YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

THE DAISY CHAIN, OR ASPIRATIONS

Charlotte Yonge

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Yonge C.

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Содержание

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PREFACE

No one can be more sensible than is the Author that the present is an overgrown book of a nondescript class, neither the “tale” for the young, nor the novel for their elders, but a mixture of both.

Begun as a series of conversational sketches, the story outran both the original intention and the limits of the periodical in which it was commenced; and, such as it has become, it is here presented to those who have already made acquaintance with the May family, and may be willing to see more of them. It would beg to be considered merely as what it calls itself, a Family Chronicle—a domestic record of home events, large and small, during those years of early life when the character is chiefly formed, and as an endeavour to trace the effects of those aspirations which are a part of every youthful nature. That the young should take one hint, to think whether their hopes and upward-breathings are truly upwards, and founded in lowliness, may be called the moral of the tale.

For those who may deem the story too long, and the characters too numerous, the Author can only beg their pardon for any tedium that they may have undergone before giving it up. Feb. 22nd, 1856.

PART 1

CHAPTER I

Si douce est la Marguerite.

—CHAUCER.

"Miss Winter, are you busy? Do you want this afternoon? Can you take a good long walk?"

"Ethel, my dear, how often have I told you of your impetuosity—you have forgotten."

"Very well"—with an impatient twist—"I beg your pardon. Good-morning, Miss Winter," said a thin, lank, angular, sallow girl, just fifteen, trembling from head to foot with restrained eagerness, as she tried to curb her tone into the requisite civility.

"Good-morning, Ethel, good-morning, Flora," said the prim, middle-aged daily governess, taking off her bonnet, and arranging the stiff little rolls of curl at the long, narrow looking-glass, the border of which distorted the countenance.

"Good-morning," properly responded Flora, a pretty, fair girl, nearly two years older than her sister.

"Will you—" began to burst from Etheldred's lips again, but was stifled by Miss Winter's inquiry, "Is your mamma pretty well to-day?"

"Oh! very well," said both at once; "she is coming to the reading." And Flora added, "Papa is going to drive her out to-day."

"I am very glad. And the baby?"

"I do believe she does it on purpose!" whispered Ethel to herself, wriggling fearfully on the wide window-seat on which she had precipitated herself, and kicking at the bar of the table, by which manifestation she of course succeeded in deferring her hopes, by a reproof which caused her to draw herself into a rigid, melancholy attitude, a sort of penance of decorum, but a rapid motion of the eyelids, a tendency to crack the joints of the fingers, and an unquietness at the ends of her shoes, betraying the restlessness of the digits therein contained.

It was such a room as is often to be found in old country town houses, the two large windows looking out on a broad old-fashioned street, through heavy framework, and panes of glass scratched with various names and initials. The walls were painted blue, the skirting almost a third of the height, and so wide at the top as to form a narrow shelf. The fireplace, constructed in the days when fires were made to give as little heat as possible, was ornamented with blue and white Dutch tiles bearing marvellous representations of Scripture history, and was protected by a very tall green guard; the chairs were much of the same date, solid and heavy, the seats in faded carpet-work, but there was a sprinkling of lesser ones and of stools; a piano; a globe; a large table in the middle of the room, with three desks on it; a small one, and a light cane chair by each window; and loaded book-cases. Flora began, "If you don't want this afternoon to yourself—"

Ethel was on her feet, and open-mouthed. "Oh, Miss Winter, if you would be so kind as to walk to Cocksmoor with us!"

"To Cocksmoor, my dear!" exclaimed the governess in dismay.

"Yes, yes, but hear," cried Ethel. "It is not for nothing. Yesterday—"

"No, the day before," interposed Flora.

"There was a poor man brought into the hospital. He had been terribly hurt in the quarry, and papa says he'll die. He was in great distress, for his wife has just got twins, and there were lots of children before. They want everything—food and clothes—and we want to walk and take it."

"We had a collection of clothes ready, luckily," said Flora; "and we have a blanket, and some tea and some arrowroot, and a bit of bacon, and mamma says she does not think it too far for us to walk, if you will be so kind as to go with us."

Miss Winter looked perplexed. "How could you carry the blanket, my dear?"

"Oh, we have settled that," said Ethel, "we mean to make the donkey a sumpter-mule, so, if you are tired, you may ride home on her."

"But, my dear, has your mamma considered? They are such a set of wild people at Cocksmoor; I don't think we could walk there alone."

"It is Saturday," said Ethel, "we can get the boys."

"If you would reflect a little! They would be no protection. Harry would be getting into scrapes, and you and Mary running wild."

"I wish Richard was at home!" said Flora.

"I know!" cried Ethel. "Mr. Ernescliffe will come. I am sure he can walk so far now. I'll ask him."

Ethel had clapped after her the heavy door with its shining brass lock, before Miss Winter well knew what she was about, and the governess seemed annoyed. "Ethel does not consider," said she. "I don't think your mamma will be pleased."

"Why not?" said Flora.

"My dear—a gentleman walking with you, especially if Margaret is going!"

"I don't think he is strong enough," said Flora; "but I can't think why there should be any harm. Papa took us all out walking with him yesterday—little Aubrey and all, and Mr. Ernescliffe went."

"But, my dear—"

She was interrupted by the entrance of a fine tall blooming girl of eighteen, holding in her hand a pretty little maid of five. "Good-morning. Miss Winter. I suppose Flora has told you the request we have to make to you?"

"Yes, my dear Margaret, but did your mamma consider what a lawless place Cocksmoor is?"

"That was the doubt," said Margaret, "but papa said he would answer for it nothing would happen to us, and mamma said if you would be so kind."

"It is unlucky," began the governess, but stopped at the incursion of some new-comers, nearly tumbling over each other, Ethel at the head of them. "Oh, Harry!" as the gathers of her frock gave way in the rude grasp of a twelve-year-old boy. "Miss Winter, 'tis all right—Mr. Ernescliffe says he is quite up to the walk, and will like it very much, and he will undertake to defend you from the quarrymen."

"Is Miss Winter afraid of the quarrymen?" hallooed Harry. "Shall I take a club?"

"I'll take my gun and shoot them," valiantly exclaimed Tom; and while threats were passing among the boys, Margaret asked, in a low voice, "Did you ask him to come with us?"

"Yes, he said he should like it of all things. Papa was there, and said it was not too far for him —besides, there's the donkey. Papa says it, so we must go, Miss Winter."

Miss Winter glanced unutterable things at Margaret, and Ethel began to perceive she had done something wrong. Flora was going to speak, when Margaret, trying to appear unconscious of a certain deepening colour in her own cheeks, pressed a hand on her shoulder, and whispering, "I'll see about it. Don't say any more, please," glided out of the room.

"What's in the wind?" said Harry. "Are many of your reefs out there, Ethel?"

"Harry can talk nothing but sailors' language," said Flora, "and I am sure he did not learn that of Mr. Ernescliffe. You never hear slang from him."

"But aren't we going to Cocksmoor?" asked Mary, a blunt downright girl of ten.

"We shall know soon," said Ethel. "I suppose I had better wait till after the reading to mend that horrid frock?"

"I think so, since we are so nearly collected," said Miss Winter; and Ethel, seating herself on the corner of the window-seat, with one leg doubled under her, took up a Shakespeare, holding it close to

her eyes, and her brother Norman, who, in age, came between her and Flora, kneeling on one knee on the window-seat, and supporting himself with one arm against the shutter, leaned over her, reading it too, disregarding a tumultuous skirmish going on in that division of the family collectively termed "the boys," namely, Harry, Mary, and Tom, until Tom was suddenly pushed down, and tumbled over into Ethel's lap, thereby upsetting her and Norman together, and there was a general downfall, and a loud scream, "The sphynx!"

"You've crushed it," cried Harry, dealing out thumps indiscriminately.

"No, here 'tis," said Mary, rushing among them, and bringing out a green sphynx caterpillar on her finger—"'tis not hurt."

"Pax! Pax!" cried Norman, over all, with the voice of an authority, as he leaped up lightly and set Tom on his legs again. "Harry! you had better do that again," he added warningly. "Be off, out of this window, and let Ethel and me read in peace."

"Here's the place," said Ethel—"Crispin, Crispian's day. How I do like Henry V."

"It is no use to try to keep those boys in order!" sighed Miss Winter.

"Saturnalia, as papa calls Saturday," replied Flora.

"Is not your eldest brother coming home to-day?" said Miss Winter in a low voice to Flora, who shook her head, and said confidentially, "He is not coming till he has passed that examination. He thinks it better not."

Here entered, with a baby in her arms, a lady with a beautiful countenance of calm sweetness, looking almost too young to be the mother of the tall Margaret, who followed her. There was a general hush as she greeted Miss Winter, the girls crowding round to look at their little sister, not quite six weeks old.

"Now, Margaret, will you take her up to the nursery?" said the mother, while the impatient speech was repeated, "Mamma, can we go to Cocksmoor?"

"You don't think it will be too far for you?" said the mother to Miss Winter as Margaret departed.

"Oh, no, not at all, thank you, that was not—But Margaret has explained."

"Yes, poor Margaret," said Mrs. May, smiling. "She has settled it by choosing to stay at home with me. It is no matter for the others, and he is going on Monday, so that it will not happen again."

"Margaret has behaved very well," said Miss Winter.

"She has indeed," said her mother, smiling. "Well, Harry, how is the caterpillar?"

"They've just capsized it, mamma," answered Harry, "and Mary is making all taut."

Mrs. May laughed, and proceeded to advise Ethel and Norman to put away Henry V., and find the places in their Bibles, "or you will have the things mixed together in your heads," said she.

In the meantime Margaret, with the little babe, to-morrow to be her godchild, lying gently in her arms, came out into the matted hall, and began to mount the broad shallow-stepped staircase, protected by low stout balusters, with a very thick, flat, and solid mahogany hand-rail, polished by the boys' constant riding up and down upon it. She was only on the first step, when the dining-room door opened, and there came out a young man, slight, and delicate-looking, with bright blue eyes, and thickly-curling light hair. "Acting nurse?" he said, smiling. "What an odd little face it is! I didn't think little white babies were so pretty! Well, I shall always consider myself as the real godfather—the other is all a sham."

"I think so," said Margaret; "but I must not stand with her in a draught," and on she went, while he called after her. "So we are to have an expedition to-day."

She did not gainsay it, but there was a little sigh of disappointment, and when she was out of hearing, she whispered, "Oh! lucky baby, to have so many years to come before you are plagued with troublesome propriety!"

Then depositing her little charge with the nurse, and trying to cheer up a solemn-looking boy of three, who evidently considered his deposition from babyhood as a great injury, she tripped lightly down again, to take part in the Saturday's reading and catechising.

It was pleasant to see that large family in the hush and reverence of such teaching, the mother's gentle power preventing the outbreaks of restlessness to which even at such times the wild young spirits were liable. Margaret and Miss Winter especially rejoiced in it on this occasion, the first since the birth of the baby, that she had been able to preside. Under her, though seemingly without her taking any trouble, there was none of the smothered laughing at the little mistakes, the fidgeting of the boys, or Harry's audacious impertinence to Miss Winter; and no less glad was Harry to have his mother there, and be guarded from himself.

The Catechism was repeated, and a comment on the Sunday Services read aloud. The Gospel was that on the taking the lowest place, and when they had finished, Ethel said, "I like the verse which explains that:

'They who now sit lowest here,
When their Master shall appear,
He shall bid them higher rise,
And be highest in the skies.'"

"I did not think of that being the meaning of 'when He that bade thee cometh,'" said Norman thoughtfully.

"It seemed to be only our worldly advantage that was meant before," said Ethel.

"Well, it means that too," said Flora.

"I suppose it does," said Mrs. May; "but the higher sense is the one chiefly to be dwelt on. It is a lesson how those least known and regarded here, and humblest in their own eyes, shall be the highest hereafter."

And Margaret looked earnestly at her mother, but did not speak.

"May we go, mamma?" said Mary.

"Yes, you three—all of you, indeed, unless you wish to say any more."

The "boys" availed themselves of the permission. Norman tarried to put his books into a neat leather case, and Ethel stood thinking. "It means altogether—it is a lesson against ambition," said she.

"True," said her mother, "the love of eminence for its own sake."

"And in so many different ways!" said Margaret.

"Ay, worldly greatness, riches, rank, beauty," said Flora.

"All sorts of false flash and nonsense, and liking to be higher than one ought to be," said Norman. "I am sure there is nothing lower, or more mean and shabby, than getting places and praise a fellow does not deserve."

"Oh, yes!" cried Ethel, "but no one fit to speak to would do that!"

"Plenty of people do, I can tell you," said Norman.

"Then I hope I shall never know who they are!" exclaimed Ethel. "But I'll tell you what I was thinking of, mamma. Caring to be clever, and get on, only for the sake of beating people."

"I think that might be better expressed."

"I know," said Ethel, bending her brow, with the fullness of her thought—"I mean caring to do a thing only because nobody else can do it—wanting to be first more than wanting to do one's best."

"You are quite right, my dear Ethel," said her mother; "and I am glad you have found in the Gospel a practical lesson, that should be useful to you both. I had rather you did so than that you read it in Greek, though that is very nice too," she added, smiling, as she put her hand on a little Greek Testament, in which Ethel had been reading it, within her English Bible. "Now, go and mend that deplorable frock, and if you don't dream over it, you won't waste too much of your holiday."

"I'll get it done in no time!" cried Ethel, rushing headlong upstairs, twice tripping in it before she reached the attic, where she slept, as well as Flora and Mary—a large room in the roof, the windows gay with bird-cages and flowers, a canary singing loud enough to deafen any one but girls to whom headaches were unknown, plenty of books and treasures, and a very fine view, from the dormer window, of the town sloping downwards, and the river winding away, with some heathy hills in the distance. Poking and peering about with her short-sighted eyes, Ethel lighted on a work-basket in rare disorder, pulled off her frock, threw on a shawl, and sat down cross-legged on her bed, stitching vigorously, while meantime she spouted with great emphasis an ode of Horace, which Norman having learned by heart, she had followed his example; it being her great desire to be even with him in all his studies, and though eleven months younger, she had never yet fallen behind him. On Saturday, he showed her what were his tasks for the week, and as soon as her rent was repaired, she swung herself downstairs in search of him for this purpose. She found him in the drawing-room, a pretty, pleasant room—its only fault that it was rather too low. It had windows opening down to the lawn, and was full of pretty things, works and knick-knacks. Ethel found the state of affairs unfavourable to her. Norman was intent on a book on the sofa, and at the table sat Mr. Ernescliffe, hard at work with calculations and mathematical instruments. Ethel would not for the world that any one should guess at her classical studies—she scarcely liked to believe that even her father knew of them, and to mention them before Mr. Ernescliffe would have been dreadful. So she only shoved Norman, and asked him to come.

"Presently," he said.

"What have you here?" said she, poking her head into the book. "Oh! no wonder you can't leave off. I've been wanting you to read it all the week."

She read over him a few minutes, then recoiled: "I forgot, mamma told me not to read those stories in the morning. Only five minutes, Norman."

"Wait a bit, I'll come."

She fidgeted, till Mr. Ernescliffe asked Norman if there was a table of logarithms in the house.

"Oh, yes," she answered; "don't you know, Norman? In a brown book on the upper shelf in the dining-room. Don't you remember papa's telling us the meaning of them, when we had the grand book-dusting?"

He was conscious of nothing but his book; however, she found the logarithms, and brought them to Mr. Ernescliffe, staying to look at his drawing, and asking what he was making out. He replied, smiling at the impossibility of her understanding, but she wrinkled her brown forehead, hooked her long nose, and spent the next hour in amateur navigation.

Market Stoneborough was a fine old town. The Minster, grand with the architecture of the time of Henry III., stood beside a broad river, and round it were the buildings of a convent, made by a certain good Bishop Whichcote, the nucleus of a grammar school, which had survived the Reformation, and trained up many good scholars; among them, one of England's princely merchants, Nicholas Randall, whose effigy knelt in a niche in the chancel wall, scarlet-cloaked, white-ruffed, and black doubletted, a desk bearing an open Bible before him, and a twisted pillar of Derbyshire spar on each side. He was the founder of thirteen almshouses, and had endowed two scholarships at Oxford, the object of ambition of the Stoneborough boys, every eighteen months.

There were about sixty or seventy boarders, and the town boys slept at home, and spent their weekly holiday there on Saturday—the happiest day in the week to the May family, when alone, they had the company at dinner of Norman and Harry, otherwise known by their school names of June and July, given them because their elder brother had begun the series of months as May.

Some two hundred years back, a Dr. Thomas May had been headmaster, but ever since that time there had always been an M. D., not a D. D., in the family, owning a comfortable demesne of spacious garden, and field enough for two cows, still green and intact, among modern buildings and improvements.

The present Dr. May stood very high in his profession, and might soon have made a large fortune in London, had he not held fast to his home attachments. He was extremely skilful and clever, with a boyish character that seemed as if it could never grow older; ardent, sensitive, and heedless, with a quickness of sympathy and tenderness of heart that was increased, rather than blunted, by exercise in scenes of suffering.

At the end of the previous summer holidays, Dr. May had been called one morning to attend a gentleman who had been taken very ill, at the Swan Inn.

He was received by a little boy of ten years old, in much grief, explaining that his brother had come two days ago from London, to bring him to school here; he had seemed unwell ever since they met, and last night had become much worse. And extremely ill the doctor found him; a youth of two or three and twenty, suffering under a severe attack of fever, oppressed, and scarcely conscious, so as quite to justify his little brother's apprehensions. He advised the boy to write to his family, but was answered by a look that went to his heart—"Alan" was all he had in the world—father and mother were dead, and their relations lived in Scotland, and were hardly known to them.

"Where have you been living, then?"

"Alan sent me to school at Miss Lawler's when my mother died, and there I have been ever since, while he has been these three years and a half on the African station."

"What, is he in the navy?"

"Yes," said the boy proudly, "Lieutenant Ernescliffe. He got his promotion last week. My father was in the battle of Trafalgar; and Alan has been three years in the West Indies, and then he was in the Mediterranean, and now on the coast of Africa, in the Atalantis. You must have heard about him, for it was in the newspaper, how, when he was mate, he had the command of the Santa Isabel, the slaver they captured."

The boy would have gone on for ever, if Dr. May had not recalled him to his brother's present condition, and proceeded to take every measure for the welfare and comfort of the forlorn pair. He learned from other sources that the Ernescliffes were well connected. The father had been a distinguished officer, but had been ill able to provide for his sons; indeed, he died, without ever having seen little Hector, who was born during his absence on a voyage—his last, and Alan's first. Alan, the elder by thirteen years, had been like a father to the little boy, showing judgment and self-denial that marked him of a high cast of character. He had distinguished himself in encounters with slave ships, and in command of a prize that he had had to conduct to Sierra Leone, he had shown great coolness and seamanship, in several perilous conjunctures, such as a sudden storm, and an encounter with another slaver, when his Portuguese prisoners became mutinous, and nothing but his steadiness and intrepidity had saved the lives of himself and his few English companions. He was, in fact, as Dr. May reported, pretty much of a hero. He had not, at the time, felt the effects of the climate, but, owing to sickness and death among the other officers, he had suffered much fatigue and pressure of mind and body. Immediately on his return, had followed his examination, and though he had passed with great credit, and it had been at once followed by well-earned promotion, his nervous excitable frame had been overtasked, and the consequence was a long and severe illness.

The Swan Inn was not forty yards from Dr. May's back gate, and, at every spare moment, he was doing the part of nurse as well as doctor, professionally obliged to Alan Ernescliffe for bringing him a curious exotic specimen of fever, and requiting him by the utmost care and attention, while, for their own sakes, he delighted in the two boys with all the enthusiasm of his warm heart. Before the first week was at an end, they had learned to look on the doctor as one of the kindest friends it had been their lot to meet with, and Alan knew that if he died, he should leave his little brother in the hands of one who would comfort him as a father.

No sooner was young Ernescliffe able to sit up, than Dr. May insisted on conveying him to his own house, as his recovery was likely to be tedious in solitude at the Swan. It was not till he had been drawn in a chair along the sloping garden, and placed on the sofa to rest, that he discovered that the

time the good doctor had chosen for bringing a helpless convalescent to his house, was two days after an eleventh child had been added to his family.

Mrs. May was too sorry for the solitary youth, and too sympathising with her husband, to make any objection, though she was not fond of strangers, and had some anxieties. She had the utmost dependence on Margaret's discretion, but there was a chance of awkward situations, which papa was not likely to see or guard against. However, all seemed to do very well, and no one ever came into her room without some degree of rapture about Mr. Ernescliffe. The doctor reiterated praises of his excellence, his principle, his ability and talent, his amusing talk; the girls were always bringing reports of his perfections; Norman retracted his grumbling at having his evenings spoiled; and "the boys" were bursting with the secret that he was teaching them to rig a little ship that was to astonish mamma on her first coming downstairs, and to be named after the baby; while Blanche did all the coquetry with him, from which Margaret abstained. The universal desire was for mamma to see him, and when the time came, she owned that papa's swan had not turned out a goose.

There were now no grounds for prolonging his stay; but it was very hard to go, and he was glad to avail himself of the excuse of remaining for the christening, when he was to represent the absent godfather. After that, he must go; he had written to his Scottish cousins to offer a visit, and he had a promise that he should soon be afloat again. No place would ever seem to him so like home as Market Stoneborough. He was quite like one of themselves, and took a full share in the discussions on the baby's name, which, as all the old family appellations had been used up, was an open question. The doctor protested against Alice and Edith, which he said were the universal names in the present day. The boys hissed every attempt of their sisters at a romantic name, and then Harry wanted it to be Atalantis! At last Dr. May announced that he should have her named Dowsabel if they did not agree, and Mrs. May advised all the parties concerned to write their choice on a slip of paper, and little Aubrey should draw two out of her bag, trusting that Atalantis Dowsabel would not come out, as Harry confidently predicted.

However, it was even worse, Aubrey's two lots were Gertrude and Margaret. Ethel and Mary made a vehement uproar to discover who could have written Margaret, and at last traced it home to Mr. Ernescliffe, who replied that Flora, without saying why, had desired him to set down his favourite name. He was much disconcerted, and did not materially mend the matter by saying it was the first name that came into his head.

CHAPTER II

Meadows trim with daisies pied.

—MILTON.

Ethel's navigation lesson was interrupted by the dinner-bell. That long table was a goodly sight. Few ever looked happier than Dr. and Mrs. May, as they sat opposite to each other, presenting a considerable contrast in appearance as in disposition. She was a little woman, with that smooth pleasant plumpness that seems to belong to perfect content and serenity, her complexion fair and youthful, her face and figure very pretty, and full of quiet grace and refinement, and her whole air and expression denoting a serene, unruffled, affectionate happiness, yet with much authority in her mildness—warm and open in her own family, but reserved beyond it, and shrinking from general society.

The doctor, on the contrary, had a lank, bony figure, nearly six feet high, and looking more so from his slightness; a face sallow, thin, and strongly marked, an aquiline nose, highly developed forehead, and peculiar temples, over which the hair strayed in thin curling flakes. His eyes were light coloured, and were seldom seen without his near-sighted spectacles, but the expressions of the mouth were everything—so varying, so bright, and so sweet were his smiles that showed beautiful white teeth—moreover, his hand was particularly well made, small and delicate; and it always turned out that no one ever recollected that Dr. May was plain, who had heard his kindly greeting.

The sons and daughters were divided in likeness to father and mother; Ethel was almost an exaggeration of the doctor's peculiarities, especially at the formed, but unsoftened age of fifteen; Norman had his long nose, sallow complexion, and tall figure, but was much improved by his mother's fine blue eyes, and was a very pleasant-looking boy, though not handsome; little Tom was a thin, white, delicate edition of his father; and Blanche contrived to combine great likeness to him with a great deal of prettiness. Of those that, as nurse said, favoured their mamma, Margaret was tall and blooming, with the same calm eyes, but with the brilliance of her father's smile; Flora had greater regularity of feature, and was fast becoming a very pretty girl, while Mary and Harry could not boast of much beauty, but were stout sturdy pictures of health; Harry's locks in masses of small tight yellow curls, much given to tangling and matting, unfit to be seen all the week, till nurse put him to torture every Saturday, by combing them out so as, at least, to make him for once like, she said, a gentleman, instead of a young lion.

Little Aubrey was said by his papa to be like nothing but the full moon. And there he shone on them, by his mamma's side, announcing in language few could understand, where he had been with papa.

"He has been a small doctor," said his father, beginning to cut the boiled beef as fast as if his hands had been moved by machinery. "He has been with me to see old Mrs. Robins, and she made so much of him, that if I take him again he'll be regularly spoiled."

"Poor old woman, it must have been a pleasure to her," said Mrs. May—"it is so seldom she has any change."

"Who is she?" asked Mr. Ernescliffe.

"The butcher's old mother," said Margaret, who was next to him. "She is one of papa's pet patients, because he thinks her desolate and ill-used."

"Her sons bully her," said the doctor, too intent on carving to perceive certain deprecatory glances of caution cast at him by his wife, to remind him of the presence of man and maid—"and that smart daughter is worse still. She never comes to see the old lady but she throws her into an agitated state, fit to bring on another attack. A meek old soul, not fit to contend with them!"

"Why do they do it?" said Ethel.

"For the cause of all evil! That daughter marries a grazier, and wants to set up for gentility; she comes and squeezes presents out of her mother, and the whole family are distrusting each other, and squabbling over the spoil before the poor old creature is dead! It makes one sick! I gave that Mrs. Thorn a bit of my mind at last; I could not stand the sight any longer. Madam, said I, you'll have to answer for your mother's death, as sure as my name's Dick May—a harpy dressed up in feathers and lace."

There was a great laugh, and an entreaty to know whether this was really his address—Ethel telling him she knew he had muttered it to himself quite audibly, for which she was rewarded by a pretended box on the ear. It certainly was vain to expect order at dinner on Saturday, for the doctor was as bad as the boys, and Mrs. May took it with complete composure, hardly appearing sensible of the Babel which would sometimes almost deafen its promoter, papa; and yet her interference was all-powerful, as now when Harry and Mary were sparring over the salt, with one gentle "Mary!" and one reproving glance, they were reduced to quiescence.

Meanwhile Dr. May, in a voice above the tumult, was telling "Maggie," as he always called his wife, some piece of news about Mr. Rivers, who had bought Abbotstoke Grange; and Alan Ernescliffe, in much lower tones, saying to Margaret how he delighted in the sight of these home scenes, and this free household mirth.

"It is the first time you have seen us in perfection," said Margaret, "with mamma at the head of the table—no, not quite perfection either, without Richard."

"I am very glad to have seen it," repeated Alan. "What a blessing it must be to your brothers to have such a home!"

"Yes, indeed," said Margaret earnestly.

"I cannot fancy any advantage in life equal to it. Your father and mother so entirely one with you all."

Margaret smiled, too much pleased to speak, and glanced at her mother's sweet face.

"You can't think how often I shall remember it, or how rejoiced I—" He broke off, for the noise subsided, and his speech was not intended for the public ear, so he dashed into the general conversation, and catching his own name, exclaimed, "What's that base proposal, Ethel?"

"To put you on the donkey," said Norman.

"They want to see a sailor riding," interposed the doctor.

"Dr. May!" cried the indignant voice of Hector Ernescliffe, as his honest Scottish face flushed like a turkey cock, "I assure you that Alan rides like—"

"Like a horse marine," said Norman.

Hector and Harry both looked furious, but "June" was too great a man in their world for them to attempt any revenge, and it was left for Mary to call out, "Why, Norman, nonsense! Mr. Ernescliffe rode the new black kicking horse till he made it quite steady."

"Made it steady! No, Mary, that is saying too much for it," said Mr. Ernescliffe.

"It has no harm in it—capital horse—splendid," said the doctor; "I shall take you out with it this afternoon, Maggie."

"You have driven it several times?" said Alan.

"Yes, I drove him to Abbotstoke yesterday—never started, except at a fool of a woman with an umbrella, and at the train—and we'll take care not to meet that."

"It is only to avoid the viaduct at half-past four," said Mrs. May, "and that is easily done."

"So you are bound for Cocksmoor?" said the doctor. "I told the poor fellow you were going to see his wife, and he was so thankful, that it did one's heart good."

"Is he better? I should like to tell his wife," said Flora.

The doctor screwed up his face. “A bad business,” he said; “he is a shade better to-day; he may get through yet; but he is not my patient. I only saw him because I happened to be there when he was brought in, and Ward was not in the way.”

“And what’s his name?”

“I can’t tell—don’t think I ever heard.”

“We ought to know,” said Miss Winter; “it would be awkward to go without.”

“To go roaming about Cocksmoor asking where the man in the hospital lives!” said Flora. “We can’t wait till Monday.”

“I’ve done,” said Norman; “I’ll run down to the hospital and find out. May I, mamma?”

“Without your pudding, old fellow?”

“I don’t want pudding,” said Norman, slipping back his chair. “May I, mamma?”

“To be sure you may;” and Norman, with a hand on the back of Ethel’s chair, took a flying leap over his own, that set all the glasses ringing.

“Stop, stop! know what you are going after, sir,” cried his father. “What will they know there of Cocksmoor, or the man whose wife has twins? You must ask for the accident in number five.”

“And oh, Norman, come back in time!” said Ethel.

“I’ll be bound I’m back before Etheldred the Unready wants me,” he answered, bounding off with an elasticity that caused his mother to say the boy was made of india-rubber; and then putting his head in by the window to say, “By-the-bye, if there’s any pudding owing to me, that little chorister fellow of ours, Bill Blake, has got a lot of voracious brothers that want anything that’s going. Tom and Blanche might take it down to ‘em; I’m off! Hooray!” and he scampered headlong up the garden, prolonging his voice into a tremendous shout as he got farther off, leaving every one laughing, and his mother tenderly observing that he was going to run a quarter of a mile and back, and lose his only chance of pudding for the week—old Bishop Whichcote’s rules contemplating no fare but daily mutton, to be bought at a shilling per sheep. A little private discussion ensued between Harry and Hector on the merits of the cakes at Ballhatchet’s gate, and old Nelly’s pies, which led the doctor to mourn over the loss of the tarts of the cranberries, that used to grow on Cocksmoor, before it was inhabited, and to be the delight of the scholars of Stoneborough, when he was one of them—and then to enchant the boys by relations of ancient exploits, especially his friend Spencer climbing up, and engraving a name on the top of the market cross, now no more—swept away by the Town Council in a fit of improvement, which had for the last twenty years enraged the doctor at every remembrance of it. Perhaps at this moment his wife could hardly sympathise, when she thought of her boys emulating such deeds.

“Papa,” said Ethel, “will you lend me a pair of spectacles for the walk?”

“And make yourself one, Ethel,” said Flora.

“I don’t care—I want to see the view.”

“It is very bad for you, Ethel,” further added her mother; “you will make your sight much shorter if you accustom your eyes to them.”

“Well, mamma, I never do wear them about the house.”

“For a very good reason,” said Margaret; “because you haven’t got them.”

“No, I believe Harry stole them in the holidays.”

“Stole them!” said the doctor; “as if they weren’t my property, unjustifiably appropriated by her!”

“They were that pair that you never could keep on, papa,” said Ethel—“no use at all to you. Come, do lend me them.”

“I’m sure I shan’t let you wear them,” said Harry. “I shan’t go, if you choose to make yourself such an object.”

“Ah!” said the father, “the boys thought it time to put a stop to it when it came to a caricature of the little doctor in petticoats.”

"Yes, in Norman's Lexicon," said Ethel, "a capital likeness of you, papa; but I never could get him to tell me who drew it."

Nor did Ethel know that that caricature had been the cause of the black eye that Harry had brought home last summer. Harry returned, to protest that he would not join the walk, if she chose to be seen in the spectacles, while she undauntedly continued her petition, though answered that she would attract the attacks of the quarrymen, who would take her for an attenuated owl.

"I wish you were obliged to go about without them yourself, papa!" cried Ethel, "and then you would know how tiresome it is not to see twice the length of your own nose."

"Not such a very short allowance either," said the doctor quaintly, and therewith the dinner concluded. There was apt to be a race between the two eldest girls for the honour of bringing down the baby; but this time their father strode up three steps at once, turned at the top of the first flight, made his bow to them, and presently came down with his little daughter in his arms, nodded triumphantly at the sisters, and set her down on her mother's lap.

"There, Maggie, you are complete, you old hen-and-chicken daisy. Can't you take her portrait in the character, Margaret?"

"With her pink cap, and Blanche and Aubrey as they are now, on each side?" said Flora.

"Margaret ought to be in the picture herself," said Ethel. "Fetch the artist in Norman's Lexicon, Harry."

"Since he has hit off one of us so well," said the doctor. "Well! I'm off. I must see old Southern. You'll be ready by three? Good-bye, hen and chicken."

"And I may have the spectacles?" said Ethel, running after him; "you know I am an injured individual, for mamma won't let me carry baby about the house because I am so blind."

"You are welcome to embellish yourself, as far as I am concerned."

A general dispersion ensued, and only Mrs. May, Margaret, and the baby, remained.

"Oh, no!" sighed Margaret; "you can't be the hen-and-chicken daisy properly, without all your chickens. It is the first christening we ever had without our all being there."

"It was best not to press it, my dear," said her mother. "Your papa would have had his thoughts turned to the disappointment again and it makes Richard himself so unhappy to see his vexation, that I believe it is better not to renew it."

"But to miss him for so long!" said Margaret. "Perhaps it is best, for it is very miserable when papa is sarcastic and sharp, and he cannot understand it, and takes it as meaning so much more than it really does, and grows all the more frightened and diffident. I cannot think what he would do without you to encourage him."

"Or you, you good sister," said her mother, smiling. "If we could only teach him not to mind being laughed at, and to have some confidence in himself, he and papa would get on together."

"It is very hard," cried Margaret, almost indignantly, "that papa won't believe it, when he does his best."

"I don't think papa can bear to bring himself to believe that it is his best."

"He is too clever himself to see how other people can be slow," said Margaret; "and yet"—the tears came into her eyes—"I cannot bear to think of his telling Richard it was no use to think of being a clergyman, and he had better turn carpenter at once, just because he failed in his examination."

"My dear, I wish you would forget that," said Mrs. May. "You know papa sometimes says more than he means, and he was excessively vexed and disappointed. I know he was pleased with Ritchie's resolve not to come home again till he had passed, and it is best that it should not be broken."

"The whole vacation, studying so hard, and this christening!" said Margaret; "it is treating him as if he had done wrong. I do believe Mr. Ernescliffe thinks he has—for papa always turns away the conversation if his name is mentioned! I wish you would explain it, mamma; I can't bear that."

"If I can," said Mrs. May, rather pleased that Margaret had taken on herself this vindication of her favourite brother her father's expense. "But, after all, Margaret, I never feel quite sure that poor Ritchie does exert himself to the utmost, he is too desponding to make the most of himself."

"And the more vexed papa is, the worse it grows!" said Margaret. "It is provoking, though. How I do wish sometimes to give Ritchie a jog, when there is some stumbling-block that he sticks fast at. Don't you remember those sums, and those declensions? When he is so clear and sensible about practical matters too—anything but learning—I cannot think why—and it is very mortifying!"

"I dare say it is very good for us not to have our ambition gratified," said her mother. "There are so many troubles worse than these failures, that it only shows how happy we are that we should take them so much to heart."

"They are a very real trouble!" said Margaret. "Don't smile, mamma. Only remember how wretched his schooldays were, when papa could not see any difficulty in what to him was so hard, and how all papa's eagerness only stupified him the more."

"They are a comfort not to have that over again! Yet," said the mother, "I often think there is more fear for Norman. I dread his talent and success being snares."

"There is no self-sufficiency about him," said Margaret.

"I hope not, and he is so transparent, that it would be laughed down at the first bud: but the universal good report, and certainty of success, and being so often put in comparison with Richard, is hardly safe. I was very glad he heard what Ethel said to-day."

"Ethel spoke very deeply," said Margaret; "I was a good deal struck by it—she often comes out with such solid thoughts."

"She is an excellent companion for Norman."

"The desire of being first!" said Margaret, "I suppose that is a form of caring for oneself! It set me thinking a good deal, mamma, how many forms of ambition there are. The craving for rank, or wealth, or beauty, are so clearly wrong, that one does not question about them; but I suppose, as Ethel said, the caring to be first in attainments is as bad."

"Or in affection," said Mrs. May.

"In affection—oh, mamma, there is always some one person with whom one is first!" said Margaret eagerly; and then, her colour deepening, as she saw her mother looking at her, she said hastily, "Ritchie—I never considered it—but I know—it is my great pleasure—oh, mamma!"

"Well, my dear, I do not say but that you are the first with Richard, and that you well deserve to be so; but is the seeking to be the first even in that way safe? Is it not self-seeking again?"

"Well, perhaps it is. I know it is what makes jealousy."

"The only plan is not to think about ourselves at all," said Mrs. May. "Affection is round us like sunshine, and there is no use in measuring and comparing. We must give it out freely ourselves, hoping for nothing again."

"Oh, mamma, you don't mean that!"

"Perhaps I should have said, bargaining for nothing again. It will come of itself, if we don't exact it; but rivalry is the sure means of driving it away, because that is trying to get oneself worshipped."

"I suppose, then, you have never thought of it," said Margaret, smiling.

"Why, it would have been rather absurd," said Mrs. May, laughing, "to begin to torment myself whether you were all fond of me! You all have just as much affection for me, from beginning to end, as is natural, and what's the use of thinking about it? No, no, Margaret, don't go and protest that you love me, more than is natural," as Margaret looked inclined to say something very eager, "that would be in the style of Regan and Goneril. It will be natural by-and-by that you should, some of you, love some one else better, and if I cared for being first, what should I do then?"

"Oh, mamma! But," said Margaret suddenly, "you are always sure of papa."

"In one way, yes," said Mrs. May; "but how do I know how long—" Calm as she was, she could not finish that sentence. "No, Margaret, depend upon it, the only security is not to think about

ourselves at all, and not to fix our mind on any affection on earth. The least share of the Love above is the fullness of all blessing, and if we seek that first, all these things will be added unto us, and are," she whispered, more to herself than to Margaret.

CHAPTER III

Wee modest crimson-tipped flower,
Thou'st met me in an evil hour,
For I maun crush amang the stoure
  Thy slender stem.
To spare thee now is past my power,
  Thou bonnie gem.

BURNS.

"Is this all the walking party?" exclaimed Mr. Ernescliffe, as Miss Winter, Flora, and Norman gathered in the hall.

"Harry won't go because of Ethel's spectacles," answered Flora; "and Mary and he are inseparable, so they are gone with Hector to have a shipwreck in the field."

"And your other sisters?"

"Margaret has ratted—she is going to drive out with mamma," said Norman; "as to Etheldred the Unready, I'll run up and hurry her."

In a moment he was at her door. "Oh! Norman, come in. Is it time?"

"I should think so! You're keeping every one waiting."

"Oh, dear! go on; only just tell me the past participle of 'offero', and I'll catch you up."

"'Oblatus.'"

"Oh, yes, how stupid. The 'a' long or short? Then that's right. I had such a line in my head, I was forced to write it down. Is not it a capital subject this time?"

"The devotion of Decius? Capital. Let me see!" said Norman, taking up a paper scribbled in pencil, with Latin verses. "Oh, you have taken up quite a different line from mine. I began with Mount Vesuvius spouting lava like anything."

"But Mount Vesuvius didn't spout till it overthrew Pompeii."

"Murder!" cried Norman, "I forgot! It's lucky you put me in mind. I must make a fresh beginning. There go my six best lines! However, it was an uncanny place, fit for hobgoblins, and shades, and funny customers, which will do as well for my purpose. Ha! that's grand about its being so much better than the vana gloria triumphalis—only take care of the scanning there—"

"If it was but English. Something like this:

"For what is equal to the fame
 Of forgetting self in the aim?

That's not right, but—"

"Ethel, Norman, what are you about?" cried Flora. "Do you mean to go to Cocksmoor to-day?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Ethel, flying into vehement activity; "only I've lost my blue-edged handkerchief —Flora, have you seen it?"

"No; but here is your red scarf."

"Thank you, there is a good Flora. And oh! I finished a frock all but two stitches. Where is it gone? Go on, all of you, I'll overtake you:

"Purer than breath of earthly fame,
 Is losing self in a glorious aim.

"Is that better, Norman?"

"You'll drive us out of patience," said Flora, tying the handkerchief round Ethel's throat, and pulling out the fingers of her gloves, which, of course, were inside out; "are you ready?"

