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WHAT LITTLE HANDS CAN DO.



“At this moment his two cousins, Ellen and Annie, came into the room ; they looked bright, happy little girls.”—Page 2.

WHAT LITTLE HANDS CAN DO:

OR,

The Children of Beechgrove.

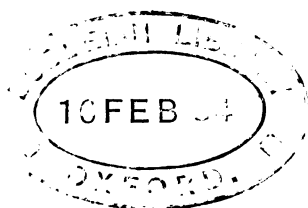
*A BOOK OF INTEREST
FOR SUNDAY AND WEEK DAY READING.*

BY MRS. M. C. OWEN.

“ Oh ! what can little hands do
To please the King of Heaven ?
The little hands some work may try,
To help the poor in misery—
Such grace to mine be given ! ”

FOURTH EDITION.

LONDON:
JARROLD & SONS, 3, PATERNOSTER BUILDINGS.





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WHAT LITTLE HANDS CAN DO.

Chapter First.

INTRODUCTION.

“**A**NOTHER wet Sunday! how very tiresome;” exclaimed a little boy about nine years old, who stood looking out of a window, watching the passers-by, during a steady and heavy rain. “We have had so many lately, and I never know what to do; we must not play, and we cannot read all day long.” At this moment Herbert Wilmot, hearing a footstep, turned round and met the eyes of his aunt Howard, with whom he had just arrived to spend a month in the summer time.

“What is the matter, my dear boy?” asked his aunt, seeing his sorrowful face. “Are you grieving because we cannot go out this morning?”



“At this moment his two cousins, Ellen and Annie, came into the room ; they looked bright, happy little girls.”—Page 2.

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1030. f. 2.

"Yes, aunty. Is it not very tiresome, my first Sunday at Beechgrove, and to have to stay in all day?"

"Well, my dear Herbert," replied his aunt, laying her hand kindly on his shoulder, "I will not say it is *tiresome*, for I do not like to speak of the arrangements of God in that way; but I agree with you, it is very *disappointing* that the first Sunday *morning* in the country should be so wet; but we will not, therefore, make up our minds to a wet *day*: at this season we often have very heavy rain followed quickly by bright sunshine, and we may have a very fine afternoon and evening. You know I promised your dear mamma, when I asked her to allow you to visit me, to take great care of your health; and as the doctor has forbidden you to go out when at all damp, I must unwillingly keep you a prisoner this morning as well as your cousins; but I intend to remain at home with you myself, and I hope we shall find means to pass a very happy and profitable morning."

Herbert's face, which had been very gloomy, brightened up a little on hearing his aunt intended herself remaining at home, for he was very fond of Mrs. Howard, and never found time hang heavily when in her company.

At this moment his two cousins, Ellen and Annie, came into the room; they looked bright, happy little girls, of about ten and eleven years of age.

They seemed surprised that their mamma thought it needful to remain at home herself, because they knew she very rarely did so on account of weather; but as she only told them her intention, without giving her reasons, they were quite satisfied to hear the good news, and at once asked what they should do. "Will you tell us a new Bible story, mamma?" said Ellen; "I do so like your stories."

"I don't want to hear Bible stories," interrupted Herbert. "I know them all, and am quite tired of them."

"Oh, Herbert! surely you don't know *all* mamma's stories," exclaimed Annie; "for you are younger than we are, and we do not know all; and there's always something new to talk about when she tells them. It is *so* nice, I am *sure you will* like them."

"I'm sure I shan't, then; for I know them already," persisted Herbert, who still looked very cross and uncomfortable.

"Well, my dears," said Mrs. Howard, "we will not dispute the matter, because we do not know what Herbert knows, and he has not yet heard any of our stories, so I do not think he can *quite* tell how he will like them till he has tried;" she added, smiling, and drawing her little nephew to her side. "So run now and fetch your Bibles, and come and sit down, and when we have done our reading, Herbert shall tell us how he likes our story."

Mrs. Howard knew that Herbert had been what we call a spoiled child at home, and she felt very sorry for him ; and while she hoped to see some improvement in him before he returned to town, she did not intend needlessly to cross his wishes, as she knew habits are stubborn things and cannot be very quickly cured ; but she hoped, with God's blessing, he might himself see how unlovely over-indulgence had made him, and also how much his own pleasures were spoilt by always wishing to have his own way, and never being willing to consider the wishes of others. He was an only child, and had delicate health ; and his every wish and desire had been considered by loving parents and a fond nurse, until the poor little boy seemed to suppose the world was made for him alone. You may easily understand that he was not a favourite among his playfellows ; and his little cousins, though kind and affectionate children in general, were not particularly charmed when their mamma announced to them that Herbert was to become their guest for a month. Their fears that he would be "always making himself disagreeable," seemed likely to prove true, when the first Sunday they heard him oppose their mother's Bible stories. However, they remembered the hints their mamma had given them about their behaviour to him, and they ran off to fetch their books, hoping he would soon find out his mistake. They then returned to the dining

room, and took their seats by their mamma; Herbert, as the youngest and the visitor, having the post of honour by her side.

