notion on the part of Harry that it was to be employed in catching whales and crocodiles. Then all their favourite books were stowed away in the same chest, in especial a packet of a dozen penny books, of which I think I could give a complete list now. For one afternoon as I searched about in the lumber-room after a set of old library steps, which I wanted to get repaired, I came upon the chest, and opening it, discovered my boys' hoard, and in it this packet of books. I sat down on the top of the chest and read them all through, from Jack the Giant-killer down to Hop o' my Thumb without rising, and this in the broad daylight, with the yellow sunshine nestling beside me on the rose-coloured silken seat, richly worked, of a large stately-looking chair with three golden legs. Yes I could tell you all those stories, not to say the names of them, over yet. Only I knew every one of them before; finding now that they had fared like good vintages, for if they had lost something in potency, they had gained much in flavour. Harry could not read these, and Charlie not very well, but they put confidence in them notwithstanding, in virtue of the red, blue, and yellow prints. Then there was a box of sawdust, the design of which I have not yet discovered; a huge ball of string; a rabbit's skin; a Noah's ark; an American clock, that refused to go for all the variety of treatment they gave it; a box of lead-soldiers, and twenty other things, amongst which was a huge gilt ball having an eagle of brass with outspread wings on the top of it.

Great was their consternation and dismay when they found that this magazine could not be taken in the post-chaise in which they were to follow us to the station. A good part of our luggage had been sent on before us, but the boys had intended the precious box to go with themselves. Knowing well, however, how little they would miss it, and with what shouts of south-sea discovery they would greet the forgotten treasure when they returned, I insisted on the lumbering article being left in peace. So that, as man goeth treasureless to his grave, whatever he may have accumulated before the fatal moment, they had to set off for the far country without chest or ginger-beer—not therefore altogether so desolate and unprovided for as they imagined. The abandoned treasure was forgotten the moment the few tears it had occasioned were wiped away.

It was the loveliest of mornings when we started upon our journey. The sun shone, the wind was quiet, and everything was glad. The swallows were twittering from the corbels they had added to the adornment of the dear old house.

"I'm sorry to leave the swallows behind," said Wynnie, as she stepped into the carriage after her mother. Connie, of course, was already there, eager and strong-hearted for the journey.

We set off. Connie was in delight with everything, especially with all forms of animal life and enjoyment that we saw on the road. She seemed to enter into the spirit of the cows feeding on the rich green grass of the meadows, of the donkeys eating by the roadside, of the horses we met bravely diligent at their day's work, as they trudged along the road with wagon or cart behind them. I sat by the coachman, but so that I could see her face by the slightest turning of my head. I knew by its expression that she gave a silent blessing to the little troop of a brown-faced gipsy family, which came out of a dingy tent to look at the passing carriage. A fleet of ducklings in a pool, paddling along under the convoy of the parent duck, next attracted her.

"Look; look. Isn't that delicious?" she cried.

"I don't think I should like it though," said Wynnie.

"What shouldn't you like, Wynnie?" asked her mother.

"To be in the water and not feel it wet. Those feathers!"

"They feel it with their legs and their webby toes," said Connie.

"Yes, that is some consolation," answered Wynnie.

"And if you were a duck, you would feel the good of your feathers in winter, when you got into your cold bath of a morning."

I give all this chat for the sake of showing how Connie's illness had not in the least withdrawn her from nature and her sympathies—had rather, as it were, made all the fibres of her being more delicate and sympathetic, so that the things around her could enter her soul even more easily than before, and what had seemed to shut her out had in reality brought her into closer contact with the movements of all vitality.

We had to pass through the village to reach the railway station. Everybody almost was out to bid us good-bye. I did not want, for Connie's sake chiefly, to have any scene, but recalling something I had forgotten to say to one of my people, I stopped the carriage to speak to him. The same instant there was a crowd of women about us. But Connie was the centre of all their regards. They hardly looked at her mother or sister. Had she been a martyr who had stood the test and received her aureole, she could hardly have been more regarded. The common use of the word martyr is a curious instance of how words get degraded. The sufferings involved in martyrdom, and not the pure will giving occasion to that suffering, is fixed upon by the common mind as the martyrdom. The witness-bearing is lost sight of, except we can suppose that "a martyr to the toothache" means a witness of the fact of the toothache and its tortures. But while *martyrdom* really means a bearing for the sake of the truth, yet there is a way in which any suffering, even that we have brought upon ourselves, may become martyrdom. When it is so borne that the sufferer therein bears witness to the presence and fatherhood of God, in quiet, hopeful submission to his will, in gentle endurance, and that effort after cheerfulness which is not seldom to be seen where the effort is hardest to make; more than all, perhaps, and rarest of all, when it is accepted as the just and merciful consequence of wrong-doing, and is endured humbly, and with righteous shame, as the cleansing of the Father's hand, indicating that repentance unto life which lifts the sinner out of his sins, and makes him such that the holiest men of old would talk to him with gladness and respect, then indeed it may be called a martyrdom. This latter could not be Connie's case, but the former was hers, and so far she might be called a martyr, even as the old women of the village designated her.