"Oh, my frock! my frock! There 'tis—three stitches—go on, and I'll come," said Ethel, seizing a needle, and sewing vehemently at a little pink frock. "Go on, Miss Winter goes slowly up the hill, and I'll overtake you."

"Come, Norman, then; it is the only way to make her come at all."

"I shall wait for her," said Norman. "Go on, Flora, we shall catch you up in no time;" and, as Flora went, he continued, "Never mind your aims and fames and trumpery English rhymes. Your verses will be much the best, Ethel; I only went on a little about Mount Vesuvius and the landscape, as Alan described it the other day, and Decius taking a last look, knowing he was to die. I made him beg his horse's pardon, and say how they will both be remembered, and their self-devotion would inspire Romans to all posterity, and shout with a noble voice!" said Norman, repeating some of his lines, correcting them as he proceeded.

"Oh! yes; but oh, dear, I've done! Come along," said Ethel, crumpling her work into a bundle, and snatching up her gloves; then, as they ran downstairs, and emerged into the street, "It is a famous subject."

"Yes, you have made a capital beginning. If you won't break down somewhere, as you always do, with some frightful false quantity, that you would get an imposition for, if you were a boy. I wish you were. I should like to see old Hoxton's face, if you were to show him up some of these verses."

"I'll tell you what, Norman, if I was you, I would not make Decius flatter himself with the fame he was to get—it is too like the stuff every one talks in stupid books. I want him to say—Rome—my country—the eagles—must win, if they do—never mind what becomes of me."

"But why should he not like to get the credit of it, as he did? Fame and glory—they are the spirit of life, the reward of such a death."

"Oh, no, no," said Ethel. "Fame is coarse and vulgar—blinder than ever they draw Love or Fortune—she is only a personified newspaper, trumpeting out all that is extraordinary, without minding whether it is good or bad. She misses the delicate and lovely—I wished they would give us a theme to write about her. I should like to abuse her well."

"It would make a very good theme, in a new line," said Norman; "but I don't give into it, altogether. It is the hope and the thought of fame, that has made men great, from first to last. It is in every one that is not good for nothing, and always will be! The moving spirit of man's greatness!"

"I'm not sure," said Ethel; "I think looking for fame is like wanting a reward at once. I had rather people forgot themselves. Do you think Arnold von Winkelried thought about fame when he threw himself on the spears?"

"He got it," said Norman.

"Yes; he got it for the good of other people, not to please himself. Fame does those that admire it good, not those that win it."

"But!" said Norman, and both were silent for some short interval, as they left the last buildings of the town, and began to mount a steep hill. Presently Norman slackened his pace, and driving his stick vehemently against a stone, exclaimed, "It is no use talking, Ethel, it is all a fight and a race. One is always to try to be foremost. That's the spirit of the thing—that's what the great, from first to last, have struggled, and fought, and lived, and died for."

"I know it is a battle, I know it is a race. The Bible says so," replied Ethel; "but is not there the difference, that here all may win—not only one? One may do one's best, not care whether one is first or last. That's what our reading to-day said."

"That was against trumpery vanity—false elevation—not what one has earned for oneself, but getting into other people's places that one never deserved. That every one despises!"

"Of course! That they do. I say, Norman, didn't you mean Harvey Anderson?"

Instead of answering, Norman exclaimed, “It is pretension that is hateful—true excelling is what one’s life is for. No, no, I’ll never be beat, Ethel—I never have been beat by any one, except by you, when you take pains,” he added, looking exultingly at his sister, “and I never will be.”

“Oh, Norman!”

“I mean, of course, while I have senses. I would not be like Richard for all the world.”

“Oh, no, no, poor Richard!”

“He is an excellent fellow in everything else,” said Norman; “I could sometimes wish I was more like him—but how he can be so amazingly slow, I can’t imagine. That examination paper he broke down in—I could have done it as easily as possible.”

“I did it all but one question,” said Ethel, “but so did he, you know, and we can’t tell whether we should have it done well enough.”

“I know I must do something respectable when first I go to Oxford, if I don’t wish to be known as the man whose brother was plucked,” said Norman.

“Yes,” said Ethel; “if papa will but let you try for the Randall scholarship next year, but he says it is not good to go to Oxford so young.”

“And I believe I had better not be there with Richard,” added Norman. “I don’t like coming into contrast with him, and I don’t think he can like it, poor fellow, and it isn’t his fault. I had rather stay another year here, get one of the open scholarships, and leave the Stoneborough ones for those who can do no better.”

In justice to Norman, we must observe that this was by no means said as a boast. He would scarcely have thus spoken to any one but Etheldred, to whom, as well as to himself, it seemed mere matter-of-fact. The others had in the meantime halted at the top of the hill, and were looking back at the town—the great old Minster, raising its twin towers and long roof, close to the river, where rich green meadows spread over the valley, and the town rising irregularly on the slope above, plentifully interspersed with trees and gardens, and one green space on the banks of the river, speckled over with a flock of little black dots in rapid motion.

“Here you are!” exclaimed Flora. “I told them it was of no use to wait when you and Norman had begun a dissertation.”

“Now, Mr. Ernescliffe, I should like you to say,” cried Ethel, “which do you think is the best, the name of it, or the thing?” Her eloquence always broke down with any auditor but her brother, or, perhaps, Margaret.

“Ethel!” said Norman, “how is any one to understand you? The argument is this: Ethel wants people to do great deeds, and be utterly careless of the fame of them; I say, that love of glory is a mighty spring.”

“A mighty one!” said Alan: “but I think, as far as I understand the question, that Ethel has the best of it.”

“I don’t mean that people should not serve the cause first of all,” said Norman, “but let them have their right place and due honour.”

“They had better make up their minds to do without it,” said Alan. “Remember—

‘The world knows nothing of its greatest men.’”

“Then it is a great shame,” said Norman.

“But do you think it right,” said Ethel, “to care for distinction? It is a great thing to earn it, but I don’t think one should care for the outer glory.”

“I believe it is a great temptation,” said Alan. “The being over-elated or over-depressed by success or failure in the eyes of the world, independently of the exertion we have used.”

“You call it a temptation?” said Ethel.

“Decidedly so.”

"But one can't live or get on without it," said Norman.

There they were cut short. There was a plantation to be crossed, with a gate that would not open, and that seemed an effectual barrier against both Miss Winter and the donkey, until by persuasive eloquence and great gallantry, Mr. Ernescliffe performed the wonderful feat of getting the former over the tall fence, while Norman conducted the donkey a long way round, undertaking to meet them at the other side of the plantation.

The talk became desultory, as they proceeded for at least a mile along a cart-track through soft-tufted grass and heath and young fir-trees. It ended in a broad open moor, stony; and full of damp boggy hollows, forlorn and desolate under the autumn sky. Here they met Norman again, and walked on along a very rough and dirty road, the ground growing more decidedly into hills and valleys as they advanced, till they found themselves before a small, but very steep hillock, one side of which was cut away into a slate quarry. Round this stood a colony of roughly-built huts, of mud, turf, or large blocks of the slate. Many workmen were engaged in splitting up the slates, or loading wagons with them, rude wild-looking men, at the sight of whom the ladies shrank up to their protectors, but who seemed too busy even to spare time for staring at them.

They were directed to John Taylor's house, a low mud cottage, very wretched looking, and apparently so smoky that Mr. Ernescliffe and Norman were glad to remain outside and survey the quarry, while the ladies entered.

Inside they found more cleanliness and neatness than they had expected, but there was a sad appearance of poverty, insufficient furniture, and the cups and broken tea-pot on the table, holding nothing but toast and water, as a substitute for their proper contents. The poor woman was sitting by the fire with one twin on her lap, and the other on a chair by her side, and a larger child was in the corner by the fire, looking heavy and ill, while others of different ages lounged about listlessly. She was not untidy, but very pale, and she spoke in a meek, subdued way, as if the ills of life were so heavy on her that she had no spirit even to complain. She thanked them for their gifts but languidly, and did not visibly brighten when told that her husband was better.

Flora asked when the babes would be christened.

"I can't hardly tell, Miss—'tis so far to go."

"I suppose none of the children can go to school? I don't know their faces there," said Flora, looking at a nice tall, smooth-haired girl of thirteen or fourteen.

"No, Miss—'tis so far. I am sorry they should not, for they always was used to it where we lived before, and my oldest girl she can work very nicely. I wish I could get a little place for her."

"You would hardly know what to do without her," said Miss Winter.

"No, ma'am; but she wants better food than I can give her, and it is a bad wild place for a girl to grow up. It is not like what I was used to, ma'am; I was always used to keep to my school and to my church—but it is a bad place to live in here."

No one could deny it, and the party left the cottage gravely. Alan and Norman joined them, having heard a grievous history of the lawlessness of the people from a foreman with whom they had met. There seemed to be no visible means of improvement. The parish church was Stoneborough, and there the living was very poor, the tithes having been appropriated to the old Monastery, and since its dissolution having fallen into possession of a Body that never did anything for the town. The incumbent, Mr. Ramsden, had small means, and was not a high stamp of clergyman, seldom exerting himself, and leaving most of his parish work to the two under masters of the school, Mr. Wilmot and Mr. Harrison, who did all they had time and strength for, and more too, within the town itself. There was no hope for Cocksmoor!

"There would be a worthy ambition!" said Etheldred, as they turned their steps homeward. "Let us propose that aim to ourselves, to build a church on Cocksmoor!"

"How many years do you give us to do it in?" said Norman.

"Few or many, I don't care. I'll never leave off thinking about it till it is done."

"It need not be long," said Flora, "if one could get up a subscription."

"A penny subscription?" said Norman. "I'd rather have it my own doing."

"You agree then," said Ethel; "do you, Mr. Ernescliffe?"

"I may safely do so," he answered, smiling. Miss Winter looked at Etheldred reprovingly, and she shrank into herself, drew apart, and indulged in a reverie. She had heard in books of girls writing poetry, romance, history—gaining fifties and hundreds. Could not some of the myriads of fancies floating in her mind thus be made available? She would compose, publish, earn money—some day call papa, show him her hoard, beg him to take it, and, never owning whence it came, raise the building. Spire and chancel, pinnacle and buttress, rose before her eyes, and she and Norman were standing in the porch with an orderly, religious population, blessing the unknown benefactor, who had caused the news of salvation to be heard among them.

They were almost at home, when the sight of a crowd in the main street checked them. Norman and Mr. Ernescliffe went forward to discover the cause, and spoke to some one on the outskirts—then Mr. Ernescliffe hurried back to the ladies.

"There's been an accident," he said hastily—"you had better go down the lane and in by the garden."

He was gone in an instant, and they obeyed in silence. Whence came Ethel's certainty that the accident concerned themselves? In an agony of apprehension, though without one outward sign of it, she walked home. They were in the garden—all was apparently as usual, but no one was in sight. Ethel had been first, but she held back, and let Miss Winter go forward into the house. The front door was open—servants were standing about in confusion, and one of the maids, looking dreadfully frightened, gave a cry, "Oh! Miss—Miss—have you heard?"

"No—what? What has happened? Not Mrs. May—" exclaimed Miss Winter.

"Oh, ma'am! it is all of them. The carriage is overturned, and—"

"Who's hurt? Mamma! papa! Oh, tell me!" cried Flora.

"There's nurse," and Ethel flew up to her. "What is it? Oh, nurse!"

"My poor, poor children," said old nurse, passionately kissing Ethel. Harry and Mary were on the stairs behind her, clinging together.

A stranger looked into the house, followed by Adams, the stableman. "They are going to bring Miss May in," some one said.

Ethel could bear it no longer. As if she could escape, she fled upstairs into her room, and, falling on her knees, hid her face on her bed.

There were heavy steps in the house, then a sound of hasty feet coming up to her. Norman dashed into the room, and threw himself on a chair. He was ghastly pale, and shuddered all over.

"Oh, Norman, Norman, speak! What is it?" He groaned, but could not speak; he rested his head against her, and gasped. She was terribly frightened. "I'll call—" and she would have gone, but he held her. "No—no—they can't!" He was prevented from saying more, by chattering teeth and deadly faintness. She tried to support him, but could only guide him as he sank, till he lay at full length on the floor, where she put a pillow under his head, and gave him some water. "Is it—oh, tell me! Are they much hurt? Oh, try to say!"

"They say Margaret is alive," said Norman, in gasps; "but—And papa—he stood up—sat—walked—was better-"

"Is he hurt—much hurt?"

"His arm—" and the tremor and fainting stopped him again.

"Mamma?" whispered Ethel; but Norman only pressed his face into the pillow.

She was so bewildered as to be more alive to the present distress of his condition than to the vague horrors downstairs. Some minutes passed in silence, Norman lying still, excepting a nervous trembling that agitated his whole frame. Again was heard the strange tread, doors opening and

shutting, and suppressed voices, and he turned his face upwards, and listened with his hand pressed to his forehead, as if to keep himself still enough to listen.

"Oh! what is the matter? What is it?" cried Ethel, startled and recalled to the sense of what was passing.

"Oh, Norman!" Then springing up, with a sudden thought, "Mr. Ward! Oh! is he there?"

"Yes," said Norman, in a low hopeless tone, "he was at the place. He said it—"

"What?"

Again Norman's face was out of sight.

"Mamma?" Ethel's understanding perceived, but her mind refused to grasp the extent of the calamity. There was no answer, save a convulsive squeezing of her hand.

Fresh sounds below recalled her to speech and action.

"Where is she? What are they doing for her? What—"

"There's nothing to be done. She—when they lifted her up, she was—"

"Dead?"

"Dead."

The boy lay with his face hidden, the girl sat by him on the floor, too much crushed for even the sensations belonging to grief, neither moving nor looking. After an interval Norman spoke again, "The carriage turned right over—her head struck on the kerb stone—"

"Did you see?" said Ethel presently.

"I saw them lift her up." He spoke at intervals, as he could get breath and bear to utter the words. "And papa—he was stunned—but soon he sat up, said he would go to her—he looked at her—felt her pulse, and then—sank down over her!"

"And did you say—I can't remember—was he hurt?"

The shuddering came again, "His arm—all twisted—broken," and his voice sank into a faint whisper; Ethel was obliged to sprinkle him again with water. "But he won't die?" said she, in a tone calm from its bewilderment.

"Oh! no, no, no—"

"And Margaret?"

"They were bringing her home. I'll go and see. Oh! what's the meaning of this?" exclaimed he, scolding himself, as, sitting up, he was forced to rest his head on his shaking hand.

"You are still faint, dear Norman; you had better lie still, and I'll go and see."

"Faint—stuff—how horridly stupid!" but he was obliged to lay his head down again; and Ethel, scarcely less trembling, crept carefully towards the stairs, but a dread of what she might meet came over her, and she turned towards the nursery.

The younger ones sat there in a frightened huddle. Mary was on a low chair by the infant's cot, Blanche in her lap, Tom and Harry leaning against her, and Aubrey almost asleep. Mary held up her finger as Ethel entered, and whispered, "Hush! don't wake baby for anything!"

The first true pang of grief shot through Ethel like a dart, stabbing and taking away her breath, "Where are they?" she said; "how is papa? who is with him?"

"Mr. Ward and Alan Ernescliffe," said Harry. "Nurse came up just now, and said they were setting his arm."

"Where is he?"

"On the bed in his dressing-room," said Harry.

"Has he come to himself—is he better?"

They did not seem to know, and Ethel asked where to find Flora. "With Margaret," she was told, and she was thinking whether she could venture to seek her, when she herself came fast up the stairs. Ethel and Harry both darted out. "Don't stop me," said Flora—"they want some handkerchiefs."

"What, is not she in her own room?"

"No," said Harry, "in mamma's;" and then his face quivered all over, and he turned away. Ethel ran after her sister, and pulling out drawers without knowing what she sought, begged to hear how papa and Margaret were.

"We can't judge of Margaret—she has moved, and made a little moaning—there are no limbs broken, but we are afraid for her head. Oh! if papa could but—"

"And papa?"

"Mr. Ward is with him now—his arm is terribly hurt."

"But oh! Flora—one moment—is he sensible?"

"Hardly; he does not take any notice—but don't keep me."

"Can I do anything?" following her to the head of the stairs.

"No; I don't see what you can do. Miss Winter and I are with Margaret; there's nothing to do for her."

It was a relief. Etheldred shrank from what she might have to behold, and Flora hastened down, too busy and too useful to have time to think. Harry had gone back to his refuge in the nursery, and Ethel returned to Norman. There they remained for a long time, both unwilling to speak or stir, or even to observe to each other on the noises that came in to them, as their door was left ajar, though in those sounds they were so absorbed, that they did not notice the cold of a frosty October evening, or the darkness that closed in on them.

They heard the poor babe crying, one of the children going down to call nurse, and nurse coming up; then Harry, at the door of the room where the boys slept, calling Norman in a low voice. Norman, now nearly recovered, went and brought him into his sister's room, and his tidings were, that their father's arm had been broken in two places, and the elbow frightfully injured, having been crushed and twisted by the wheel. He was also a good deal bruised, and though Mr. Ward trusted there was no positive harm to the head, he was in an unconscious state, from which the severe pain of the operation had only roused him, so far as to evince a few signs of suffering. Margaret was still insensible.

The piteous sound of the baby's wailing almost broke their hearts. Norman walked about the room in the dark, and said he should go down, he could not bear it; but he could not make up his mind to go, and after about a quarter of an hour, to their great relief, it ceased.

Next Mary opened the door, saying, "Norman, here's Mr. Wilmot come to ask if he can do anything—Miss Winter sent word that you had better go to him."

"How is baby?" asked Harry.

"Nurse has fed her, and is putting her to bed; she is quiet now," said Mary; "will you go down, Norman?"

"Where is he?"

"In the drawing-room."

Norman paused to ask what he was to say.

"Nothing," said Mary, "nobody can do anything. Make haste. Don't you want a candle?"

"No, thank you, I had rather be in the dark. Come up as soon as you have seen him," said Etheldred.

Norman went slowly down, with failing knees, hardly able to conquer the shudder that came over him, as he passed those rooms. There were voices in the drawing-room, and he found a sort of council there, Alan Ernescliffe, the surgeon, and Mr. Wilmot. They turned as he came in, and Mr. Wilmot held out his hand with a look of affection and kindness that went to his heart, making room for him on the sofa, while going on with what he was saying. "Then you think it would be better for me not to sit up with him."

"I should decidedly say so," replied Mr. Ward. "He has recognised Mr. Ernescliffe, and any change might excite him, and lead him to ask questions. The moment of his full consciousness is especially to be dreaded."

"But you do not call him insensible?"

"No, but he seems stunned—stupified by the shock, and by pain. He spoke to Miss Flora when she brought him some tea."

"And admirably she managed," said Alan Ernescliffe. "I was much afraid of some answer that would rouse him, but she kept her self-possession beautifully, and seemed to compose him in a moment."

"She is valuable indeed—so much judgment and activity," said Mr. Ward. "I don't know what we should have done without her. But we ought to have Mr. Richard—has no one sent to him?"

Alan Ernescliffe and Norman looked at each other.

"Is he at Oxford, or at his tutor's?" asked Mr. Wilmot.

"At Oxford; he was to be there to-day, was he not, Norman?"

"What o'clock is it? Is the post gone—seven—no; it is all safe," said Mr. Ward.

Poor Norman! he knew he was the one who ought to write, but his icy trembling hand seemed to shake more helplessly than ever, and a piteous glance fell upon Mr. Wilmot.

"The best plan would be," said Mr. Wilmot, "for me to go to him at once and bring him home. If I go by the mail-train, I shall get to him sooner than a letter could."

"And it will be better for him," said Mr. Ward. "He will feel it dreadfully, poor boy. But we shall all do better when we have him. You can get back to-morrow evening."

"Sunday," said Mr. Wilmot, "I believe there is a train at four."

"Oh! thank you, sir," said Norman.

"Since that is settled, perhaps I had better go up to the doctor," said Alan; "I don't like leaving Flora alone with him," and he was gone.

"How fortunate that that youth is here," said Mr. Wilmot—"he seems to be quite taking Richard's place."

"And to feel it as much," said Mr. Ward. "He has been invaluable with his sailor's resources and handiness."

"Well, what shall I tell poor Richard?" asked Mr. Wilmot.

"Tell him there is no reason his father should not do very well, if we can keep him from agitation—but there's the point. He is of so excitable a constitution, that his faculties being so far confused is the best thing, perhaps, that could be. Mr. Ernescliffe manages him very well—used to illness on that African coast, and the doctor is very fond of him. As to Miss May, one can't tell what to say about her yet—there's no fracture, at least—it must be a work of time to judge."

Flora at that moment half-opened the door, and called Mr. Ward, stopping for a moment to say it was for nothing of any consequence. Mr. Wilmot and Norman were left together. Norman put his hands over his face and groaned—his master looked at him with kind anxiety, but did not feel as if it were yet time to speak of consolation.

"God bless and support you, and turn this to your good, my dear boy," said he affectionately, as he pressed his hand; "I hope to bring your brother to-morrow."

"Thank you, sir," was all Norman could say; and as Mr. Wilmot went out by the front door, he slowly went up again, and, lingering on the landing-place, was met by Mr. Ward, who told him to his relief—for the mere thinking of it renewed the faint sensation—that he had better not go to his father's room.

There was nothing to be done but to return to Ethel and Harry, and tell them all; with some humiliation at being helpless, where Flora was doing so much, and to leave their father to be watched by a stranger. If he had been wanted, Norman might have made the effort, but being told that he would be worse than useless, there was nothing for him but to give way.

They sat together in Ethel's room till somewhere between eight and nine o'clock, when good old nurse, having put her younger ones to bed, came in search of them. "Dear, dear! poor darlings," said she, as she found them sitting in the dark; she felt their cold hands, and made them all come into the nursery, where Mary was already, and, fondling them, one by one, as they passively obeyed

her, she set them down on their little old stools round the fire, took away the high fender, and gave them each a cup of tea. Harry and Mary ate enough to satisfy her, from a weary craving feeling, and for want of employment; Norman sat with his elbow on his knee, and a very aching head resting on his hand, glad of drink, but unable to eat; Ethel could be persuaded to do neither, till she found old nurse would let her have no peace.

The nurse sent them all to bed, taking the two girls to their own room, undressing them, and never leaving them until Mary was in a fair way of crying herself to sleep—for saying her prayers had brought the tears; while Ethel lay so wide awake that it was of no use to wait for her, and then she went to the boys, tucked them each in, as when they were little children, and saying, “Bless your dear hearts!” bestowed on each of them a kiss which came gratefully to Norman’s burning brow, and which even Harry’s boyish manliness could not resist.

Flora was in Margaret’s room, too useful to be spared.

So ended that dreadful Saturday.

CHAPTER IV

They may not mar the deep repose
  Of that immortal flower:
Though only broken hearts are found
  To watch her cradle by,
No blight is on her slumbers found,
  No touch of harmful eye.

LYRA INNOCENTIUM.

Such a strange sad Sunday! No going to church, but all the poor children moving in awe and oppression about the house, speaking under their breath, as they gathered in the drawing-room. Into the study they might not go, and when Blanche would have asked why, Tom pressed her hand and shuddered.

Etheldred was allowed to come and look at Margaret, and even to sit in the room for a little while, to take the place of Miss Winter; but she was not sensible of sufficient usefulness to relieve the burden of fear and bewilderment in the presence of that still, pale form; and, what was almost worse, the sight of the familiar objects, the chair by the fire, the sofa, the books, the work-basket, the letter-case, the dressing things, all these were too oppressive. She sat crouched up, with her face hidden in her hands, and the instant she was released, hastened back to Norman. She was to tell him that he might go into the room, but he did not move, and Mary alone went in and out with messages.

Dr. May was not to be visited, for he was in the same half-conscious state, apparently sensible only of bodily suffering, though he answered when addressed, and no one was trusted to speak to him but Flora and Ernescliffe.

The rest wore through the day as best they might. Harry slept a good deal, Ethel read to herself, and tried to get Norman to look at passages which she liked, Mary kept the little ones from being troublesome, and at last took them to peep behind the school-room blinds for Richard's coming.

There was a simultaneous shout when, at four o'clock, they caught sight of him, and though, at Ethel's exclamation of wonder, Mary and Tom hung their heads at having forgotten themselves, the association of gladness in seeing Richard was refreshing; the sense of being desolate and forsaken was relieved, and they knew that now they had one to rely on and to comfort them.

Harry hastened to open the front door, and Richard, with his small trim figure, and fresh, fair young face, flushed, though not otherwise agitated, was among them, almost devoured by the younger ones, and dealing out quiet caresses to them, as he caught from the words and looks of the others that at least his father and sister were no worse. Mr. Wilmot had come with him, but only stayed to hear the tidings.

"Can I see papa?" were Richard's first audible words—all the rest had been almost dumb show.

Ethel thought not, but took him to Margaret's room, where he stood for many minutes without speaking; then whispered to Flora that he must go to the others, she should call him if—and went down, followed by Ethel.

Tom and Blanche had fallen into teasing tricks, a sort of melancholy play to relieve the tedium. They grew cross. Norman was roused to reprove sharply, and Blanche was beginning to cry. But Richard's entrance set all at peace—he sat down among them, and, with soft voice and arm round Blanche, as she leaned against him, made her good in a moment; and she listened while he talked over with Norman and Ethel all they could bear to speak of.

Late in the day Flora came into her father's room, and stood gazing at him, as he lay with eyes closed, breathing heavily, and his brows contracted by pain. She watched him with piteous looks,

as if imploring him to return to his children. Poor girl, to-day's quiet, after the last evening's bustle, was hard to bear. She had then been distracted from thought by the necessity of exertion, but it now repaid itself, and she knew not how to submit to do nothing but wait and watch.

"No change?" enquired Alan Ernescliffe; looking kindly in her face.

"No," replied she in a low, mournful tone. "She only once said, thank you."

A voice which she did not expect, asked inquiringly, "Margaret?" and her heart beat as if it would take away her breath, as she saw her father's eyes intently fixed on her. "Did you speak of her?" he repeated.

"Yes, dear papa," said Flora, not losing presence of mind, though in extreme fear of what the next question might be. "She is quiet and comfortable, so don't be uneasy, pray."

"Let me hear," he said, and his whole voice and air showed him to be entirely roused. "There is injury? What is it—"

He continued his inquiries till Flora was obliged fully to explain her sister's condition, and then he dismayed her by saying he would get up and go to see her. Much distressed, she begged him not to think of it, and appealed to Alan, who added his entreaties that he would at least wait for Mr. Ward; but the doctor would not relinquish his purpose, and sent her to give notice that he was coming.

Mr. Ernescliffe followed her out of the room, and tried to console her, as she looked at him in despair.

"You see he is quite himself, quite collected," he said; "you heard now clear and coherent his questions were."

"Can't it be helped? Do try to stop him till I can send to Mr. Ward."

"I will try, but I think he is in a state to judge for himself. I do, upon my word; and I believe trying to prevent him would be more likely to do him harm than letting him satisfy himself. I really think you need not be alarmed."

"But you know," said Flora, coming nearer, and almost gasping as she whispered and signed towards the door, "she is there—it is mamma's room, that will tell all."

"I believe he knows," said Alan. "It was that which made him faint after the accident, for he had his perceptions fully at first. I have suspected all day that he was more himself than he seemed, but I think he could not bear to awaken his mind to understand it, and that he was afraid to hear about her—your sister, so that our mention of her was a great relief, and did him good. I am convinced he knows the rest. Only go on, be calm, as you have been, and we shall do very well."

Flora went to prepare. Ethel eagerly undertook to send to Mr. Ward, and hastened from the room, as if in a sort of terror, shrinking perhaps from what might lead to an outburst of grief. She longed to have seen her father, but was frightened at the chance of meeting him. When she had sent her message, and told her brothers what was passing, she went and lingered on the stairs and in the passage for tidings. After what seemed a long time, Flora came out, and hastened to the nursery, giving her intelligence on the way.

"Better than could be hoped, he walked alone into the room, and was quite calm and composed. Oh! if this will not hurt him, if the seeing baby was but over!"

"Does he want her?"

"Yes, he would have come up here himself, but I would not let him. Nurse, do you hear? Papa wants baby; let me have her."

"Bless me, Miss Flora, you can't hold her while you are all of a tremble! And he has been to Miss Margaret?"

"Yes, nurse, and he was only rather stiff and lame."

"Did Margaret seem to know him?" said Ethel.

"She just answered in that dreamy way when he spoke to her. He says he thinks it is as Mr. Ward believes, and that she will soon come to herself. He is quite able to consider—"

"And he knows all?"

"I am sure he does. He desired to see baby, and he wants you, nurse. Only mind you command yourself—don't say a word you can help—do nothing to agitate him."

Nurse promised, but the tears came so fast, and sobs with them, as she approached her master's room, that Flora saw no composure could be expected from her; and taking the infant from her, carried it in, leaving the door open for her to follow when wanted. Ethel stood by listening. There was silence at first, then some sounds from the baby, and her father's voice soothing it, in his wonted caressing phrases and tones, so familiar that they seemed to break the spell, drive away her vague terrors, and restore her father. Her heart bounded, and a sudden impulse carried her to the bedside, at once forgetting all dread of seeing him, and chance of doing him harm. He lay, holding the babe close to him, and his face was not altered, so that there was nothing in the sight to impress her with the need of caution, and, to the consternation of the anxious Flora, she exclaimed, abruptly and vehemently, "Papa! should not she be christened?"

Dr. May looked up at Ethel, then at the infant; "Yes," he said, "at once." Then added feebly and languidly, "Some one must see to it."

There was a pause, while Flora looked reproachfully at her sister, and Ethel became conscious of her imprudence, but in a few moments Dr. May spoke again, first to the baby, and then asking, "Is Richard here?"

"Yes, papa."

"Send him up presently. Where's nurse?"

Ethel retreated, much alarmed at her rash measure, and when she related it she saw that Richard and Mr. Ernescliffe both thought it had been a great hazard.

"Papa wants you," was a welcome sound to the ears of Richard, and brought a pink glow into his face. He was never one who readily showed his feelings, and there was no danger of his failing in self-command, though grievously downcast, not only at the loss of the tender mother, who had always stood between him and his father's impatience, but by the dread that he was too dull and insignificant to afford any help or comfort in his father's dire affliction.

Yet there was something in the gentle sad look that met him, and in the low tone of the "How d'ye do, Ritchie?" that drove off a thought of not being loved; and when Dr. May further added, "You'll see about it all—I am glad you are come," he knew he was of use, and was encouraged and cheered. That his father had full confidence and reliance in him, and that his presence was a satisfaction and relief he could no longer doubt; and this was a drop of balm beyond all his hopes; for loving and admiring his father intensely, and with depressed spirits and a low estimate of himself, he had begun to fancy himself incapable of being anything but a vexation and burden.

He sat with his father nearly all the evening, and was to remain with him at night. The rest were comforted by the assurance that Dr. May was still calm, and did not seem to have been injured by what had passed. Indeed, it seemed as if the violence and suddenness of the shock, together with his state of suffering, had deadened his sensations; for there was far less agitation about him than could have been thought possible in a man of such strong, warm affections and sensitive temperament.

Ethel and Norman went up arm-in-arm at bedtime.

"I am going to ask if I may wish papa good-night," said Ethel. "Shall I say anything about your coming?"

Norman hesitated, but his cheeks blanched; he shuddered, shook his head without speaking, ran up after Harry, and waved her back when she would have followed.

Richard told her that she might come in, and, as she slowly advanced, she thought she had never seen anything so ineffably mournful as the affectionate look on her father's face. She held his hand and ventured—for it was with difficulty she spoke—to hope he was not in pain.

"Better than it was, thank you, my dear," he said, in a soft weak tone: then, as she bent down to kiss his brow; "you must take care of the little ones."

"Yes, papa," she could hardly answer, and a large drop gathered slowly in each eye, long in coming, as if the heart ached too much for them to flow freely.

"Are they all well?"

"Yes, papa."

"And good?" He held her hand, as if lengthening the interview.

"Yes, very good all day."

A long deep sigh. Ethel's two tears stood on her cheeks.

"My love to them all. I hope I shall see them to-morrow. God bless you, my dear, good-night."

Ethel went upstairs, saddened and yet soothed. The calm silent sorrow, too deep for outward tokens, was so unlike her father's usually demonstrative habits, as to impress her all the more, yet those two tears were followed by no more; there was much strangeness and confusion in her mind in the newness of grief.

She found poor Flora, spent with exertion, under the reaction of all she had undergone, lying on her bed, sobbing as if her heart would break, calling in gasps of irrepressible agony on "mamma! mamma!" yet with her face pressed down on the pillow that she might not be heard. Ethel, terrified and distressed, timidly implored her to be comforted, but it seemed as if she were not even heard; she would have fetched some one, but whom? Alas! alas! it brought back the sense that no mother would ever soothe them—Margaret, papa, both so ill, nurse engaged with Margaret! Ethel stood helpless and despairing, and Flora sobbed on, so that Mary awakened to burst out in a loud frightened fit of crying; but in a few moments a step was at the door, a knock, and Richard asked, "Is anything the matter?"

He was in the room in a moment, caressing and saying affectionate things with gentleness and fondling care, like his mother, and which recalled the days when he had been proud to be left for a little while the small nurse and guardian of the lesser ones. Mary was hushed in a moment, and Flora's exhausted weeping was gradually soothed, when she was able to recollect that she was keeping him from her father; with kind good-nights, he left Ethel to read to her till she could sleep. Long did Ethel read, after both her sisters were slumbering soundly; she went on in a sort of dreamy grief, almost devoid of pain, as if all this was too terrible to be true: and she had imagined herself into a story, which would give place at dawn to her ordinary life.

At last she went to bed, and slept till wakened by the return of Flora, who had crept down in her dressing-gown to see how matters were going. Margaret was in the same state, papa was asleep, after a restless distressing night, with much pain and some fever; and whenever Richard had begun to hope from his tranquillity, that he was falling asleep, he was undeceived by hearing an almost unconsciously uttered sigh of "Maggie, my Maggie!" and then the head turned wearily on the pillow, as if worn out with the misery from which there was no escape. Towards morning the pain had lessened, and, as he slept, he seemed much less feverish than they could have ventured to expect.

Norman looked wan and wretched, and could taste no breakfast; indeed Harry reported that he had been starting and talking in his sleep half the night, and had proceeded to groaning and crying out till, when it could be borne no longer, Harry waked him, and finished his night's rest in peace.

The children were kept in the drawing-room that morning, and there were strange steps in the house; but only Richard and Mr. Ernescliffe knew the reason. Happily there had been witnesses enough of the overturn to spare any reference to Dr. May—the violent start of the horses had been seen, and Adams and Mr. Ernescliffe agreed, under their breath, that the new black one was not fit to drive, while the whole town was so used to Dr. May's headlong driving, that every one was recollecting their own predictions of accidents. There needed little to account for the disaster—the only wonder was that it had not happened sooner.

"I say," announced Harry, soon after they were released again, "I've been in to papa. His door was open, and he heard me, and called me. He says he should like any of us to come in and see him. Hadn't you better go, Norman?"

Norman started up, and walked hastily out of the room, but his hand shook so, that he could hardly open the door; and Ethel, seeing how it was with him, followed him quickly, as he dashed, at full speed, up the stairs. At the top, however, he was forced to cling to the rail, gasping for breath, while the moisture started on his forehead.

"Dear Norman," she said, "there's nothing to mind. He looks just as usual. You would not know there was anything the matter." But he rested his head on his hand, and looked as if he could not stir. "I see it won't do," said Ethel—"don't try—you will be better by-and-by, and he has not asked for you in particular."

"I won't be beat by such stuff," said Norman, stepping hastily forwards, and opening the door suddenly. He got through the greeting pretty well, there was no need for him to speak, he only gave his hand and looked away, unable to bring himself to turn his eyes on his father, and afraid of letting his own face be seen. Almost at the same moment, nurse came to say something about Margaret, and he seized the opportunity of withdrawing his hand, and hurrying away, in good time, for he was pale as death, and was obliged to sit down on the head of the stairs, and lean his head against Etheldred.

"What does make me so ridiculous?" he exclaimed faintly, but very indignantly.

The first cure was the being forced to clear out of Mr. Ward's way, which he could not effect without being seen; and Ethel though she knew that he would be annoyed, was not sorry to be obliged to remain, and tell what was the matter with him. "Oh," said Mr. Ward, turning and proceeding to the dining-room, "I'll set that to rights in a minute, if you will ask for a tumbler of hot water Miss Ethel."

And armed with the cordial he had prepared, Ethel hunted up her brother, and persuaded him, after scolding her a little, to swallow it, and take a turn in the garden; after which he made a more successful attempt at visiting his father.

There was another room whither both Norman and Etheldred wished to go, though they dared not hint at their desire. At last Richard came to them, as they were wandering in the garden, and, with his usual stillness of manner, shaded with additional seriousness, said, "Would you like to come into the study?"

Etheldred put one hand into his, Norman took the other, and soon they stood in that calm presence. Fair, cold, white, and intensely still—that face brought home to them the full certainty that the warm brightening look would never beam on them, the soft blue eyes never guide, check, and watch them, the smile never approve or welcome them. To see her unconscious of their presence was too strange and sad, and all were silent, till, as they left the room, Ethel looked out at Blanche and Aubrey in the garden. "They will never remember her! Oh! why should it be?"

Richard would fain have moralised and comforted, but she felt as if she knew it all before, and heard with languid attention. She had rather read than talk, and he sat down to write letters.

There were no near relations to be sent for. Dr. May was an only son, and his wife's sister, Mrs. Arnott, was in New Zealand; her brother had long been dead, and his widow, who lived in Edinburgh, was scarcely known to the May family. Of friends there were many, fast bound by affection and gratitude, and notes, inquiries, condolences, and offers of service came in thickly, and gave much occupation to Flora, Richard, and Alan Ernescliffe, in turn. No one from without could do anything for them—they had all the help they wanted in Miss Winter and in Alan, who was invaluable in sharing with Richard the care of the doctor, as well as in giving him the benefit of his few additional years' experience, and relieving him of some of his tasks. He was indeed like one of themselves, and a most valuable help and comforter. Mr. Wilmot gave them all the time he could, and on this day saw the doctor, who seemed to find some solace in his visit, though saying very little.

On this day the baby was to be baptized. The usual Stoneborough fashion was to collect all the christenings for the month into one Sunday, except those for such persons as thought themselves too refined to see their children christened before the congregation, and who preferred an empty church and a week-day. The little one had waited till she was nearly six weeks old for "a Christening Sunday,"

and since that had been missed, she could not be kept unbaptized for another month; so, late in the day, she was carried to church.

Richard had extremely gratified old nurse, by asking her to represent poor Margaret; Mrs. Hoxton stood for the other godmother, and Alan Ernescliffe was desired to consider himself absolutely her sponsor, not merely a proxy. The younger children alone were to go with them: it was too far off, and the way lay too much through the town for it to be thought proper for the others to go. Ethel wished it very much, and thought it nonsense to care whether people looked at her; and in spite of Miss Winter's seeming shocked at her proposing it, had a great mind to persist. She would even have appealed to her papa, if Flora had not stopped her, exclaiming, "Really, Ethel, I think there never was a person so entirely without consideration as you are."

Much abashed, Ethel humbly promised that if she might go into papa's room, she would not say one word about the christening, unless he should begin, and, to her great satisfaction, he presently asked her to read the service to him. Flora came to the doorway of Margaret's room, and listened; when she had finished, all were silent.

"How shall we, how can we virtuously bring up our motherless little sister?" was the thought with each of the girls. The answers were, in one mind, "I trust we shall do well by her, dear little thing. I see, on an emergency, that I know how to act. I never thought I was capable of being of so much use, thanks to dear, dear mamma's training. I shall manage, I am sure, and so they will all depend on me, and look up to me. How nice it was to hear dear papa say what he did about the comfort of my being able to look after Margaret."

In the other, "Poor darling, it is saddest of all for her, because she knows nothing, and will never remember her mamma! But if Margaret is but better, she will take care of her, and oh how we ought to try—and I, such a naughty wild thing—if I should hurt the dear little ones by carelessness, or by my bad example! Oh! what shall I do, for want of some one to keep me in order? If I should vex papa by any of my wrong ways!"

They heard the return of the others, and the sisters both sprang up, "May we bring her to you?" said Flora.

"Yes, do, my dears."

The sisters all came down together with the little one, and Flora put her down within the arm her father stretched out for her. He gazed into the baby face, which, in its expressionless placidity, almost recalled her mother's tranquil sweetness.

"Gertrude Margaret," said Flora, and with a look that had more of tenderness than grief, he murmured, "My Daisy blossom, my little Maggie."