"Well, my dear Herbert," said Mrs. Howard, "suppose you tell us what stories from the Bible you know, and then I shall be able to select one that will be quite new to you."

"Oh, I think I know them *all*," repeated Herbert. About *Noah*, and *Abraham*, and *Moses*, and *David*, and *all* of them."

"Well, you have heard some very pretty ones if you have heard about all you have mentioned. But there are many more; and perhaps you have not heard *all* the stories about each of the persons you have named. Tell me, now, if you remember a story about a lame boy, to whom David was very kind?"

Herbert thought for a moment, and then was obliged to own he did not remember *that* story; the little girls declared they had not heard it either, though their mamma said she thought they must have poor memories, as she believed she had told it to them. "However," said she, "it will be quite new to you also, so we will read it."

"What was the name of the little boy, mamma?" asked Annie; "and how did he become lame?"

"Stop, my dear child; you are in too great a hurry. The little boy's name was a very long one, and perhaps you will think it rather a hard one, it is *Mephibosheth*."

The children looked at each other as if they had never heard such a strange name, and wondered how a pretty story could belong to it. They then looked at their mamma, who said, "If you open your Bibles at the 4th chapter of the Second Book of Samuel, and the 4th verse, we shall find the story of *Mephibosheth*."

She then read as follows:—





Chapter Second.

THE STORY OF MEPHIBOSHETH.

“**A**ND Jonathan, Saul’s son, had a son that was lame of his feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled. And it came to pass as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame, and his name was Mephibosheth.”

She then continued—“You will all remember, Saul was the first king of Israel, but he did not honour and serve God; and God sent Samuel the prophet to tell him that he had rejected him from being king, and had chosen Him a man after His own heart to be king. This was David. And though he did not become king then, or attempt to do so, yet Saul was jealous of him from the time he knew he was one day to be king; and he persecuted and tried to kill

David, but *Jonathan*, Saul's son, loved David very much indeed, and tried to protect him from his father's anger. But when he found he could no longer preserve David from Saul's jealousy, he sent him away. But before they parted they went out into a field together; and David made a promise that he would not forget Jonathan, but would be kind to him when he became king, and also would shew kindness to Jonathan's children after he was dead. For a long time after this, Saul tried to hurt and injure David whenever he could; but at last, Saul and Jonathan were both killed in a battle with the Philistines; who, you will remember, were the great enemies of the Israelites.

"Well, when the news came that Saul and his three sons had all been killed, I suppose their friends expected the Philistines might come and take their houses and lands, and perhaps kill the children they had left at home, so the nurse that took care of Jonathan's little boy, Mephibosheth, took him up in her arms and ran away to hide him somewhere safely. We are not told *where* she took him, but no doubt it was the best place she could think of in her fright; and as she was running to hide him, she fell with the poor little Mephibosheth, and so hurt him that he became lame. Perhaps she was afraid to let any one know where he was hidden who might have done him good, or perhaps nothing could be done

for the poor child ; which it was we do not know, but this we know, that he was lame all his life. What a sad trial it was for him, and what a sorrow for his poor nurse, when she saw him unable to run about like other children, to remember the accident that made him so. However, sometimes our greatest trials turn out to be our greatest blessings, and we shall find that it was so with Mephibosheth.

“ Many years after Saul and Jonathan were killed, when David was settled as king, he often thought of all he had suffered from Saul, and how wonderfully God had delivered him and taken care of him when Saul wanted to kill him ; and one day he said, ‘ Is there any one left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan’s sake ? ’ David, you see, did not forget his dear friend Jonathan ; and he did not forget that he had promised to shew kindness to his children after his death. This was very right of David ; and now that God had made him king, he asked his servants whether there was any one left of the house of Saul to whom he might shew kindness for Jonathan’s sake.