After we had again started, our ears were invaded with shouts from the post-chaise behind us, in which Charlie and Harry, their grief at the abandoned chest forgotten as if it had never been, were yelling in the exuberance of their gladness. Dora, more staid as became her years, was trying to act the matron with them in vain, and old nursie had enough to do with Miss Connie's baby to heed what the young gentlemen were about, so long as explosions of noise was all the mischief. Walter, the man-servant, who had been with us ten years, and was the main prop of the establishment, looking after everything and putting his hand to everything, with an indefinite charge ranging from the nursery to the wine-cellar, and from the corn-bin to the pig-trough, and who, as we could not possibly get on

without him, sat on the box of the post-chaise beside the driver from the Griffin, rather connived, I fear, than otherwise at the noise of the youngsters.

"Good-bye, Marshmallows," they were shouting at the top of their voices, as if they had just been released from a prison, where they had spent a wretched childhood; and, as it could hardly offend anybody's ears on the open country road I allowed them to shout till they were tired, which condition fortunately arrived before we reached the station, so that there was no occasion for me to interfere. I always sought to give them as much liberty as could be afforded them.

At the station we found Weir waiting to see us off, with my sister, now in wonderful health. Turner was likewise there, and ready to accompany us a good part of the way. But beyond the valuable assistance he lent us in moving Connie, no occasion arose for the exercise of his professional skill. She bore the journey wonderfully, slept not unfrequently, and only at the end showed herself at length wearied. We stopped three times on the way: first at Salisbury, where the streams running through the streets delighted her. There we remained one whole day, but sent the children and servants, all but my wife's maid, on before us, under the charge of Walter. This left us more at our ease. At Exeter, we stopped only the night, for Connie found herself quite able to go on the next morning. Here Turner left us, and we missed him very much. Connie looked a little out of spirits after his departure, but soon recovered herself. The next night we spent at a small town on the borders of Devonshire, which was the limit of our railway travelling. Here we remained for another whole day, for the remnant of the journey across part of Devonshire and Cornwall to the shore must be posted, and was a good five hours' work. We started about eleven o'clock, full of spirits at the thought that we had all but accomplished the only part of the undertaking about which we had had any uneasiness. Connie was quite merry. The air was thoroughly warm. We had an open carriage with a hood. Wynnie sat opposite her mother, Dora and Eliza the maid in the rumble, and I by the coachman. The road being very hilly, we had four horses; and with four horses, sunshine, a gentle wind, hope and thankfulness, who would not be happy?

There is a strange delight in motion, which I am not sure that I altogether understand. The hope of the end as bringing fresh enjoyment has something to do with it, no doubt; the accompaniments of the motion, the change of scene, the mystery that lies beyond the next hill or the next turn in the road, the breath of the summer wind, the scent of the pine-trees especially, and of all the earth, the tinkling jangle of the harness as you pass the trees on the roadside, the life of the horses, the glitter and the shadow, the cottages and the roses and the rosy faces, the scent of burning wood or peat from the chimneys, these and a thousand other things combine to make such a journey delightful. But I believe it needs something more than this—something even closer to the human life—to account for the pleasure that motion gives us. I suspect it is its living symbolism; the hidden relations which it bears to the eternal soul in its aspirations and longings—ever following after, ever attaining, never satisfied. Do not misunderstand me, my reader. A man, you will allow, perhaps, may be content although he is not and cannot be happy: I feel inclined to turn all this the other way, saying that a man ought always to be happy, never to be content. You will see I do not say *contented*; I say *content*. Here comes in his faith: his life is hid with Christ in God, measureless, unbounded. All things are his, to become his by blessed lovely gradations of gift, as his being enlarges to receive; and if ever the shadow of his own necessary incompleteness falls upon the man, he has only to remember that in God's idea he is complete, only his life is hid from himself with Christ in God the Infinite. If anyone accuses me here of mysticism, I plead guilty with gladness: I only hope it may be of that true mysticism which, inasmuch as he makes constant use of it, St. Paul would understand at once. I leave it, however.