"Might we?" said Ethel, when Flora took her again, "might we take her to her godmother to see if she would notice her?"

He looked as if he wished it; but said, "No, I think not, better not rouse her," and sighed heavily; then, as they stood round his bed, unwilling to go, he added, "Girls, we must learn carefulness and thoughtfulness. We have no one to take thought for us now."

Flora pressed the babe in her arms, Ethel's two reluctant tears stood on her cheeks, Mary exclaimed, "I'll try not to be naughty;" and Blanche climbed up to kiss him, saying, "I will be always good papa."

"Daisy—papa's Daisy—your vows are made," whispered Ethel, gaining sole possession of the babe for a minute. "You have promised to be good and holy. We have the keeping of you, mamma's precious flower, her pearl of truth! Oh, may God guard you to be an unstained jewel, till you come back to her again—and a blooming flower, till you are gathered into the wreath that never fades—my own sweet poor little motherless Daisy!"

CHAPTER V

"Through lawless camp, through ocean wild,
Her prophet eye pursues her child;
Scans mournfully her poet's strain,
Fears for her merchant, loss alike and gain."

LYRA INNOCENTIUM.

Dr. May took the management of himself into his own hands, and paid so little attention to Mr. Ward's recommendations that his sons and daughters were in continual dread of his choosing to do something that might cause injurious agitation.

However, he did not go further than Margaret's bedroom where he sat hour after hour his eyes fixed upon her, as she continued in a state bordering on insensibility. He took little notice of anything else, and hardly spoke. There were heavy sighs now and then, but Richard and Flora, one or other of whom were always watching him, could hardly tell whether to ascribe them to the oppression of sorrow or of suffering. Their great fear was of his insisting on seeing his wife's face, and it was a great relief that he never alluded to her, except once, to desire Richard to bring him her ring. Richard silently obeyed, and, without a word, he placed it on his little finger. Richard used to read the Psalms to him in the morning, before he was up, and Flora would bring little Daisy and lay her by his side.

To the last moment they dreaded his choosing to attend the funeral, and Flora had decided on remaining at home, though trembling at the thought of what there might be to go through. They tried to let him hear nothing about it, but he seemed to know everything; and when Flora came into Margaret's room without her bonnet, he raised his head, and said, "I thought you were all going."

"The others are—but may I not stay with you and her, papa?"

"I had rather be alone, my dears. I will take care of her. I should wish you all to be there."

They decided that his wishes ought to be followed, and that the patients must be entrusted to old nurse. Richard told Flora, who looked very pale, that she would be glad of it afterwards, and she had his arm to lean upon.

The grave was in the cloister attached to the minster, a smooth green square of turf, marked here and there with small flat lozenges of stone, bearing the date and initials of those who lay there, and many of them recording former generations of Mays, to whom their descent from the headmaster had given a right of burial there. Dr. Hoxton, Mr. Wilmot, and the surgeon, were the only friends whom Richard had asked to be with them, but the minster was nearly full, for there was a very strong attachment and respect for Dr. and Mrs. May throughout the neighbourhood, and every one's feelings were strongly excited.

"In the midst of life, we are in death—" There was a universal sound as of a sort of sob, that Etheldred never disconnected from those words. Yet hardly one tear was shed by the young things who stood as close as they could round the grave. Harry and Mary did indeed lock their hands together tightly, and the shoulders of the former shook as he stood, bowing down his head, but the others were still and quiet, in part from awe and bewilderment, but partly, too, from a sense that it was against her whole nature that there should be clamorous mourning for her. The calm still day seemed to tell them the same, the sun beaming softly on the gray arches and fresh grass, the sky clear and blue, and the trees that showed over the walls bright with autumn colouring, all suitable to the serenity of a life unclouded to its last moment. Some of them felt as if it were better to be there than in their saddened desolate home.

But home they must go, and, before going upstairs, as Flora and Etheldred stood a moment or two with Norman, Ethel said in a tone of resolution, and of some cheerfulness, “Well, we have to begin afresh.”

“Yes,” said Flora, “it is a great responsibility. I do trust we may be enabled to do as we ought.”

“And now Margaret is getting better, she will be our stay,” said Ethel.

“I must go to her,” and Flora went upstairs.

“I wish I could be as useful as Flora,” said Ethel; but I mean to try, and if I can but keep out of mischief, it will be something.

“There is an object for all one does, in trying to be a comfort to papa.”

“That’s no use,” said Norman, listlessly. “We never can.”

“Oh, but, Norman, he won’t be always as he is now—I am sure he cares for us enough to be pleased, if we do right and get on.”

“We used to be so happy!” said Norman.

Ethel hesitated a little, and presently answered, “I don’t think it can be right to lament for our own sakes so much, is it?”

“I don’t want to do so,” said Norman, in the same dejected way.

“I suppose we ought not to feel it either.” Norman only shook his head. “We ought to think of her gain. You can’t? Well, I am glad, for no more can I. I can’t think of her liking for papa and baby and all of us to be left to ourselves. But that’s not right of me, and of course it all comes right where she is; so I always put that out of my head, and think what is to come next in doing, and pleasing papa, and learning.”

“That’s grown horrid,” said Norman. “There’s no pleasure in getting on, nor in anything.”

“Don’t you care for papa and all of us being glad, Norman?” As Norman could not just then say that he did, he would not answer.

“I wish—” said Ethel, disappointed, but cheering up the next minute. “I do believe it is having nothing to do. You will be better when you get back to school on Monday.”

“That is worst of all!”

“You don’t like going among the boys again? But that must be done some time or other. Or shall I get Richard to speak to Dr. Hoxton to let you have another week’s leave?”

“No, no, don’t be foolish. It can’t be helped.”

“I am very sorry, but I think you will be better for it.”

She almost began to fancy herself unfeeling, when she found him so much more depressed than she was herself, and unable to feel it a relief to know that the time of rest and want of occupation was over. She thought it light-minded, though she could not help it, to look forward to the daily studies where she might lose her sad thoughts and be as if everything were as usual. But suppose she should be to blame, where would now be the gentle discipline? Poor Ethel’s feelings were not such as to deserve the imputation of levity, when this thought came over her; but her buoyant mind, always seeking for consolation, recurred to Margaret’s improvement, and she fixed her hopes on her.

Margaret was more alive to surrounding objects, and, when roused, she knew them all, answered clearly when addressed, had even, more than once, spoken of her own accord, and shown solicitude at the sight of her father’s bandaged, helpless arm, but he soon soothed this away. He was more than ever watchful over her, and could scarcely be persuaded to leave her for one moment, in his anxiety to be at hand to answer, when first she should speak of her mother, a moment apprehended by all the rest, almost as much for his sake as for hers.

So clear had her perceptions been, and so much more awake did she appear, on this evening, that he expected the inquiry to come every moment, and lingered in her room; till she asked the hour, and begged him to go to bed.

As he bent over her, she looked up in his face, and said softly, “Dear papa.”

There was that in her tone which showed she perceived the truth, and he knelt by her side kissing her, but not daring to relax his restraint of feeling.

"Dear papa," she said again, "I hope I shall soon be better, and be some comfort to you."

"My best—my own—my comfort," he murmured, all he could say without giving way.

"Baby—is she well?"

"Yes, thank Heaven, she has not suffered at all."

"I heard her this morning, I must see her to-morrow. But don't stay, dear, dear papa, it is late, and I am sure you are not at all well. Your arm—is it very much hurt?"

"It is nothing you need think about, my dear. I am much better than I could have imagined possible."

"And you have been nursing me all the time! Papa, you must let me take care of you now. Do pray go to bed at once, and get up late. Nurse will take good care of me. Good-night, dear papa."

When Dr. May had left her, and tried to tell Richard how it had been, the tears cut him short, and had their free course; but there was much of thankfulness, for it might be looked on as the restoration of his daughter; the worst was over, and the next day he was able to think of other things, had more attention to spare for the rest, and when the surgeon came, took some professional interest in the condition of his own arm, inquired after his patients, and even talked of visiting them.

In the meantime, Margaret sent for her eldest brother, begging him to tell her the whole, and it was heard as calmly and firmly as it was told. Her bodily state lulled her mind; and besides it was not new; she had observed much while her faculties were still too much benumbed for her to understand all, or to express her feelings. Her thoughts seemed chiefly occupied with her father. She made Richard explain to her the injury he had suffered, and begged to know whether his constant attendance on her could do him harm. She was much rejoiced when her brother assured her that nothing could be better for him, and she began to say, with a smile, that very likely her being hurt had been fortunate. She asked who had taken care of him before Richard's arrival, and was pleased to hear that it was Mr. Ernescliffe. A visit from the little Gertrude Margaret was happily accomplished, and, on the whole, the day was most satisfactory—she herself declaring that she could not see that there was anything the matter with her, except that she felt lazy, and did not seem able to move.

Thus the next Sunday morning dawned with more cheerfulness. Dr. May came downstairs for the first time, in order to go to church with his whole flock, except the two Margarets. He looked very wan and shattered, but they clustered gladly round him, when he once more stood among them, little Blanche securing his hand, and nodding triumphantly to Mr. Ernescliffe, as much as to say, "Now I have him, I don't want you."

Norman alone was missing; but he was in his place at church among the boys. Again, in returning, he slipped out of the party, and was at home the first, and when this recurred in the afternoon Ethel began to understand his motive. The High Street led past the spot where the accident had taken place, though neither she nor any of the others knew exactly where it was, except Norman, on whose mind the scene was branded indelibly; she guessed that it was to avoid it that he went along what was called Randall's Alley, his usual short cut to school.

The Sunday brought back to the children that there was no one to hear their hymns; but Richard was a great comfort, watching over the little ones more like a sister than a brother. Ethel was ashamed of herself when she saw him taking thought for them, tying Blanche's bonnet, putting Aubrey's gloves on, teaching them to put away their Sunday toys, as if he meant them to be as neat and precise as himself.

Dr. May did not encounter the family dinner, nor attempt a second going to church; but Blanche was very glorious as she led him down to drink tea, and, before going up again, he had a conversation with Alan Ernescliffe, who felt himself obliged to leave Stoneborough early on the morrow.

"I can endure better to go now," said he, "and I shall hear of you often; Hector will let me know, and Richard has promised to write."

"Ay, you must let us often have a line. I should guess you were a letter-writing man."

"I have hitherto had too few friends who cared to hear of me to write much, but the pleasure of knowing that any interest is taken in me here—"

"Well," said the doctor, "mind that a letter will always be welcome, and when you are coming southwards, here are your old quarters. We cannot lose sight of you anyway, especially"—and his voice quivered—"after the help you gave my poor boys and girls in their distress."

"It would be the utmost satisfaction to think I had been of the smallest use," said Alan, hiding much under these commonplace words.

"More than I know," said Dr. May; "too much to speak of. Well, we shall see you again, though it is a changed place, and you must come and see your god-daughter—poor child—may she only be brought up as her sisters were! They will do their best, poor things, and so must I, but it is sad work!"

Both were too much overcome for words, but the doctor was the first to continue, as he took off his dimmed spectacles. He seemed to wish to excuse himself for giving way; saying, with a look that would fain have been a smile, "The world has run so light and easy with me hitherto, that you see I don't know how to bear with trouble. All thinking and managing fell to my Maggie's share, and I had as little care on my hands as one of my own boys—poor fellows. I don't know how it is to turn out, but of all the men on earth to be left with eleven children, I should choose myself as the worst."

Alan tried to say somewhat of "Confidence—affection—daughters," and broke down, but it did as well as if it had been connected.

"Yes, yes," said the doctor, "they are good children every one of them. There's much to be thankful for, if one could only pluck up heart to feel it."

"And you are convinced that Marga—that Miss May is recovering."

"She has made a great advance today. The head is right, at least," but the doctor looked anxious and spoke low as he said, "I am not satisfied about her yet. That want of power over the limbs, is more than the mere shock and debility, as it seems to me, though Ward thinks otherwise, and I trust he is right, but I cannot tell yet as to the spine. If this should not soon mend I shall have Fleet to see her. He was a fellow-student of mine very clever, and I have more faith in him than in any one else in that line."

"By all means—Yes," said Alan, excessively shocked. "But you will let me know how she goes on—Richard will be so kind."

"We will not fail," said Dr May more and more touched at the sight of the young sailor struggling in vain to restrain his emotion, "you shall hear. I'll write myself as soon as I can use my hand, but I hope she may be all right long before that is likely to be."

"Your kindness—" Alan attempted to say, but began again. "Feeling as I must—" then interrupting himself. "I beg your pardon, 'tis no fit time, nor fit—But you'll let me hear."

"That I will," said Dr May, and as Alan hastily left the room, he continued, half aloud, to himself, "Poor boy! poor fellow. I see. No wonder! Heaven grant I have not been the breaking of their two young hearts, as well as my own! Maggie looked doubtful—as much as she ever did when my mind was set on a thing, when I spoke of bringing him here. But after all, she liked him as much as the rest of us did—she could not wish it otherwise—he is one of a thousand, and worthy of our Margaret. That he is! and Maggie thinks so. If he gets on in his profession, why then we shall see—" but the sigh of anguish of mind here showed that the wound had but been forgotten for one moment.

"Pshaw! What am I running on to? I'm all astray for want of her! My poor girl—"

Mr Ernescliffe set out before sunrise. The boys were up to wish him good-bye, and so were Etheldred and Mary, and some one else, for while the shaking of hands was going on in the hall there was a call, "Mr Ernthcliffe," and over the balusters peeped a little rough curly head, a face glowing with carnation deepened by sleep, and a round, plump, bare arm and shoulder, and down at Alan's feet there fell a construction of white and pink paper, while a voice lisped out, "Mr Ernthcliffe, there's a white rothe for you."

An indignant “Miss Blanche!” was heard behind and there was no certainty that any thanks reached the poor little heroine, who was evidently borne off summarily to the nursery, while Ethel gave way to a paroxysm of suppressed laughter, joined in, more or less, by all the rest, and thus Alan, promising faithfully to preserve the precious token, left Dr May’s door, not in so much outward sorrow as he had expected.

Even their father laughed at the romance of the white “rothe,” and declared Blanche was a dangerous young lady; but the story was less successful with Miss Winter, who gravely said it was no wonder since Blanche’s elder sister had been setting her the example of forwardness in coming down in this way after Mr. Ernescliffe. Ethel was very angry, and was only prevented from vindicating herself by remembering there was no peacemaker now, and that she had resolved only to think of Miss Winter’s late kindness, and bear with her tiresome ways.

Etheldred thought herself too sorrowful to be liable to her usual faults which would seem so much worse now; but she found herself more irritable than usual, and doubly heedless, because her mind was preoccupied. She hated herself, and suffered more from sorrow than even at the first moment, for now she felt what it was to have no one to tame her, no eye over her; she found herself going a tort et a travers all the morning, and with no one to set her right. Since it was so the first day, what would follow?

Mary was on the contrary so far subdued, as to be exemplary in goodness and diligence, and Blanche was always steady. Flora was too busy to think of the school-room, for the whole house was on her hands, besides the charge of Margaret, while Dr. May went to the hospital, and to sundry patients, and they thought he seemed the better for the occupation, as well as gratified and affected by the sympathy he everywhere met with from high and low.

The boys were at school, unseen except when at the dinner play-hour Norman ran home to ask after his father and sister; but the most trying time was at eight in the evening, when they came home. That was wont to be the merriest part of the whole day, the whole family collected, papa at leisure and ready for talk or for play, mamma smiling over her work-basket, the sisters full of chatter, the brothers full of fun, all the tidings of the day discussed, and nothing unwelcome but bedtime. How different now! The doctor was with Margaret, and though Richard tried to say something cheerful as his brothers entered, there was no response, and they sat down on the opposite sides of the fire, forlorn and silent, till Richard, who was printing some letters on card-board to supply the gaps in Aubrey’s ivory Alphabet, called Harry to help him; but Ethel, as she sat at work, could only look at Norman, and wish she could devise anything likely to gratify him.

After a time Flora came down, and laying some sheets of closely written note-paper before her sister, said, “Here is dear mamma’s unfinished letter to Aunt Flora. Papa says we elder ones are to read it. It is a description of us all, and very much indeed we ought to learn from it. I shall keep a copy of it.”

Flora took up her work, and began to consult with Richard, while Ethel moved to Norman’s side, and kneeling so as to lean against his shoulder, as he sat on a low cushion, they read their mother’s last letter by the fire-light, with indescribable feelings, as they went through the subjects that had lately occupied them, related by her who would never be among them again. After much of this kind, for her letters to Mrs. Arnott were almost journals, came,

“You say it is long since you had a portrait gallery of the chicken daisies, and if I do not write in these leisure days, you will hardly get it after I am in the midst of business again. The new Daisy is like Margaret at the same age—may she continue like her! Pretty creature, she can hardly be more charming than at present. Aubrey, the moon-faced, is far from reconciled to his disposition from babyhood; he is a sober, solemn gentleman, backward in talking, and with such a will of his own, as will want much watching; very different from Blanche, who is Flora over again, perhaps prettier and more fairy-like, unless this is only one’s admiration for the buds of the present season. None of them has ever been so winning as this little maid, who even attracts Dr. Hoxton himself, and obtains sugar-

plums and kisses. ‘Rather she than I,’ says Harry, but notice is notice to the white Mayflower, and there is my anxiety—I am afraid it is not wholesome to be too engaging ever to get a rebuff. I hope having a younger sister, and outgrowing baby charms may be salutary. Flora soon left off thinking about her beauty, and the fit of vanity does less harm at five than fifteen. My poor Tom has not such a happy life as Blanche, he is often in trouble at lessons, and bullied by Harry at play, in spite of his champion, Mary; and yet I cannot interfere, for it is good for him to have all this preparatory teasing before he goes into school. He has good abilities, but not much perseverance or energy, and I must take the teaching of him into my own hands till his school-days begin, in hopes of instilling them. The girlishness and timidity will be knocked out of him by the boys, I suppose; Harry is too kind and generous to do more than tease him moderately, and Norman will see that it does not go too far. It is a common saying that Tom and Mary made a mistake, that he is the girl, and she the boy, for she is a rough, merry creature, the noisiest in the house, always skirmishing with Harry in defence of Tom, and yet devoted to him, and wanting to do everything he does. Those two, Harry and Mary, are exactly alike, except for Harry’s curly mane of lion-coloured wig. The yellow-haired laddie, is papa’s name for Harry, which he does not mind from him, though furious if the girls attempt to call him so. Harry is the thorough boy of the family, all spirit, recklessness, and mischief, but so true, and kind, and noble-hearted, that one loves him the better after every freely confessed scrape. I cannot tell you how grateful I am to my boy for his perfect confidence, the thing that chiefly lessens my anxiety for him in his half-school, half-home life, which does not seem to me to work quite well with him. There are two sons of Mrs. Anderson’s at the school, who are more his friends than I like, and he is too easily led by the desire not to be outdone, and to show that he fears nothing. Lately, our sailor-guest has inspired him with a vehement wish to go to sea; I wish it was not necessary that the decision should be made so early in life, for this fault is just what would make us most fear to send him into the world very young, though in some ways it might not do amiss for him.

“So much for the younger bairns, whom you never beheld, dear Flora. The three whom you left, when people used to waste pity on me for their being all babies together, now look as if any pair of them were twins, for Norman is the tallest, almost outgrowing his strength, and Ethel’s sharp face, so like her papa’s, makes her look older than Flora. Norman and Ethel do indeed take after their papa, more than any of the others, and are much alike. There is the same brilliant cleverness, the same strong feeling, not easy of demonstration, though impetuous in action; but poor Ethel’s old foibles, her harum-scarum nature, quick temper, uncouth manners, and heedlessness of all but one absorbing object, have kept her back, and caused her much discomfort; yet I sometimes think these manifest defects have occasioned a discipline that is the best thing for the character in the end. They are faults that show themselves, and which one can tell how to deal with, and I have full confidence that she has the principle within her that will conquer them.”

“If—” mournfully sighed Ethel; but her brother pointed on further.

“My great hope is her entire indifference to praise—not approval, but praise. If she has not come up to her own standard, she works on, not always with good temper, but perseveringly, and entirely, unheeding of commendation till she has satisfied herself, only thinking it stupid not to see the faults. It is this independence of praise that I want to see in her brother and sister. They justly earn it, and are rightly pleased with it; but I cannot feel sure whether they do not depend on it too much. Norman lives, like all school-boys, a life of emulation, and has never met with anything but success. I do believe Dr. Hoxton and Mr. Wilmot are as proud of him as we are; and he has never shown any tendency to conceit, but I am afraid he has the love of being foremost, and pride in his superiority, caring for what he is, compared with others, rather than what he is himself.”

“I know,” said Norman; “I have done so, but that’s over. I see what it is worth. I’d give all the quam optimes I ever got in my life to be the help Richard is to papa.”

“You would if you were his age.”

“Not I, I’m not the sort. I’m not like her. But are we to go on about the elders?”

"Oh! yes, don't let us miss a word. There can't be anything but praise of them."

"Your sweet goddaughter. I almost feel as if I had spoken in disparagement of her, but I meant no such thing, dear girl. It would be hard to find a fault in her, since the childish love of admiration was subdued. She is so solid and steady, as to be very valuable with the younger ones, and is fast growing so lovely, that I wish you could behold her. I do not see any vanity, but there lies my dread, not of beauty—vanity, but that she will find temptation in the being everywhere liked and sought after. As to Margaret, my precious companion and friend, you have heard enough of her to know her, and, as to telling you what she is like, I could as soon set about describing her papa. When I thought of not being spared to them this time, it was happiness indeed to think of her at their head, fit to be his companion, with so much of his own talent as to be more up to conversation with him, than he could ever have found his stupid old Maggie. It was rather a trial of her discretion to have Mr. Ernescliffe here while I was upstairs, and very well she seems to have come out of it. Poor Richard's last disappointment is still our chief trouble. He has been working hard with a tutor all through the vacation, and has not even come home to see his new sister, on his way to Oxford. He had made a resolution that he would not come to us till he had passed, and his father thought it best that it should be kept. I hope he will succeed next time, but his nervousness renders it still more doubtful. With him it is the very reverse of Norman. He suffers too much for want of commendation, and I cannot wonder at it, when I see how much each failure vexes his father, and Richard little knows how precious is our perfect confidence in him, how much more valuable than any honours he could earn. You would be amused to see how little he is altered from the pretty little fair fellow, that you used to say was so like my old portrait, even the wavy rings of light glossy hair sit on his forehead, just as you liked to twist them; and his small trim figure is a fine contrast to Norman's long legs and arms, which—"

There the letter broke off, the playful affection of the last words making it almost more painful to think that the fond hand would never finish the sentence.

CHAPTER VI

A drooping daisy changed into a cup,
In which her bright-eyed beauty is shut up.

WORDSWORTH.

"So there you are up for the day—really you look very comfortable," said Ethel, coming into the room where Margaret lay on her bed, half-raised by pillows, supported by a wooden frame.

"Yes, is not it a charming contrivance of Richard's? It quite gives me the use of my hands," said Margaret.

"I think he is doing something else for you," said Ethel; "I heard him carpentering at six o'clock this morning, but I suppose it is to be a secret."

"And don't you admire her night-cap?" said Flora.

"Is it anything different?" said Ethel, peering closer. "Oh, I see—so she has a fine day night-cap. Is that your taste, Flora?"

"Partly," said Margaret, "and partly my own. I put in all these little white puffs, and I hope you think they do me credit. Wasn't it grand of me?"

"She only despises you for them," said Flora.

"I'm very glad you could," said Ethel, gravely; "but do you know? it is rather like that horrid old lady in some book, who had a paralytic stroke, and the first thing she did that showed she had come to her senses was to write, 'Rose-coloured curtains for the doctors.'"

"Well, it was for the doctor," said Margaret, "and it had its effect. He told me I looked much better when he found me trying it on."

"And did you really have the looking-glass and try it on?" cried Ethel.

"Yes, really," said Flora. "Don't you think one may as well be fit to be seen if one is ill? It is no use to depress one's friends by being more forlorn and disconsolate than one can help."

"No—not disconsolate," said Ethel; "but the white puffiness—and the hemming—and the glass!"

"Poor Ethel can't get over it," said Margaret. "But, Ethel, do you think there is nothing disconsolate in untidiness?"

"You could be tidy without the little puffs! Your first bit of work too! Don't think I'm tiresome. If they were an amusement to you, I am sure I am very glad of them, but I can't see the sense of them."

"Poor little things!" said Margaret laughing. "It is only my foible for making a thing look nice. And, Ethel," she added, drawing her down close over her, "I did not think the trouble wasted, if seeing me look fresher cheered up dear papa a moment."

"I spoke to papa about nurse's proposal," said Margaret presently to Flora, "and he quite agrees to it. Indeed it is impossible that Anne should attend properly to all the children while nurse is so much engaged with me."

"I think so," said Flora; "and it does not answer to bring Aubrey into the school-room. It only makes Mary and Blanche idle, and Miss Winter does not like it."

"Then the question is, who shall it be? Nurse has no one in view, and only protests against 'one of the girls out of the school here.'"

"That's a great pity," said Flora. "Don't you think we could make her take to Jane White, she is so very nice."

"I thought of her, but it will never answer if we displease nurse. Besides, I remember at the time Anne came, dear mamma thought there was danger of a girl's having too many acquaintances, especially taking the children out walking. We cannot always be sure of sending her out with Anne."

"Do you remember—" said Ethel, there stopping.

"Well," said both sisters.

"Don't you recollect, Flora, that girl whose father was in the hospital—that girl at Cocksmoor?"

"I do," said Flora. "She was a very nice girl; I wonder whether nurse would approve of her."

"How old?" said Margaret. "Fourteen, and tall. Such a clean cottage!"

The girls went on, and Margaret began to like the idea very much, and consider whether the girl could be brought for inspection, before nurse was prejudiced by hearing of her Cocksmoor extraction. At that moment Richard knocked at the door, and entered with Tom, helping him to bring a small short-legged table, such as could stand on the bed at the right height for Margaret's meals or employments.

There were great exclamations of satisfaction, and gratitude; "it was the very thing wanted, only how could he have contrived it?"

"Don't you recognise it?" said he.

"Oh, I see; it is the old drawing-desk that no one used. And you have put legs to it—how famous! You are the best contriver, Richard!"

"Then see, you can raise it up for reading or writing; here's a corner for your ink to stand flat; and there it is down for your dinner."

"Charming, you have made it go so easily, when it used to be so stiff. There—give me my work-basket, please, Ethel; I mean to make some more white puffs."

"What's the matter now, Ethel?" said Flora; "you look as if you did not approve of the table."

"I was only thinking it was as if she was settling herself to lie in bed for a very long time," said Ethel.

"I hope not," said Richard; "but I don't see why she should not be as comfortable as she can, while she is there."

"I am sure I hope you will never be ill, Ethel," said Flora. "You would be horrid to nurse!"

"She will know how to be grateful when she is," said Margaret.

"I say, Richard," exclaimed Ethel, "this is hospital-meeting day, so you won't be wanted to drive papa."

"No, I am at your service; do you want a walk?"

So it was determined that Richard and Ethel should walk together to Cocksmoor.

No two people could be much more unlike than Richard and Etheldred May; but they were very fond of each other. Richard was sometimes seriously annoyed by Ethel's heedlessness, and did not always understand her sublimities, but he had a great deal of admiration for one who partook so much of his father's nature; and Ethel had a due respect for her eldest brother, gratitude and strong affection for many kindnesses, a reverence for his sterling goodness, and his exemption from her own besetting failings, only a little damped by compassionate wonder at his deficiency in talent, and by her vexation at not being always comprehended.

They went by the road, for the plantation gate was far too serious an undertaking for any one not in the highest spirits for enterprise. On the way there was a good deal of that desultory talk, very sociable and interesting, that is apt to prevail between two people, who would never have chosen each other for companions, if they were not of the same family, but who are nevertheless very affectionate and companionable. Ethel was anxious to hear what her brother thought of papa's spirits, and whether he talked in their drives.

"Sometimes," said Richard. "It is just as it happens. Now and then he goes on just like himself, and then at other times he will not speak for three or four miles."

"And he sighs?" said Ethel. "Those sighs are so very sad, and long, and deep! They seem to have whole volumes in them, as if there was such a weight on him."

"Some people say he is not as much altered as they expected," said Richard.

"Oh! do they? Well! I can't fancy any one feeling it more. He can't leave off his old self, of course, but—" Ethel stopped short.

"Margaret is a great comfort to him," said Richard.

"That she is. She thinks of him all day long, and I don't think either of them is ever so happy as in the evening, when he sits with her. They talk about mamma then—"

It was just what Richard could not do, and he made some observation to change the subject, but Ethel returned to it, so far as to beg to know how the arm was going on, for she did not like to say anything about it to papa.

"It will be a long business, I am afraid," said Richard. "Indeed, he said the other day, he thought he should never have the free use of the elbow."

"And do you think it is very painful? I saw the other day, when Aubrey was sitting on his knee and fidgeting, he shrank whenever he even came towards it, and yet it seemed as if he could not bear to put him down."

"Yes it is excessively tender, and sometimes gets very bad at night."

"Ah," said Ethel; "there's a line—here—round his eyes, that there never used to be, and when it deepens, I am sure he is in pain, or has been kept awake."

"You are very odd, Ethel; how do you see things in people's faces, when you miss so much at just the same distance?"

"I look after what I care about," said Ethel. "One sees more with one's mind than one's eyes. The best sight is inside."

"But do you always see the truth?" said Richard gravely.

"Quite enough. What is less common than the ordinary world?" said Ethel.

Richard shook his head, not quite satisfied, but not sure enough that he entered into her meaning to question it.

"I wonder you don't wear spectacles," was the result of his meditation, and it made her laugh by being so inapposite to her own reflections: but the laugh ended in a melancholy look. "Dear mamma did not like me to use them," she said, in a low voice.

Thus they talked till they arrived at Cocksmoor, where poor Mrs. Taylor, inspirited by better reports of her husband and the hopes for her daughter, was like another woman. Richard was very careful not to raise false expectations, saying it all depended on Miss May and nurse, and what they thought of her strength and steadiness, but these cautions did not seem capable of damping the hopes of the smooth-haired Lucy, who stood smiling and curtseying. The twins were grown and improved, and Ethel supposed they would be brought to church on the next christening Sunday, but their mother looked helpless and hopeless about getting them so far, and how was she to get gossips? Ethel began to grow very indignant, but she was always shy of finding fault with poor people to their faces when she would not have done so to persons in her own station, and so she was silent, while Richard hoped they would be able to manage, and said it would be better not to wait another month for still worse weather and shorter days.

As they were coming out of the house, a big, rough-looking, uncivilised boy came up before them, and called out, "I say—ben't you the young doctor up at Stoneborough?"

"I am Dr. May's son," said Richard; while Ethel, startled, clung to his arm, in dread of some rudeness.

"Granny's bad," said the boy; proceeding without further explanation to lead the way to another hovel, though Richard tried to explain that the knowledge of medicine was not in his case hereditary. A poor old woman sat groaning over the fire, and two children crouched, half-clothed, on the bare floor.

Richard's gentle voice and kind manner drew forth some wonderful descriptions—"her head was all of a goggle, her legs all of a fur, she felt as if some one was cutting right through her."

"Well," said Richard kindly, "I am no doctor myself, but I'll ask my father about you, and perhaps he can give you an order for the hospital."

"No, no, thank ye, sir; I can't go to the hospital, I can't leave these poor children; they've no father nor mother, sir, and no one to do for them but me."

"What do you live on, then?" said Richard, looking round the desolate hut.

"On Sam's wages, sir; that's that boy. He is a good boy to me, sir, and his little sisters; he brings it, all he gets, home to me, rig'lar, but 'tis but six shillings a week, and they makes 'em take half of it out in goods and beer, which is a bad thing for a boy like him, sir."

"How old are you, Sam?"

Sam scratched his head, and answered nothing. His grandmother knew he was the age of her black bonnet, and as he looked about fifteen, Ethel honoured him and the bonnet accordingly, while Richard said he must be very glad to be able to maintain them all, at his age, and, promising to try to bring his father that way, since prescribing at second hand for such curious symptoms was more than could be expected, he took his leave.

"A wretched place," said Richard, looking round. "I don't know what help there is for the people. There's no one to do any thing for them, and it is of no use to tell them to come to church when it it so far off, and there is so little room for them."

"It is miserable," said Ethel; and all her thoughts during her last walk thither began to rush over her again, not effaced, but rather burned in, by all that had subsequently happened. She had said it should be her aim and effort to make Cocksmoor a Christian place. Such a resolve must not pass away lightly; she knew it must be acted on, but how? What would her present means—one sovereign—effect? Her fancies, rich and rare, had nearly been forgotten of late, but she might make them of use in time—in time, and here were hives of children growing up in heathenism. Suddenly an idea struck her—Richard, when at home, was a very diligent teacher in the Sunday-school at Stoneborough, though it was a thankless task, and he was the only gentleman so engaged, except the two clergymen—the other male teachers being a formal, grave, little baker, and one or two monitors.

"Richard," said Ethel, "I'll tell you what. Suppose we were to get up a Sunday-school at Cocksmoor. We could get a room, and walk there every Sunday afternoon, and go to church in the evening instead."

He was so confounded by the suddenness of the project, that he did not answer, till she had time for several exclamations and "Well, Richard?"

"I cannot tell," he said. "Going to church in the evening would interfere with tea-time—put out all the house—make the evening uncomfortable."

"The evenings are horrid now, especially Sundays," said Ethel.

"But missing two more would make them worse for the others."

"Papa is always with Margaret," said Ethel. "We are of no use to him. Besides these poor children—are not they of more importance?"

"And, then, what is to become of Stoneborough school?"

"I hate it," exclaimed Ethel; then seeing Richard shocked, and finding she had spoken more vehemently than she intended—"It is not as bad for you among the boys, but, while that committee goes on it is not the least use to try to teach the girls right. Oh! the fusses about the books, and one's way of teaching! And fancy how Mrs Ledwich used us. You know I went again last Sunday, for the first time, and there I found that class of Margaret's, that she had just managed to get into some degree of nice order, taken so much pains with, taught so well. She had been telling me what to hear them—there it is given away to Fanny Anderson, who is no more fit to teach than that stick, and all Margaret's work will be undone. No notice to us—not even the civility to wait and see when she gets better."

"If we left them now for Cocksmoor, would it not look as it we were affronted?"

Ethel was slightly taken aback, but only said, "Papa would be very angry if he knew it."

"I am glad you did not tell him," said Richard.

"I thought it would only tease him," said Ethel, "and that he might call it a petty female squabble; and when Margaret is well, it will come right, if Fanny Anderson has not spoiled the girls in the meantime. It is all Mrs. Ledwich's doing. How I did hate it when every one came up and shook hands with me, and asked after Margaret and papa, only just out of curiosity!"

"Hush, hush, Ethel, what's the use of thinking such things?"

A silence,—then she exclaimed, "But, indeed, Richard, you don't fancy that I want to teach at Cocksmoor, because it is disagreeable at Stoneborough?"

"No, indeed."

The rendering of full justice conveyed in his tone so opened Ethel's heart that she went on eagerly:—"The history of it is this. Last time we walked here, that day, I said, and I meant it, that I would never put it out of my head; I would go on doing and striving, and trying, till this place was properly cared for, and has a church and a clergyman. I believe it was a vow, Richard, I do believe it was,—and if one makes one, one must keep it. There it is. So, I can't give money, I have but one pound in the world, but I have time, and I would make that useful, if you would help me."

"I don't see how," was the answer, and there was a fragment of a smile on Richard's face, as if it struck him as a wild scheme, that Ethel should undertake, single handed, to evangelise Cocksmoor.

It was such a damper as to be most mortifying to an enthusiastic girl, and she drew into herself in a moment.

They walked home in silence, and when Richard warned her that she was not keeping her dress out of the dirt, it sounded like a sarcasm on her projects, and, with a slightly pettish manner, she raised the unfortunate skirt, its crape trimmings greatly bespattered with ruddy mud. Then recollecting how mamma would have shaken her head at that very thing, she regretted the temper she had betrayed, and in a larmoyante voice, sighed, "I wish I could pick my way better. Some people have the gift, you have hardly a splash, and I'm up to the ankles in mud."

"It is only taking care," said Richard; "besides your frock is so long, and full. Can't you tuck it up and pin it?"

"My pins always come out," said Ethel, disconsolately, crumpling the black folds into one hand, while she hunted for a pin with the other.

"No wonder, if you stick them in that way," said Richard. "Oh! you'll tear that crape. Here, let me help you. Don't you see, make it go in and out, that way; give it something to pull against."

Ethel laughed. "That's the third thing you have taught me—to thread a needle, tie a bow, and stick in a pin! I never could learn those things of any one else; they show, but don't explain the theory."

They met Dr. May at the entrance of the town, very tired, and saying he had been a long tramp, all over the place, and Mrs. Hoxton had been boring him with her fancies. As he took Richard's arm he gave the long heavy sigh that always fell so painfully on Ethel's ear.

"Dear, dear, dear papa!" thought she, "my work must also be to do all I can to comfort him."

Her reflections were broken off. Dr. May exclaimed, "Ethel, don't make such a figure of yourself. Those muddy ankles and petticoats are not fit to be seen—there, now you are sweeping the pavement. Have you no medium? One would think you had never worn a gown in your life before!"

Poor Ethel stepped on before with mud-encrusted heels, and her father speaking sharply in the weariness and soreness of his heart; her draggle-tailed petticoats weighing down at once her missionary projects at Cocksmoor, and her tender visions of comforting her widowed father; her heart was full to overflowing, and where was the mother to hear her troubles?

She opened the hall door, and would have rushed upstairs, but nurse happened to be crossing the hall. "Miss Ethel! Miss Ethel, you aren't going up with them boots on! I do declare you are just like one of the boys. And your frock!"

Ethel sat submissively down on the lowest step, and pulled off her boots. As she did so, her father and brother came in—the former desiring Richard to come with him to the study, and write a note for him. She hoped that thus she might have Margaret to herself, and hurried into her room.

Margaret was alone, maids and children at tea, and Flora dressing. The room was in twilight, with the red gleam of the fire playing cheerfully over it.

"Well, Ethel, have you had a pleasant walk?"

"Yes—no—Oh, Margaret!" and throwing herself across the bottom of the bed, she burst into tears.

"Ethel, dear, what is the matter? Papa—"

"No—no—only I draggled my frock, and Richard threw cold water. And I am good for nothing! Oh! if mamma was but here!"

"Darling Ethel, dear Ethel, I wish I could comfort you. Come a little nearer to me, I can't reach you! Dear Ethel, what has gone wrong?"

"Everything," said Ethel. "No—I'm too dirty to come on your white bed; I forgot, you won't like it," added she, in an injured tone.

"You are wet, you are cold, you are tired," said Margaret. "Stay here and dress, don't go up in the cold. There, sit by the fire pull off your frock and stockings, and we will send for the others. Let me see you look comfortable—there. Now tell me who threw cold water."

"It was figurative cold water," said Ethel, smiling for a moment. "I was only silly enough to tell Richard my plan, and it's horrid to talk to a person who only thinks one high-flying and nonsensical —and then came the dirt."

"But what was the scheme, Ethel?"

"Cocksmoor," said Ethel, proceeding to unfold it.

"I wish we could," said Margaret. "It would be an excellent thing. But how did Richard vex you?"

"I don't know," said Ethel, "only he thought it would not do. Perhaps he said right, but it was coldly, and he smiled."

"He is too sober-minded for our flights," said Margaret. "I know the feeling of it, Ethel dear; but you know if he did see that some of your plans might not answer, it is no reason you should not try to do something at once. You have not told me about the girl."

Ethel proceeded to tell the history. "There!" said Margaret cheerfully, "there are two ways of helping Cocksmoor already. Could you not make some clothes for the two grandchildren? I could help you a little, and then, if they were well clothed, you might get them to come to the Sunday-school. And as to the twins, I wonder what the hire of a cart would be to bring the christening party? It is just what Richard could manage."

"Yes," said Ethel; "but those are only little isolated individual things!"

"But one must make a beginning."

"Then, Margaret, you think it was a real vow? You don't think it silly of me?" said Ethel wistfully.

"Ethel, dear, I don't think dear mamma would say we ought to make vows, except what the church decrees for us. I don't think she would like the notion of your considering yourself pledged; but I do think, that, after all you have said and felt about Cocksmoor, and being led there on that day, it does seem as if we might be intended to make it our especial charge."

"Oh, Margaret, I am glad you say so. You always understand."