“ Now David’s servants knew a servant of Saul’s, named Ziba ; so they brought him to David, and the king asked him if there was any one of Saul’s family to whom he might shew the ‘ *kindness of God*. ’ Mark these words, dear children ; the king wished to shew the *kindness of God* to some one belonging to his cruel enemy Saul ! This was much more than

doing it for *Jonathan's* sake; *he* had been his dear and kind friend, and it is always a pleasure to serve the friends or the children of those we love; but David did not ask for any of *Jonathan's* family alone, but any of the house of *Saul*, that he might shew the '*kindness of God*' to him.

"He might well call it the '*kindness of God*,' for only God can teach us to love and be kind to our enemies, and to those who have been unkind to us. You know our own wicked hearts always lead us to return evil for evil, and to be unkind to those who are unkind to us. The Lord Jesus was the only one who was *always* kind to His enemies, and never returned evil for evil. You know when the wicked people beat Him, and spat upon Him, and smote Him upon the cheek, He bore it all like a lamb, and prayed for His wicked murderers. People who love Jesus try to follow His blessed example, and to love those who hate them; and so you see David did, though he had not the beautiful history of the Lord Jesus to read as we have, because he lived long before the Lord was born. Still he loved God, and was taught by God's Holy Spirit to love his enemies; and so instead of wishing to *kill* every one that remained in his kingdom belonging to Saul, he asked whether there was not some one left of his family to whom he might shew what?' '*The kindness of God.*' You see he did not

wait until he *found* some one, but he *thought* about it, and *asked* about it, which shewed his heart was occupied with kind and loving thoughts.

“Now we shall see what Ziba tells him. ‘And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son which is lame on his feet.’ How pleased David must have felt to find the only one left of Saul’s house, who he hears of, is the son of his dearly-loved Jonathan. He asked Ziba where he was, and desired him to go and fetch him at once.

“Poor Mephibosheth! How astonished and frightened he must have been when he heard that David wanted to see him! Perhaps Ziba told him the king wanted to shew him kindness, but he came to the king and bowed down before him. And what were the first kind words David said to him? ‘*Fear not!*’ David remembered Mephibosheth would be likely to be very much afraid when he sent for him, because he knew he was the grandson of the wicked Saul, who had treated David so cruelly, and that therefore he had no right to expect any kindness from David himself; but how delighted and surprised he must have been when he heard the rest of what David said to him. After telling him not to be afraid he said, ‘I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father’s sake, and will give thee back all the land of Saul thy grandfather, and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.’

“Was not this great love in David, dear children? not only to make Mephibosheth a rich man, but to tell him he should eat bread at the king’s table continually. This was the greatest honour he could give him; it was treating him like his own son.

“What did Mephibosheth say to such great and wonderful kindness? He bowed down before the king, and said, ‘What is thy servant, that thou shouldst look upon such a dead dog as I am?’ You see Mephibosheth was not proud; he speaks of himself as a ‘*dead dog*.’ Now of what use is a *dead dog*? of *no* use at all. A *living dog* may be of great use to its master, but a *dead dog* can be of no use to any one, and is also a very ugly and disagreeable object to look at. Poor Mephibosheth meant to say he knew he had no right to expect David to look upon him, because he belonged to the house of Saul; and he also knew he never could be of any use to David. Why was this? because he was *lame*. But you know, dear children, God tells us, ‘He that exalts himself (or sets himself up,) shall be abased (or brought down), but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.’

“Now, Mephibosheth was indeed humble when he spoke of himself as a *dead dog*; and David exalted him to the highest position he could give him, to eat bread at his own table *continually*; not once or twice, but *always*. Now you know

it is a very great honour if a person is invited to dine with the Queen *once* in his life, and *very* few people have the honour; but what would any one think of dining at the Queen's table *always* who did not belong to her family? This was what David said Mephibosheth should do. 'Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that belonged to thy master Saul and to all his house; thou, therefore, and thy sons and thy servants, shall till the ground for him. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.' And Ziba promised king David that he would do as he wished, and see after all the land that the king had given to Mephibosheth. And then before Ziba left the king he again said, 'As for Mephibosheth, he shall eat at my table as one of the king's sons.'

"Now, dear children, just let us count how many times the king speaks of this to Ziba; *three times* over he mentions it! Perhaps David wished Mephibosheth to see the pleasure it gave him to promote him to this honour for his dear father's sake. 'So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, and did eat bread at the king's table continually, and was lame on both his feet.'