I think I must have been the very happiest of the party myself. No doubt I was younger much than I am now, but then I was quite middle-aged, with full confession thereof in gray hairs and wrinkles. Why should not a man be happy when he is growing old, so long as his faith strengthens the feeble knees which chiefly suffer in the process of going down the hill? True, the fever heat is over, and the oil burns more slowly in the lamp of life; but if there is less fervour, there is more pervading

warmth; if less of fire, more of sunshine; there is less smoke and more light. Verily, youth is good, but old age is better—to the man who forsakes not his youth when his youth forsakes him. The sweet visitings of nature do not depend upon youth or romance, but upon that quiet spirit whose meekness inherits the earth. The smell of that field of beans gives me more delight now than ever it could have given me when I was a youth. And if I ask myself why I find it is simply because I have more faith now than I had then. It came to me then as an accident of nature—a passing pleasure flung to me only as the dogs' share of the crumbs. Now I believe that God *means* that odour of the bean-field; that when Jesus smelled such a scent about Jerusalem or in Galilee, he thought of his Father. And if God means it, it is mine, even if I should never smell it again. The music of the spheres is mine if old age should make me deaf as the adder. Am I mystical again, reader? Then I hope you are too, or will be before you have done with this same beautiful mystical life of ours. More and more nature becomes to me one of God's books of poetry—not his grandest—that is history—but his loveliest, perhaps.

And ought I not to have been happy when all who were with me were happy? I will not run the risk of wearying even my contemplative reader by describing to him the various reflexes of happiness that shone from the countenances behind me in the carriage, but I will try to hit each off in a word, or a single simile. My Ethelwyn's face was bright with the brightness of a pale silvery moon that has done her harvest work, and, a little weary, lifts herself again into the deeper heavens from stooping towards the earth. Wynnie's face was bright with the brightness of the morning star, ever growing pale and faint over the amber ocean that brightens at the sun's approach; for life looked to Wynnie severe in its light, and somewhat sad because severe. Connie's face was bright with the brightness of a lake in the rosy evening, the sound of the river flowing in and the sound of the river flowing forth just audible, but itself still, and content to be still and mirror the sunset. Dora's was bright with the brightness of a marigold that follows the sun without knowing it; and Eliza's was bright with the brightness of a half-blown cabbage rose, radiating good-humour. This last is not a good simile, but I cannot find a better. I confess failure, and go on.

After stopping once to bait, during which operation Connie begged to be carried into the parlour of the little inn that she might see the china figures that were certain to be on the chimney-piece, as indeed they were, where she drank a whole tumbler of new milk before we lifted her to carry her back, we came upon a wide high moorland country the roads through which were lined with gorse in full golden bloom, while patches of heather all about were showing their bells, though not yet in their autumnal outburst of purple fire. Here I began to be reminded of Scotland, in which I had travelled a good deal between the ages of twenty and five-and-twenty. The further I went the stronger I felt the resemblance. The look of the fields, the stone fences that divided them, the shape and colour and materials of the houses, the aspect of the people, the feeling of the air, and of the earth and sky generally, made me imagine myself in a milder and more favoured Scotland. The west wind was fresh, but had none of that sharp edge which one can so often detect in otherwise warm winds blowing under a hot sun. Though she had already travelled so many miles, Connie brightened up within a few minutes after we got on this moor; and we had not gone much farther before a shout from the rumble informed us that keen-eyed little Dora had discovered the Atlantic: a dip in the high coast revealed it blue and bright. We soon lost sight of it again, but in Connie's eyes it seemed to linger still. As often as I looked round, the blue of them seemed the reflection of the sea in their little convex mirrors. Ethelwyn's eyes, too, were full of it, and a flush on her generally pale cheek showed that she too expected the ocean. After a few miles along this breezy expanse, we began to descend towards the sea-level. Down the winding of a gradual slope, interrupted by steep descents, we approached this new chapter in our history. We came again upon a few trees here and there, all with their tops cut off in a plane inclined upwards away from the sea. For the sea-winds, like a sweeping scythe, bend the trees all away towards the land, and keep their tops mown with their sharp rushing, keen with salt spray off the crests of the broken waves. Then we passed through some ancient villages, with streets narrow, and steep and sharp-angled, that needed careful driving and the frequent pressure of