"But you know we are so young, that now we have not her to judge for us, we must only do little things that we are quite sure of, or we shall get wrong."

"That's not the way great things were done."

"I don't know, Ethel; I think great things can't be good unless they stand on a sure foundation of little ones."

"Well, I believe Richard was right, and it would not do to begin on Sunday, but he was so tame; and then my frock, and the horrid deficiency in those little neatnesses."

"Perhaps that is good for you in one way; you might get very high-flying if you had not the discipline of those little tiresome things, correcting them will help you, and keep your high things from being all romance. I know dear mamma used to say so; that the trying to conquer them was a help to you. Oh, here's Mary! Mary, will you get Ethel's dressing things? She has come home wet-footed and cold, and has been warming herself by my fire."

Mary was happy to help, and Ethel was dressed and cheered by the time Dr. May came in, for a hurried visit and report of his doings; Flora followed on her way from her room. Then all went to tea, leaving Margaret to have a visit from the little ones under charge of nurse. Two hours' stay with her, that precious time when she knew that sad as the talk often was, it was truly a comfort to him. It ended when ten o'clock struck, and he went down—Margaret hearing the bell, the sounds of the assembling servants, the shutting of the door, the stillness of prayer-time, the opening again, the feet moving off in different directions, then brothers and sisters coming in to kiss her and bid her good-night, nurse and Flora arranging her for the night, Flora coming to sleep in her little bed in the corner of the room, and, lastly, her father's tender good-night, and melancholy look at her, and all was quiet, except the low voices and movements as Richard attended him in his own room.

Margaret could think: "Dear, dear Ethel, how noble and high she is! But I am afraid! It is what people call a difficult, dangerous age, and the grander she is, the greater danger of not managing her rightly. If those high purposes should run only into romance like mine, or grow out into eccentricities and unfemininesses, what a grievous pity it would be! And I, so little older, so much less clever, with just sympathy enough not to be a wise restraint—I am the person who has the responsibility, and oh, what shall I do? Mamma trusted to me to be a mother to them, papa looks to me, and I so unfit, besides this helplessness. But God sent it, and put me in my place. He made me lie here, and will raise me up if it is good, so I trust He will help me with my sisters."

"Grant me to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in Thy holy comfort."

CHAPTER VII

Something between a hindrance and a help.

WORDSWORTH.

Etheldred awoke long before time for getting up, and lay pondering over her visions. Margaret had sympathised, and therefore they did not seem entirely aerial. To earn money by writing was her favourite plan, and she called her various romances in turn before her memory, to judge which might be brought down to sober pen and ink. She considered till it became not too unreasonably early to get up. It was dark, but there was a little light close to the window: she had no writing-paper, but she would interline her old exercise-book. Down she ran, and crouching in the school-room window-seat, she wrote on in a trance of eager composition, till Norman called her, as he went to school, to help him to find a book.

This done, she went up to visit Margaret, to tell her the story, and consult her. But this was not so easy. She found Margaret with little Daisy lying by her, and Tom sitting by the fire over his Latin.

"Oh, Ethel, good-morning, dear! you are come just in time."

"To take baby?" said Ethel, as the child was fretting a little.

"Yes, thank you, she has been very good, but she was tired of lying here, and I can't move her about," said Margaret.

"Oh, Margaret, I have such a plan," said Ethel, as she walked about with little Gertrude; but Tom interrupted.

"Margaret, will you see if I can say my lesson?" and the thumbed Latin grammar came across her just as Dr. May's door opened, and he came in exclaiming, "Latin grammar! Margaret, this is really too much for you. Good-morning, my dears. Ha! Tommy, take your book away, my boy. You must not inflict that on sister now. There's your regular master, Richard, in my room, if it is fit for his ears yet. What, the little one here too?"

"How is your arm, papa?" said Margaret. "Did it keep you awake?"

"Not long—it set me dreaming though, and a very romantic dream it was, worthy of Ethel herself."

"What was it, papa?"

"Oh, it was an odd thing, joining on strangely enough with one I had three or four and twenty years ago, when I was a young man, hearing lectures at Edinburgh, and courting—" he stopped, and felt Margaret's pulse, asked her a few questions, and talked to the baby. Ethel longed to hear his dream, but thought he would not like to go on; however, he did presently.

"The old dream was the night after a picnic on Arthur's Seat with the Mackenzies; mamma and Aunt Flora were there. 'Twas a regular boy's dream, a tournament, or something of that nature, where I was victor, the queen—you know who she was—giving me her token—a Daisy Chain."

"That is why you like to call us your Daisy Chain," said Ethel.

"Did you write it in verse?" said Margaret. "I think I once saw some verses like it in her desk."

"I was in love, and three-and-twenty," said the doctor, looking drolly guilty in the midst of his sadness. "Ay, those fixed it in my memory, perhaps my fancy made it more distinct than it really was. An evening or two ago I met with them, and that stirred it up I suppose. Last night came the tournament again, but it was the melee, a sense of being crushed down, suffocated by the throng of armed knights and horses—pain and wounds—and I looked in vain through the opposing overwhelming host for my—my Maggie. Well, I got the worst of it, my sword arm was broken—I fell, was stifled—crushed—in misery—all I could do was to grasp my token—my Daisy Chain," and he pressed Margaret's hand as he said so. "And, behold, the tumult and despair were passed. I lay on the

grass in the cloisters, and the Daisy Chain hung from the sky, and was drawing me upwards. There—it is a queer dream for a sober old country doctor. I don't know why I told you, don't tell any one again."

And he walked away, muttering. "For he told me his dreams, talked of eating and drinking," leaving Margaret with her eyes full of tears, and Ethel vehemently caressing the baby.

"How beautiful!" said Ethel.

"It has been a comfort to him, I am sure," said Margaret.

"You don't think it ominous," said Ethel with a slight tremulous voice.

"More soothing than anything else. It is what we all feel, is it not? that this little daisy bud is the link between us and heaven?"

"But about him. He was victor at first—vanquished the next time."

"I think—if it is to have an interpretation, though I am not sure we ought to take it so seriously, it would only mean that in younger days people care for victory and distinction in this world, like Norman, or as papa most likely did then; but, as they grow older, they care less, and others pass them, and they know it does not signify, for in our race all may win."

"But he has a great name. How many people come from a distance to consult him! he is looked upon, too, in other ways! he can do anything with the corporation."

Margaret smiled. "All this does not sound grand—it is not as if he had set up in London."

"Oh, dear, I am so glad he did not."

"Shall I tell you what mamma told me he said about it, when Uncle Mackenzie said he ought? He answered that he thought health and happy home attachments were a better provision for us to set out in life with than thousands."

"I am sure he was right!" said Ethel earnestly. "Then you don't think the dream meant being beaten, only that our best things are not gained by successes in this world?"

"Don't go and let it dwell on your mind as a vision," said Margaret. "I think dear mamma would call that silly."

An interruption occurred, and Ethel had to go down to breakfast with a mind floating between romance, sorrow, and high aspirations, very unlike the actual world she had to live in. First, there was a sick man walking into the study, and her father, laying down his letters, saying, "I must despatch him before prayers, I suppose. I've a great mind to say I never will see any one who won't keep to my days."

"I can't imagine why they don't," said Flora, as he went. "He is always saying so, but never acting on it. If he would once turn one away, the rest would mind."

Richard went on in silence, cutting bread and butter.

"There's another ring," said Mary.

"Yes, he is caught now, they'll go on in a stream. I shall not keep Margaret waiting for her breakfast, I shall take it up."

The morning was tiresome; though Dr. May had two regular days for seeing poor people at his house, he was too good-natured to keep strictly to them, and this day, as Flora had predicted, there was a procession of them not soon got rid of, even by his rapid queries and the talismanic figures made by his left hand on scraps of paper, with which he sent them off to the infirmary. Ethel tried to read; the children lingered about; it was a trial of temper to all but Tom, who obtained Richard's attention to his lessons. He liked to say them to his brother, and was an incentive to learn them quickly, that none might remain for Miss Winter when Richard went out with his father. If mamma had been there, she would have had prayers; but now no one had authority enough, though they did at last even finish breakfast. Just as the gig came to the door, Dr. May dismissed his last patient, rang the bell in haste, and as soon as prayers were over, declared he had an appointment, and had no time to eat. There was a general outcry that it was bad enough when he was well, and now he must not take liberties; Flora made him drink some tea; and Richard placed morsels in his way, while he read his letters. He ran up for a final look at Margaret, almost upset the staid Miss Winter as he ran down again, called Richard to take the reins, and was off.

It was French day, always a trial to Ethel. M. Ballompre, the master, knew what was good and bad French, but could not render a reason, and Ethel, being versed in the principles of grammar, from her Latin studies, chose to know the why and wherefore of his corrections—she did not like to see her pages defaced, and have no security against future errors; while he thought her a troublesome pupil, and was put out by her questions. They wrangled, Miss Winter was displeased, and Ethel felt injured.

Mary's inability to catch the pronunciation, and her hopeless dull look when she found that coeur must not be pronounced cour, nor cur, but something between, to which her rosy English lips could never come—all this did not tease M. Ballompre, for he was used to it.

His mark for Ethel's lesson was "de l'humeur."

"I am sorry," said Miss Winter, when he was gone. "I thought you had outgrown that habit of disputing over every phrase."

"I can't tell how a language is to be learned without knowing the reasons of one's mistakes," said Ethel.

"That is what you always say, my dear. It is of no use to renew it all, but I wish you would control yourself. Now, Mary, call Blanche, and you and Ethel take your arithmetic."

So Flora went to read to Margaret, while Blanche went lightly and playfully through her easy lessons, and Mary floundered piteously over the difficulties of Compound Long Division. Ethel's mind was in too irritated and tumultuous a state for her to derive her usual solace from Cube Root. Her sum was wrong, and she wanted to work it right, but Miss Winter, who had little liking for the higher branches of arithmetic, said she had spent time enough over it, and summoned her to an examination such as the governess was very fond of and often practised. Ethel thought it useless, and was teased by it; and though her answers were chiefly correct, they were given in an irritated tone. It was of this kind:—

What is the date of the invention of paper?
What is the latitude and longitude of Otaheite?
What are the component parts of brass?
Whence is cochineal imported?

When this was over, Ethel had to fetch her mending-basket, and Mary her book of selections; the piece for to-day's lesson was the quarrel of Brutus and Cassius; and Mary's dull droning tone was a trial to her ears; she presently exclaimed, "Oh, Mary, don't murder it!"

"Murder what?" said Mary, opening wide her light blue eyes.

"That use of exaggerated language,—" began Miss Winter.

"I've heard papa say it," said Ethel, only wanting to silence Miss Winter. In a cooler moment she would not have used the argument.

"All that a gentleman may say, may not be a precedent for a young lady; but you are interrupting Mary."

"Only let me show her. I can't bear to hear her, listen, Mary.

"What shall one of us
That struck the foremost"—

"That is declaiming," said Miss Winter. "It is not what we wish for in a lady. You are neglecting your work and interfering."

Ethel made a fretful contortion, and obeyed. So it went on all the morning, Ethel's eagerness checked by Miss Winter's dry manner, producing pettishness, till Ethel, in a state between self-reproach and a sense of injustice, went up to prepare for dinner, and to visit Margaret on the way.

She found her sister picking a merino frock to pieces. “See here,” she said eagerly, “I thought you would like to make up this old frock for one of the Cocksmoor children; but what is the matter?” as Ethel did not show the lively interest that she expected.

“Oh, nothing, only Miss Winter is so tiresome.”

“What was it?”

“Everything, it was all horrid. I was cross, I know, but she and M. Ballompre made me so;” and Ethel was in the midst of the narration of her grievances, when Norman came in. The school was half a mile off, but he had not once failed to come home, in the interval allowed for play after dinner, to inquire for his sister.

“Well, Norman, you are out of breath, sit down and rest. What is doing at school; are you dux of your class?”

“Yes,” said the boy wearily.

“What mark for the verses?” said Ethel.

“Quam bene.”

“Not optime?”

“No, they were tame,” Dr. Hoxton said.

“What is Harry doing?” said Margaret.

“He is fourth in his form. I left him at football.”

“Dinner!” said Flora at the door. “What will you have, Margaret?”

“I’ll fetch it,” said Norman, who considered it his privilege to wait on Margaret at dinner. When he had brought the tray, he stood leaning against the bed-post, musing. Suddenly, there was a considerable clatter of fire-irons, and his violent start surprised Margaret.

“Ethel has been poking the fire,” she said, as if no more was needed to account for their insecurity. Norman put them up again, but a ringing sound betrayed that it was not with a firm touch, and when, a minute after, he came to take her plate, she saw that he was trying with effort to steady his hand.

“Norman, dear, are you sure you are well?”

“Yes, very well,” said he, as if vexed that she had taken any notice.

“You had better not come racing home. I’m not worth inquiries now, I am so much better,” said she, smiling.

He made no reply, but this was not consenting silence.

“I don’t like you to lose your football,” she proceeded.

“I could not—” and he stopped short.

“It would be much better for you,” said she, looking up in his face with anxious affectionate eyes, but he shunned her glance and walked away with her plate.

Flora had been in such close attendance upon Margaret, that she needed some cheerful walks, and though she had some doubts how affairs at home would go on without her, she was overruled, and sent on a long expedition with Miss Winter and Mary, while Ethel remained with Margaret.

The only delay before setting out, was that nurse came in, saying, “If you please, Miss Margaret, there is a girl come to see about the place.”

The sisters looked at each other and smiled, while Margaret asked whence she came, and who she was.

“Her name is Taylor, and she comes from Cocksmoor, but she is a nice, tidy, strong-looking girl, and she says she has been used to children.”

Nurse had fallen into the trap most comfortably, and seemed bent upon taking this girl as a choice of her own. She wished to know if Miss Margaret would like to see her.

“If you please, nurse, but if you think she will do, that is enough.”

“Yes, Miss, but you should look to them things yourself. If you please, I’ll bring her up.” So nurse departed.

"Charming!" cried Ethel, "that's your capital management, Flora; nurse thinks she has done it all herself."

"She is your charge though," said Flora, "coming from your own beloved Cocksmoor."

Lucy Taylor came in, looking very nice, and very shy, curtseying low, in extreme awe of the pale lady in bed. Margaret was much pleased with her, and there was no more to be done but to settle that she should come on Saturday, and to let nurse take her into the town to invest her with the universal blackness of the household, where the two Margarets were the only white things.

This arranged, and the walking party set forth, Ethel sat down by her sister's bed, and began to assist in unpicking the merino, telling Margaret how much obliged she was to her for thinking of it, and how grieved at having been so ungrateful in the morning. She was very happy over her contrivances, cutting out under her sister's superintendence. She had forgotten the morning's annoyance, till Margaret said, "I have been thinking of what you said about Miss Winter, and really I don't know what is to be done."

"Oh, Margaret, I did not mean to worry you," said Ethel, sorry to see her look uneasy.

"I like you to tell me everything, dear Ethel; but I don't see clearly the best course. We must go on with Miss Winter."

"Of course," said Ethel, shocked at her murmurs having even suggested the possibility of a change, and having, as well as all the others, a great respect and affection for her governess.

"We could not get on without her even if I were well," continued Margaret; "and dear mamma had such perfect trust in her, and we all know and love her so well—it would make us put up with a great deal."

"It is all my own fault," said Ethel, only anxious to make amends to Miss Winter. "I wish you would not say anything about it."

"Yes, it does seem wrong even to think of it," said Margaret, "when she has been so very kind. It is a blessing to have any one to whom Mary and Blanche may so entirely be trusted. But for you—"

"It is my own fault," repeated Ethel.

"I don't think it is quite all your own fault," said Margaret, "and that is the difficulty. I know dear mamma thought Miss Winter an excellent governess for the little ones, but hardly up to you, and she saw that you worried and fidgeted each other, so, you know, she used to keep the teaching of you a good deal in her own hands."

"I did not know that was the reason," said Ethel, overpowered by the recollection of the happy morning's work she had often done in that very room, when her mother had not been equal to the bustle of the whole school-room. That watchful, protecting, guarding, mother's love, a shadow of Providence, had been round them so constantly on every side, that they had been hardly conscious of it till it was lost to them.

"Was it not like her?" said Margaret, "but now, my poor Ethel, I don't think it would be right by you or by Miss Winter, to take you out of the school-room. I think it would grieve her."

"I would not do that for the world."

"Especially after her kind nursing of me, and even, with more reason, it would not be becoming in us to make changes. Besides, King Etheldred," said Margaret, smiling, "we all know you are a little bit of a sloven, and, as nurse says, some one must be always after you, and do you know? even if I were well, I had rather it was Miss Winter than me."

"Oh, no, you would not be formal and precise—you would not make me cross."

"Perhaps you might make me so," said Margaret, "or I should let you alone, and leave you a slattern. We should both hate it so! No, don't make me your mistress, Ethel dear—let me be your sister and play-fellow still, as well as I can."

"You are, you are. I don't care half so much when I have got you."

"And will you try to bear with her, and remember it is right in the main, though it is troublesome?"

"That I will. I won't plague you again. I know it is bad for you, you look tired."

"Pray don't leave off telling me," said Margaret—"it is just what I wish on my own account, and I know it is comfortable to have a good grumble."

"If it does not hurt you, but I am sure you are not easy now—are you?"

"Only my back," said Margaret. "I have been sitting up longer than usual, and it is tired. Will you call nurse to lay me flat again?"

The nursery was deserted—all were out, and Ethel came back in trepidation at the notion of having to do it herself, though she knew it was only to put one arm to support her sister, while, with the other, she removed the pillows; but Ethel was conscious of her own awkwardness and want of observation, nor had Margaret entire trust in her. Still she was too much fatigued to wait, so Ethel was obliged to do her best. She was careful and frightened, and therefore slow and unsteady. She trusted that all was right, and Margaret tried to believe so, though still uneasy.

Ethel began to read to her, and Dr. May came home. She looked up smiling, and asked where he had been, but it was vain to try to keep him from reading her face. He saw in an instant that something was amiss, and drew from her a confession that her back was aching a little. He knew she might have said a great deal—she was not in a comfortable position—she must be moved. She shook her head—she had rather wait—there was a dread of being again lifted by Ethel that she could not entirely hide. Ethel was distressed, Dr. May was angry, and, no wonder, when he saw Margaret suffer, felt his own inability to help, missed her who had been wont to take all care from his hands, and was vexed to see a tall strong girl of fifteen, with the full use of both arms, and plenty of sense, incapable of giving any assistance, and only doing harm by trying.

"It is of no use," said he. "Ethel will give no attention to anything but her books! I've a great mind to put an end to all the Latin and Greek! She cares for nothing else."

Ethel could little brook injustice, and much as she was grieving, she exclaimed, "Papa, papa, I do care—now don't I, Margaret? I did my best!"

"Don't talk nonsense. Your best, indeed! If you had taken the most moderate care—"

"I believe Ethel took rather too much care," said Margaret, much more harassed by the scolding than by the pain. "It will be all right presently. Never mind, dear papa."

But he was not only grieved for the present, but anxious for the future; and, though he knew it was bad for Margaret to manifest his displeasure, he could not restrain it, and continued to blame Ethel with enough of injustice to set her on vindication, whereupon he silenced her, by telling her she was making it worse by self-justification when Margaret ought to be quiet. Margaret tried to talk of other things, but was in too much discomfort to exert herself enough to divert his attention.

At last Flora returned, and saw in an instant what was wanted. Margaret was settled in the right posture, but the pain would not immediately depart, and Dr. May soon found out that she had a headache, of which he knew he was at least as guilty as Etheldred could be.

Nothing could be done but keep her quiet, and Ethel went away to be miserable; Flora tried to comfort her by saying it was unfortunate, but no doubt there was a knack, and everyone could not manage those things; Margaret was easier now, and as to papa's anger, he did not always mean all he said.

But consolation came at bedtime; Margaret received her with open arms when she went to wish her goodnight. "My poor Ethel," she said, holding her close, "I am sorry I have made such a fuss."

"Oh, you did not, it was too bad of me—I am grieved; are you quite comfortable now?"

"Yes, quite, only a little headache, which I shall sleep off. It has been so nice and quiet. Papa took up George Herbert, and has been reading me choice bits. I don't think I have enjoyed anything so much since I have been ill."

"I am glad of that, but I have been unhappy all the evening. I wish I knew what to do. I am out of heart about everything!"

"Only try to mind and heed, and you will learn. It will be a step if you will only put your shoes side by side when you take them off."

Ethel smiled and sighed, and Margaret whispered, "Don't grieve about me, but put your clever head to rule your hands, and you will do for home and Cocksmoor too. Good-night, dearest."

"I've vexed papa," sighed Ethel—and just then he came into the room.

"Papa," said Margaret, "here's poor Ethel, not half recovered from her troubles."

He was now at ease about Margaret, and knew he had been harsh to another of his motherless girls.

"Ah! we must send her to the infant-school, to learn 'this is my right hand, and this is my left,'" said he, in his half-gay, half-sad manner.

"I was very stupid," said Ethel.

"Poor child!" said her papa, "she is worse off than I am. If I have but one hand left, she has two left hands."

"I do mean to try, papa."

"Yes, you must, Ethel. I believe I was hasty with you, my poor girl. I was vexed, and we have no one to smooth us down. I am sorry, my dear, but you must bear with me, for I never learned her ways with you when I might. We will try to have more patience with each other."

What could Ethel do but hang round his neck and cry, till he said, but tenderly, that they had given Margaret quite disturbance enough to-day, and sent her to bed, vowing to watch each little action, lest she should again give pain to such a father and sister.

CHAPTER VIII

"Tis not enough that Greek or Roman page
At stated hours, his freakish thoughts engage,
Even in his pastimes he requires a friend
To warn and teach him safely to unbend,
O'er all his pleasures gently to preside,
Watch his emotions, and control their tide."

—COWPER.

The misfortunes of that day disheartened and disconcerted Etheldred. To do mischief where she most wished to do good, to grieve where she longed to comfort, seemed to be her fate; it was vain to attempt anything for anyone's good, while all her warm feelings and high aspirations were thwarted by the awkward ungainly hands and heedless eyes that Nature had given her. Nor did the following day, Saturday, do much for her comfort, by giving her the company of her brothers. That it was Norman's sixteenth birthday seemed only to make it worse. Their father had apparently forgotten it, and Norman stopped Blanche when she was going to put him in mind of it; stopped her by such a look as the child never forgot, though there was no anger in it. In reply to Ethel's inquiry what he was going to do that morning, he gave a yawn and stretch, and said, dejectedly, that he had got some Euripides to look over, and some verses to finish.

"I am sorry; this is the first time you ever have not managed so as to make a real holiday of your Saturday!"

"I could not help it, and there's nothing to do," said Norman wearily.

"I promised to go and read to Margaret while Flora does her music," said Ethel; "I shall come after that and do my Latin and Greek with you."

Margaret would not keep her long, saying she liked her to be with Norman, but she found him with his head sunk on his open book, fast asleep. At dinner-time, Harry and Tom, rushing in, awoke him with a violent start.

"Halloo! Norman, that was a jump!" said Harry, as his brother stretched and pinched himself. "You'll jump out of your skin some of these days, if you don't take care!"

"It's enough to startle any one to be waked up with such a noise," said Ethel.

"Then he ought to sleep at proper times," said Harry, "and not be waking me up with tumbling about, and hallooing out, and talking in his sleep half the night."

"Talking in his sleep! why, just now, you said he did not sleep," said Ethel.

"Harry knows nothing about it," said Norman.

"Don't I? Well, I only know, if you slept in school, and were a junior, you would get a proper good licking for going on as you do at night."

"And I think you might chance to get a proper good licking for not holding your tongue," said Norman, which hint reduced Harry to silence.

Dr. May was not come home; he had gone with Richard far into the country, and was to return to tea. He was thought to be desirous of avoiding the family dinners that used to be so delightful. Harry was impatient to depart, and when Mary and Tom ran after him, he ordered them back.

"Where can he be going?" said Mary, as she looked wistfully after him.

"I know," said Tom.

"Where? Do tell me."

"Only don't tell papa. I went down with him to the playground this morning, and there they settled it. The Andersons, and Axworthy, and he, are going to hire a gun, and shoot pee-wits on Cocksmoor."

"But they ought not; should they?" said Mary. "Papa would be very angry."

"Anderson said there was no harm in it, but Harry told me not to tell. Indeed, Anderson would have boxed my ears for hearing, when I could not help it."

"But Harry would not let him?"

"Ay. Harry is quite a match for Harvey Anderson, though he is so much younger; and he said he would not have me bullied."

"That's a good Harry! But I wish he would not go out shooting!" said Mary.

"Mind, you don't tell."

"And where's Hector Ernescliffe? Would not he go?"

"No. I like Hector. He did not choose to go, though Anderson teased him, and said he was a poor Scot, and his brother didn't allow him tin enough to buy powder and shot. If Harry would have stayed at home, he would have come up here, and we might have had some fun in the garden."

"I wish he would. We never have any fun now," said Mary; "but oh! there he is," as she spied Hector peeping over the gate which led from the field into the garden. It was the first time that he had been to Dr. May's since his brother's departure, and he was rather shy, but the joyful welcome of Mary and Tom took off all reluctance, and they claimed him for a good game at play in the wood-house. Mary ran upstairs to beg to be excused the formal walk, and, luckily for her, Miss Winter was in Margaret's room. Margaret asked if it was very wet and dirty, and hearing "not very," gave gracious permission, and off went Mary and Blanche to construct some curious specimens of pottery, under the superintendence of Hector and Tom. There was a certain ditch where yellow mud was attainable, whereof the happy children concocted marbles and vases, which underwent a preparatory baking in the boys' pockets, that they might not crack in the nursery fire. Margaret only stipulated that her sisters should be well fenced in brown holland, and when Miss Winter looked grave, said, "Poor things, a little thorough play will do them a great deal of good."

Miss Winter could not see the good of groping in the dirt; and Margaret perceived that it would be one of her difficulties to know how to follow out her mother's views for the children, without vexing the good governess by not deferring to her.

In the meantime, Norman had disconsolately returned to his Euripides, and Ethel, who wanted to stay with him and look out his words, was ordered out by Miss Winter, because she had spent all yesterday indoors. Miss Winter was going to stay with Margaret, and Ethel and Flora coaxed Norman to come with them, "just one mile on the turnpike road and back again; he would be much fresher for his Greek afterwards."

He came, but he did not enliven his sisters. The three plodded on, taking a diligent constitutional walk, exchanging very few words, and those chiefly between the girls. Flora gathered some hoary clematis, and red berries, and sought in the hedge-sides for some crimson "fairy baths" to carry home; and, at the sight of the amusement Margaret derived from the placing the beauteous little Pezizas in a saucer of damp green moss, so as to hide the brown sticks on which they grew, Ethel took shame to herself for want of perception of little attentions. When she told Norman so, he answered, "There's no one who does see what is the right thing. How horrid the room looks! Everything is nohow!" added he, looking round at the ornaments and things on the tables, which had lost their air of comfort and good taste. It was not disorder, and Ethel could not see what he meant. "What's wrong?" said she.

"Oh, never mind—you can't do it. Don't try—you'll only make it worse. It will never be the same as long as we live."

"I wish you would not be so unhappy!" said Ethel.

"Never mind," again said Norman, but he put his arm round her.

"Have you done your Euripides? Can I help you? Will you construe it with me, or shall I look out your words?"

"Thank you, I don't mind that. It is the verses! I want some sense!" said Norman, running his fingers through his hair till it stood on end. "'Tis such a horrid subject, Coral Islands! As if there was anything to be said about them."

"Dear me, Norman, I could say ten thousand things, only I must not tell you what mine are, as yours are not done."

"No, don't," said Norman decidedly.

"Did you read the description of them in the Quarterly? I am sure you might get some ideas there. Shall I find it for you? It is in an old number."

"Well, do; thank you."

He rested listlessly on the sofa while his sister rummaged in a chiffonier. At last she found the article, and eagerly read him the description of the strange forms of the coral animals, and the beauties of their flower-like feelers and branching fabrics. It would once have delighted him, but his first comment was, "Nasty little brutes!" However, the next minute he thanked her, took the book, and said he could hammer something out of it, though it was too bad to give such an unclassical subject. At dusk he left off, saying he should get it done at night, his senses would come then, and he should be glad to sit up.

"Only three weeks to the holidays," said Ethel, trying to be cheerful; but his assent was depressing, and she began to fear that Christmas would only make them more sad.

Mary did not keep Tom's secret so inviolably, but that, while they were dressing for tea, she revealed to Ethel where Harry was gone. He was not yet returned, though his father and Richard were come in, and the sisters were at once in some anxiety on his account, and doubt whether they ought to let papa know of his disobedience.

Flora and Ethel, who were the first in the drawing-room, had a consultation.

"I should have told mamma directly," said Flora.

"He never did so," sighed Ethel; "things never went wrong then."

"Oh, yes, they did; don't you remember how naughty Harry was about climbing the wall, and making faces at Mrs. Richardson's servants?"

"And how ill I behaved the first day of last Christmas holidays?"

"She knew, but I don't think she told papa."

"Not that we knew of, but I believe she did tell him everything, and I think, Flora, he ought to know everything, especially now. I never could bear the way the Mackenzies used to have of thinking their parents must be like enemies, and keeping secrets from them."

"They were always threatening each other, 'I'll tell mamma,'" said Flora, "and calling us tell-tales because we told our own dear mamma everything. But it is not like that now—I neither like to worry papa, nor to bring Harry into disgrace—besides, Tom and Mary meant it for a secret."

"Papa would not be angry with him if we told him it was a secret," said Ethel; "I wish Harry would come in. There's the door—oh! it is only you."

"Whom did you expect?" said Richard, entering.

The sisters looked at each other, and Ethel, after an interval, explained their doubts about Harry.

"He is come in," said Richard; "I saw him running up to his own room, very muddy."

"Oh, I'm glad! But do you think papa ought to hear it? I don't know what's to be done. 'Tis the children's secret," said Flora.

"It will never do to have him going out with those boys continually," said Ethel—"Harvey Anderson close by all the holidays!"

"I'll try what I can do with him," said Richard. "Papa had better not hear it now, at any rate. He is very tired and sad this evening! and his arm is painful again, so we must not worry him with histories of naughtiness among the children."

"No," said Ethel decidedly, "I am glad you were there, Ritchie; I never should have thought of one time being better than another."

"Just like Ethel!" said Flora, smiling.

"Why should not you learn?" said Richard gently.

"I can't," said Ethel, in a desponding way.

"Why not? You are much sharper than most people, and, if you tried, you would know those things much better than I do, as you know how to learn history."

"It is quite a different sort of cleverness," said Flora. "Recollect Sir Isaac Newton, or Archimedes."

"Then you must have both sorts," said Ethel, "for you can do things nicely, and yet you learn very fast."

"Take care, Ethel, you are singeing your frock! Well, I really don't think you can help those things!" said Flora. "Your short sight is the reason of it, and it is of no use to try to mend it."

"Don't tell her so," said Richard. "It can't be all short sight—it is the not thinking. I do believe that if Ethel would think, no one would do things so well. Don't you remember the beautiful perspective drawing she made of this room for me to take to Oxford? That was very difficult, and wanted a great deal of neatness and accuracy, so why should she not be neat and accurate in other things? And I know you can read faces, Ethel—why don't you look there before you speak?"

"Ah! before instead of after, when I only see I have said something malapropos," said Ethel.

"I must go and see about the children," said Flora; "if the tea comes while I am gone, will you make it, Ritchie?"

"Flora despairs of me," said Ethel.

"I don't," said Richard. "Have you forgotten how to put in a pin yet?"

"No; I hope not."

"Well, then, see if you can't learn to make tea; and, by-the-bye, Ethel, which is the next christening Sunday?"

"The one after next, surely. The first of December is Monday—yes, to-morrow week is the next."

"Then I have thought of something; it would cost eighteenpence to hire Joliffe's spring-cart, and we might have Mrs. Taylor and the twins brought to church in it. Should you like to walk to Cocksmoor and settle it?"

"Oh yes, very much indeed. What a capital thought. Margaret said you would know how to manage."

"Then we will go the first fine day papa does not want me."

"I wonder if I could finish my purple frocks. But here's the tea. Now, Richard, don't tell me to make it. I should do something wrong, and Flora will never forgive you."

Richard would not let her off. He stood over her, counted her shovelfuls of tea, and watched the water into the teapot—he superintended her warming the cups, and putting a drop into each saucer. "Ah!" said Ethel, with a concluding sigh, "it makes one hotter than double equations!"

It was all right, as Flora allowed with a slightly superior smile. She thought Richard would never succeed in making a notable or elegant woman of Ethel, and it was best that the two sisters should take different lines. Flora knew that, though clever and with more accomplishments, she could not surpass Ethel in intellectual attainments, but she was certainly far more valuable in the house, and had been proved to have just the qualities in which her sister was most deficient. She did not relish hearing that Ethel wanted nothing but attention to be more than her equal, and she thought Richard mistaken. Flora's remembrance of their time of distress was less unmixedly wretched than it was with the others, for she knew she had done wonders.

The next day Norman told Ethel that he had got on very well with the verses, and finished them off late at night. He showed them to her before taking them to school on Monday morning, and Ethel

thought they were the best he had ever written. There was too much spirit and poetical beauty for a mere schoolboy task, and she begged for the foul copy to show it to her father. “I have not got it,” said Norman. “The foul copy was not like these; but when I was writing them out quite late, it was all I don’t know how. Flora’s music was in my ears, and the room seemed to get larger, and like an ocean cave; and when the candle flickered, ‘twas like the green glowing light of the sun through the waves.”

“As it says here,” said Ethel.

“And the words all came to me of themselves in beautiful flowing Latin, just right, as if it was anybody but myself doing it, and they ran off my pen in red and blue and gold, and all sorts of colours; and fine branching zig-zagging stars, like what the book described, only stranger, came dancing and radiating round my pen and the candle. I could hardly believe the verses would scan by daylight, but I can’t find a mistake. Do you try them again.”

Ethel scanned. “I see nothing wrong,” she said, “but it seems a shame to begin scanning Undine’s verses, they are too pretty. I wish I could copy them. It must have been half a dream.”

“I believe it was; they don’t seem like my own.”

“Did you dream afterwards?”

He shivered. “They had got into my head too much; my ears sang like the roaring of the sea, and I thought my feet were frozen on to an iceberg: then came darkness, and sea monsters, and drowning —it was too horrid!” and his face expressed all, and more than all, he said. “But ‘tis a quarter to seven—we must go,” said he, with a long yawn, and rubbing his eyes. “You are sure they are right, Ethel? Harry, come along.”

Ethel thought those verses ought to make a sensation, but all that came of them was a Quam optime, and when she asked Norman if no special notice had been taken of them, he said, in his languid way, “No; only Dr. Hoxton said they were better than usual.”

Ethel did not even have the satisfaction of hearing that Mr. Wilmot, happening to meet Dr. May, said to him, “Your boy has more of a poet in him than any that has come in my way. He really sometimes makes very striking verses.”

Richard watched for an opportunity of speaking to Harry, which did not at once occur, as the boy spent very little of his time at home, and, as if by tacit consent, he and Norman came in later every evening. At last, on Thursday, in the additional two hours’ leisure allowed to the boys, when the studious prepared their tasks, and the idle had some special diversion, Richard encountered him running up to his own room to fetch a newly-invented instrument for projecting stones.

“I’ll walk back to school with you,” said Richard. “I mean to run,” returned Harry.

“Is there so much hurry?” said Richard. “I am sorry for it, for I wanted to speak to you, Harry; I have something to show you.”

His manner conveyed that it related to their mother, and the sobering effect was instantaneous. “Very well,” said he, forgetting his haste. “I’ll come into your room.”

The awe-struck, shy, yet sorrowful look on his rosy face showed preparation enough, and Richard’s only preface was to say, “It is a bit of a letter that she was in course of writing to Aunt Flora, a description of us all. The letter itself is gone, but here is a copy of it. I thought you would like to read what relates to yourself.”

Richard laid before him the sheet of notepaper on which this portion of the letter was written, and left him alone with it, while he set out on the promised walk with Ethel.

They found the old woman, Granny Hall, looking like another creature, smoke-dried and withered indeed, but all briskness and animation.

“Well! be it you, sir, and the young lady?”

“Yes; here we are come to see you again,” said Richard. “I hope you are not disappointed that I’ve brought my sister this time instead of the doctor.”

"No, no, sir; I've done with the doctor for this while," said the old woman, to Ethel's great amusement. "He have done me a power of good, and thank him for it heartily; but the young lady is right welcome here—but 'tis a dirty walk for her."

"Never mind that," said Ethel, a little shyly, "I came—where are your grandchildren?"

"Oh, somewhere out among the blocks. They gets out with the other children; I can't be always after them."

"I wanted to know if these would fit them," said Ethel, beginning to undo her basket.

"Well, 'pon my word! If ever I see! Here!" stepping out to the door, "Polly—Jenny! come in, I say, this moment! Come in, ye bad girls, or I'll give you the stick; I'll break every bone of you, that I will!" all which threats were bawled out in such a good-natured, triumphant voice, and with such a delighted air, that Richard and Ethel could not help laughing.

After a few moments, Polly and Jenny made their appearance, extremely rough and ragged, but compelled by their grandmother to duck down, by way of courtesies, and, with finger in mouth, they stood, too shy to show their delight, as the garments were unfolded; Granny talking so fast that Ethel would never have brought in the stipulation, that the frocks should be worn to school and church, if Richard, in his mild, but steady way, had not brought the old woman to listen to it. She was full of asseverations that they should go; she took them to church sometimes herself, when it was fine weather and they had clothes, and they could say their catechiz as well as anybody already; yes, they should come, that they should, and next Sunday. Ethel promised to be there to introduce them to the chief lady, the president of the Committee, Mrs. Ledwich, and, with a profusion of thanks, they took leave.

They found John Taylor, just come out of the hospital, looking weak and ill, as he smoked his pipe over the fire, his wife bustling about at a great rate, and one of the infants crying. It seemed to be a great relief that they were not come to complain of Lucy, and there were many looks of surprise on hearing what their business really was. Mrs. Taylor thanked them, and appeared not to know whether she was glad or sorry; and her husband, pipe in hand, gazed at the young gentleman as if he did not comprehend the species, since he could not be old enough to be a clergyman.

Richard hoped they would find sponsors by that time; and there Mrs. Taylor gave little hope; it was a bad lot—there was no one she liked to ask to stand, she said, in a dismal voice; but there her husband put in, "I'll find some one if that's all; my missus always thinks nobody can't do nothing."

"To be sure," said the lamentable Mrs. Taylor, "all the elder ones was took to church, and I'm loath the little ones shouldn't; but you see, sir, we are poor people, and it's a long way, and they was set down in the gentleman's register book."

"But you know that is not the same, Mrs. Taylor. Surely Lucy could have told you that, when she went to school."

"No, sir, 'tis not the same—I knows that; but this is a bad place to live in—"

"Always the old song, missus!" exclaimed her husband. "Thank you kindly, sir—you have been a good friend to us, and so was Dr. May, when I was up to the hospital, through the thick of his own troubles. I believe you are in the right of it, sir, and thank you. The children shall be ready, and little Jack too, and I'll find gossips, and let 'em christened on Sunday."

"I believe you will be glad of it," said Richard; and he went on to speak of the elder children coming to school on Sunday, thus causing another whining from the wife about distance and bad weather, and no one else going that way. He said the little Halls were coming, but Mrs. Taylor begun saying she disliked their company for the children—granny let them get about so much, and they said bad words. The father again interfered. Perhaps Mr. Wilmot, who acted as chaplain at the hospital, had been talking to him, for he declared at once that they should come; and Richard suggested that he might see them home when he came from church; then, turning to the boy and girl, told them they would meet their sister Lucy, and asked them if they would not like that.

On the whole, the beginning was not inauspicious, though there might be a doubt whether old Mrs. Hall would keep all her promises. Ethel was so much diverted and pleased as to be convinced she would; Richard was a little doubtful as to her power over the wild girls. There could not be any doubt that John Taylor was in earnest, and had been worked upon just at the right moment; but there was danger that the impression would not last. “And his wife is such a horrible whining dawdle!” said Ethel—“there will be no good to be done if it depends on her.”

Richard made no answer, and Ethel presently felt remorseful for her harsh speech about a poor ignorant woman, overwhelmed with poverty, children, and weak health.

“I have been thinking a great deal about what you said last time we took this walk,” said Richard, after a considerable interval.

“Oh, have you!” cried Ethel eagerly; and the black peaty pond she was looking at seemed to sparkle with sunlight.