"We may think how happy Mephibosheth now was, being so loved and honoured by David; and how often he would think and speak with him of his dear father Jonathan. No doubt

David told him how Jonathan took off his *own* dress, and gave it to him, with his girdle and his bow. Perhaps David may have had some of these things with him through all his wanderings, and may have shewn them to Mephibosheth: he may have told him also the curious plan that Jonathan hit upon to let him know that Saul had determined to kill him, and how he managed it; he may also have told him that once, when he was hiding in a wood from Saul, and was feeling very sad and very unhappy, and was almost ready to think he never should be king, but was afraid Saul would one day kill him; that when he was in this sad state, Jonathan came and found him in the wood, 'and strengthened his hands in God.' 1 *Sam.* xxiii. 16. This meant, that Jonathan tried to cheer, and encourage, and comfort David, by reminding him of *God's* promise that he should be king, and also reminding him that everything that God said *should* happen, *must* happen. And you may suppose how happy Mephibosheth must have been to hear the king speak of his father in this way.

"David perhaps also told Mephibosheth how once Jonathan nearly lost his life for eating a little honey, when his father had made a law that no one should eat anything that day; and he may also have told him of another occasion, when Jonathan and his servant gained a great victory over their enemies while Saul and his soldiers were waiting for the

battle to begin; and how no one knew who had beaten the Philistines till they counted the soldiers, and found Jonathan and his servant were absent. These and many more stories we may suppose David had delight in telling the child of his beloved friend, as he daily took his meals with him. And we shall now see how Mephibosheth returned David's love, and how tenderly attached he became to him, though he could not serve him as others did on account of his lameness."





Chapter Third.

THE STORY OF MEPHIBOSHETH—*continued.*

“**A** LONG time after David had taken Mephibosheth to his table, a sad trial fell upon the king. He had a son named Absalom; he was a very fine, handsome young man, and a great favourite with the people; but I am sorry to say he was not a good son to his father. He had given him a great deal of trouble and sorrow, and at last he tried to take the kingdom from him, and made the people think they were not properly cared for by the king, and that if he were king he would take more care of them. Then he told his father a lie, and said he was leaving home to do something for the Lord; but he went away, and some wicked people followed him and made him king instead of David.

"This is what we call a *rebellion*. It is a very dreadful thing in a country, because it causes much war and shedding of blood: but oh, how much worse when a son rises in rebellion against his own father! We may be sure God's judgment will come upon a rebellious son, for He has commanded children to honour their father and mother. (*Eph. vi. 2.*)

"When David heard that Absalom called himself king, he told his servants they must run away with him from Absalom. I suppose David did not want to go to war with his son, for he loved him very much though he was acting so wickedly. So poor David, and some friends and servants, all left their own comfortable homes and beautiful city of Jerusalem, and passed over the brook Kedron, and went up a mountain. Many of the people who lived in that neighbourhood were very sorry, and cried very bitterly when they saw their dear king driven away from his home by his wicked undutiful son. David must have felt as unhappy as he did when he was hiding from Saul in the woods and mountains, or even more so, because he must have known that all his troubles were caused by his wicked son. He had now no home and no food, and no clothes but what people gave him, and the little they had taken with them when they left home.

"As David was going up a mountain, who do you think he met? Why, he met Ziba, the servant of

¶

Mephibosheth, who had with him two asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and one hundred bunches of raisins, and a hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine.* And the king asked Ziba what all these nice things were for ; and Ziba said to the king, the asses were for some of his servants to ride upon, and the wine and food were for those who were faint and hungry on their journey. Do you think David thought of any one else when he saw Ziba, or did he only think of the present he brought to him? Oh, yes ; David thought of Mephibosheth ; and he asked Ziba, 'Where is thy master's son?' And what did Ziba tell him? He said, 'He is staying behind at Jerusalem instead of coming with you, because he thinks now he shall be able to get the kingdom for himself!'

"What! *Mephibosheth* try to take away the kingdom from David, who had been so very kind to him! Oh, surely this could not be true. Well, we must wait a little and see. Ziba told David so, and David believed him, and was so grieved and pained to think that Mephibosheth could have acted so ungratefully and wickedly, that he said to Ziba, "You may have everything that I gave to

* My little readers must understand that in olden times wine bottles were made of large *skins*, holding much more than our glass bottles now do ; so Ziba only took *one* bottle of wine, though he had so much bread and fruit.

Mephibosheth!’ Was Ziba to have all the land that had belonged to king Saul? Yes, *everything*, David said, because he thought Ziba had shewn great kindness and love in coming after him with these provisions instead of staying behind to help Mephibosheth to take the kingdom for himself.

“Poor David; how very sad he must have felt to think, that not only his own son Absalom was fighting against him, but that now Mephibosheth, whom he had treated like a son, should also be in rebellion against him. David wrote some psalms which shew us how very unhappy he was at this time.