the break upon the wheel. And now the sea shone upon us with nearer greeting, and we began to fancy we could hear its talk with the shore. At length we descended a sharp hill, reached the last level, drove over a bridge and down the line of the stream, saw the land vanish in the sea—a wide bay; then drove over another wooden drawbridge, and along the side of a canal in which lay half-a-dozen sloops and schooners. Then came a row of pretty cottages; then a gate, and an ascent, and ere we reached the rectory, we were aware of its proximity by loud shouts, and the sight of Charlie and Harry scampering along the top of a stone wall to meet us. This made their mother nervous, but she kept quiet, knowing that unrestrained anxiety is always in danger of bringing about the evil it fears. A moment after, we drew up at a long porch, leading through the segment of a circle to the door of the house. The journey was over. We got down in the little village of Kilkhaven, in the county of Cornwall.

CHAPTER XIII. WHAT WE DID WHEN WE ARRIVED

We carried Connie in first of all, of course, and into the room which nurse had fixed upon for her—the best in the house, of course, again. She did seem tired now, and no wonder. She had a cup of tea at once, and in half an hour dinner was ready, of which we were all very glad. After dinner I went up to Connie's room. There I found her fast asleep on the sofa, and Wynnie as fast asleep on the floor beside her. The drive and the sea air had had the same effect on both of them. But pleased as I was to see Connie sleeping so sweetly, I was even more pleased to see Wynnie asleep on the floor. What a wonderful satisfaction it may give to a father and mother to see this or that child asleep! It is when her kittens are asleep that the cat creeps away to look after her own comforts. Our cat chose to have her kittens in my study once, and as I would not have her further disturbed than to give them another cushion to lie on in place of that which belonged to my sofa, I had many opportunities of watching them as I wrote, or prepared my sermons. But I must not talk about the cat and her kittens now. When parents see their children asleep, especially if they have been suffering in any way, they breathe more freely; a load is lifted off their minds; their responsibility seems over; the children have gone back to their Father, and he alone is looking after them for a while. Now, I had not been comfortable about Wynnie for some time, and especially during our journey, and still more especially during the last part of our journey. There was something amiss with her. She seemed constantly more or less dejected, as if she had something to think about that was too much for her, although, to tell the truth, I really believe now that she had not quite enough to think about. Some people can thrive tolerably without much thought: at least, they both live comfortably without it, and do not seem to be capable of effecting it if it were required of them; while for others a large amount of mental and spiritual operation is necessary for the health of both body and mind, and when the matter or occasion for so much is not afforded them, the consequence is analogous to what follows when a healthy physical system is not supplied with sufficient food: the oxygen, the source of life, begins to consume the life itself; it tears up the timbers of the house to burn against the cold. Or, to use a different simile, when the Moses-rod of circumstance does not strike the rock and make the waters flow, such a mind—one that must think to live—will go digging into itself, and is in danger of injuring the very fountain of thought, by drawing away its living water into ditches and stagnant pools. This was, I say, the case in part with my Wynnie, although I did not understand it at that moment. She did not look quite happy, did not always meet a smile with a smile, looked almost reprovingly upon the frolics of the little brother-imps, and though kindness itself when any real hurt or grief befell them, had reverted to her old, somewhat dictatorial manner, of which I have already spoken as interrupted by Connie's accident. To her mother and me she was service itself, only service without the smile which is as the flame of the sacrifice and makes it holy. So we were both a little uneasy about her, for we did not understand her. On the journey she had seemed almost annoyed at Connie's ecstasies, and said to Dora many times: "Do be quiet, Dora;" although there was not a single creature but ourselves within hearing, and poor Connie seemed only delighted with the child's explosions. So I was—but although I say *so*, I hardly know why I was pleased to see her thus, except it was from a vague belief in the anodyne of slumber. But this pleasure did not last long; for as I stood regarding my two treasures, even as if my eyes had made her uncomfortable, she suddenly opened hers, and started to her feet, with the words, "I beg your pardon, papa," looking almost guiltily round her, and putting up her hair hurriedly, as if she had committed an impropriety in being caught untidy. This was fresh sign of a condition of mind that was not healthy.

"My dear," I said, "what do you beg my pardon for? I was so pleased to see you asleep! and you look as if you thought I were going to scold you."

"O papa," she said, laying her head on my shoulder, "I am afraid I must be very naughty. I so often feel now as if I were doing something wrong, or rather as if you would think I was doing

something wrong. I am sure there must be something wicked in me somewhere, though I do not clearly know what it is. When I woke up now, I felt as if I had neglected something, and you had come to find fault with me. *Is* there anything, papa?"