“Do you really mean it?” said Richard deliberately.

“Yes, to be sure;” she said, with some indignation.

“Because I think I see a way to make a beginning, but you must make up your mind to a great deal of trouble, and dirty walks, and you must really learn not to draggle your frock.”

“Well, well; but tell me.”

“This is what I was thinking. I don’t think I can go back to Oxford after Christmas. It is not fit to leave you while papa is so disabled.”

“Oh no, he could not get on at all. I heard him tell Mr. Wilmot the other day that you were his right hand.”

Ethel was glad she had repeated this, for there was a deepening colour and smiling glow of pleasure on her brother’s face, such as she had seldom seen on his delicate, but somewhat impassive features.

“He is very kind!” he said warmly. “No, I am sure I cannot be spared till he is better able to use his arm, and I don’t see any chance of that just yet. Then if I stay at home, Friday is always at my own disposal, while papa is at the hospital meeting.”

“Yes, yes, and we could go to Cocksmoor, and set up a school. How delightful!”

“I don’t think you would find it quite so delightful as you fancy,” said Richard; “the children will be very wild and ignorant, and you don’t like that at the National School.”

“Oh, but they are in such need, besides there will be no Mrs. Ledwich over me. It is just right —I shan’t mind anything. You are a capital Ritchie, for having thought of it!”

“I don’t think—if I am ever to be what I wish, that is, if I can get through at Oxford—I don’t think it can be wrong to begin this, if Mr. Ramsden does not object.”

“Oh, Mr. Ramsden never objects to anything.”

“And if Mr. Wilmot will come and set us off. You know we cannot begin without that, or without my father’s fully liking it.”

“Oh! there can be no doubt of that!”

“This one thing, Ethel, I must stipulate. Don’t you go and tell it all out at once to him. I cannot have him worried about our concerns.”

“But how—no one can question that this is right. I am sure he won’t object.”

“Stop, Ethel, don’t you see, it can’t be done for nothing? If we undertake it, we must go on with it, and when I am away it will fall on you and Flora. Well, then, it ought to be considered whether you are old enough and steady enough; and if it can be managed for you to go continually all this way, in this wild place. There will be expense too.”

Ethel looked wild with impatience, but could not gainsay these scruples, otherwise than by declaring they ought not to weigh against the good of Cocksmoor.

“It will worry him to have to consider all this,” said Richard, “and it must not be pressed upon him.”

"No," said Ethel sorrowfully; "but you don't mean to give it up."

"You are always in extremes, Ethel. All I want is to find a good time for proposing it."

She fidgeted and gave a long sigh.

"Mind," said Richard, stopping short, "I'll have nothing to do with it except on condition you are patient, and hold your tongue about it."

"I think I can, if I may talk to Margaret."

"Oh yes, to Margaret of course. We could not settle anything without her help."

"And I know what she will say," said Ethel. "Oh, I am so glad," and she jumped over three puddles in succession.

"And, Ethel, you must learn to keep your frock out of the dirt."

"I'll do anything, if you'll help me at Cocksmoor."

CHAPTER IX

For the structure that we raise,
  Time is with materials filled;
Our to-days and yesterdays,
  Are the blocks which we build.
Truly shape and fashion these,
  Leave no yawning gaps between;
Think not, because no man sees,
  Such things will remain unseen.—LONGFELLOW.

When Ethel came home, burning with the tidings of the newly-excited hopes for Cocksmoor, they were at once stopped by Margaret eagerly saying, “Is Richard come in? pray call him;” then on his entrance, “Oh, Richard, would you be so kind as to take this to the bank. I don’t like to send it by any one else—it is so much;” and she took from under her pillows a velvet bag, so heavy, that it weighed down her slender white hand.

“What, he has given you the care of his money?” said Ethel.

“Yes; I saw him turning something out of his waistcoat-pocket into the drawer of the looking-glass, and sighing in that very sad way. He said his fees had come to such an accumulation that he must see about sending them to the bank; and then he told me of the delight of throwing his first fee into dear mamma’s lap, when they were just married, and his old uncle had given up to him, and how he had brought them to her ever since; he said she had spoiled him by taking all trouble off his hands. He looked at it, as if it was so sorrowful to him to have to dispose of it, that I begged him not to plague himself any more, but let me see about it, as dear mamma used to do; so he said I was spoiling him too, but he brought me the drawer, and emptied it out here: when he was gone, I packed it up, and I have been waiting to ask Richard to take it all to the bank, out of his sight.”

“You counted it?” said Richard.

“Yes—there’s fifty—I kept seventeen towards the week’s expenses. Just see that it is right,” said Margaret, showing her neat packets.

“Oh, Ritchie,” said Ethel, “what can expense signify, when all that has been kicking about loose in an open drawer? What would not one of those rolls do?”

“I think I had better take them out of your way,” said Richard quietly. “Am I to bring back the book to you, Margaret?”

“Yes, do,” said Margaret; “pray do not tease him with it.” And as her brother left the room, she continued, “I wish he was better. I think he is more oppressed now than even at first. The pain of his arm, going on so long, seems to me to have pulled him down; it does not let him sleep, and, by the end of the day, he gets worn and fagged by seeing so many people, and exerting himself to talk and think; and often, when there is something that must be asked, I don’t know how to begin, for it seems as if a little more would be too much for him.”

“Yes, Richard is right,” said Ethel mournfully; “it will not do to press him about our concerns; but do you think him worse to-day?”

“He did not sleep last night, and he is always worse when he does not drive out into the country; the fresh air, and being alone with Richard, are a rest for him. To-day is especially trying; he does not think poor old Mr. Southern will get through the evening, and he is so sorry for the daughter.”

“Is he there now?”

“Yes; he thought of something that might be an alleviation, and he would go, though he was tired. I am afraid the poor daughter will detain him, and he is not fit to go through such things now.”

"No, I hope he will soon come; perhaps Richard will meet him. But, oh, Margaret, what do you think Richard and I have been talking of?" and, without perception of fit times and seasons, Ethel would have told her story, but Margaret, too anxious to attend to her, said, "Hark! was not that his step?" and Dr. May came in, looking mournful and fatigued.

"Well," said he, "I was just too late. He died as I got there, and I could not leave the daughter till old Mrs. Bowers came."

"Poor thing," said Margaret. "He was a good old man."

"Yes," said Dr. May, sitting wearily down, and speaking in a worn-out voice. "One can't lightly part with a man one has seen at church every Sunday of one's life, and exchanged so many friendly words with over his counter. 'Tis a strong bond of neighbourliness in a small place like this, and, as one grows old, changes come heavier—'the clouds return again after the rain.' Thank you, my dear," as Ethel fetched his slippers, and placed a stool for his feet, feeling somewhat ashamed of thinking it an achievement to have, unbidden, performed a small act of attention which would have come naturally from any of the others.

"Papa, you will give me the treat of drinking tea with me?" said Margaret, who saw the quiet of her room would suit him better than the bustle of the children downstairs. "Thank you," as he gave a smile of assent.

That Margaret could not be made to listen this evening was plain, and all that Ethel could do, was to search for some books on schools. In seeking for them, she displayed such confusion in the chiffonier, that Flora exclaimed, "Oh, Ethel, how could you leave it so?"

"I was in a hurry, looking for something for Norman. I'll set it to rights," said Ethel, gulping down her dislike of being reproved by Flora, with the thought that mamma would have said the same.

"My dear!" cried Flora presently, jumping up, "what are you doing? piling up those heavy books on the top of the little ones; how do you think they will ever stand? let me do it."

"No, no, Flora;" and Richard, in a low voice, gave Ethel some advice, which she received, seated on the floor, in a mood between temper and despair.

"He is going to teach her to do it on the principles of gravitation," said Flora.

Richard did not do it himself, but, by his means, Ethel, without being in the least irritated, gave the chiffonier a thorough dusting and setting-to-rights, sorting magazines, burning old catalogues, and finding her own long-lost 'Undine', at which she was so delighted that she would have forgotten all; in proceeding to read it, curled up on the floor amongst the heaps of pamphlets, if another gentle hint from Richard had not made her finish her task so well, as to make Flora declare it was a pleasure to look in, and Harry pronounce it to be all neat and ship-shape.

There was no speaking to Margaret the next morning—it was French day—and Ethel had made strong resolutions to behave better; and whether there were fewer idioms, or that she was trying to understand, instead of carping at the master's explanations, they came to no battle; Flora led the conversation, and she sustained her part with credit, and gained an excellent mark.

Flora said afterwards to Margaret, "I managed nicely for her. I would not let M. Ballompre blunder upon any of the subjects Ethel feels too deeply to talk of in good French, and really Ethel has a great talent for languages. How fast she gets on with Italian!"

"That she does," said Margaret. "Suppose you send her up, Flora—you must want to go and draw or practice, and she may do her arithmetic here, or read to me."

It was the second time Margaret had made this proposal, and it did not please Flora, who had learned to think herself necessary to her sister, and liked to be the one to do everything for her. She was within six weeks of seventeen, and surely she need not be sent down again to the school-room, when she had been so good a manager of the whole family. She was fond of study and of accomplishments, but she thought she might be emancipated from Miss Winter; and it was not pleasant to her that a sister, only eighteen months older, and almost dependant on her, should have authority to dispose of her time.

"I practise in the evening," she said, "and I could draw here, if I wished, but I have some music to copy."

Margaret was concerned at the dissatisfaction, though not understanding the whole of it: "You know, dear Flora," she said, "I need not take up all your time now."

"Don't regret that," said Flora. "I like nothing so well as waiting on you, and I can attend to my own affairs very well here."

"I'll tell you why I proposed it," said Margaret. "I think it would be a relief for Ethel to escape from Miss Winter's beloved Friday questions."

"Great nonsense they are," said Flora. "Why don't you tell Miss Winter they are of no use?"

"Mamma never interfered with them," said Margaret. "She only kept Ethel in her own hands, and if you would be so kind as to change sometimes and sit in the school-room, we could spare Ethel, without hurting Miss Winter's feelings."

"Well, I'll call Ethel, if you like, but I shall go and practise in the drawing-room. The old school-room piano is fit for nothing but Mary to hammer upon."

Flora went away, evidently annoyed, and Margaret's conjectures on the cause of it were cut short by Ethel running in with a slate in one hand and two books in the other, the rest having all tumbled down on the stairs.

"Oh, Margaret, I am so glad to come to you. Miss Winter has set Mary to read 'To be, or not to be,' and it would have driven me distracted to have stayed there. I have got a most beautiful sum in Compound Proportion, about a lion, a wolf, and a bear eating up a carcase, and as soon as they have done it, you shall hear me say my ancient geography, and then we will do a nice bit of Tasso; and if we have any time after that, I have got such a thing to tell you—only I must not tell you now, or I shall go on talking and not finish my lessons."

It was not till all were done, that Ethel felt free to exclaim, "Now for what I have been longing to tell you—Richard is going to—" But the fates were unpropitious. Aubrey trotted in, expecting to be amused; next came Norman, and Ethel gave up in despair; and, after having affronted Flora in the morning, Margaret was afraid of renewing the offence, by attempting to secure Ethel as her companion for the afternoon; so not till after the walk could Margaret contrive to claim the promised communication, telling Ethel to come and settle herself cosily by her.

"I should have been very glad of you last evening," said she, "for papa went to sleep, and my book was out of reach."

"Oh, I am sorry; how I pity you, poor Margaret!"

"I suppose I have grown lazy," said Margaret, "for I don't mind those things now. I am never sorry for a quiet time to recollect and consider."

"It must be like the waiting in the dark between the slides of a magic lantern," said Ethel; "I never like to be quiet. I get so unhappy."

"I am glad of resting and recollecting," said Margaret. "It has all been so like a dream, that merry morning, and then, slowly waking to find myself here in dear mamma's place, and papa watching over me. Sometimes I think I have not half understood what it really is, and that I don't realise, that if I was up and about, I should find the house without her."

"Yes; that is the aching part!" said Ethel. "I am happy, sitting on her bed here with you. You are a little of her, besides being my own dear Peg-top! You are very lucky to miss the mealtimes and the evenings."

"That is the reason I don't feel it wrong to like to have papa sitting with me all the evening," said Margaret, "though it may make it worse for you to have him away. I don't think it selfish in me to keep him. He wants quiet so much, or to talk a little when it suits him; we are too many now, when he is tired."

"Oh, it is best," said Ethel. "Nothing that you do is selfish—don't talk of it, dear Margaret. It will be something like old times when you come down again."

"But all this time you are not telling me what I want so much to hear," said Margaret, "about Cocksmoor. I am so glad Richard has taken it up."

"That he has. We are to go every Friday, and hire a room, and teach the children. Once a week will do a great deal, if we can but make them wish to learn. It is a much better plan than mine; for if they care about it, they can come to school here on Sunday."

"It is excellent," said Margaret, "and if he is at home till Easter, it will give it a start, and put you in the way of it, and get you through the short days and dark evenings, when you could not so well walk home without him."

"Yes, and then we can all teach; Flora, and Mary, and you, when you are well again. Richard says it will be disagreeable, but I don't think so—they are such unsophisticated people. That Granny Hall is such a funny old woman; and the whole place wants nothing but a little care, to do very well."

"You must prepare for disappointments, dear Ethel."

"I know; I know nothing is done without drawbacks; but I am so glad to make some beginning."

"So am I. Do you know, mamma and I were one day talking over those kind of things, and she said she had always regretted that she had so many duties at home, that she could not attend as much to the poor as she would like; but she hoped now we girls were growing up, we should be able to do more.

"Did she?" was all Ethel said, but she was deeply gratified.

"I've been wanting to tell you. I knew you would like to hear it. It seems to set us to work so happily."

"I only wish we could begin," said Ethel, "but Richard is so slow! Of course we can't act without papa's consent and Mr. Wilmot's help, and he says papa must not be worried about it, he must watch for his own time to speak about it."

"Yes" said Margaret.

"I know—I would not have it otherwise; but what is tiresome is this. Richard is very good, but he is so dreadfully hard to stir up, and what's worse, so very much afraid of papa, that while he is thinking about opportunities, they will all go by, and then it will be Easter, and nothing done!"

"He is not so much afraid of papa as he was," said Margaret. "He has felt himself useful and a comfort, and papa is gentler; and that has cheered him out of the desponding way that kept him back from proposing anything."

"Perhaps," said Ethel; "but I wish it was you. Can't you? you always know how to manage."

"No; it is Richard's affair, and he must do as he thinks fit. Don't sigh, dear Ethel—perhaps he may soon speak, and, if not, you can be preparing in a quiet way all the time. Don't you remember how dear mamma used to tell us that things, hastily begun, never turn out well?"

"But this is not hasty. I've been thinking about it these six weeks," said Ethel. "If one does nothing but think, it is all no better than a vision. I want to be doing."

"Well, you can be doing—laying a sound foundation," said Margaret. "The more you consider, and the wiser you make yourself, the better it will be when you do set to work."

"You mean by curing myself of my slovenly ways and impatient temper?"

"I don't know that I was exactly thinking of that," said Margaret, "but that ought to be the way. If we are not just the thing in our niche at home, I don't think we can do much real good elsewhere."

"It would be hollow, show-goodness," said Ethel. "Yes, that is true; and it comes across me now, and then what a horrid wretch I am, to be wanting to undertake so much, when I leave so much undone. But, do you know, Margaret, there's no one such a help in those ways as Richard. Though he is so precise, he is never tiresome. He makes me see things, and do them neatly, without plaguing me, and putting me in a rage. I'm not ready to bite off my own fingers, or kick all the rattle-traps over and leave them, as I am when Miss Winter scolds me, or nurse, or even Flora sometimes; but it is as if I was gratifying him, and his funny little old bachelor tidyisms divert me; besides, he teaches me the theory, and never lays hold of my poor fingers, and, when they won't bend the wrong way, calls them frogs."

"He is a capital master for you," said Margaret, much amused and pleased, for Richard was her especial darling, and she triumphed in any eulogy from those who ordinarily were too apt to regard his dullness with superior compassion.

"If he would only read our books, and enter into poetry and delight in it; but it is all nonsense to him," said Ethel. "I can't think how people can be so different; but, oh! here he comes. Ritchie, you should not come upon us before we are aware."

"What? I should have heard no good of myself?"

"Great good," said Margaret—"she was telling me you would make a neat-handed woman of her in time."

"I don't see why she should not be as neat as other people," said Richard gravely. "Has she been telling you our plan?"

And it was again happily discussed; Ethel, satisfied by finding him fully set upon the design, and Margaret giving cordial sympathy and counsel. When Ethel was called away, Margaret said, "I am so glad you have taken it up, not only for the sake of Cocksmoor, but of Ethel. It is good for her not to spend her high soul in dreams."

"I am afraid she does not know what she undertakes," said Richard.

"She does not; but you will keep her from being turned back. It is just the thing to prevent her energies from running to waste, and her being so much with you, and working under you, is exactly what one would have chosen."

"By contraries!" said Richard, smiling. "That is what I was afraid of. I don't half understand or follow her, and when I think a thing nonsense, I see you all calling it very fine, and I don't know what to make of it—"

"You are making yourself out more dull than you are," said Margaret affectionately.

"I know I am stupid, and seem tame and cold," said Richard, "and you are the only one that does not care about it. That is what makes me wish Norman was the eldest. If I were as clever as he, I could do so much with Ethel, and be so much more to papa."

"No, you would not. You would have other things in your head. You would not be the dear, dear old Ritchie that you are. You would not be a calm, cautious, steady balance to the quicksilver heads some of us have got. No, no, Norman's a very fine fellow, a very dear fellow, but he would not do half so well for our eldest—he is too easily up, and down again."

"And I am getting into my old way of repining," said Richard. "I don't mind so much, since my father has at least one son to be proud of, and I can be of some use to him now."

"Of the greatest, and to all of us. I am so glad you can stay after Christmas, and papa was pleased at your offering, and said he could not spare you at all, though he would have tried, if it had been any real advantage to you."

"Well, I hope he will approve. I must speak to him as soon as I can find him with his mind tolerably disengaged."

The scene that ensued that evening in the magic lantern before Margaret's bed, did not promise much for the freedom of her father's mind. Harry entered with a resolute manner. "Margaret, I wanted to speak to you," said he, spreading himself out, with an elbow on each arm of the chair. "I want you to speak to papa about my going to sea. It is high time to see about it—I shall be thirteen on the fourth of May."

"And you mean it seriously, Harry?"

"Yes, of course I do, really and truly; and if it is to come to pass, it is time to take measures. Don't you see, Margaret?"

"It is time, as you say," answered Margaret reflectingly, and sadly surveying the bright boy, rosy cheeked, round faced, and blue eyed, with the childish gladsomeness of countenance, that made it strange that his lot in life should be already in the balance.

"I know what you will all tell me, that it is a hard life, but I must get my own living some way or other, and I should like that way the best," said he earnestly.

"Should you like to be always far from home?"

"I should come home sometimes, and bring such presents to Mary, and baby, and all of you; and I don't know what else to be, Margaret. I should hate to be a doctor—I can't abide sick people; and I couldn't write sermons, so I can't be a clergyman; and I won't be a lawyer, I vow, for Harvey Anderson is to be a lawyer—so there's nothing left but soldiers and sailors, and I mean to be a sailor!"

"Well, Harry, you may do your duty, and try to do right, if you are a sailor, and that is the point."

"Ay, I was sure you would not set your face against it, now you know Alan Ernescliffe."

"If you were to be like him—" Margaret found herself blushing, and broke off.

"Then you will ask papa about it?"

"You had better do so yourself. Boys had better settle such serious affairs with their fathers, without setting their sisters to interfere. What's the matter, Harry—you are not afraid to speak to papa?"

"Only for one thing," said Harry. "Margaret, I went out to shoot pee-wits last Saturday with two fellows, and I can't speak to papa while that's on my mind."

"Then you had better tell him at once."

"I knew you would say so; but it would be like a girl, and it would be telling of the two fellows."

"Not at all; papa would not care about them."

"You see," said Harry, twisting a little, "I knew I ought not; but they said I was afraid of a gun, and that I had no money. Now I see that was chaff, but I didn't then, and Norman wasn't there."

"I am so glad you have told me all this, Harry dear, for I knew you had been less at home of late, and I was almost afraid you were not going on quite well."

"That's what it is," said Harry. "I can't stand things at all, and I can't go moping about as Norman does. I can't live without fun, and now Norman isn't here, half the time it turns to something I am sorry for afterwards."

"But, Harry, if you let yourself be drawn into mischief here for want of Norman, what would you do at sea?"

"I should be an officer!"

"I am afraid," said Margaret, smiling, "that would not make much difference inside, though it might outside. You must get the self-control, and leave off being afraid to be said to be afraid."

Harry fidgeted. "I should start fresh, and be out of the way of the Andersons," he said. "That Anderson junior is a horrid fellow—he spites Norman, and he bullied me, till I was big enough to show him that it would not do—and though I am so much younger, he is afraid of me. He makes up to me, and tries to get me into all the mischief that is going."

"And you know that, and let him lead you? Oh, Harry!"

"I don't let him lead me," said Harry indignantly, "but I won't have them say I can't do things."

Margaret laughed, and Harry presently perceived what she meant, but instead of answering, he began to boast, "There never was a May in disgrace yet, and there never shall be."

"That is a thing to be very thankful for," said Margaret, "but you know there may be much harm without public disgrace. I never heard of one of the Andersons being in disgrace yet."

"No—shabby fellows, that just manage to keep fair with old Hoxton, and make a show," said Harry. "They look at translations, and copy old stock verses. Oh, it was such fun the other day. What do you think? Norman must have been dreaming, for he had taken to school, by mistake, Richard's old Gradus that Ethel uses, and there were ever so many rough copies of hers sticking in it."

"Poor Ethel! What consternation she would be in! I hope no one found it out."

"Why, Anderson junior was gaping about in despair for sense for his verses—he comes on that, and slyly copies a whole set of her old ones, done when she—Norman, I mean—was in the fifth form. His subject was a river, and hers Babylon; but, altering a line or two, it did just as well. He never

guessed I saw him, and thought he had done it famously. He showed them up, and would have got some noted good mark, but that, by great good luck, Ethel had made two of her pentameters too short, which he hadn't the wit to find out, thinking all Norman did must be right. So he has shown up a girl's verses—isn't that rare?" cried Harry, dancing on his chair with triumph.

"I hope no one knows they were hers?"

"Bless you, no!" said Harry, who regarded Ethel's attainments as something contraband. "D'ye think I could tell? No, that's the only pity, that he can't hear it; but, after all, I don't care for anything he does, now I know he has shown up a girl's verses."

"Are these verses of poor Ethel's safe at home?"

"Yes, I took care of that. Mind you don't tell anyone, Margaret; I never told even Norman."

"But all your school-fellows aren't like these? You have Hector Ernescliffe."

"He's a nice fellow enough, but he is little, and down in the school. 'Twould be making a fourth form of myself to be after him. The fact is, Margaret, they are a low, ungentlemanly lot just now, about sixth and upper fifth form," said Harry, lowering his voice into an anxious confidential tone; "and since Norman has been less amongst them, they've got worse; and you see, now home is different, and he isn't like what he was, I'm thrown on them, and I want to get out of it. I didn't know that was it before, but Richard showed me what set me on thinking of it, and I see she knew all about it."

"That she did! There is a great deal in what you say, Harry, but you know she thought nothing would be of real use but changing within. If you don't get a root of strength in yourself, your ship will be no better to you than school—there will be idle midshipmen as well as idle school-boys."

"Yes, I know," said Harry; "but do you think papa will consent? She would not have minded."

"I can't tell. I should think he would; but if any scheme is to come to good, it must begin by your telling him of the going out shooting."

Harry sighed. "I'd have done it long ago if she was here," he said. "I never did anything so bad before without telling, and I don't like it at all. It seems to come between him and me when I wish him good-night."

"Then, Harry, pray do tell him. You'll have no comfort if you don't."

"I know I shan't; but then he'll be so angry! And, do you know, Margaret, 'twas worse than I told you, for a covey of partridges got up, and unluckily I had got the gun, and I fired and killed one, and that was regular poaching, you know! And when we heard some one coming, how we did cut! Ax—the other fellow, I mean, got it, and cooked it in his bedroom, and ate it for supper; and he laughs about it, but I have felt so horrid all the week! Suppose a keeper had got a summons!"

"I can only say again, the only peace will be in telling."

"Yes; but he will be so angry. When that lot of fellows a year or two ago did something like it, and shot some of the Abbotstoke rabbits, don't you remember how much he said about its being disgraceful, and ordering us never to have anything to do with their gunnery? And he will think it so very bad to have gone out on a lark just now! Oh, I wish I hadn't done it."

"So do I, indeed, Harry! but I am sure, even it he should be angry at first, he will be pleased with your confessing."

Harry looked very reluctant and disconsolate, and his sister did not wonder for Dr. May's way of hearing of a fault was never to be calculated on. "Come, Harry," said she, "if he is ever so angry, though I don't think he will be, do you think that will be half as bad as this load at your heart? Besides, if you are not bold enough to speak to him, do you think you can ever be brave enough for a sailor?"

"I will," said Harry, and the words were hardly spoken, before his father's hand was on the door. He was taken by surprise at the moment of trial coming so speedily, and had half a mind to retreat by the other door; he was stayed by the reflection that Margaret would think him a coward, unfit for a sailor, and he made up his mind to endure whatever might betide.

"Harry here? This is company I did not expect."

"Harry has something to say to you, papa."

"Eh! my boy, what is it?" said he kindly.

"Papa, I have killed a partridge. Two fellows got me to hire a gun, and go out shooting with them last Saturday," said Harry, speaking firmly and boldly now he had once begun. "We meant only to go after pee-wits, but a partridge got up, and I killed it."

Then came a pause. Harry stopped, and Dr. May waited, half expecting to hear that the boy was only brought to confession by finding himself in a scrape. Margaret spoke. "And he could not be happy till he had told you."

"Is it so? Is that the whole?" said the doctor, looking at his son with a keen glance, between affection and inquiry, as if only waiting to be sure the confession was free, before he gave his free forgiveness.

"Yes, papa," said Harry, his voice and lip losing their firmness, as the sweetness of expression gained the day on his father's face. "Only that I know—'twas very wrong—especially now—and I am very sorry—and I beg your pardon."

The latter words came between sighs, fast becoming sobs, in spite of Harry's attempts to control them, as his father held out his arm, and drew him close to him.

"That's mamma's own brave boy," he said in his ear—in a voice which strong feeling had reduced to such a whisper, that even Margaret could not hear—she only saw how Harry, sobbing aloud, clung tighter and tighter to him, till he said "Take care of my arm!" and Harry sprang back at least a yard, with such a look of dismay, that the doctor laughed. "No harm done!" said he. "I was only a little in dread of such a young lion! Comeback, Harry," and he took his hand. "It was a bad piece of work, and it will never do for you to let yourself be drawn into every bit of mischief that is on foot; I believe I ought to give you a good lecture on it, but I can't do it, after such a straightforward confession. You must have gone through enough in the last week, not to be likely to do it again."

"Yes, papa—thank you."

"I suppose I must not ask you any questions about it, for fear of betraying the fellows," said Dr. May, half smiling.

"Thank you, papa," said Harry, infinitely relieved and grateful, and quite content for some space to lean in silence against the chair, with that encircling arm round him, while some talk passed between his father and Margaret.

What a world of thought passed through the boy's young soul in that space! First, there was a thrill of intense, burning love to his father, scarcely less fondness to his sweet motherly sister; a clinging feeling to every chair and table of that room, which seemed still full of his mother's presence; a numbering over of all the others with ardent attachment, and a flinging from him with horror the notion of asking to be far away from that dearest father, that loving home, that arm that was round him. Anything rather than be without them in the dreary world! But then came the remembrance of cherished visions, the shame of relinquishing a settled purpose, the thought of weary morrows, with the tempters among his playmates, and his home blank and melancholy; and the roaming spirit of enterprise stirred again, and reproached him with being a baby, for fancying he could stay at home for ever. He would come back again with such honours as Alan Ernescliffe had brought, and oh! if his father so prized them in a stranger, what would it be in his own son? Come home to such a greeting as would make up for the parting! Harry's heart throbbed again for the boundless sea, the tall ship, and the wondrous foreign climes, where he had so often lived in fancy. Should he, could he speak: was this the moment? and he stood gazing at the fire, oppressed with the weighty reality of deciding his destiny. At last Dr. May looked in his face, "Well, what now, boy? You have your head full of something—what's coming next?"

Out it came, "Papa will you let me be a sailor?"

"Oh!" said Dr. May, "that is come on again, is it? I thought that you had forgotten all that."

"No, papa," said Harry, with the manly coolness that the sense of his determination gave him —"it was not a mere fancy, and I have never had it out of my head. I mean it quite in earnest—I had

rather be a sailor. I don't wish to get away from Latin and Greek, I don't mind them; but I think I could be a better sailor than anything. I know it is not all play, but I am willing to rough it; and I am getting so old, it is time to see about it, so will you consent to it, papa?"

"Well! there's some sense in your way of putting it," said Dr. May. "You have it strong in your head then, and you know 'tis not all fair-weather work!"

"That I do; Alan told me histories, and I've read all about it; but one must rough it anywhere, and if I am ever so far away, I'll try not to forget what's right. I'll do my duty, and not care for danger."

"Well said, my man; but remember 'tis easier talking by one's own fireside than doing when the trial comes."

"And will you let me, papa?"

"I'll think about it. I can't make up my mind as 'quick as directly,' you know, Harry," said his father, smiling kindly, "but I won't treat it as a boy's fancy, for you've spoken in a manly way, and deserve to be attended to. Now run down, and tell the girls to put away their work, for I shall come down in a minute to read prayers."

Harry went, and his father sighed and mused! "That's a fine fellow! So this is what comes of bringing sick sailors home—one's own boys must be catching the infection. Little monkey, he talks as wisely as if he were forty! He is really set on it, do you think, Margaret? I'm afraid so!"

"I think so," said Margaret; "I don't think he ever has it out of his mind!"

"And when the roving spirit once lays hold of a lad, he must have his way—he is good for nothing else," said Dr. May.

"I suppose a man may keep from evil in that profession as well as in any other," said Margaret.

"Aha! you are bit too, are you?" said the doctor; "'tis the husbandman and viper, is it?" Then his smile turned into a heavy sigh, as he saw he had brought colour to Margaret's pale cheek, but she answered calmly, "Dear mamma did not think it would be a bad thing for him."

"I know," said the doctor, pausing; "but it never came to this with her."

"I wish he had chosen something else; but—" and Margaret thought it right to lay before her father some part of what he had said of the temptations of the school at Stoneborough. The doctor listened and considered at last he rose, and said, "Well, I'll set Ritchie to write to Ernescliffe, and hear what he says. What must be, must be. 'Tis only asking me to give up the boy, that's all;" and as he left the room, his daughter again heard his sigh and half-uttered words, "Oh, Maggie, Maggie!"

CHAPTER X

A tale
Would rouse adventurous courage in a boy,
And make him long to be a mariner,
That he might rove the main.

—*SOUTHEY.*

Etheldred had the satisfaction of seeing the Taylors at school on Sunday, but no Halls made their appearance, and, on inquiry, she was told, "Please ma'am, they said they would not come;" so Ethel condemned Granny Hall as "a horrid, vile, false, hypocritical old creature! It was no use having anything more to do with her."

"Very well," said Richard; "then I need not speak to my father."

"Ritchie now! you know I meant no such thing!"

"You know, it is just what will happen continually."

"Of course there will be failures, but this is so abominable, when they had those nice frocks, and those two beautiful eighteen-penny shawls! There are three shillings out of my pound thrown away!"

"Perhaps there was some reason to prevent them. We will go and see."

"We shall only hear some more palavering. I want to have no more to say to—" but here Ethel caught herself up, and began to perceive what a happiness it was that she had not the power of acting on her own impulses.

The twins and their little brother of two years old were christened in the afternoon, and Flora invited the parents to drink tea in the kitchen, and visit Lucy, while Ethel and Mary each carried a baby upstairs to exhibit to Margaret.

Richard, in the meantime, had a conversation with John Taylor, and learned a good deal about the district, and the number of the people. At tea, he began to rehearse his information, and the doctor listened with interest, which put Ethel in happy agitation, believing that the moment was come, and Richard seemed to be only waiting for the conclusion of a long tirade against those who ought to do something for the place, when behold! Blanche was climbing on her father's knee, begging for one of his Sunday stories.

Etheldred was cruelly disappointed, and could not at first rejoice to see her father able again to occupy himself with his little girl. The narration, in his low tones, roused her from her mood of vexation. It was the story of David, which he told in language scriptural and poetical, so pretty and tender in its simplicity, that she could not choose but attend. Ever and anon there was a glance towards Harry, as if he were secretly likening his own "yellow-haired laddie" to the "shepherd boy, ruddy, and of a fair countenance."

"So Tom and Blanche," he concluded, "can you tell me how we may be like the shepherd-boy, David?"

"There aren't giants now," said Tom.

"Wrong is a giant," said his little sister.

"Right, my white May-flower, and what then?"

"We are to fight," said Tom.

"Yes, and mind, the giant with all his armour may be some great thing we have to do: but what did David begin with when he was younger?"

"The lion and the bear."

"Ay, and minding his sheep. Perhaps little things, now you are little children, may be like the lion and the bear—so kill them off—get rid of them—cure yourself of whining or dawdling, or

whatever it be, and mind your sheep well," said he, smiling sweetly in answer to the children's earnest looks as they caught his meaning, "and if you do, you will not find it near so hard to deal with your great giant struggle when it comes."

Ah! thought Ethel, it suits me as well as the children. I have a great giant on Cocksmoor, and here I am, not allowed to attack him, because, perhaps, I am not minding my sheep, and letting my lion and my bear run loose about the house.

She was less impatient this week, partly from the sense of being on probation, and partly because she, in common with all the rest, was much engrossed with Harry's fate. He came home every day at dinner-time with Norman to ask if Alan Ernescliffe's letter had come; and at length Mary and Tom met them open-mouthed with the news that Margaret had it in her room.

Thither they hastened. Margaret held it out with a smile of congratulation. "Here it is, Harry; papa said you were to have it, and consider it well, and let him know, when you had taken time. You must do it soberly. It is once for all."

Harry's impetuosity was checked, and he took the letter quietly. His sister put her hand on his shoulder, "Would you mind my kissing you, dear Harry?" and as he threw his arms round her neck, she whispered, "Pray that you may choose right."

He went quietly away, and Norman begged to know what had been Alan Ernescliffe's advice.

"I can scarcely say he gave any direct advice," said Margaret; "He would not have thought that called for. He said, no doubt there were hardships and temptations, more or less, according to circumstances; but weighing one thing with another, he thought it gave as fair a chance of happiness as other professions, and the discipline and regularity had been very good for himself, as well as for many others he had known. He said, when a man is willing to go wrong there is much to help him, but when he is resolved on doing right, he need not be prevented."

"That is what you may say of anything," said Norman.

"Just so; and it answered papa's question, whether it was exposing Harry to more temptation than he must meet with anywhere. That was the reason it was such a comfort to have anyone to write to, who understands it so well."

"Yes, and knows Harry's nature."

"He said he had been fortunate in his captains, and had led, on the whole, a happy life at sea; and he thought if it was so with him, Harry was likely to enjoy it more, being of a hardy adventurous nature, and a sailor from choice, not from circumstances."

"Then he advised for it? I did not think he would; you know he will not let Hector be a sailor."

"He told me he thought only a strong natural bent that way made it desirable, and that he believed Hector only wished it from imitation of him. He said too, long ago, that he thought Harry cut out for a sailor.

"A spirited fellow!" said Norman, with a look of saddened pride and approval, not at all like one so near the same age. "He is up to anything, afraid of nothing, he can lick any boy in the school already. It will be worse than ever without him!"

"Yes, you will miss your constant follower. He has been your shadow ever since he could walk. But there's the clock, I must not keep you any longer; good-bye, Norman."

Harry gave his brother the letter as soon as they were outside the house, and, while he read it, took his arm and guided him. "Well," said Norman as he finished.

"It is all right," said Harry; and the two brothers said no more; there was something rising up in their throats at the thought that they had very few more walks to take together to Bishop Whichcote's school; Norman's heart was very full at the prospect of another vacancy in his home, and Harry's was swelling between the ardour of enterprise and the thought of bidding good-bye to each familiar object, and, above all, to the brother who had been his model and admiration from babyhood.

"June!" at length he broke out, "I wish you were going too. I should not mind it half so much if you were."

"Nonsense, Harry! you want to be July after June all your life, do you? You'll be much more of a man without me."

That evening Dr. May called Harry into his study to ask him if his mind was made up; he put the subject fairly before him, and told him not to be deterred from choosing what he thought would be for the best by any scruples about changing his mind. "We shall not think a bit the worse of you; better now, than too late."

There was that in his face and tone that caused Harry to say, in a stifled voice, "I did not think you would care so much, papa; I won't go, if you do."

Dr. May put his hand on his shoulder, and was silent. Harry felt a strange mixture of hope and fear, joy and grief, disappointment and relief. "You must not give it up on that account, my dear," he said at length; "I should not let you see this, if it did not happen at a time when I can't command myself as I ought. If you were an only son, it might be your duty to stay; being one of many, 'tis nonsense to make a rout about parting with you. If it is better for you, it is better for all of us; and we shall do very well when you are once fairly gone. Don't let that influence you for a moment."

Harry paused, not that he doubted, but he was collecting his energies—"Then, papa, I choose the navy."

"Then it is done, Harry. You have chosen in a dutiful, unselfish spirit, and I trust it will prosper with you; for I am sure your father's blessing—aye, and your mother's too, go with you! Now then," after a pause, "go and call Richard. I want him to write to Ernescliffe about that naval school. You must take your leave of the Whichcote foundation on Friday. I shall go and give Dr. Hoxton notice tomorrow, and get Tom's name down instead."

And when the name of Thomas May was set down, Dr. Hoxton expressed his trust that it would pass through the school as free from the slightest blemish as those of Richard, Norman, and Harry May.

Now that Harry's destiny was fixed, Ethel began to think of Cocksmoor again, and she accomplished another walk there with Richard, Flora, and Mary, to question Granny Hall about the children's failure.

The old woman's reply was a tissue of contradictions: the girls were idle hussies, all contrary: they plagued the very life out of her, and she represented herself as using the most frightful threats, if they would not go to school. Breaking every bone in their skin was the least injury she promised them; till Mary, beginning to think her a cruel old woman, took hold of her brother's coat-tails for protection.

"But I am afraid, Mrs. Hall," said Richard, in that tone which might be either ironical or simple, "if you served them so, they would never be able to get to school at all, poor things."

"Bless you, sir, d'ye think I'd ever lay a finger near them; it's only the way one must talk to children, you see," said she, patronising his inexperience.

"Perhaps they have found that out," said Richard. Granny looked much entertained, and laughed triumphantly and shrewdly, "ay, ay, that they have, the lasses—they be sharp enough for anything, that they be. Why, when I tell little Jenny that there's the black man coming after her, what does she do but she ups and says, 'Granny, I know 'tis only the wind in the chimney.'"

"Then I don't think it seems to answer," said Richard. "Just suppose you were to try for once, really punishing them when they won't obey you, perhaps they would do it next time."

"Why, sir, you see I don't like to take the stick to them; they've got no mother, you see, sir."

Mary thought her a kind grandmother, and came out from behind her brother.

"I think it would be kinder to do it for once. What do you think they will do as they grow older, if you don't keep them in order when they are little?"

This was foresight beyond Granny Hall, who began to expatiate on the troubles she had undergone in their service, and the excellence of Sam. There was certainly a charm in her manners, for Ethel forgot her charge of ingratitude, the other sisters were perfectly taken with her, nor could

they any of them help giving credence to her asseverations that Jenny and Polly should come to school next Sunday.

They soon formed another acquaintance; a sharp-faced woman stood in their path, with a little girl in her hand, and arrested them with a low curtsey, and not a very pleasant voice, addressing herself to Flora, who was quite as tall as Richard, and appeared the person of most consequence.

"If you please, miss, I wanted to speak to you. I have got a little girl here, and I want to send her to school, only I have no shoes for her."

"Why, surely, if she can run about here on the heath, she can go to school," said Flora.

"Oh! but there is all the other children to point at her. The poor thing would be daunted, you see, miss; if I could but get some friend to give her a pair of shoes, I'd send her in a minute. I want her to get some learning; as I am always saying, I'd never keep her away, if I had but got the clothes to send her in. I never lets her be running on the common, like them Halls, as it's a shame to see them in nice frocks, as Mrs. Hall got by going hypercriting about."

"What is your name?" said Richard, cutting her short.

"Watts, if you please, sir; we heard there was good work up here, sir, and so we came; but I'd never have set foot in it if I had known what a dark heathenish place it is, with never a Gospel minister to come near it," and a great deal more to the same purpose.

Mary whispered to Flora something about having outgrown her boots, but Flora silenced her by a squeeze of the hand, and the two friends of Cocksmoor felt a good deal puzzled.

At last Flora said, "You will soon get her clothed if she comes regularly to school on Sundays, for she will be admitted into the club; I will recommend her if she has a good character and comes regularly. Good-morning, Mrs. Watts. Now we must go, or it will be dark before we get home." And they walked hastily away.

"Horrid woman!" was Ethel's exclamation.

"But Flora," said innocent Mary, "why would you not let me give the little girl my boots?"

"Perhaps I may, if she is good and comes to school, said Flora.

"I think Margaret ought to settle what you do with your boots," said Richard, not much to Flora's satisfaction.

"It is the same," she said. "If I approve, Margaret will not object."

"How well you helped us out, Flora," said Ethel; "I did not know in the least what to say."

"It will be the best way of testing her sincerity, said Flora; and at least it will do the child good; but I congratulate you on the promising aspect of Cocksmoor."

"We did not expect to find a perfect place," said Ethel; "if it were, it would be of no use to go to it."

Ethel could answer with dignity, but her heart sank at the aspect of what she had undertaken. She knew there would be evil, but she had expected it in a more striking and less disagreeable form.

That walk certainly made her less impatient, though it did not relax her determination, nor the guard over her lion and bear, which her own good feeling, aided by Margaret's council, showed her were the greatest hindrances to her doing anything good and great.

Though she was obliged to set to work so many principles and reflections to induce herself to wipe a pen, or to sit straight on her chair, that it was like winding up a steam-engine to thread a needle; yet the work was being done—she was struggling with her faults, humbled by them, watching them, and overcoming them.

Flora, meanwhile, was sitting calmly down in the contemplation of the unexpected services she had rendered, confident that her character for energy and excellence was established, believing it herself, and looking back on her childish vanity and love of domineering as long past and conquered. She thought her grown-up character had begun, and was too secure to examine it closely.

CHAPTER XI

One thing is wanting in the beamy cup
Of my young life! one thing to be poured in;
Ay, and one thing is wanting to fill up
The measure of proud joy, and make it sin.

—F. W. F.

Hopes that Dr. May would ever have his mind free, seemed as fallacious as mamma's old promise to Margaret, to make doll's clothes for her whenever there should be no live dolls to be worked for in the nursery.

Richard and Ethel themselves had their thoughts otherwise engrossed. The last week before the holidays was an important one. There was an examination, by which the standing of the boys in the school was determined, and this time it was of more than ordinary importance, as the Randall scholarship of £100 a year for three years would be open in the summer to the competition of the first six boys. Richard had never come within six of the top, but had been past at every examination by younger boys, till his father could bear it no longer; and now Norman was too young to be likely to have much chance of being of the number. There were eight decidedly his seniors, and Harvey Anderson, a small, quick-witted boy, half a year older, who had entered school at the same time, and had always been one step below him, had, in the last three months, gained fast upon him.

Harry, however, meant Norman to be one of the six, and declared all the fellows thought he would be, except Andersen's party. Mr. Wilmot, in a call on Ethel and Flora, told them that he thought their brother had a fair chance, but he feared he was over-working himself, and should tell the doctor so, whenever he could catch him; but this was difficult, as there was a great deal of illness just then, and he was less at home than usual.

All this excited the home party, but Norman only seemed annoyed by talk about it, and though always with a book in his hand, was so dreamy and listless, that Flora declared that there was no fear of his doing too much—she thought he would fail for want of trying.

"I mean to try," said Norman; "say no more about it, pray."

The great day was the 20th of December, and Ethel ran out, as the boys went to school, to judge of Norman's looks, which were not promising. "No wonder," said Harry, since he had stayed up doing Euripides and Cicero the whole length of a candle that had been new at bedtime. "But never mind, Ethel, if he only beats Anderson, I don't care for anything else."

"Oh, it will be unbearable if he does not! Do try, Norman, dear."

"Never you mind."

"He'll light up at the last moment," said Ethel, consolingly, to Harry; but she was very uneasy herself, for she had set her heart on his surpassing Harvey Anderson. No more was heard all day. Tom went at dinner-time to see if he could pick up any news; but he was shy, or was too late, and gained no intelligence. Dr. May and Richard talked of going to hear the speeches and viva voce examination in the afternoon—objects of great interest to all Stoneborough men—but just as they came home from a long day's work, Dr. May was summoned to the next town, by an electric telegraph, and, as it was to a bad case, he did not expect to be at home till the mail-train came in at one o'clock at night. Richard begged to go with him, and he consented, unwillingly, to please Margaret, who could not bear to think of his "fending for himself" in the dark on the rail-road.

Very long did the evening seem to the listening sisters. Eight, and no tidings; nine, the boys not come; Tom obliged to go to bed by sheer sleepiness, and Ethel unable to sit still, and causing Flora demurely to wonder at her fidgeting so much, it would be so much better to fix her attention

to some employment; while Margaret owned that Flora was right, but watched, and started at each sound, almost as anxiously as Ethel.

It was ten, when there was a sharp pull at the bell, and down flew the sisters; but old James was beforehand, and Harry was exclaiming, "Dux! James, he is Dux! Hurrah! Flossy, Ethel, Mary! There stands the Dux of Stoneborough! Where's papa?"

"Sent for to Whitford. But oh! Norman, Dux! Is he really?"

"To be sure, but I must tell Margaret," and up he rushed, shouted the news to her, but could not stay for congratulation; broke Tom's slumber by roaring it in his ear, and dashed into the nursery, where nurse for once forgave him for waking the baby. Norman, meanwhile, followed his eager sisters into the drawing-room, putting up his hand as if the light dazzled him, and looking, by no means, as it he had just achieved triumphant success.

Ethel paused in her exultation: "But is it, is it true, Norman?"

"Yes," he said wearily, making his way to his dark corner.

"But what was it for? How is it?"

"I don't know," he answered.

"What's the matter?" said Flora. "Are you tired, Norman, dear, does your head ache?"

"Yes;" and the pain was evidently severe.

"Won't you come to Margaret?" said Ethel, knowing what was the greater suffering; but he did not move, and they forbore to torment him with questions. The next moment Harry came down in an ecstacy, bringing in, from the hall, Norman's beautiful prize books, and showing off their Latin inscription.

"Ah!" said he, looking at his brother, "he is regularly done for. He ought to turn in at once. That Everard is a famous fellow for an examiner. He said he never had seen such a copy of verses sent up by a school-boy, and could hardly believe June was barely sixteen. Old Hoxton says he is the youngest Dux they have had these fifty years that he has known the school, and Mr. Wilmot said 'twas the most creditable examination he had ever known, and that I might tell papa so. What did possess that ridiculous old landlubber at Whitford, to go and get on the sick-list on this, of all the nights of the year? June, how can you go on sitting there, when you know you ought to be in your berth?"

"I wish he was," said Flora, "but let him have some tea first."

"And tell us more, Harry," said Ethel. "Oh! it is famous! I knew he would come right at last. It is too delightful, if papa was but here!"

"Isn't it? You should have seen how Anderson grinned—he is only fourth—down below Forder, and Cheviot, and Ashe."

"Well, I did not think Norman would have been before Forder and Cheviot. That is grand."

"It was the verses that did it," said Harry; "they had an hour to do Themistocles on the hearth of Admetus, and there he beat them all to shivers. 'Twas all done smack, smooth, without a scratch, in Alcaics, and Cheviot heard Wilmot saying, 'twas no mere task, but had poetry, and all that sort of thing in it. But I don't know whether that would have done, if he had not come out so strong in the recitation; they put him on in Priam's speech to Achilles, and he said it—Oh it was too bad papa did not hear him! Every one held their breath and listened."

"How you do go on!" muttered Norman; but no one heeded, and Harry continued. "He construed a chorus in Sophocles without a blunder, but what did the business was this, I believe. They asked all manner of out-of-the-way questions—history and geography, what no one expected, and the fellows who read nothing they can help, were thoroughly posed. Forder had not a word to say, and the others were worse, for Cheviot thought Queen Elizabeth's Earl of Leicester was Simon de Montfort; and didn't know when that battle was, beginning with an E.—was it Evesham, or Edgehill?"

"O Harry, you are as bad yourself?"

"But any one would know Leicester, because of Kenilworth," said Harry; "and I'm not sixth form. If papa had but been there! Every one was asking for him, and wishing it. For Dr. Hoxton

called me—they shook hands with me, and wished me joy of it, and told me to tell my father how well Norman had done."

"I suppose you looked so happy, they could not help it," said Flora, smiling at that honest beaming face of joy.

"Ay," said Norman, looking up; "they had something to say to him on his own score, which he has forgotten."

"I should think not," said Harry. "Why, what d'ye think they said? That I had gone on as well as all the Mays, and they trusted I should still, and be a credit to my profession."

"Oh! Harry! why didn't you tell us?"

"Oh! that is grand!" and, as the two elder girls made this exclamation, Mary proceeded to a rapturous embrace. "Get along, Mary, you are throttling one. Mr. Everard inquired for my father and Margaret, and said he'd call to-morrow, and Hoxton and Wilmot kept on wishing he was there."

"I wish he had been!" said Ethel; "he would have taken such delight in it; but, even if he could have gone, he doubted whether it would not have made Norman get on worse from anxiety."

"Well, Cheviot wanted me to send up for him at dinner-time," said Harry; "for as soon as we sat down in the hall, June turned off giddy, and could not stay, and looked so horrid, we thought it was all over with him, and he would not be able to go up at all."

"And Cheviot thought you ought to send for papa!"

"Yes, I knew he would not be in, and so we left him lying down on the bench in the cloister till dinner was over."

"What a place for catching cold!" said Flora.

"So Cheviot said, but I couldn't help it; and when we went to call him afterwards, he was all right. Wasn't it fun, when the names were called over, and May senior at the head! I don't think it will be better when I am a post-captain myself! But Margaret has not heard half yet."

After telling it once in her room, once in the nursery, in whispers like gusts of wind, and once in the pantry, Harry employed himself in writing—"Norman is Dux!" in immense letters, on pieces of paper, which he disposed all over the house, to meet the eyes of his father and Richard on their return.

Ethel's joy was sadly damped by Norman's manner. He hardly spoke—only just came in to wish Margaret good-night, and shrank from her affectionate sayings, departing abruptly to his own room.

"Poor fellow! he is sadly overdone," said she, as he went.

"Oh!" sighed Ethel, nearly ready to cry, "'tis not like what I used to fancy it would be when he came to the head of the school!"

"It will be different to-morrow," said Margaret, trying to console herself as well as Ethel. "Think how he has been on the strain this whole day, and long before, doing so much more than older boys. No wonder he is tired and worn out."

Ethel did not understand what mental fatigue was, for her active, vigorous spirit had never been tasked beyond its powers.

"I hope he will be like himself to-morrow!" said she disconsolately. "I never saw him rough and hasty before. It was even with you, Margaret."

"No, no, Ethel you aren't going to blame your own Norman for unkindness on this of all days in the year. You know how it was; you love him better; just as I do, for not being able to bear to stay in this room, where—"

"Yes," said Ethel, mournfully; "it was a great shame of me! How could I? Dear Norman! how he does grieve—what love his must have been! But yet, Margaret," she said impatiently, and the hot tears breaking out, "I cannot—cannot bear it! To have him not caring one bit for all of us! I want him to triumph! I can't without him!"

"What, Ethel, you, who said you didn't care for mere distinction and praise? Don't you think dear mamma would say it was safer for him not to be delighted and triumphant?"

"It is very tiresome," said Ethel, nearly convinced, but in a slightly petulant voice.

"And does not one love those two dear boys to-night!" said Margaret. "Norman not able to rejoice in his victory without her, and Harry in such an ecstacy with Norman's honours. I don't think I ever was so fond of my two brothers."

Ethel smiled, and drew up her head, and said no boys were like them anywhere, and papa would be delighted, and so went to bed happier in her exultation, and in hoping that the holidays would make Norman himself again.

Nothing could be better news for Dr. May, who had never lost a grain of the ancient school-party-loyalty that is part of the nature of the English gentleman. He was a thorough Stoneborough boy, had followed the politics of the Whichcote foundation year by year all his life, and perhaps, in his heart, regarded no honour as more to be prized than that of Dux and Randall scholar. Harry was in his room the next morning as soon as ever he was stirring, a welcome guest—teased a little at first, by his pretending to take it all as a sailor's prank to hoax him and Richard, and then free to pour out to delighted ears the whole history of the examination, and of every one's congratulations.

Norman himself was asleep when Harry went to give this narration. He came down late, and his father rose to meet him as he entered. "My boy," he said, "I had not expected this of you. Well done, Norman!" and the whole tone and gesture had a heartfelt approval and joy in them, that Ethel knew her brother was deeply thrilled by, for his colour deepened, and his lips quivered into something like a smile, though he did not lift his eyes.

Then came Richard's warm greeting and congratulation, he, too, showing himself as delighted as if the honours were his own; and then Dr. May again, in lively tones, like old times, laughing at Norman for sleeping late, and still not looking well awake, asking him if he was quite sure it was not all a dream.

"Well," said Norman, "I should think it was, if it were not that you all believe it."

"Harry had better go to sleep next," said Dr. May, "and see what dreaming will make him. If it makes Dux of Norman, who knows but it may make Drakes of him? Ha! Ethel—

"Oh, give us for our Kings such Queens,
And for our Ducks such Drakes."

There had not been such a merry breakfast for months. There was the old confusion of voices; the boys, Richard, and the doctor had much to talk over of the school doings of this week, and there was nearly as much laughing as in days past. Ethel wondered whether any one but herself observed that the voice most seldom heard was Norman's.

The promised call was made by Dr. Hoxton, and Mr. Everard, an old friend, and after their departure Dr. May came to Margaret's room with fresh accounts, corroborating what Harry had said of the clear knowledge and brilliant talent that Norman had displayed, to a degree that surprised his masters, almost as much as the examiners. The copy of verses Dr. May brought with him, and construed them to Margaret, commenting all the way on their ease, and the fullness of thought, certainly remarkable in a boy of sixteen.

They were then resigned to Ethel's keeping, and she could not help imparting her admiration to their author, with some apology for vexing him again.

"I don't want to be cross," said Norman, whom these words roused to a sense that he had been churlish last night; "but I cannot help it. I wish people would not make such a fuss about it."

"I don't think you can be well, Norman."

"Nonsense. There's nothing the matter with me."

"But I don't understand your not caring at all, and not being the least pleased."

"It only makes it worse," said Norman; "I only feel as if I wanted to be out of the way. My only comfortable time yesterday was on that bench in the cool quiet cloister. I don't think I could

have got through without that, when they left me in peace, till Cheviot and Harry came to rout me up, and I knew it was all coming."

"Ah! you have overworked yourself, but it was for something. You have given papa such pleasure and comfort, as you can't help being glad of. That is very different from us foolish young ones and our trumpeting."

"What comfort can it be? I've not been the smallest use all this time. When he was ill, I left him to Ernescliffe, and lay on the floor like an ass; and if he were to ask me to touch his arm, I should be as bad again. A fine thing for me to have talked all that arrogant stuff about Richard! I hate the thought of it; and, as if to make arrows and barbs of it, here's Richard making as much of this as if it was a double first class! He afraid to be compared with me, indeed!"

"Norman, indeed, this is going too far. We can't be as useful as the elder ones; and when you know how papa was vexed about Richard, you must be glad to have pleased him."

"If I were he, it would only make me miss her more. I believe he only makes much of me that he may not disappoint me."

"I don't think so. He is really glad, and the more because she would have been so pleased. He said it would have been a happy day for her, and there was more of the glad look than the sorry one. It was the glistening look that comes when he is watching baby, or hearing Margaret say pretty things to her. You see it is the first bright morning we have had."

"Yes," said Norman; "perhaps it was, but I don't know. I thought half of it was din."

"Oh, Norman!"

"And another thing, Ethel, I don't feel as if I had fairly earned it. Forder or Cheviot ought to have had it. They are both more really good scholars than I am, and have always been above me. There was nothing I really knew better, except those historical questions that no one reckoned on; and not living at home with their sisters and books, they had no such chance, and it is very hard on them, and I don't like it."

"Well, but you really and truly beat them in everything."

"Ay, by chance. There were lots of places in construing, where I should have broken down if I had happened to be set on in them; it was only a wonder I did not in that chorus, for I had only looked at it twice; but Everard asked me nothing but what I knew; and now and then I get into a funny state, when nothing is too hard for me, and that was how it was yesterday evening. Generally, I feel as dull as a post," said Norman, yawning and stretching; "I could not make a nonsense hexameter this minute, if I was to die for it."

"A sort of Berserkar fury!" said Ethel, "like that night you did the coral-worm verses. It's very odd. Are you sure you are well, dear Norman?"

To which he answered, with displeasure, that he was as well as possible, ordered her not to go and make any more fuss, and left her hastily. She was unhappy, and far from satisfied; she had never known his temper so much affected, and was much puzzled; but she was too much afraid of vexing him, to impart her perplexity even to Margaret. However, the next day, Sunday, as she was reading to Margaret after church, her father came in, and the first thing he said was, "I want to know what you think of Norman."

"How do you mean?" said Margaret; "in health or spirits?"

"Both," said Dr. May. "Poor boy! he has never held up his head since October, and, at his age, that is hardly natural. He goes moping about, has lost flesh and appetite, and looks altogether out of order, shooting up like a Maypole too."

"Mind and body," said Margaret, while Ethel gazed intently at her father, wondering whether she ought to speak, for Margaret did not know half what she did; nothing about the bad nights, nor what he called the "funny state."

"Yes, both. I fancied it was only his rapid growth, and the excitement of this examination, and that it would go off, but I think there's more amiss. He was lounging about doing nothing, when the

girls were gone to school after dinner, and I asked him to walk down with me to the Almshouses. He did not seem very willing, but he went, and presently, as I had hold of his arm, I felt him shivering, and saw him turn as pale as a sheet. As soon as I noticed it, he flushed crimson, and would not hear of turning back, stoutly protesting he was quite well, but I saw his hand was quivering even when I got into church. Why, Ethel, you have turned as red as he did."

"Then he has done it!" exclaimed Ethel, in a smothered voice.

"What do you mean? Speak, Ethel."

"He has gone past it—the place," whispered she.

The doctor made a sound of sorrowful assent, as if much struck; then said, "you don't mean he has never been there since?"

"Yes," said Ethel, "he has always gone round Randall's alley or the garden; he has said nothing, but has contrived to avoid it."

"Well," said Dr. May, after a pause, "I hoped none of us knew the exact spot."

"We don't; he never told us, but he was there."

"Was he?" exclaimed her father; "I had no notion of that. How came he there?"

"He went on with Mr. Ernescliffe, and saw it all," said Ethel, as her father drew out her words, apparently with his eye; "and then came up to my room so faint that he was obliged to lie on the floor ever so long."

"Faint—how long did it last?" said her father, examining her without apparent emotion, as if it had been an indifferent patient.

"I don't know, things seemed so long that evening. Till after dark at least, and it came on in the morning—no, the Monday. I believe it was your arm—for talking of going to see you always brought it on, till Mr. Ward gave him a dose of brandy-and-water, and that stopped it."

"I wish I had known this before. Derangement of the nervous system, no doubt—a susceptible boy like that—I wonder what sort of nights he has been having."

"Terrible ones," said Ethel; "I don't think he ever sleeps quietly till morning; he has dreams, and he groans and talks in his sleep; Harry can tell you all that."

"Bless me!" cried Dr. May, in some anger; "what have you all been thinking about to keep this to yourselves all this time?"

"He could not bear to have it mentioned," said Ethel timidly; "and I didn't know that it signified so much; does it?"

"It signifies so much, that I had rather have given a thousand pounds than have let him go on all this time, to be overworked at school, and wound up to that examination!"

"Oh, dear! I am sorry!" said Ethel, in great dismay. "If you had but been at home when Cheviot wanted Harry to have sent for you—because he did not think him fit for it!" And Ethel was much relieved by pouring out all she knew, though her alarm was by no means lessened by the effect it produced on her father, especially when he heard of the "funny state."

"A fine state of things," he said; "I wonder it has not brought on a tremendous illness by this time. A boy of that sensitive temperament meeting with such a shock—never looked after—the quietest and most knocked down of all, and therefore the most neglected—his whole system disordered—and then driven to school to be harassed and overworked; if we had wanted to occasion brain fever we could not have gone a better way to set about it. I should not wonder if health and nerves were damaged for life!"

"Oh! papa, papa!" cried Ethel, in extreme distress, "what shall I do! I wish I had told you, but—"

"I'm not blaming you, Ethel, you knew no better, but it has been grievous neglect. It is plain enough there is no one to see after you," said the doctor, with a low groan.

"We may be taking it in time," said Margaret's soft voice—"it is very well it has gone on no longer."

"Three months is long enough," said Dr. May.

"I suppose," continued Margaret, "it will be better not to let dear Norman know we are uneasy about him."

"No, no, certainly not. Don't say a word of this to him. I shall find Harry, and ask about these disturbed nights, and then watch him, trusting it may not have gone too far; but there must be dreadful excitability of brain!"

He went away, leaving Margaret to comfort Ethel as well as she could, by showing her that he had not said the mischief was done, putting her in mind that he was wont to speak strongly; and trying to make her thankful that her brother would now have such care as might avert all evil results.

"But, oh," said Ethel, "his success has been dearly purchased!"

CHAPTER XII

"It hath do me mochil woe."
"Yea hath it? Use," quod he, "this medicine;
Every daie this Maie or that thou dine,
Go lokin in upon the freshe daisie,
And though thou be for woe in poinct to die,
That shall full gretly lessen thee of thy pine."

CHAUCER.

That night Norman started from, what was not so much sleep, as a trance of oppression and suffering, and beheld his father's face watching him attentively.

"Papa! What's the matter?" said he, starting up. "Is any one ill?"

"No; no one, lie down again," said Dr. May, possessing himself of a hand, with a burning spot in the palm, and a throbbing pulse.

"But what made you come here? Have I disturbed any one? Have I been talking?"

"Only mumbling a little, but you looked very uncomfortable."

"But I'm not ill—what are you feeling my pulse for?" said Norman uneasily.

"To see whether that restless sleep has quickened it."

Norman scarcely let his father count for a moment, before he asked, "What o'clock is it?"

"A little after twelve."

"What does make you stay up so late, papa?"

"I often do when my arm seems likely to keep me awake. Richard has done all I want."

"Pray don't stay here in the cold," said Norman, with feverish impatience, as he turned upwards the cool side of his pillow. "Good-night!"

"No hurry," said his father, still watching him.

"There's nothing the matter," repeated the boy.

"Do you often have such unquiet nights?"

"Oh, it does not signify. Good-night," and he tried to look settled and comfortable.

"Norman," said his father, in a voice betraying much grief, "it will not do to go on in this way. If your mother was here, you would not close yourself against her."

Norman interrupted him in a voice strangled with sobs: "It is no good saying it—I thought it would only make it worse for you; but that's it. I cannot bear the being without her."

Dr. May was glad to see that a gush of tears followed this exclamation, as Norman hid his face under the coverings.

"My poor boy," said he, hardly able to speak, "only One can comfort you truly; but you must not turn from me; you must let me do what I can for you, though it is not the same."

"I thought it would grieve you more," said Norman, turning his face towards him again.

"What, to find my children, feeling with me, and knowing what they have lost? Surely not, Norman."

"And it is of no use," added Norman, hiding his face again, "no one can comfort—"

"There you are wrong," said Dr. May, with deep feeling, "there is much comfort in everything, in everybody, in kindness, in all around, if one can only open one's mind to it. But I did not come to keep you awake with such talk: I saw you were not quite well, so I came up to see about you; and now, Norman, you will not refuse to own that something is the matter."

"I did not know it," said Norman, "I really believe I am well, if I could get rid of these horrible nights. I either lie awake, tumbling and tossing, or I get all sorts of unbearable dreams."

"Ay, when I asked master Harry about you, all the answer I could get was, that he was quite used to it, and did not mind it at all. As if I asked for his sake! How fast that boy sleeps—he is fit for a midshipman's berth!"

"But do you think there is anything amiss with me?"

"I shall know more about that to-morrow morning. Come to my room as soon as you are up, unless I come to you. Now, I have something to read before I go to bed, and I may as well try if it will put you to sleep."

Norman's last sight that night was of the outline of his father's profile, and he was scarcely awake the next morning before Dr. May was there again.

Unwilling as he had been to give way, it was a relief to relinquish the struggle to think himself well, and to venture to lounge and dawdle, rest his heavy head, and stretch his inert limbs without fear of remark. His father found him after breakfast lying on the sofa in the drawing-room with a Greek play by his side, telling Ethel what words to look out.

"At it again!" exclaimed Dr. May. "Carry it away, Ethel. I will have no Latin or Greek touched these holidays."

"You know," said Norman, "if I don't sap, I shall have no chance of keeping up."

"You'll keep nowhere if you don't rest."

"It is only Euripides, and I can't do anything else," said Norman languidly.

"Very likely, I don't care. You have to get well first of all, and the Greek will take care of itself. Go up to Margaret. I put you in her keeping, while I am gone to Whitford. After that, I dare say Richard will be very glad to have a holiday, and let you drive me to Abbotstoke."

Norman rose, and wearily walked upstairs, while his sister lingered to excuse herself. "Papa, I did not think Euripides would hurt him—he knows it all so well, and he said he could not read anything else."

"Just so, Ethel. Poor fellow, he has not spirits or energy for anything: his mind was forced into those classicalities when it wanted rest, and now it has not spring enough to turn back again."

"Do you think him so very ill?"

"Not exactly, but there's low fever hanging about him, and we must look after him well, and I hope we may get him right. I have told Margaret about him; I can't stop any longer now."

Norman found the baby in his sister's room, and this was just what suited him. The Daisy showed a marked preference for her brothers; and to find her so merry and good with him, pleased and flattered him far more than his victory at school. He carried her about, danced her, whistled to her, and made her admire her pretty blue eyes in the glass most successfully, till nurse carried her off. But perhaps he had been sent up rather too soon, for as he sat in the great chair by the fire, he was teased by the constant coming and going, all the petty cares of a large household transacted by Margaret—orders to butcher and cook—Harry racing in to ask to take Tom to the river—Tom, who was to go when his lesson was done, coming perpetually to try to repeat the same unhappy bit of 'As in Proesenti', each time in a worse whine.

"How can you bear it, Margaret?" said Norman, as she finally dismissed Tom, and laid down her account-book, taking up some delicate fancy work. "Mercy, here's another," as enter a message about lamp oil, in the midst of which Mary burst in to beg Margaret to get Miss Winter to let her go to the river with Harry and Tom.

"No, indeed, Mary, I could not think of such a thing. You had better go back to your lessons, and don't be silly," as she looked much disposed to cry.

"No one but a Tom-boy would dream of it," added Norman; and Mary departed disconsolate, while Margaret gave a sigh of weariness, and said, as she returned to her work, "There, I believe I have done. I hope I was not cross with poor Mary, but it was rather too much to ask."

"I can't think how you can help being cross to every one," said Norman, as he took away the books she had done with.

"I am afraid I am," said Margaret sadly. "It does get trying at times."

"I should think so! This eternal worrying must be more than any one can bear, always lying there too."

"It is only now and then that it grows tiresome," said Margaret. "I am too happy to be of some use, and it is too bad to repine, but sometimes a feeling comes of its being always the same, as if a little change would be such a treat."

"Aren't you very tired of lying in bed?"

"Yes, very, sometimes. I fancy, but it is only fancy, that I could move better if I was up and dressed. It has seemed more so lately, since I have been stronger."

"When do you think they will let you get up?"

"There's the question. I believe papa thinks I might be lifted to the sofa now—and oh! how I long for it—but then Mr. Ward does not approve of my sitting up, even as I am doing now, and wants to keep me flat. Papa thinks that of no use, and likely to hurt my general health, and I believe the end of it will be that he will ask Sir Matthew Fleet's opinion."

"Is that the man he calls Mat?"

"Yes, you know they went through the university together, and were at Edinburgh and Paris, but they have never met since he set up in London, and grew so famous. I believe it would be a great treat to papa to have him, and it would be a good thing for papa too; I don't think his arm is going on right—he does not trust to Mr. Ward's treatment, and I am sure some one else ought to see it."

"Did you know, Margaret, that he sits up quite late, because he cannot sleep for it?"

"Yes, I hear him moving about, but don't tell him so; I would not have him guess for the world, that it kept me awake."

"And does it?"

"Why, if I think he is awake and in pain I cannot settle myself to sleep; but that is no matter; having no exercise, of course I don't sleep so much. But I am very anxious about him—he looks so thin, and gets so fagged—and no wonder."

"Ah! Mr. Everard told me he was quite shocked to see him, and would hardly have known him," and Norman groaned from the bottom of his heart.

"Well, I shall hope much from Sir Matthew's taking him in hand," said Margaret cheerfully; "he will mind him, though he will not Mr. Ward."

"I wish the holidays were over!" said Norman, with a yawn, as expressive as a sigh.

"That's not civil, on the third day," said Margaret, smiling, "when I am so glad to have you to look after me, so as to set Flora at liberty."

"What, can I do you any good?" said Norman, with a shade of his former alacrity.

"To be sure you can, a great deal. Better not come near me otherwise, for I make every one into a slave. I want my morning reading now—that book on Advent, there."

"Shall I read it to you?"

"Thank you, that's nice, and I shall get on with baby's frock."

Norman read, but, ere long, took to yawning; Margaret begged for the book, which he willingly resigned, saying, however, that he liked it, only he was stupid. She read on aloud, till she heard a succession of heavy breathings, and saw him fast asleep, and so he continued till waked by his father's coming home.

Richard and Ethel were glad of a walk, for Margaret had found them a pleasant errand. Their Cocksmoor children could not go home to dinner between service and afternoon school, and Margaret had desired the cook to serve them up some broth in the back kitchen, to which the brother and sister were now to invite them. Mary was allowed to take her boots to Rebekah Watts, since Margaret held that goodness had better be profitable, at least at the outset; and Harry and Tom joined the party.

Norman, meantime, was driving his father—a holiday preferment highly valued in the days when Dr. May used only to assume the reins, when his spirited horses showed too much consciousness

that they had a young hand over them, or when the old hack took a fit of laziness. Now, Norman needed Richard's assurance that the bay was steady, so far was he from being troubled with his ancient desire, that the steed would rear right up on his hind legs.

He could neither talk nor listen till he was clear out of the town, and found himself master of the animal, and even then the words were few, and chiefly spoken by Dr. May, until after going along about three miles of the turnpike road, he desired Norman to turn down a cross-country lane.

"Where does this lead?"

"It comes out at Abbotstoke, but I have to go to an outlying farm."

"Papa," said Norman, after a few minutes, "I wish you would let me do my Greek."

"Is that what you have been pondering all this time? What, may not the bonus Homerus slumber sometimes?"

"It is not Homer, it is Euripides. I do assure you, papa, it is no trouble, and I get much worse without it."

"Well, stop here, the road grows so bad that we will walk, and let the boy lead the horse to meet us at Woodcote."

Norman followed his father down a steep narrow lane, little better than a stony water-course, and began to repeat, "If you would but let me do my work! I've got nothing else to do, and now they have put me up, I should not like not to keep my place."

"Very likely, but—hollo—how swelled this is!" said Dr. May, as they came to the bottom of the valley, where a stream rushed along, coloured with a turbid creamy yellow, making little whirlpools where it crossed the road, and brawling loudly just above where it roared and foamed between two steep banks of rock, crossed by a foot-bridge of planks, guarded by a handrail of rough poles. The doctor had traversed it, and gone a few paces beyond, when, looking back, he saw Norman very pale, with one foot on the plank, and one hand grasping the rail. He came back, and held out his hand, which Norman gladly caught at, but no sooner was the other side attained, than the boy, though he gasped with relief, exclaimed, "This is too bad! Wait one moment, please, and let me go back."

He tried, but the first touch of the shaking rail, and glance at the chasm, disconcerted him, and his father, seeing his white cheeks and rigid lips, said, "Stop, Norman, don't try it. You are not fit," he added, as the boy came to him reluctantly.

"I can't bear to be such a wretch!" said he. "I never used to be. I will not—let me conquer it;" and he was turning back, but the doctor took his arm, saying decidedly, "No, I won't have it done. You are only making it worse by putting a force on yourself." But the farther Norman was from the bridge, the more displeased he was with himself, and more anxious to dare it again. "There's no bearing it," he muttered; "let me only run back. I'll overtake you. I must do it if no one looks on."

"No such thing," said the doctor, holding him fast. "If you do, you'll have it all over again at night."

"That's better than to know I am worse than Tom."

"I tell you, Norman, it is no such thing. You will recover your tone if you will only do as you are told, but your nerves have had a severe shock, and when you force yourself in this way, you only increase the mischief."

"Nerves," muttered Norman disdainfully. "I thought they were only fit for fine ladies."

Dr. May smiled. "Well, will it content you if I promise that as soon as I see fit, I'll bring you here, and let you march over that bridge as often as you like?"

"I suppose I must be contented, but I don't like to feel like a fool."

"You need not, while the moral determination is sound."

"But my Greek, papa."

"At it again—I declare, Norman, you are the worst patient I ever had!"

Norman made no answer, and Dr. May presently said, "Well, let me hear what you have to say about it. I assure you it is not that I don't want you to get on, but that I see you are in great need of rest."

"Thank you, papa. I know you mean it for my good, but I don't think you do know how horrid it is. I have got nothing on earth to do or care for—the school work comes quite easy to me, and I'm sure thinking is worse; and then"—Norman spoke vehemently—"now they have put me up, it will never do to be beaten, and all the four others ought to be able to do it. I did not want or expect to be dux, but now I am, you could not bear me not to keep my place, and to miss the Randall scholarship, as I certainly shall, if I do not work these whole holidays."

"Norman, I know it," said his father kindly. "I am very sorry for you, and I know I am asking of you what I could not have done at your age—indeed, I don't believe I could have done it for you a few months ago. It is my fault that you have been let alone, to have an overstrain and pressure on your mind, when you were not fit for it, and I cannot see any remedy but complete freedom from work. At the same time, if you fret and harass yourself about being surpassed, that is, as you say, much worse for you than Latin and Greek. Perhaps I may be wrong, and study might not do you the harm I think it would; at any rate, it is better than tormenting yourself about next half year, so I will not positively forbid it, but I think you had much better let it alone. I don't want to make it a matter of duty. I only tell you this, that you may set your mind at rest as far as I am concerned. If you do lose your place, I will consider it as my own doing, and not be disappointed. I had rather see you a healthy, vigorous, useful man, than a poor puling nervous wretch of a scholar, if you were to get all the prizes in the university."

Norman made a little murmuring sound of assent, and both were silent for some moments, then he said, "Then you will not be displeased, papa, if I do read, as long as I feel it does me no harm."

"I told you I don't mean to make it a matter of obedience. Do as you please—I had rather you read than vexed yourself."

"I am glad of it. Thank you, papa," said Norman, in a much cheered voice.

They had, in the meantime, been mounting a rising ground, clothed with stunted wood, and came out on a wide heath, brown with dead bracken; a hollow, traced by the tops of leafless trees, marked the course of the stream that traversed it, and the inequalities of ground becoming more rugged in outlines and grayer in colouring as they receded, till they were closed by a dark fir wood, beyond which rose in extreme distance the grand mass of Welsh mountain heads, purpled against the evening sky, except where the crowning peaks bore a veil of snow. Behind, the sky was pure gold, gradually shading into pale green, and then into clear light wintry blue, while the sun sitting behind two of the loftiest, seemed to confound their outlines, and blend them in one flood of soft hazy brightness. Dr. May looked at his son, and saw his face clear up, his brow expand, and his lips unclose with admiration.

"Yes," said the doctor, "it is very fine, is it not? I used to bring mamma here now and then for a treat, because it put her in mind of her Scottish hills. Well, your's are the golden hills of heaven, now, my Maggie!" he added, hardly knowing that he spoke aloud. Norman's throat swelled, as he looked up in his face, then cast down his eyes hastily to hide the tears that had gathered on his eyelashes.

"I'll leave you here," said Dr. May; "I have to go to a farmhouse close by, in the hollow behind us; there's a girl recovering from a fever. I'll not be ten minutes, so wait here."

When he came back, Norman was still where he had left him, gazing earnestly, and the tears standing on his cheeks. He did not move till his father laid his hand on his shoulder—they walked away together without a word, and scarcely spoke all the way home.

Dr. May went to Margaret and talked to her of Norman's fine character, and intense affection for his mother, the determined temper, and quietly borne grief, for which the doctor seemed to have worked himself into a perfect enthusiasm of admiration; but lamenting that he could not tell what to do with him—study or no study hurt him alike—and he dreaded to see health and spirits shattered for ever. They tried to devise change of scene, but it did not seem possible just at present; and Margaret, besides her fears for Norman, was much grieved to see this added to her father's troubles.

At night Dr. May again went up to see whether Norman, whom he had moved into Margaret's former room, were again suffering from fever. He found him asleep in a restless attitude, as if he had just dropped off, and waking almost at the instant of his entrance, he exclaimed, "Is it you? I thought it was mamma. She said it was all ambition."

Then starting, and looking round the room, and at his father, he collected himself, and said, with a slight smile, "I didn't know I had been asleep. I was awake just now, thinking about it. Papa, I'll give it up. I'll try to put next half out of my head, and not mind if they do pass me."

"That's right, my boy," said the doctor.

"At least if Cheviot and Forder do, for they ought. I only hope Anderson won't. I can stand anything but that. But that is nonsense too."

"You are quite right, Norman," said the doctor, "and it is a great relief to me that you see the thing so sensibly."

"No, I don't see it sensibly at all, papa. I hate it all the time, and I don't know whether I can keep from thinking of it, when I have nothing to do; but I see it is wrong; I thought all ambition and nonsense was gone out of me, when I cared so little for the examination; but now I see, though I did not want to be made first, I can't bear not to be first; and that's the old story, just as she used to tell me to guard against ambition. So I'll take my chance, and if I should get put down, why, 'twas not fair that I should be put up, and it is what I ought to be, and serves me right into the bargain—"

"Well, that's the best sort of sense, your mother's sense," said the doctor, more affected than he liked to show. "No wonder she came to you in your dream, Norman, my boy, if you had come to such a resolution. I was half in hopes you had some such notion when I came upon you, on Far-view down."

"I think that sky did it," said Norman, in a low voice; "it made me think of her in a different way—and what you said too."

"What did I say? I don't remember."

But Norman could not repeat the words, and only murmured, "Golden hills." It was enough.

"I see," said the doctor, "you had dwelt on the blank here, not taken home what it is to her."

"Ay," almost sobbed Norman, "I never could before—that made me," after a long silence, "and then I know how foolish I was, and how she would say it was wrong to make this fuss, when you did not like it, about my place, and that it was not for the sake of my duty, but of ambition. I knew that, but till I went to bed to-night, I could not tell whether I could make up my mind, so I would say nothing."

CHAPTER XIII

The days are sad, it is the Holy tide,
When flowers have ceased to blow and birds to sing.

F. TENNYSON.

It had been a hard struggle to give up all thoughts of study, and Norman was not at first rewarded for it, but rather exemplified the truth of his own assertion, that he was worse without it; for when this sole occupation for his mind was taken away, he drooped still more. He would willingly have shown his father that he was not discontented, but he was too entirely unnerved to be either cheerful or capable of entering with interest into any occupation. If he had been positively ill, the task would have been easier, but the low intermittent fever that hung about him did not confine him to bed, only kept him lounging, listless and forlorn, through the weary day, not always able to go out with his father, and on Christmas Day unfit even for church.

All this made the want of his mother, and the vacancy in his home, still more evident, and nothing was capable of relieving his sadness but his father's kindness, which was a continual surprise to him. Dr. May was a parent who could not fail to be loved and honoured; but, as a busy man, trusting all at home to his wife, he had only appeared to his children either as a merry playfellow, or as a stern paternal authority, not often in the intermediate light of guiding friend, or gentle guardian; and it affected Norman exceedingly to find himself, a tall schoolboy, watched and soothed with motherly tenderness and affection; with complete comprehension of his feelings, and delicate care of them. His father's solicitude and sympathy were round him day and night, and this, in the midst of so much toil, pain, grief, and anxiety of his own, that Norman might well feel overwhelmed with the swelling, inexpressible feelings of grateful affection.