"Nothing whatever, my child. But you cannot be well when you feel like that."

"I am perfectly well, so far as I know. I was so cross to Dora to-day! Why shouldn't I feel happy when everybody else is? I must be wicked, papa."

Here Connie woke up.

"There now! I've waked Connie," Wynnie resumed. "I'm always doing something I ought not to do. Please go to sleep again, Connie, and take that sin off my poor conscience."

"What nonsense is Wynnie talking about being wicked?" asked Connie.

"It isn't nonsense, Connie. You know I am."

"I know nothing of the sort, Wynnie. If it were me now! And yet I don't *feel* wicked."

"My dear children," I said, "we must all pray to God for his Spirit, and then we shall feel just as we ought to feel. It is not for anyone to say to himself how he ought to feel at any given moment; still less for one man to say to another how he ought to feel; that is in the former case to do as St. Paul says he had learned to give up doing—to judge our own selves, which ought to be left to God; in the latter case it is to do what our Lord has told us expressly we are not to do—to judge other people. You get your bonnet, Wynnie, and come out with me. I am going to explore a little of this desert island upon which we have been cast away. And you, Connie, just to please Wynnie, must try and go to sleep again."

Wynnie ran for her bonnet, a little afraid perhaps that I was going to talk seriously to her, but showing no reluctance anyhow to accompany me.

Now I wonder whether it will be better to tell what we saw, or only what we talked about, and give what we saw in the shape in which we reported it to Connie, when we came back into her room, bearing, like the spies who went to search the land, our bunch of grapes, that is, of sweet news of nature, to her who could not go to gather them for herself. It think it will be the best plan to take part of both plans.

When we left the door of the house, we went up the few steps of a stair leading on to the downs, against and amidst, and indeed *in*, the rocks, buttressing the sea-edge of which our new abode was built. A life for a big-winged angel seemed waiting us upon those downs. The wind still blew from the west, both warm and strong—I mean strength-giving—and the wind was the first thing we were aware of. The ground underfoot was green and soft and springy, and sprinkled all over with the bright flowers, chiefly yellow, that live amidst the short grasses of the downs, the shadows of whose unequal surface were now beginning to be thrown east, for the sun was going seawards. I stood up, stretched out my arms, threw back my shoulders and my head, and filled my chest with a draught of the delicious wind, feeling thereafter like a giant refreshed with wine. Wynnie stood apparently unmoved amidst the life-nectar, thoughtful, and turning her eyes hither and thither.

"That makes me feel young again," I said.

"I wish it would make me feel old then," said Wynnie.

"What do you mean, my child?"

"Because then I should have a chance of knowing what it is like to feel young," she answered rather enigmatically. I did not reply. We were walking up the brow which hid the sea from us. The smell of the down-turf was indescribable in its homely delicacy; and by the time we had reached the top, almost every sense was filled with its own delight. The top of the hill was the edge of the great shore-cliff; and the sun was hanging on the face of the mightier sky-cliff opposite, and the sea stretched for visible miles and miles along the shore on either hand, its wide blue mantle fringed with lovely white wherever it met the land, and scalloped into all fantastic curves, according to the whim of the nether fires which had formed its bed; and the rush of the waves, as they bore the rising tide up on the shore, was the one music fit for the whole. Ear and eye, touch and smell, were alike invaded

with blessedness. I ought to have kept this to give my reader in Connie's room; but he shall share with her presently. The sense of space—of mighty room for life and growth—filled my soul, and I thanked God in my heart. The wind seemed to bear that growth into my soul, even as the wind of God first breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, and the sun was the pledge of the fulfilment of every aspiration. I turned and looked at Wynnie. She stood pleased but listless amidst that which lifted me into the heaven of the Presence.

"Don't you enjoy all this grandeur, Wynnie?"

"I told you I was very wicked, papa."

"And I told you not to say so, Wynnie."

"You see I cannot enjoy it, papa. I wonder why it is."

"I suspect it is because you haven't room, Wynnie."

"I know you mean something more than I know, papa."

"I mean, my dear, that it is not because you are wicked, but because you do not know God well enough, and therefore your being, which can only live in him, is 'cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in.' It is only in him that the soul has room. In knowing him is life and its gladness. The secret of your own heart you can never know; but you can know Him who knows its secret. Look up, my darling; see the heavens and the earth. You do not feel them, and I do not call upon you to feel them. It would be both useless and absurd to do so. But just let them look at you for a moment, and then tell me whether it must not be a blessed life that creates such a glory as this All."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.