How could his father know exactly what he would like—say the very things he was thinking—see that his depression was not wilful repining—find exactly what best soothed him! He wondered, but he could not have said so to any one, only his eye brightened, and, as his sisters remarked, he never seemed half so uncomfortable when papa was in the room. Indeed, the certainty that his father felt the sorrow as acutely as himself, was one reason of his opening to him. He could not feel that his brothers and sisters did so, for, outwardly, their habits were unaltered, their spirits not lowered, their relish for things around much the same as before, and this had given Norman a sense of isolation. With his father it was different. Norman knew he could never appreciate what the bereavement was to him—he saw its traces in almost every word and look, and yet perceived that something sustained and consoled him, though not in the way of forgetfulness. Now and then Norman caught at what gave this comfort, and it might be hoped he would do so increasingly; though, on this Christmas Day, Margaret felt very sad about him, as she watched him sitting over the fire, cowering with chilliness and headache, while every one was gone to church, and saw that the reading of the service with her had been more of a trouble than a solace.

She tried to think it bodily ailment, and strove hard not to pine for her mother, to comfort them both, and say the fond words of refreshing cheering pity that would have made all light to bear. Margaret's home Christmas was so spent in caring for brother, father, and children, that she had hardly time to dwell on the sad change that had befallen herself.

Christmas was a season that none of them knew well how to meet: Blanche was overheard saying to Mary that she wished it would not come, and Mary, shaking her head, and answering that she was afraid that was naughty, but it was very tiresome to have no fun. Margaret did her best upstairs, and Richard downstairs, by the help of prints and hymns, to make the children think of the true joy of Christmas, and in the evening their father gathered them round, and told them the stories of the

Shepherds and of the Wise Men, till Mary and Blanche agreed, as they went up to bed, that it had been a very happy evening.

The next day Harry discomfited the schoolroom by bursting in with the news that "Louisa and Fanny Anderson were bearing down on the front door." Ethel and Flora were obliged to appear in the drawing-room, where they were greeted by two girls, rather older than themselves. A whole shower of inquiries for Dr. May, for Margaret, and for the dear little baby, were first poured out; then came hopes that Norman was well, as they had not seen him at church yesterday.

"Thank you, he was kept at home by a bad headache, but it is better to-day."

"We came to congratulate you on his success—we could not help it—it must have been such a pleasure to you."

"That it was!" exclaimed Ethel, pleased at participation in her rejoicing. "We were so surprised."

Flora gave a glance of warning, but Ethel's short-sighted eyes were beyond the range of correspondence, and Miss Anderson continued. "It must have been a delightful surprise. We could hardly believe it when Harvey came in and told us. Every one thought Forder was sure, but they all were put out by the questions of general information—those were all Mr. Everard's doing."

"Mr. Everard was very much struck with Norman's knowledge and scholarship too," said Flora.

"So every one says. It was all Mr. Everard's doing. Miss Harrison told mamma, but, for my part, I am very glad for the sake of Stoneborough; I like a town boy to be at the head."

"Norman was sorry for Forder and Cheviot," began Ethel. Flora tried to stop her, but Louisa Anderson caught at what she said, and looked eagerly for more. "He felt," said she, only thinking of exalting her generous brother, "as if it was hardly right, when they are so much his seniors, that he could scarcely enjoy it."

"Ah! that is just what people say," replied Louisa. "But it must be very gratifying to you, and it makes him certain of the Randal scholarship too, I suppose. It is a great thing for him! He must have worked very hard."

"Yes, that he has," said Flora; "he is so fond of study, and that goes halfway."

"So is dear Harvey. How earnest he is over his books! Mamma sometimes says, 'Now Harvey, dear, you'll be quite stupified, you'll be ill; I really shall get Dr. May to forbid you.' I suppose Norman is very busy too; it is quite the fashion for boys not to be idle now."

"Poor Norman can't help it," said Ethel piteously. "Papa will not hear of his doing any Latin or Greek these whole holidays."

"He thinks he will come to it better again for entire rest," said Flora, launching another look at her sister, which again fell short.

A great deal of polite inquiry whether they were uneasy about him followed, mixed with a little boasting of dear Harvey's diligence.

"By-the-bye, Ethel, it is you that are the great patroness of the wild Cocksmoor children—are not you?"

Ethel coloured, and mumbled, and Flora answered for her, "Richard and Ethel have been there once or twice. You know our under nursery-maid is a Cocksmoor girl."

"Well, mamma said she could not think how Miss May could take one from thence. The whole place is full of thieves, and do you know, Bessie Boulder has lost her gold pencil-case."

"Has she?" said Flora.

"And she had it on Sunday when she was teaching her class."

"Oh!" cried Ethel vehemently; "surely she does not suspect any of those poor children!"

"I only know such a thing never happened at school before," said Fanny, "and I shall never take anything valuable there again."

"But is she sure she lost it at school?"

"Oh, yes, quite certain. She will not accuse any one, but it is not comfortable. And how those children do behave at church!"

"Poor things! they have been sadly neglected," said Flora.

"They are quite spoiling the rest, and they are such figures! Why don't you, at least, make them cut their hair? You know it is the rule of the school."

"I know, but half the girls in the first class wear it long."

"Oh, yes, but those are the superior people, that one would not be strict with, and they dress it so nicely too. Now these are like little savages."

"Richard thinks it might drive them away to insist at first," said Ethel; "we will try to bring it about in time."

"Well, Mrs. Ledwich is nearly resolved to insist, so you had better be warned, Ethel. She cannot suffer such untidiness and rags to spoil the appearance of the school, and, I assure you, it is quite unpleasant to the teachers."

"I wish they would give them all to me!" said Ethel. "But I do hope Mrs. Ledwich will have patience with them, for they are only to be gained gently."

The visitors took their leave, and the two sisters began exclaiming—Ethel at their dislike of her proteges, and Flora at what they had said of Norman. "And you, Ethel, how could you go and tell them we were surprised, and Norman thought it was hard on the other boys? They'll have it all over the town that he got it unjustly, and knows it, as they say already it was partiality of Mr. Everard's."

"Oh, no, no, they never can be so bad!" cried Ethel; "they must have understood better that it was his noble humility and generosity."

"They understand anything noble! No, indeed! They think every one like their own beautiful brother! I knew what they came for all the time; they wanted to know whether Norman was able to work these holidays, and you told them the very thing they wanted to hear. How they will rejoice with that Harvey, and make sure of the Randall!"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Ethel; "Norman must get that!"

"I don't think he will," said Flora, "losing all this time, while they are working. It cannot be helped, of course, but it is a great pity."

"I almost wish he had not been put up at all, if it is to end in this way," said Ethel. "It is very provoking, and to have them triumphing as they will! There's no bearing it!"

"Norman, certainly, is not at all well, poor fellow," said Flora, "and I suppose he wants rest, but I wish papa would let him do what he can. It would be much better for him than moping about as he is always doing now; and the disappointment of losing his place will be grievous, though now he fancies he does not care for it."

"I wonder when he will ever care for anything again. All I read and tell him only seems to tease him, though he tries to thank me."

"There is a strange apathy about him," said Flora, "but I believe it is chiefly for want of exertion. I should like to rouse him if papa would let me; I know I could, by telling him how these Andersons are reckoning on his getting down. If he does, I shall be ready to run away, that I may never meet any one here again."

Ethel was very unhappy till she was able to pour all this trouble out to Margaret, and worked herself almost into crying about Norman's being passed by "that Harvey," and his sisters exulting, and papa being vexed, and Norman losing time and not caring.

"There you are wrong," said Margaret, "Norman did care very much, and it was not till he had seen clearly that it was a matter of duty to do as papa thought right, and not agitate his mind about his chances of keeping up, that he could bear to give up his work;" and she told Ethel a little of what had passed.

Ethel was much struck. "But oh, Margaret, it is very hard, just to have him put up for the sake of being put down, and pleasing the Andersons!"

"Dear Ethel, why should you mind so much about the Andersons? May they not care about their brother as we do for ours?"

"Such a brother to care about!" said Ethel.

"But I suppose they may like him the best," said Margaret, smiling.

"I suppose they do," said Ethel grudgingly; "but still I cannot bear to see Norman doing nothing, and I know Harvey Anderson will beat him."

"Surely you had rather he did nothing than made himself ill!"

"To be sure, but I wish it wasn't so."

"Yes; but, Ethel, whose doing is his getting into this state?"

Ethel looked grave. "It was wrong of me," said she, "but then papa is not sure that Greek would hurt him."

"Not sure, but he thinks it not wise to run the risk. But, Ethel, dear, why are you so bent on his being dux at all costs?"

"It would be horrid if he was not."

"Don't you remember you used to say that outward praise or honour was not to be cared for as long as one did one's duty, and that it might be a temptation?"

"Yes, I know I did," said Ethel, faltering, "but that was for oneself."

"It is harder, I think, to feel so about those we care for," said Margaret; "but after all, this is just what will show whether our pride in Norman is the right true loving pride, or whether it is only the family vanity of triumphing over the Andersons."

Ethel hung her head. "There's some of that," she said, "but it is not all. No—I don't want to triumph over them, nobody would do that."

"Not outwardly perhaps, but in their hearts."

"I can't tell," said Ethel, "but it is the being triumphed over that I cannot bear."

"Perhaps this is all a lesson in humility for us," said Margaret "It is teaching us, 'Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.'"

Ethel was silent for some little space, then suddenly exclaimed, "And you think he will really be put down?"

Margaret seemed to have been talking with little effect, but she kept her patience, and answered, "I cannot guess, Ethel, but I'll tell you one thing—I think there's much more chance if he comes to his work fresh and vigorous after a rest, than if he went on dulling himself with it all this time."

With which Ethel was so far appeased that she promised to think as little as she could of the Andersons, and a walk with Richard to Cocksmoor turned the current of her thoughts. They had caught some more Sunday-school children by the help of Margaret's broth, but it was uphill work; the servants did not like such guests in the kitchen, and they were still less welcome at school.

"What do you think I heard, Ethel?" said Flora, the next Sunday, as they joined each other in the walk from school to church; "I heard Miss Graves say to Miss Boulder, 'I declare I must remonstrate. I undertook to instruct a national, not a ragged school;' and then Miss Boulder shook out her fine watered silk and said, 'It positively is improper to place ladies in contact with such squalid objects.'"

"Ladies!" cried Ethel. "A stationer's daughter and a banker's clerk's! Why do they come to teach at school at all?"

"Because our example makes it genteel," said Flora.

"I hope you did something more in hopes of making it genteel."

"I caught one of your ragged regiment with her frock gaping behind, and pinned it up. Such rags as there were under it! Oh, Ethel!"

"Which was it?"

"That merry Irish-looking child. I don't know her name."

"Oh! it is a real charming Irish name, Una M'Carthy. I am so glad you did it, Flora. I hope they were ashamed."

"I doubt whether it will do good. We are sure of our station and can do anything—they are struggling to be ladies."

"But we ought not to talk of them any more, Flora; here we are almost at the churchyard."

The Tuesday of this week was appointed for the visit of the London surgeon, Sir Matthew Fleet, and the expectation caused Dr. May to talk much to Margaret of old times, and the days of his courtship, when it had been his favourite project that his friend and fellow-student should marry Flora Mackenzie, and there had been a promising degree of liking, but "Mat" had been obliged to be prudent, and had ended by never marrying at all. This the doctor, as well as his daughters, believed was for the sake of Aunt Flora, and thus the girls were a good deal excited about his coming, almost as much on his own account, as because they considered him as the arbiter of Margaret's fate. He only came in time for a seven o'clock dinner, and Margaret did not see him that night, but heard enough from her sisters, when they came up to tell the history of their guest, and of the first set dinner when Flora had acted as lady of the house. The dinner it appeared had gone off very well. Flora had managed admirably, and the only mishap was some awkward carving of Ethel's which had caused the dish to be changed with Norman. As to the guest, Flora said he was very good-looking and agreeable. Ethel abruptly pronounced, "I am very glad Aunt Flora married Uncle Arnott instead."

"I can't think why," said Flora. "I never saw a person of pleasanter manners."

"Did they talk of old times?" said Margaret.

"No," said Ethel; "that was the thing."

"You would not have them talk of those matters in the middle of dinner," said Flora.

"No," again said Ethel; "but papa has a way—don't you know, Margaret, how one can tell in a moment if it is company talk."

"What was the conversation about?" said Margaret.

"They talked over some of their fellow-students," said Flora.

"Yes," said Ethel; "and then when papa told him that beautiful history of Dr. Spencer going to take care of those poor emigrants in the fever, what do you think he said? 'Yes, Spencer was always doing extravagant things.' Fancy that to papa, who can hardly speak of it without having to wipe his spectacles, and who so longs to hear of Dr. Spencer."

"And what did he say?"

"Nothing; so Flora and Sir Matthew got to pictures and all that sort of thing, and it was all company talk after that."

"Most entertaining in its kind," said Flora: "but—oh, Norman!" as he entered—"why, they are not out of the dining-room yet!"

"No; they are talking of some new invention, and most likely will not come for an hour."

"Are you going to bed?"

"Papa followed me out of the dining-room to tell me to do so after tea."

"Then sit down there, and I'll go and make some, and let it come up with Margaret's. Come, Ethel. Good-night, Norman. Is your head aching to-night?"

"Not much, now I have got out of the dining-room."

"It would have been wiser not to have gone in," said Flora, leaving the room.

"It was not the dinner, but the man," said Norman. "It is incomprehensible to me how my father could take to him. I'd as soon have Harvey Anderson for a friend!"

"You are like me," said Ethel, "in being glad he is not our uncle."

"He presume to think of falling in love with Aunt Flora!" cried Norman indignantly.

"Why, what is the matter with him?" asked Margaret. "I can't find much ground for Ethel's dislike, and Flora is pleased."

"She did not hear the worst, nor you either, Ethel," said Norman. "I could not stand the cold hard way he spoke of hospital patients. I am sure he thinks poor people nothing but a study, and rich ones nothing but a profit. And his half sneers! But what I hated most was his way of avoiding discussions. When he saw he had said what would not go down with papa, he did not honestly stand

up to the point, and argue it out, but seemed to have no mind of his own, and to be only talking to please papa—but not knowing how to do it. He understand my father indeed!"

Norman's indignation had quite revived him, and Margaret was much entertained with the conflicting opinions. The next was Richard's, when he came in late to wish her good-night, after he had been attending on Sir Matthew's examination of his father's arm. He did nothing but admire the surgeon's delicacy of touch and understanding of the case, his view agreeing much better with Dr. May's own than that with Mr. Ward's. Dr. May had never been entirely satisfied with the present mode of treatment, and Richard was much struck by hearing him say, in answer to Sir Matthew, that he knew his recovery might have been more speedy and less painful if he had been able to attend to it at first, or to afford time for being longer laid up. A change of treatment was now to be made, likely soon to relieve the pain, to be less tedious and troublesome, and to bring about a complete cure in three or four months at latest. In hearing such tidings, there could be little thought of the person who brought them, and Margaret did not, till the last moment, learn that Richard thought Sir Matthew very clever and sensible, and certain to understand her case. Her last visitor was her father: "Asleep, Margaret? I thought I had better go to Norman first in case he should be awake."

"Was he?"

"Yes, but his pulse is better to-night. He was lying awake to hear what Fleet thought of me. I suppose Richard told you?"

"Yes, dear papa; what a comfort it is!"

"Those fellows in London do keep up to the mark! But I would not be there for something. I never saw a man so altered. However, if he can only do for you as well—but it is of no use talking about it. I may trust you to keep yourself calm, my dear?"

"I am trying—indeed I am, dear papa. If you could help being anxious for me—though I know it is worse for you, for I only have to lie still, and you have to settle for me. But I have been thinking how well off I am, able to enjoy so much, and be employed all day long. It is nothing to compare with that poor girl you told me of, and you need not be unhappy for me. I have some verses to say over to myself to-night:

"O Lord my God, do Thou Thy holy will,
I will lie still,
I will not stir, lest I forsake Thine arm
And break the charm
That lulls me, clinging to my Father's breast
In perfect rest."

"Is not that comfortable?"

"My child—my dear child—I will say no more, lest I should break your sweet peace with my impatience. I will strive for the same temper, my Margaret. Bless you, dearest, good-night."

After a night spent in waking intervals of such thoughts, Margaret found the ordinary morning, and the talk she could not escape, somewhat oppressive. Her brothers and sisters disturbed her by their open expressions of hope and anxiety; she dreaded to have the balance of tranquillity overset; and then blamed herself for selfishness in not being as ready to attend to them as usual. Ethel and Norman came up after breakfast, their aversion by no means decreased by further acquaintance. Ethel was highly indignant at the tone in which he had exclaimed, "What, May, have you one as young as this?" on discovering the existence of the baby; and when Norman observed that was not so atrocious either, she proceeded, "You did not hear the contemptuous, compassionate tone when he asked papa what he meant to do with all these boys."

"I'm glad he has not to settle," said Norman.

"Papa said Harry was to be a sailor, and he said it was a good way to save expenses of education —a good thing."

"No doubt," said Norman, "he thinks papa only wants to get rid of us, or if not, that it is an amiable weakness."

"But I can't see anything so shocking in this," said Margaret.

"It is not the words," said Norman, "the look and tone convey it; but there are different opinions. Flora is quite smitten with him, he talks so politely to her."

"And Blanche!" said Ethel. "The little affected pussy-cat made a set at him, bridled and talked in her mincing voice, with all her airs, and made him take a great deal of notice of her."

Nurse here came to prepare for the surgeon's visit.

It was over, and Margaret awaited the judgment. Sir Matthew had spoken hopefully to her, but she feared to fasten hopes on what might have no meaning, and could rely on nothing, till she had seen her father, who never kept back his genuine opinion, and would least of all from her. She found her spirits too much agitated to talk to her sisters, and quietly begged them to let her be quite alone till the consultation was over, and she lay trying to prepare herself to submit thankfully, whether she might be bidden to resign herself to helplessness, or to let her mind open once more to visions of joyous usefulness. Every step she hoped would prove to be her father's approach, and the longest hour of her life was that before he entered her room. His face said that the tidings were good, and yet she could not ask.

"Well, Margaret, I am glad we had him down. He thinks you may get about again, though it may be a long time first."

"Does he?—oh, papa!" and the colour spread over her face, as she squeezed his hand very fast.

"He has known the use of the limbs return almost suddenly after even a year or two," and Dr. May gave her the grounds of the opinion, and an account of other like cases, which he said had convinced him, "though, my poor child," he said, "I feared the harm I had done you was irremediable, but thanks—" He turned away his face, and the clasp of their hands spoke the rest.

Presently he told Margaret that she was no longer to be kept prostrate, but she was to do exactly as was most comfortable to her, avoiding nothing but fatigue. She might be lifted to the sofa the next day, and if that agreed with her, she might be carried downstairs.

This, in itself, after she had been confined to her bed for three months, was a release from captivity, and all the brothers and sisters rejoiced as if she was actually on her feet again. Richard betook himself to constructing a reading-frame for the sofa; Harry tormented Miss Winter by insisting on a holiday for the others, and gained the day by an appeal to his father; then declared he should go and tell Mr. Wilmot the good news; and Norman, quite enlivened, took up his hat, and said he would come too.

In all his joy, however, Dr. May could not cease bewailing the alteration in his old friend, and spent half the evening in telling Margaret how different he had once been, in terms little less measured than Ethel's: "I never saw such a change. Mat Fleet was one of the most warm, open-hearted fellows in the world, up to anything. I can hardly believe he is the same—turned into a mere machine, with a moving spring of self-interest! I don't believe he cares a rush for any living thing! Except for your sake, Margaret, I wish I had never seen him again, and only remembered him as he was at Edinburgh, as I remembered dear old Spencer. It is a grievous thing! Ruined entirely! No doubt that London life must be trying—the constant change and bewilderment of patients preventing much individual care and interest. It must be very hardening. No family ties either, nothing to look to but pushing his way. Yes! there's great excuse for poor Mat. I never knew fully till now the blessing it was that your dear mother was willing to take me so early, and that this place was open to me with all its home connections and interests. I am glad I never had anything to do with London!"

And when he was alone with Norman, he could not help saying, "Norman, my boy, I'm more glad than ever you yielded to me about your Greek these holidays, and for the reason you did. Take

care the love of rising and pushing never gets hold of you; there's nothing that faster changes a man from his better self."

Meanwhile, Sir Matthew Fleet had met another old college friend in London, and was answering his inquiries for the Dick May of ancient times.

"Poor May! I never saw a man so thrown away. With his talent and acuteness, he might be the most eminent man of his day, if he had only known how to use them. But he was always the same careless, soft-hearted fellow, never knowing how to do himself any good, and he is the same still, not a day older nor wiser. It was a fatal thing for him that there was that country practice ready for him to step into, and even of that he does not make as good a thing as he might. Of course, he married early, and there he is, left a widower with a house full of children—screaming babies, and great tall sons growing up, and he without a notion what he shall do with them, as heedless as ever—saving nothing, of course. I always knew it was what he would come to, if he would persist in burying himself in that wretched little country town, but I hardly thought, after all he has gone through, to find him such a mere boy still. And yet he is one of the cleverest men I ever met—with such talent, and such thorough knowledge of his profession, that it does one good to hear him talk. Poor May! I am sorry for him, he might have been anything, but that early marriage and country practice were the ruin of him."

CHAPTER XIV

To thee, dear maid, each kindly wile
  Was known, that elder sisters know,
To check the unseasonable smile,
  With warning hand and serious brow.

From dream to dream with her to rove,
  Like fairy nurse with hermit child;
Teach her to think, to pray, to love,
  Make grief less bitter, joy less wild.

LINES ON A MONUMENT AT LICHFIELD.

Sir Matthew Fleet's visit seemed like a turning-point with the May family, rousing and giving them revived hopes. Norman began to shake off his extreme languor and depression, the doctor was relieved from much of the wearing suffering from his hurt, and his despondency as to Margaret's ultimate recovery had been driven away. The experiment of taking her up succeeded so well, that on Sunday she was fully attired, "fit to receive company." As she lay on the sofa there seemed an advance toward recovery. Much sweet coquetry was expended in trying to look her best for her father; and her best was very well, for though the brilliant bloom of health was gone, her cheeks had not lost their pretty rounded contour, and still had some rosiness, while her large bright blue eyes smiled and sparkled. A screen shut out the rest of the room, making a sort of little parlour round the fire, where sundry of the family were visiting her after coming home from church in the afternoon. Ethel was in a vehement state of indignation at what had that day happened at school. "Did you ever hear anything like it! When the point was, to teach the poor things to be Christians, to turn them back, because their hair was not regulation length!"

"What's that! Who did?" said Dr. May, coming in from his own room, where he had heard a few words.

"Mrs. Ledwich. She sent back three of the Cocksmoor children this morning. It seems she warned them last Sunday without saying a word to us."

"Sent them back from church!" said the doctor.

"Not exactly from church," said Margaret.

"It is the same in effect," said Ethel, "to turn them from school; for if they did try to go alone, the pew-openers would drive them out."

"It is a wretched state of things!" said Dr. May, who never wanted much provocation to begin storming about parish affairs. "When I am churchwarden again, I'll see what can be done about the seats; but it's no sort of use, while Ramsden goes on as he does."

"Now my poor children are done for!" said Ethel. "They will never come again. And it's horrid, papa; there are lots of town children who wear immense long plaits of hair, and Mrs. Ledwich never interferes with them. It is entirely to drive the poor Cocksmoor ones away—for nothing else, and all out of Fanny Anderson's chatter."

"Ethel, my dear," said Margaret pleadingly.

"Didn't I tell you, Margaret, how, as soon as Flora knew what Mrs. Ledwich was going to do, she went and told her this was the children's only chance, and if we affronted them for a trifle, there would be no hope of getting them back. She said she was sorry, if we were interested for them, but rules must not be broken; and when Flora spoke of all who do wear long hair unmolested, she shuffled and said, for the sake of the teachers, as well as the other children, rags and dirt could not be allowed;

and then she brought up the old story of Miss Boulder's pencil, though she has found it again, and ended by saying Fanny Anderson told her it was a serious annoyance to the teachers, and she was sure we should agree with her, that something was due to voluntary assistants and subscribers."

"I am afraid there has been a regular set at them," said Margaret, "and perhaps they are troublesome, poor things."

"As if school-keeping were for luxury!" said Dr. May. "It is the worst thing I have heard of Mrs. Ledwich yet! One's blood boils to think of those poor children being cast off because our fine young ladies are too grand to teach them! The clergyman leaving his work to a set of conceited women, and they turning their backs on ignorance, when it comes to their door! Voluntary subscribers, indeed! I've a great mind I'll be one no longer."

"Oh, papa, that would not be fair—" began Ethel; but Margaret knew he would not act on this, squeezed her hand, and silenced her.

"One thing I've said, and I'll hold to it," continued Dr. May; "if they outvote Wilmot again in your Ladies' Committee, I'll have no more to do with them, as sure as my name's Dick May. It is a scandal the way things are done here!"

"Papa," said Richard, who had all the time been standing silent, "Ethel and I have been thinking, if you approved, whether we could not do something towards teaching the Cocksmoor children, and breaking them in for the Sunday-school."

What a bound Ethel's heart gave, and how full of congratulation and sympathy was the pressure of Margaret's hand!

"What did you think of doing?" said the doctor. Ethel burned to reply, but her sister's hand admonished her to remember her compact. Richard answered, "We thought of trying to get a room, and going perhaps once or twice a week to give them a little teaching. It would be little enough, but it might do something towards civilising them, and making them wish for more."

"How do you propose to get a room?"

"I have reconnoitred, and I think I know a cottage with a tolerable kitchen, which I dare say we might hire for an afternoon for sixpence."

Ethel, unable to bear it any longer, threw herself forward, and sitting on the ground at her father's feet, exclaimed, "Oh, papa! papa! do say we may!"

"What's all this about?" said the doctor, surprised.

"Oh! you don't know how I have thought of it day and night these two months!"

"What! Ethel, have a fancy for two whole months, and the whole house not hear of it!" said her father, with a rather provoking look of incredulity.

"Richard was afraid of bothering you, and wouldn't let me. But do speak, papa. May we?"

"I don't see any objection."

She clasped her hands in ecstasy. "Thank you! thank you, papa! Oh, Ritchie! Oh, Margaret!" cried she, in a breathless voice of transport.

"You have worked yourself up to a fine pass," said the doctor, patting the agitated girl fondly as she leaned against his knee. "Remember, slow and steady."

"I've got Richard to help me," said Ethel.

"Sufficient guarantee," said her father, smiling archly as he looked up to his son, whose fair face had coloured deep red. "You will keep the Unready in order, Ritchie."

"He does," said Margaret; "he has taken her education into his hands, and I really believe he has taught her to hold up her frock and stick in pins."

"And to know her right hand from her left, eh, Ethel? Well, you deserve some credit, then. Suppose we ask Mr. Wilmot to tea, and talk it over."

"Oh, thank you, papa! When shall it be? To-morrow?"

"Yes, if you like. I have to go to the town-council meeting, and am not going into the country, so I shall be in early."

"Thank you. Oh, how very nice!"

"And what about cost? Do you expect to rob me?"

"If you would help us," said Ethel, with an odd shy manner; "we meant to make what we have go as far as may be, but mine is only fifteen and sixpence."

"Well, you must make interest with Margaret for the turn-out of my pocket to-morrow."

"Thank you, we are very much obliged," said the brother and sister earnestly, "that is more than we expected."

"Ha! don't thank too soon. Suppose to-morrow should be a blank day!"

"Oh, it won't!" said Ethel. "I shall tell Norman to make you go to paying people."

"There's avarice!" said the doctor. "But look you here, Ethel, if you'll take my advice, you'll make your bargain for Tuesday. I have a note appointing me to call at Abbotstoke Grange on Mr. Rivers, at twelve o'clock, on Tuesday. What do you think of that, Ethel? An old banker, rich enough for his daughter to curl her hair in bank-notes. If I were you, I'd make a bargain for him."

"If he had nothing the matter with him, and I only got one guinea out of him!"

"Prudence! Well, it may be wiser."

Ethel ran up to her room, hardly able to believe that the mighty proposal was made; and it had been so readily granted, that it seemed as if Richard's caution had been vain in making such a delay, that even Margaret had begun to fear that the street of by-and-by was leading to the house of never. Now, however, it was plain that he had been wise. Opportunity was everything; at another moment, their father might have been harassed and oppressed, and unable to give his mind to concerns, which now he could think of with interest, and Richard could not have caught a more favourable conjuncture.

Ethel was in a wild state of felicity all that evening and the next day, very unlike her brother, who, dismayed at the open step he had taken, shrank into himself, and in his shyness dreaded the discussion in the evening, and would almost have been relieved, if Mr. Wilmot had been unable to accept the invitation. So quiet and grave was he, that Ethel could not get him to talk over the matter at all with her, and she was obliged to bestow all her transports and grand projects on Flora or Margaret, when she could gain their ears, besides conning them over to herself, as an accompaniment to her lessons, by which means she tried Miss Winter's patience almost beyond measure. But she cared not —she saw a gathering school and rising church, which eclipsed all thought of present inattentions and gaucheries. She monopolised Margaret in the twilight, and rhapsodised to her heart's content, talking faster and faster, and looking more and more excited. Margaret began to feel a little overwhelmed, and while answering "yes" at intervals, was considering whether Ethel had not been flying about in an absent inconsiderate mood all day, and whether it would seem unkind to damp her ardour, by giving her a hint that she was relaxing her guard over herself. Before Margaret had steeled herself, Ethel was talking of a story she had read, of a place something like Cocksmoor. Margaret was not ready with her recollection, and Ethel, saying it was in a magazine in the drawing-room chiffonier, declared she would fetch it.

Margaret knew what it was to expect her visitors to return "in one moment," and with a "now-or-never" feeling she began, "Ethel, dear, wait," but Ethel was too impetuous to attend. "I'll be back in a twinkling," she called out, and down she flew, in her speed whisking away, without seeing it, the basket with Margaret's knitting and all her notes and papers, which lay scattered on the floor far out of reach, vexing Margaret at first, and then making her grieve at her own impatient feeling.

Ethel was soon in the drawing-room, but the right number of the magazine was not quickly forthcoming, and in searching she became embarked in another story. Just then, Aubrey, whose stout legs were apt to carry him into every part of the house where he was neither expected nor wanted, marched in at the open door, trying by dint of vehement gestures to make her understand, in his imperfect speech, something that he wanted. Very particularly troublesome she thought him, more especially as she could not make him out, otherwise than that he wanted her to do something with the newspaper and the fire. She made a boat for him with an old newspaper, a very hasty and frail

performance, and told him to sail it on the carpet, and be Mr. Ernescliffe going away; and she thought him thus safely disposed of. Returning to her book and her search, with her face to the cupboard, and her book held up to catch the light, she was soon lost in her story, and thought of nothing more till suddenly roused by her father's voice in the hall, loud and peremptory with alarm, "Aubrey! put that down!" She looked, and beheld Aubrey brandishing a great flaming paper—he dropped it at the exclamation—it fell burning on the carpet. Aubrey's white pinafore! Ethel was springing up, but in her cramped, twisted position she could not do so quickly, and even as he called, her father strode by her, snatched at Aubrey's merino frock, which he crushed over the scarcely lighted pinafore, and trampled out the flaming paper with his foot. It was a moment of dreadful fright, but the next assured them that no harm was done.

"Ethel!" cried the doctor, "Are you mad? What were you thinking of?"

Aubrey, here recollecting himself enough to be frightened at his father's voice and manner, burst into loud cries; the doctor pressed him closer on his breast, caressed and soothed him. Ethel stood by, pale and transfixed with horror. Her father was more angry with her than she had ever seen him, and with reason, as she knew, as she smelled the singeing, and saw a large burnt hole in Aubrey's pinafore, while the front of his frock was scorched and brown. Dr. May's words were not needed, "What could make you let him?"

"I didn't see—" she faltered.

"Didn't see! Didn't look, didn't think, didn't care! That's it, Ethel. 'Tis very hard one can't trust you in a room with the child any more than the baby himself. His frock perfect tinder! He would have been burned to a cinder, if I had not come in!"

Aubrey roared afresh, and Dr. May, kissing and comforting him, gathered him up in his left arm, and carried him away, looking back at the door to say, "There's no bearing it! I'll put a stop to all schools and Greek, if it is to lead to this, and make you good for nothing!"

Ethel was too much terrified to know where she was, or anything, but that she had let her little brother run into fearful peril, and grievously angered her father; she was afraid to follow him, and stood still, annihilated, and in despair, till roused by his return; then, with a stifled sob, she exclaimed, "Oh, papa!" and could get no further for a gush of tears.

But the anger of the shock of terror was over, and Dr. May was sorry for her tears, though still he could not but manifest some displeasure. "Yes, Ethel," he said, "it was a frightful thing," and he could not but shudder again. "One moment later! It is an escape to be for ever thankful for—poor little fellow!—but, Ethel, Ethel, do let it be a warning to you."

"Oh, I hope—I'll try—" sobbed Ethel.

"You have said you would try before."

"I know I have," said Ethel, choked. "If I could but—"

"Poor child," said Dr. May sadly; then looking earnestly at her, "Ethel, my dear, I am afraid of its being with you as—as it has been with me;" he spoke very low, and drew her close to him. "I grew up, thinking my inbred heedlessness a sort of grace, so to say, rather manly—the reverse of finikin. I was spoiled as a boy, and my Maggie carried on the spoiling, by never letting me feel its effects. By the time I had sense enough to regret this as a fault, I had grown too old for changing of ingrain, long-nurtured habits—perhaps I never wished it really. You have seen," and his voice was nearly inaudible, "what my carelessness has come to—let that suffice at least, as a lesson that may spare you—what your father must feel as long as he lives."

He pressed his hand tightly on her shoulder, and left her, without letting her see his face. Shocked and bewildered, she hurried upstairs to Margaret. She threw herself on her knees, felt her arms round her, and heard her kind soothing, and then, in broken words, told how dreadful it had been, and how kind papa had been, and what he had said, which was now the uppermost thought. "Oh, Margaret, Margaret, how very terrible it is! And does papa really think so?"

"I believe he does," whispered Margaret.

"How can he, can he bear it!" said Ethel, clasping her hands. "Oh! it is enough to kill one—I can't think why it did not!"

"He bears it," said Margaret, "because he is so very good, that help and comfort do come to him. Dear papa! He bears up because it is right, and for our sakes, and he has a sort of rest in that perfect love they had for each other. He knows how she would wish him to cheer up and look to the end, and support and comfort are given to him, I know they are; but oh, Ethel! it does make one tremble and shrink, to think what he has been going through this autumn, especially when I hear him moving about late at night, and now and then comes a heavy groan—whenever any especial care has been on his mind."

Ethel was in great distress. "To have grieved him again!" said she, "and just as he seemed better and brighter! Everything I do turns out wrong, and always will; I can't do anything well by any chance."

"Yes you can, when you mind what you are about."

"But I never can—I'm like him, every one says so, and he says the heedlessness is ingrain, and can't be got rid of."

"Ethel, I don't really think he could have told you so."

"I'm sure he said ingrain."

"Well, I suppose it is part of his nature, and that you have inherited it, but—" Margaret paused, and Ethel exclaimed:

"He said his was long-nurtured; yes, Margaret, you guessed right, and he said he could not change it, and no more can I."

"Surely, Ethel, you have not had so many years. You are fifteen instead of forty-six, and it is more a woman's work than a man's to be careful. You need not begin to despair. You were growing much better; Richard said so, and so did Miss Winter."

"What's the use of it, if in one moment it is as bad as ever? And to-day, of all days in the year, just when papa had been so very, very kind, and given me more than I asked."

"Do you know, Ethel, I was thinking whether dear mamma would not say that was the reason. You were so happy, that perhaps you were thrown off your guard."

"I should not wonder if that was it," said Ethel thoughtfully. "You know it was a sort of probation that Richard put me on. I was to learn to be steady before he spoke to papa, and now it seemed to be all settled and right, and perhaps I forgot I was to be careful still."

"I think it was something of the kind. I was a little afraid before, and I wish I had tried to caution you, but I did not like to seem unkind."

"I wish you had," said Ethel. "Dear little Aubrey! Oh, if papa had not been there! And I cannot think how, as it was, he could contrive to put the fire out, with his one hand, and not hurt himself. Margaret it was terrible. How could I mind so little! Did you see how his frock was singed?"

"Yes, papa showed it to me. How can we be thankful enough! One thing I hope, that Aubrey was well frightened, poor little boy."

"I know! I see now!" cried Ethel; "he must have wanted me to make the fire blaze up, as Richard did one evening when we came in and found it low; I remember Aubrey clapping his hands and shouting at the flame; but my head was in that unhappy story, and I never had sense to put the things together, and reflect that he would try to do it himself. I only wanted to get him out of my way, dear little fellow. Oh, dear, how bad it was of me! All from being uplifted, and my head turned, as it used to be when we were happier. Oh! I wish Mr. Wilmot was not coming!"

Ethel sat for a long time with her head hidden in Margaret's pillows, and her hand clasped by her good elder sister. At last she looked up and said, "Oh, Margaret, I am so unhappy. I see the whole meaning of it now. Do you not? When papa gave his consent at last, I was pleased and set up, and proud of my plans. I never recollected what a silly, foolish girl I am, and how unfit. I thought Mr. Wilmot would think great things of it—it was all wrong and self-satisfied. I never prayed at all that it might turn out well, and so now it won't."

"Dearest Ethel, I don't see that. Perhaps it will do all the better for your being humbled about it now. If you were wild and high flying, it would never go right."

"Its hope is in Richard," said Ethel.

"So it is," said Margaret.

"I wish Mr. Wilmot was not coming to-night," said Ethel again. "It would serve me right if papa were to say nothing about it."

Ethel lingered with her sister till Harry and Mary came up with Margaret's tea, and summoned her, and she crept downstairs, and entered the room so quietly, that she was hardly perceived behind her boisterous brother. She knew her eyes were in no presentable state, and cast them down, and shrank back as Mr. Wilmot shook her hand and greeted her kindly.

Mr. Wilmot had been wont to come to tea whenever he had anything to say to Dr. or Mrs. May, which was about once in ten or twelve days. He was Mary's godfather, and their most intimate friend in the town, and he had often been with them, both as friend and clergyman, through their trouble —no later than Christmas Day, he had come to bring the feast of that day to Margaret in her sick-room. Indeed, it had been chiefly for the sake of the Mays that he had resolved to spend the holidays at Stoneborough, taking the care of Abbotstoke, while his brother, the vicar, went to visit their father. This was, however, the first time he had come in his old familiar way to spend an evening, and there was something in the resumption of former habits that painfully marked the change.

Ethel, on coming in, found Flora making tea, her father leaning back in his great chair in silence, Richard diligently cutting bread, and Blanche sitting on Mr. Wilmot's knee, chattering fast and confidentially. Flora made Harry dispense the cups, and called every one to their places; Ethel timidly glanced at her father's face, as he rose and came into the light. She thought the lines and hollows were more marked than ever, and that he looked fatigued and mournful, and she felt cut to the heart; but he began to exert himself, and to make conversation, not, however, about Cocksmoor, but asking Mr. Wilmot what his brother thought of his new squire, Mr. Rivers.

"He likes him very much," said Mr. Wilmot. "He is a very pleasing person, particularly kind-hearted and gentle, and likely to do a great deal for the parish. They have been giving away beef and blankets at a great rate this Christmas."

"What family is there?" asked Flora.

"One daughter, about Ethel's age, is there with her governess. He has been twice married, and the first wife left a son, who is in the Dragoons, I believe. This girl's mother was Lord Cosham's daughter."

So the talk lingered on, without much interest or life. It was rather keeping from saying nothing than conversation, and no one was without the sensation that she was missing, round whom all had been free and joyous—not that she had been wont to speak much herself, but nothing would go on smoothly or easily without her. So long did this last, that Ethel began to think her father meant to punish her by not beginning the subject that night, and though she owned that she deserved it, she could not help being very much disappointed.

At length, however, her father began: "We wanted you to talk over a scheme that these young ones have been concocting. You see, I am obliged to keep Richard at home this next term—it won't do to have no one in the house to carry poor Margaret. We can't do without him anyway, so he and Ethel have a scheme of seeing what can be done for that wretched place, Cocksmoor."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Wilmot, brightening and looking interested. "It is sadly destitute. It would be a great thing if anything could be done for it. You have brought some children to school already, I think. I saw some rough-looking boys, who said they came from Cocksmoor."

This embarked the doctor in the history of the ladies being too fine to teach the poor Cocksmoor girls, which he told with kindling vehemence and indignation, growing more animated every moment, as he stormed over the wonted subject of the bad system of management—ladies' committee, negligent incumbent, insufficient clergy, misappropriated tithes—while Mr. Wilmot, who

had mourned over it, within himself, a hundred times already, and was doing a curate's work on sufferance, with no pay, and little but mistrust from Mr. Ramsden, and absurd false reports among the more foolish part of the town, sat listening patiently, glad to hear the doctor in his old strain, though it was a hopeless matter for discussion, and Ethel dreaded that the lamentation would go on till bedtime, and Cocksmoor be quite forgotten.

After a time they came safely back to the project, and Richard was called on to explain. Ethel left it all to him, and he with rising colour, and quiet, unhesitating, though diffident manner, detailed designs that showed themselves to have been well matured. Mr. Wilmot heard, cordially approved, and, as all agreed that no time was to be lost, while the holidays lasted, he undertook to speak to Mr. Ramsden on the subject the next morning, and if his consent to their schemes could be gained, to come in the afternoon to walk with Richard and Ethel to Cocksmoor, and set their affairs in order. All the time Ethel said not a word, except when referred to by her brother; but when Mr. Wilmot took leave, he shook her hand warmly, as if he was much pleased with her. "Ah!" she thought, "if he knew how ill I have behaved! It is all show and hollowness with me."

She did not know that Mr. Wilmot thought her silence one of the best signs for the plan, nor how much more doubtful he would have thought her perseverance, if he had seen her wild and vehement. As it was, he was very much pleased, and when the doctor came out with him into the hall, he could not help expressing his satisfaction in Richard's well-judged and sensibly-described project.

"Ay, ay!" said the doctor, "there's much more in the boy than I used to think. He's a capital fellow, and more like his mother than any of them."

"He is," said Mr. Wilmot; "there was a just, well-weighed sense and soberness in his plans that put me in mind of her every moment."

Dr. May gave his hand a squeeze, full of feeling, and went up to tell Margaret. She, on the first opportunity, told Richard, and made him happier than he had been for months, not so much in Mr. Wilmot's words, as in his father's assent to, and pleasure in them.

CHAPTER XV

Pitch thy behaviour low, thy projects high,
So shalt thou humble and magnanimous be;
Sink not in spirit; who aimeth at the sky
Shoots higher much than he that means a tree.
A grain of glory mixed with humbleness,
Cures both a fever and lethargicness.

HERBERT.

"Norman, do you feel up to a long day's work?" said Dr. May, on the following morning. "I have to set off after breakfast to see old Mrs. Gould, and to be at Abbotstoke Grange by twelve; then I thought of going to Fordholm, and getting Miss Cleveland to give us some luncheon—there are some poor people on the way to look at; and that girl on Far-view Hill; and there's another place to call in at coming home. You'll have a good deal of sitting in the carriage, holding Whitefoot, so if you think you shall be cold or tired, don't scruple to say so, and I'll take Adams to drive me."

"No, thank you," said Norman briskly. "This frost is famous."

"It will turn to rain, I expect—it is too white," said the doctor, looking out at the window. "How will you get to Cocksmoor, good people?"

"Ethel won't believe it rains unless it is very bad," said Richard.

Norman set out with his father, and prosperously performed the expedition, arriving at Abbotstoke Grange at the appointed hour.

"Ha!" said the doctor, as the iron gates of ornamental scrollwork were swung back, "there's a considerable change in this place since I was here last. Well kept up indeed! Not a dead leaf left under the old walnuts, and the grass looks as smooth as if they had a dozen gardeners rolling it every day."

"And the drive," said Norman, "more like a garden walk than a road! But oh! what a splendid cedar!"

"Isn't it! I remember that as long as I remember anything. All this fine rolling of turf, and trimming up of the place, does not make much difference to you, old fellow, does it? You don't look altered since I saw you last, when old Jervis was letting the place go to rack and ruin. So they have a new entrance—very handsome conservatory—flowers—the banker does things in style. There," as Norman helped him off with his plaid, "wrap yourself up well, don't get cold. The sun is gone in, and I should not wonder if the rain were coming after all. I'll not be longer than I can help."

Dr. May disappeared from his son's sight through the conservatory, where, through the plate-glass, the exotics looked so fresh and perfumy, that Norman almost fancied that the scent reached him. "How much poor Margaret would enjoy one of those camellias," thought he, "and these people have bushels of them for mere show. If I were papa, I should be tempted to be like Beauty's father, and carry off one. How she would admire it!"

Norman had plenty of time to meditate on the camellias, and then to turn and speculate on the age of the cedar, whether it could have been planted by the monks of Stoneborough Abbey, to whom the Grange had belonged, brought from Lebanon by a pilgrim, perhaps; and then he tried to guess at the longevity of cedars, and thought of asking Margaret, the botanist of the family. Then he yawned, moved the horse a little about, opined that Mr. Rivers must be very prosy, or have some abstruse complaint, considered the sky, and augured rain, buttoned another button of his rough coat, and thought of Miss Cleveland's dinner. Then he thought there was a very sharp wind, and drove about till he found a sheltered place on the lee side of the great cedar, looked up at it, and thought

it would be a fine subject for verses, if Mr. Wilmot knew of it, and then proceeded to consider what he should make of them.

In the midst he was suddenly roused by the deep-toned note of a dog, and beheld a large black Newfoundland dog leaping about the horse in great indignation. “Rollo! Rollo!” called a clear young voice, and he saw two ladles returning from a walk. Rollo, at the first call, galloped back to his mistress, and was evidently receiving an admonition, and promising good behaviour. The two ladies entered the house, while he lay down on the step, with his lion-like paw hanging down, watching Norman with a brilliant pair of hazel eyes. Norman, after a little more wondering when Mr. Rivers would have done with his father, betook himself to civil demonstrations to the creature, who received them with dignity, and presently, after acknowledging with his tail, various whispers of “Good old fellow,” and “Here, old Rollo!” having apparently satisfied himself that the young gentleman was respectable, he rose, and vouchsafed to stand up with his forepaws in the gig, listening amiably to Norman’s delicate flatteries. Norman even began to hope to allure him into jumping on the seat: but a great bell rang, and Rollo immediately turned round, and dashed off, at full speed, to some back region of the house. “So, old fellow, you know what the dinner-bell means,” thought Norman. “I hope Mr. Rivers is hungry too. Miss Cleveland will have eaten up her whole luncheon, if this old bore won’t let my father go soon! I hope he is desperately ill—‘tis his only excuse! Heigh ho! I must jump out to warm my feet soon! There, there’s a drop of rain! Well, there’s no end to it! I wonder what Ethel is doing about Cocksmoor! It is setting in for a wet afternoon!” and Norman disconsolately put up his umbrella.

At last Dr. May and another gentleman were seen in the conservatory, and Norman gladly proceeded to clear the seat; but Dr. May called out, “Jump out, Norman, Mr. Rivers is so kind as to ask us to stay to luncheon.”

With boyish shrinking from strangers, Norman privately wished Mr. Rivers at Jericho, as he gave the reins to a servant, and entered the conservatory, where a kindly hand was held out to him by a gentleman of about fifty, with a bald smooth forehead, soft blue eyes, and gentle pleasant face. “Is this your eldest son?” said he, turning to Dr. May—and the manner of both was as if they were already well acquainted. “No, this is my second. The eldest is not quite such a long-legged fellow,” said Dr. May. And then followed the question addressed to Norman himself, where he was at school.

“At Stoneborough,” said Norman, a little amused at the thought how angry Ethel and Harry would be that the paragraph of the county paper, where “N. W. May” was recorded as prizeman and foremost in the examination, had not penetrated even to Abbotstoke Grange, or rather to its owner’s memory.

However, his father could not help adding, “He is the head of the school—a thing we Stoneborough men think much of.”

This, and Mr. Rivers’s civil answer, made Norman so hot, that he did not notice much in passing through a hall full of beautiful vases, stuffed birds, busts, etc., tastefully arranged, and he did not look up till they were entering a handsome dining-room, where a small square table was laid out for luncheon near a noble fire.

The two ladies were there, and Mr. Rivers introduced them as his daughter and Mrs. Larpent. It was the most luxurious meal that Norman had ever seen, the plate, the porcelain, and all the appointments of the table so elegant, and the viands, all partaking of the Christmas character, and of a recherche delicate description quite new to him. He had to serve as his father’s right hand, and was so anxious to put everything as Dr. May liked it, and without attracting notice, that he hardly saw or listened till Dr. May began to admire a fine Claude on the opposite wall, and embarked in a picture discussion. The doctor had much taste for art, and had made the most of his opportunities of seeing paintings during his time of study at Paris, and in a brief tour to Italy. Since that time, few good pictures had come in his way, and these were a great pleasure to him, while Mr. Rivers, a regular connoisseur, was delighted to meet with one who could so well appreciate them. Norman

perceived how his father was enjoying the conversation, and was much interested both by the sight of the first fine paintings he had ever seen, and by the talk about their merits; but the living things in the room had more of his attention and observation, especially the young lady who sat at the head of the table; a girl about his own age; she was on a very small scale, and seemed to him like a fairy, in the airy lightness and grace of her movements, and the blithe gladsomeness of her gestures and countenance. Form and features, though perfectly healthful and brisk, had the peculiar finish and delicacy of a miniature painting, and were enhanced by the sunny glance of her dark soft smiling eyes. Her hair was in black silky braids, and her dress, with its gaiety of well-assorted colour, was positively refreshing to his eye, so long accustomed to the deep mourning of his sisters. A little Italian greyhound, perfectly white, was at her side, making infinite variations of the line of beauty and grace, with its elegant outline, and S-like tail, as it raised its slender nose in hopes of a fragment of bread which she from time to time dispensed to it.

Luncheon over, Mr. Rivers asked Dr. May to step into his library, and Norman guessed that they had been talking all this time, and had never come to the medical opinion. However, a good meal and a large fire made a great difference in his toleration, and it was so new a scene, that he had no objection to a prolonged waiting, especially when Mrs. Larpent said, in a very pleasant tone, “Will you come into the drawing-room with us?”

He felt somewhat as if he was walking in enchanted ground as he followed her into the large room, the windows opening into the conservatory, the whole air fragrant with flowers, the furniture and ornaments so exquisite of their kind, and all such a fit scene for the beautiful little damsel, who, with her slender dog by her side, tripped on demurely, and rather shyly, but with a certain skipping lightness in her step. A very tall overgrown schoolboy did Norman feel himself for one bashful moment, when he found himself alone with the two ladies; but he was ready to be set at ease by Mrs. Larpent’s good-natured manner, when she said something of Rollo’s discourtesy. He smiled, and answered that he had made great friends with the fine old dog, and spoke of his running off to the dinner, at which little Miss Rivers laughed, and looked delighted, and began to tell of Rollo’s perfections and intelligence. Norman ventured to inquire the name of the little Italian, and was told it was Nipen, because it had once stolen a cake, much like the wind-spirit in Feats on the Fiord. Its beauty and tricks were duly displayed, and a most beautiful Australian parrot was exhibited, Mrs. Larpent taking full interest in the talk, in so lively and gentle a manner, and she and her pretty pupil evidently on such sister-like terms, that Norman could hardly believe her to be the governess, when he thought of Miss Winter.

Miss Rivers took up some brown leaves which she was cutting out with scissors, and shaping. “Our holiday work,” said Mrs. Larpent, in answer to the inquiring look of Norman’s eyes. “Meta has been making a drawing for her papa, and is framing it in leather-work. Have you ever seen any?”

“Never!” and Norman looked eagerly, asking questions, and watching while Miss Rivers cut out her ivy leaf and marked its veins, and showed how she copied it from nature. He thanked her, saying, “I wanted to learn all about it, for I thought it would be such nice work for my eldest sister.”

A glance of earnest interest from little Meta’s bright eyes at her governess, and Mrs. Larpent, in a kind, soft tone that quite gained his heart, asked, “Is she the invalid?”

“Yes,” said Norman. “New fancy work is a great gain to her.”

Mrs. Larpent’s sympathetic questions, and Meta’s softening eyes, gradually drew from him a great deal about Margaret’s helpless state, and her patience, and capabilities, and how every one came to her with all their cares; and Norman, as he spoke, mentally contrasted the life, untouched by trouble and care, led by the fair girl before him, with that atmosphere of constant petty anxieties round her namesake’s couch, at years so nearly the same.

“How very good she must be,” said little Meta, quickly and softly; and a tear was sparkling on her eyelashes.

“She is indeed,” said Norman earnestly. “I don’t know what papa would do but for her.”

Mrs. Larpent asked kind questions whether his father's arm was very painful, and the hopes of its cure; and he felt as if she was a great friend already. Thence they came to books. Norman had not read for months past, but it happened that Meta was just now reading Woodstock, with which he was of course familiar; and both grew eager in discussing that and several others. Of one, Meta spoke in such terms of delight, that Norman thought it had been very stupid of him to let it lie on the table for the last fortnight without looking into it.

He was almost sorry to see his father and Mr. Rivers come in, and hear the carriage ordered, but they were not off yet, though the rain was now only Scotch mist. Mr. Rivers had his most choice little pictures still to display, his beautiful early Italian masters, finished like illuminations, and over these there was much lingering and admiring. Meta had whispered something to her governess, who smiled, and advanced to Norman. "Meta wishes to know if your sister would like to have a few flowers?" said she.

No sooner said than done; the door into the conservatory was opened, and Meta, cutting sprays of beautiful geranium, delicious heliotrope, fragrant calycanthus, deep blue tree violet, and exquisite hothouse ferns; perfect wonders to Norman, who, at each addition to the bouquet, exclaimed by turns, "Oh, thank you!" and, "How she will like it!"

Her father reached a magnolia blossom from on high, and the quick warm grateful emotion trembled in Dr. May's features and voice, as he said, "It is very kind in you; you have given my poor girl a great treat. Thank you with all my heart."

Margaret Rivers cast down her eyes, half smiled, and shrank back, thinking she had never felt anything like the left-handed grasp, so full of warmth and thankfulness. It gave her confidence to venture on the one question on which she was bent. Her father was in the hall, showing Norman his Greek nymph; and lifting her eyes to Dr. May's face, then casting them down, she coloured deeper than ever, as she said, in a stammering whisper, "Oh, please—if you would tell me—do you think —is papa very ill?"

Dr. May answered in his softest, most reassuring tones: "You need not be alarmed about him, I assure you. You must keep him from too much business," he added, smiling; "make him ride with you, and not let him tire himself, and I am sure you can be his best doctor."

"But do you think," said Meta, earnestly looking up—"do you think he will be quite well again?"

"You must not expect doctors to be absolute oracles," said he. "I will tell you what I told him —I hardly think his will ever be sound health again, but I see no reason why he should not have many years of comfort, and there is no cause for you to disquiet yourself on his account—you have only to be careful of him."

Meta tried to say "thank you," but not succeeding, looked imploringly at her governess, who spoke for her. "Thank you, it is a great relief to have an opinion, for we were not at all satisfied about Mr. Rivers."

A few words more, and Meta was skipping about like a sprite finding a basket for the flowers—she had another shake of the hand, another grateful smile, and "thank you," from the doctor; and then, as the carriage disappeared, Mrs. Larpent exclaimed, "What a very nice intelligent boy that was."

"Particularly gentlemanlike," said Mr. Rivers. "Very clever—the head of the school, as his father tells me—and so modest and unassuming—though I see his father is very proud of him."

"Oh, I am sure they are so fond of each other," said Meta: "didn't you see his attentive ways to his father at luncheon! And, papa, I am sure you must like Dr. May, Mr. Wilmot's doctor, as much as I said you would."

"He is the most superior man I have met with for a long time," said Mr. Rivers. "It is a great acquisition to find a man of such taste and acquirements in this country neighbourhood, when there is not another who can tell a Claude from a Poussin. I declare, when once we began talking, there was no leaving off—I have not met a person of so much conversation since I left town. I thought you would like to see him, Meta."

"I hope I shall know the Miss Mays some time or other."

"That is the prettiest little fairy I ever did see!" was Dr. May's remark, as Norman drove from the door.

"How good-natured they are!" said Norman; "I just said something about Margaret, and she gave me all these flowers. How Margaret will be delighted! I wish the girls could see it all!"

"So you got on well with the ladies, did you?"

"They were very kind to me. It was very pleasant!" said Norman, with a tone of enjoyment that did his father's heart good.

"I was glad you should come in. Such a curiosity shop is a sight, and those pictures were some of them well worth seeing. That was a splendid Titian."

"That cast of the Pallas of the Parthenon—how beautiful it was—I knew it from the picture in Smith's dictionary. Mr. Rivers said he would show me all his antiques if you would bring me again."

"I saw he liked your interest in them. He is a good, kind-hearted dilettante sort of old man; he has got all the talk of the literary, cultivated society in London, and must find it dullish work here."

"You liked him, didn't you?"

"He is very pleasant; I found he knew my old friend, Benson, whom I had not seen since we were at Cambridge together, and we got on that and other matters; London people have an art of conversation not learned here, and I don't know how the time slipped away; but you must have been tolerably tired of waiting."

"Not to signify," said Norman. "I only began to think he must be very ill; I hope there is not much the matter with him."

"I can't say. I am afraid there is organic disease, but I think it may be kept quiet a good while yet, and he may have a pleasant life for some time to come, arranging his prints, and petting his pretty daughter. He has plenty to fall back upon."

"Do you go there again?"

"Yes, next week. I am glad of it. I shall like to have another look at that little Madonna of his —it is the sort of picture that does one good to carry away in one's eye. Whay! Stop. There's an old woman in here. It is too late for Fordholm, but these cases won't wait."

He went into the cottage, and soon returned, saying, "Fine new blankets, and a great kettle of soup, and such praises of the ladies at the Grange!" And, at the next house, it was the same story. "Well, 'tis no mockery now to tell the poor creatures they want nourishing food. Slices of meat and bottles of port wine rain down on Abbotstoke."

A far more talkative journey than usual ensued; the discussion of the paintings and antiques was almost equally delightful to the father and son, and lasted till, about a mile from Stoneborough, they descried three figures in the twilight.

"Ha! How are you, Wilmot? So you braved the rain, Ethel. Jump in," called the doctor, as Norman drew up.

"I shall crowd you—I shall hurt your arm, papa; thank you."

"No, you won't—jump in—there's room for three thread-papers in one gig. Why, Wilmot, your brother has a very jewel of a squire! How did you fare?"

"Very well on the whole," was Mr. Wllmot's answer, while Ethel scrambled in, and tried to make herself small, an art in which she was not very successful; and Norman gave an exclamation of horrified warning, as she was about to step into the flower-basket; then she nearly tumbled out again in dismay, and was relieved to find herself safely wedged in, without having done any harm, while her father called out to Mr. Wilmot, as they started, "I say! You are coming back to tea with us."

That cheerful tone, and the kindness to herself, were a refreshment and revival to Ethel, who was still sobered and shocked by her yesterday's adventure, and by the sense of her father's sorrowful displeasure. Expecting further to be scolded for getting in so awkwardly, she did not venture to

volunteer anything, and even when he kindly said, “I hope you were prosperous in your expedition,” she only made answer, in a very grave voice, “Yes, papa, we have taken a very nice tidy room.”

“What do you pay for it?”

“Fourpence for each time.”

“Well, here’s for you,” said Dr. May. “It is only two guineas to-day; that banker at the Grange beguiled us of our time, but you had better close the bargain for him, Ethel—he will be a revenue for you, for this winter at least.”

“Oh, thank you, papa,” was all Ethel could say; overpowered by his kindness, and more repressed by what she felt so unmerited, than she would have been by coldness, she said few words, and preferred listening to Norman, who began to describe their adventures at the Grange.

All her eagerness revived, however, as she sprang out of the carriage, full of tidings for Margaret; and it was almost a race between her and Norman to get upstairs, and unfold their separate budgets.

Margaret’s lamp had just been lighted, when they made their entrance, Norman holding the flowers on high.

“Oh, how beautiful! how delicious! For me? Where did you get them?”

“From Abbotstoke Grange; Miss Rivers sent them to you.”

“How very kind! What a lovely geranium, and oh, that fern! I never saw anything so choice. How came she to think of me?”

“They asked me in because it rained, and she was making the prettiest things, leather leaves and flowers for picture frames. I thought it was work that would just suit you, and learned how to do it. That made them ask about you, and it ended by her sending you this nosegay.”

“How very kind everybody is! Well, Ethel, are you come home too?”

“Papa picked me up. Oh, Margaret, we have found such a nice room, a clean sanded kitchen—”

“You never saw such a conservatory—”

“And it is to be let to us for fourpence a time—”

“The house is full of beautiful things, pictures and statues. Only think of a real Titian, and a cast of the Apollo!”

“Twenty children to begin with, and Richard is going to make some forms.”

“Mr. Rivers is going to show me all his casts.”

“Oh, is he? But only think how lucky we were to find such a nice woman; Mr. Wilmot was so pleased with her.”

Norman found one story at a time was enough, and relinquished the field, contenting himself with silently helping Margaret to arrange the flowers, holding the basket for her, and pleased with her gestures of admiration. Ethel went on with her history. “The first place we thought of would not do at all; the woman said she would not take half-a-crown a week to have a lot of children stabbling about, as she called it; so we went to another house, and there was a very nice woman indeed, Mrs. Green, with one little boy, whom she wanted to send to school, only it is too far. She says she always goes to church at Fordholm because it is nearer, and she is quite willing to let us have the room. So we settled it, and next Friday we are to begin. Papa has given us two guineas, and that will pay for, let me see, a hundred and twenty-six times, and Mr. Wilmot is going to give us some books, and Ritchie will print some alphabets. We told a great many of the people, and they are so glad. Old Granny Hall said, ‘Well, I never!’ and told the girls they must be as good as gold now the gentlefolks was coming to teach them. Mr. Wilmot is coming with us every Friday as long as the holidays last.”

Ethel departed on her father’s coming in to ask Margaret if she would like to have a visit from Mr. Wilmot. She enjoyed this very much, and he sat there nearly an hour, talking of many matters, especially the Cocksmoor scheme, on which she was glad to hear his opinion at first hand.

“I am very glad you think well of it,” she said. “It is most desirable that something should be done for those poor people, and Richard would never act rashly; but I have longed for advice whether

it was right to promote Ethel's undertaking. I suppose Richard told you how bent on it she was, long before papa was told of it."

"He said it was her great wish, and had been so for a long time past."

Margaret, in words more adequate to express the possession the project had gained of Ethel's ardent mind, explained the whole history of it. "I do believe she looks on it as a sort of call," said she, "and I have felt as if I ought not to hinder her, and yet I did not know whether it was right, at her age, to let her undertake so much."

"I understand," said Mr. Wilmot, "but, from what I have seen of Ethel, I should think you had decided rightly. There seems to me to be such a spirit of energy in her, that if she does not act, she will either speculate and theorise, or pine and prey on herself. I do believe that hard homely work, such as this school-keeping, is the best outlet for what might otherwise run to extravagance—more especially as you say the hope of it has already been an incentive to improvement in home duties."

"That I am sure it has," said Margaret.

"Moreover," said Mr. Wilmot, "I think you were quite right in thinking that to interfere with such a design was unsafe. I do believe that a great deal of harm is done by prudent friends, who dread to let young people do anything out of the common way, and so force their aspirations to ferment and turn sour, for want of being put to use."

"Still girls are told they ought to wait patiently, and not to be eager for self-imposed duties."

"I am not saying that it is not the appointed discipline for the girls themselves," said Mr. Wilmot. "If they would submit, and do their best, it would doubtless prove the most beneficial thing for them; but it is a trial in which they often fail, and I had rather not be in the place of such friends."

"It is a great puzzle!" said Margaret, sighing.

"Ah! I dare say you are often perplexed," said her friend kindly.

"Indeed I am. There are so many little details that I cannot be always teasing papa with, and yet which I do believe form the character more than the great events, and I never know whether I act for the best. And there are so many of us, so many duties, I cannot half attend to any. Lately, I have been giving up almost everything to keep this room quiet for Norman in the morning, because he was so much harassed and hurt by bustle and confusion, and I found to-day that things have gone wrong in consequence."

"You must do the best you can, and try to trust that while you work in the right spirit, your failures will be compensated," said Mr. Wilmot. "It is a hard trial."

"I like your understanding it," said Margaret, smiling sadly. "I don't know whether it is silly, but I don't like to be pitied for the wrong thing. My being so helpless is what every one laments over; but, after all, that is made up to me by the petting and kindness I get from all of them; but it is the being mistress of the house, and having to settle for every one, without knowing whether I do right or wrong, that is my trouble."

"I am not sure, however, that it is right to call it a trouble, though it is a trial."

"I see what you mean," said Margaret. "I ought to be thankful. I know it is an honour, and I am quite sure I should be grieved if they did not all come to me and consult me as they do. I had better not have complained, and yet I am glad I did, for I like you to understand my difficulties."

"And, indeed, I wish to enter into them, and do or say anything in my power to help you. But I don't know anything that can be of so much comfort as the knowledge that He who laid the burden on you, will help you to bear it."

"Yes," said Margaret, pausing; and then, with a sweet look, though a heavy sigh, she said, "It is very odd how things turn out! I always had a childish fancy that I would be useful and important, but I little thought how it would be! However, as long as Richard is in the house, I always feel secure about the others, and I shall soon be downstairs myself. Don't you think dear papa in better spirits?"

"I thought so to-day,"—and here the doctor returned, talking of Abbotstoke Grange, where he had certainly been much pleased. "It was a lucky chance," he said, "that they brought Norman in. It

was exactly what I wanted to rouse and interest him, and he took it all in so well, that I am sure they were pleased with him. I thought he looked a very lanky specimen of too much leg and arm when I called him in, but he has such good manners, and is so ready and understanding, that they could not help liking him. It was fortunate I had him instead of Richard—Ritchie is a very good fellow, certainly, but he had rather look at a steam-engine, any day, than at Raphael himself."

Norman had his turn by-and-by. He came up after tea, reporting that papa was fast asleep in his chair, and the others would go on about Cocksmoor till midnight, if they were let alone; and made up for his previous yielding to Ethel, by giving, with much animation, and some excitement, a glowing description of the Grange, so graphic, that Margaret said she could almost fancy she had been there.

"Oh, Margaret, I wonder if you ever will! I would give something for you to see the beautiful conservatory. It is a real bower for a maiden of romance, with its rich green fragrance in the midst of winter. It is like a picture in a dream. One could imagine it a fairy land, where no care, or grief, or weariness could come, all choice beauty and sweetness waiting on the creature within. I can hardly believe that it is a real place, and that I have seen it."

"Though you have brought these pretty tokens that your fairy is as good as she is fair!" said Margaret, smiling.

CHAPTER XVI

EVANS. Peace your tattlings. What is fair, William?
WILLIAM. PULCHER.
QUICKLY. Poulcats! there are fairer things than poulcats sure!
EVANS. I pray you have your remembrance, child, accusative
HING HANG HOG.
QUICKLY. HANG HOG is Latin for bacon, I warrant you.

SHAKESPEARE.

In a large family it must often happen, that since every member of it cannot ride the same hobby, nor at the same time, their several steeds must sometimes run counter to each other; and so Ethel found it, one morning when Miss Winter, having a bad cold, had given her an unwonted holiday.

Mr. Wilmot had sent a large parcel of books for her to choose from for Cocksmoor, but this she could not well do without consultation. The multitude bewildered her, she was afraid of taking too many or too few, and the being brought to these practical details made her sensible that though her schemes were very grand and full for future doings, they passed very lightly over the intermediate ground. The Paulo post fulurum was a period much more developed in her imagination than the future, that the present was flowing into.

Where was her coadjutor, Richard? Writing notes for papa, and not to be disturbed. She had better have waited tranquilly, but this would not suit her impatience, and she ran up to Margaret's room. There she found a great display of ivy leaves, which Norman, who had been turning half the shops in the town upside down in search of materials, was instructing her to imitate in leather-work —a regular mania with him, and apparently the same with Margaret.

In came Ethel. "Oh, Margaret, will you look at these 'First Truths?' Do you think they would be easy enough? Shall I take some of the Parables and Miracles at once, or content myself with the book about 'Jane Sparks?'"

"There's some very easy reading in 'Jane Sparks', isn't there? I would not make the little books from the New Testament too common."

"Take care, that leaf has five points," said Norman.

"Shall I bring you up 'Jane Sparks' to see? Because then you can judge," said Ethel.

"There, Norman, is that right?—what a beauty! I should like to look over them by-and-by, dear Ethel, very much."

Ethel gazed and went away, more put out than was usual with her. "When Margaret has a new kind of fancy work," she thought, "she cares for nothing else! as if my poor children did not signify more than trumpery leather leaves!" She next met Flora.

"Oh, Flora, see here, what a famous parcel of books Mr. Wilmot has sent us to choose from."

"All those!" said Flora, turning them over as they lay heaped on the drawing-room sofa; "what a confusion!"

"See, such a parcel of reading books. I want to know what you think of setting them up with 'Jane Sparks', as it is week-day teaching."

"You will be very tired of hearing those spelled over for ever; they have some nicer books at the national school."

"What is the name of them? Do you see any of them here?"

"No, I don't think I do, but I can't wait to look now. I must write some letters. You had better put them together a little. If you were to sort them, you would know what is there. Now, what a mess they are in."

Ethel could not deny it, and began to deal them out in piles, looking somewhat more fitting, but still felt neglected and aggrieved, at no one being at leisure but Harry, who was not likely to be of any use to her.

Presently she heard the study door open, and hoped; but though it was Richard who entered the room, he was followed by Tom, and each held various books that boded little good to her. Miss Winter had, much to her own satisfaction, been relieved from the charge of Tom, whose lessons Richard had taken upon himself; and thus Ethel had heard so little about them for a long time past, that even in her vexation and desire to have them over, she listened with interest, desirous to judge what sort of place Tom might be likely to take in school.

She did not perceive that this made Richard nervous and uneasy. He had a great dislike to spectators of Latin lessons; he never had forgotten an unlucky occasion, some years back, when his father was examining him in the Georgics, and he, dull by nature, and duller by confusion and timidity, had gone on rendering word for word—enim for, seges a crop, lini of mud, urit burns, campum the field, avenae a crop of pipe, urit burns it; when Norman and Ethel had first warned him of the beauty of his translation by an explosion of laughing, when his father had shut the book with a bounce, shaken his head in utter despair, and told him to give up all thoughts of doing anything—and when Margaret had cried with vexation. Since that time, he had never been happy when any one was in earshot of a lesson; but to-day he had no escape—Harry lay on the rug reading, and Ethel sat forlorn over her books on the sofa. Tom, however, was bright enough, declined his Greek nouns irreproachably, and construed his Latin so well, that Ethel could not help putting in a word or two of commendation, and auguring the third form. “Do let him off the parsing, Ritchie,” said she coaxingly—“he has said it so well, and I want you so much.”

“I am afraid I must not,” said Richard; who, to her surprise, did not look pleased or satisfied with the prosperous translation; “but come, Tom, you shan’t have many words, if you really know them.”

Tom twisted and looked rather cross, but when asked to parse the word viribus, answered readily and correctly.

“Very well, only two more—affuit?”

“Third person singular, praeter perfect tense of the verb affo, affis, affui, affere,” gabbled off Tom with such confidence, that though Ethel gave an indignant jump, Richard was almost startled into letting it pass, and disbelieving himself. He remonstrated in a somewhat hesitating voice. “Did you find that in the dictionary?” said he; “I thought affui came from adsum.”

“Oh, to be sure, stupid fool of a word, so it does!” said Tom hastily. “I had forgot—adsum, ades, affui, adesse.”

Richard said no more, but proposed the word oppositus.

“Adjective.”

Ethel was surprised, for she remembered that it was, in this passage, part of a passive verb, which Tom had construed correctly, “it was objected,” and she had thought this very creditable to him, whereas he now evidently took it for opposite; however, on Richard’s reading the line, he corrected himself and called it a participle, but did not commit himself further, till asked for its derivation.

“From oppositor.”

“Hallo!” cried Harry, who hitherto had been abstracted in his book, but now turned, raised himself on his elbow, and, at the blunder, shook his thick yellow locks, and showed his teeth like a young lion.

“No, now, Tom, pay attention,” said Richard resignedly. “If you found out its meaning, you must have seen its derivation.”

“Oppositus,” said Tom, twisting his fingers, and gazing first at Ethel, then at Harry, in hopes of being prompted, then at the ceiling and floor, the while he drawled out the word with a whine, “why, oppositus from op-posor.”

“A poser! ain’t it?” said Harry.

"Don't, Harry, you distract him," said Richard. "Come, Tom, say at once whether you know it or not—it is of no use to invent."

"From op-" and a mumble.

"What? I don't hear—op—"

Tom again looked for help to Harry, who made a mischievous movement of his lips, as if prompting, and, deceived by it, he said boldly, "From op-possum."

"That's right! let us hear him decline it!" cried Harry, in an ecstasy. "Oppossum, opottis, opposse, or oh-pottery!"

"Harry," said Richard, in a gentle reasonable voice, "I wish you would be so kind as not to stay, if you cannot help distracting him."

And Harry, who really had a tolerable share of forbearance and consideration, actually obeyed, contenting himself with tossing his book into the air and catching it again, while he paused at the door to give his last unsolicited assistance. "Decline oppossum you say. I'll tell you how: O-possum re-poses up a gum tree. O-pot-you-I will, says the O-posse of Yankees, come out to ketch him. Opossum poses them and declines in O-pot-esse by any manner of means of o-potting-di-do-dum, was quite oppositum-oppotitu, in fact, quite contrairy."

Richard, with the gravity of a victim, heard this sally of schoolboy wit, which threw Ethel back on the sofa in fits of laughing, and declaring that the Opossum declined, not that he was declined; but, in the midst of the disturbance thus created, Tom stepped up to her, and whispered, "Do tell me, Ethel!"

"Indeed I shan't," said she. "Why don't you say fairly if you don't know?"

He was obliged to confess his ignorance, and Richard made him conjugate the whole verb opponor from beginning to end, in which he wanted a good deal of help.

Ethel could not help saying, "How did you find out the meaning of that word, Tom, if you didn't look out the verb?"

"I—don't know," drawled Tom, in the voice, half sullen, half piteous, which he always assumed when out of sorts.

"It is very odd," she said decidedly; but Richard took no notice, and proceeded to the other lessons, which went off tolerably well, except the arithmetic, where there was some great misunderstanding, into which Ethel did not enter for some time. When she did attend, she perceived that Tom had brought a right answer, without understanding the working of the sum, and that Richard was putting him through it. She began to be worked into a state of dismay and indignation at Tom's behaviour, and Richard's calm indifference, which made her almost forget 'Jane Sparks', and long to be alone with Richard; but all the world kept coming into the room, and going out, and she could not say what was in her mind till after dinner, when, seeing Richard go up into Margaret's room, she ran after him, and entering it, surprised Margaret, by not beginning on her books, but saying at once, "Ritchie, I wanted to speak to you about Tom. I am sure he shuffled about those lessons."

"I am afraid he does," said Richard, much concerned.

"What, do you mean that it is often so?"

"Much too often," said Richard; "but I have never been able to detect him; he is very sharp, and has some underhand way of preparing his lessons that I cannot make out."

"Did you know it, Margaret?" said Ethel, astonished not to see her sister looked shocked as well as sorry.

"Yes," said Margaret, "Ritchie and I have often talked it over, and tried to think what was to be done."

"Dear me! why don't you tell papa? It is such a terrible thing!"

"So it is," said Margaret, "but we have nothing positive or tangible to accuse Tom of; we don't know what he does, and have never caught him out."

"I am sure he must have found out the meaning of that oppositum in some wrong way—if he had looked it out, he would only have found opposite. Nothing but opponor could have shown him the rendering which he made."

"That's like what I have said almost every day," said Richard, "but there we are—I can't get any further."

"Perhaps he guesses by the context," said Margaret.

"It would be impossible to do so always," said both the Latin scholars at once.

"Well, I can't think how you can take it so quietly," said Ethel. "I would have told papa the first moment, and put a stop to it. I have a great mind to do so, if you won't.

"Ethel, Ethel, that would never do!" exclaimed Margaret, "pray don't. Papa would be so dreadfully grieved and angry with poor Tom."

"Well, so he deserves," said Ethel.

"You don't know what it is to see papa angry," said Richard.

"Dear me, Richard!" cried Ethel, who thought she knew pretty well what his sharp words were. "I'm sure papa never was angry with me, without making me love him more, and, at least, want to be better."

"You are a girl," said Richard.

"You are higher spirited, and shake off things faster," said Margaret.

"Why, what do you think he would do to Tom?"

"I think he would be so very angry, that Tom, who, you know, is timid and meek, would be dreadfully frightened," said Richard.

"That's just what he ought to be, frightened out of these tricks."

"I am afraid it would frighten him into them still more," said Richard, "and perhaps give him such a dread of my father as would prevent him from ever being open with him."

"Besides, it would make papa so very unhappy," added Margaret. "Of course, if poor dear Tom had been found out in any positive deceit, we ought to mention it at once, and let him be punished; but while it is all vague suspicion, and of what papa has such a horror of, it would only grieve him, and make him constantly anxious, without, perhaps, doing Tom any good."

"I think all that is expediency," said Ethel, in her bluff, abrupt way.

"Besides," said Richard, "we have nothing positive to accuse him of, and if we had, it would be of no use. He will be at school in three weeks, and there he would be sure to shirk, even if he left it off here. Every one does, and thinks nothing of it."

"Richard!" cried both sisters, shocked. "You never did?"

"No, we didn't, but most others do, and not bad fellows either. It is not the way of boys to think much of those things."

"It is mean—it is dishonourable—it is deceitful!" cried Ethel.

"I know it is very wrong, but you'll never get the general run of boys to think so," said Richard.

"Then Tom ought not to go to school at all till he is well armed against it," said Ethel.

"That can't be helped," said Richard. "He will get clear of it in time, when he knows better."

"I will talk to him," said Margaret, "and, indeed, I think it would be better than worrying papa."

"Well," said Ethel, "of course I shan't tell, because it is not my business, but I think papa ought to know everything about us, and I don't like your keeping anything back. It is being almost as bad as Tom himself."

With which words, as Flora entered, Ethel marched out of the room in displeasure, and went down, resolved to settle Jane Sparks by herself.

"Ethel is out of sorts to-day," said Flora. "What's the matter?"

"We have had a discussion," said Margaret. "She has been terribly shocked by finding out what we have often thought about poor little Tom, and she thinks we ought to tell papa. Her principle is quite right, but I doubt—"

"I know exactly how Ethel would do it!" cried Flora; "blurt out all on a sudden, 'Papa, Tom cheats at his lessons!' then there would be a tremendous uproar, papa would scold Tom till he almost frightened him out of his wits, and then find out it was only suspicion."

"And never have any comfort again," said Margaret. "He would always dread that Tom was deceiving him, and then think it was all for want of—Oh, no, it will never do to speak of it, unless we find out some positive piece of misbehaviour."

"Certainly," said Flora.

"And it would do Tom no good to make him afraid of papa," said Richard.

"Ethel's rule is right in principle," said Margaret thoughtfully, "that papa ought to know all without reserve, and yet it will hardly do in practice. One must use discretion, and not tease him about every little thing. He takes them so much to heart, that he would be almost distracted; and, with so much business abroad, I think at home he should have nothing but rest, and, as far as we can, freedom from care and worry. Anything wrong about the children brings on the grief so much, that I cannot bear to mention it."

Richard and Flora agreed with her, admiring the spirit which made her, in her weakness and helplessness, bear the whole burden of family cares alone, and devote herself entirely to spare her father. He was, indeed, her first object, and she would have sacrificed anything to give him ease of mind; but, perhaps, she regarded him more as a charge of her own, than as, in very truth, the head of the family. She had the government in her hands, and had never been used to see him exercise it much in detail (she did not know how much her mother had referred to him in private), and had succeeded to her authority at a time when his health and spirits were in such a state as to make it doubly needful to spare him. It was no wonder that she sometimes carried her consideration beyond what was strictly right, and forgot that he was the real authority, more especially as his impulsive nature sometimes carried him away, and his sound judgment was not certain to come into play at the first moment, so that it required some moral courage to excite displeasure, so easy of manifestation; and of such courage there was, perhaps, a deficiency in her character. Nor had she yet detected her own satisfaction in being the first with every one in the family.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.