“For some time after this, David had to flee from his wicked son, Absalom; but at last his servants went to battle with Absalom and his men, and God allowed this wicked son to be killed. You remember, I dare say, how it happened? He was caught by his fine long hair as he was riding under an oak, and his mule ran away; and Joab, David’s general, saw him hanging there, and killed him. Poor king David was in very great sorrow when he heard that his wicked son was dead; he wept bitterly for him, and wished he had died instead of Absalom. It is a dreadful thing to think of a son being cut off while in rebellion against his father.”
(2 *Sam.* xviii. 33.)





Chapter Fourth.

THE STORY OF MEPHIBOSHETH—*continued.*

“**W**HEN Absalom was dead, the people at Jerusalem wished very much that David would come back and take the kingdom again. So he returned, with all his friends and servants, to Jerusalem. Several people shewed their pleasure in David's return by going to meet him; who do you think was one of the persons who did so? Why, *Mephibosheth*! As soon as he heard David was coming home, he went to meet him. But oh! he looked such an untidy figure; not at all fit to go to see a king, for he had neither dressed his feet nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, since David went away. Why was this? It was on account of his great grief and sorrow at losing David. It proved, that now David was gone, he did

not care for comfort or neatness, or anything else. When the king saw him coming, looking this strange figure, he said to him, 'Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth ?' "

"And what did Mephibosheth say, do you think—that he wanted the kingdom, as Ziba had said? Oh, no! he told a very different story. He said to David, 'My lord, oh king, my servant deceived me; for I said, I will saddle an ass, and ride on it to go to the king, because I am lame; but he has told you untrue and wicked things about me, but I am sure the king will understand the matter rightly, and will do what is right, for all my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king, yet thou didst set me among those that eat at thine own table; what right, therefore, have I to cry any more unto the king?'"

'You see, poor Mephibosheth was still humble, and had not been spoilt and made proud by all David's kindness to him; he still felt he had not any claim upon it. And though he must have been very much pained that David should have heard such false things about him, he was quite satisfied that the king should settle about his property just as he liked. I think David must have felt very much vexed with himself for believing Ziba's story so quickly; he had been hasty in giving him his master's property. And now he found out his mistake, he said to Mephibosheth, 'Why speakest

thou any more of thy matters? I have said, thou and Ziba divide the land.'"

"David did not like to hear any more about this matter; he felt he had been deceived, and that he had done poor Mephibosheth a great injustice in doubting his faithful love to himself. And I dare say, dear children, you all know how very uncomfortable you feel towards any one when you know you have been unjust or unkind to them. This was how David now felt; but what did Mephibosheth say when the king told him he and Ziba were to share the land? Was he angry, or did he think it unjust? No; his true love for David now came out; he said yes, let him take *all*; forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace to his own house; he did not care for land and money now; his joy was full to see David back. Ziba might take all the land and all the money, he would not quarrel about it; the king was back again, and this was enough to make Mephibosheth quite happy."

"This was beautiful, unselfish love, and must surely have made David feel very much ashamed of himself for believing that Mephibosheth ever wished to take the kingdom for himself during his absence."

"We do not read any more about Mephibosheth after this, but I think David would never forget their meeting on his return home, and would never believe any more stories about selfishness or ingradi-

tude in Mephibosheth ; and I hope it taught him to be slow in believing all he heard, because it is particularly important for a king to be very *just* ; and we must not always judge, you know, by *appearances* ; for, as in Ziba's case, they often deceive us. When the Lord Jesus Christ, the true David, shall rule, we read, ' He shall *not* judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears : but with *righteousness* shall he judge the poor.' *Isa.* xi. 3. This means that Christ will not look upon things as they *appear* to be, but as they *really* are, and will make *no* mistakes and do no one any injustice ; and we know He values the love of our hearts more than all our services. For He says to us, ' My son, give me thine heart.' " (*Prov.* xxiii. 26.)





Chapter Fifth.

INTERESTING CONVERSATION.

MRS. HOWARD here paused, and looking round to Herbert, said, "Now, Herbert, you shall tell us how you like my story."

"Very much indeed, Aunty," replied the child, whose face had by this time lost all its gloom; "but I think it was very wrong of David to believe Ziba's story."

"It was, my dear, a sad mistake; but, perhaps, we can hardly be surprised at it, when we remember the deep trouble and sorrow poor David was in. Sorrow, you know, makes us generally very selfish; we are thinking so much of our own trouble, that we do not pay much attention to other people, but rather expect them to be thinking of us. This was the case with David, and caused him many sorrowful thoughts afterwards, I doubt not: but think, my children, what a beautiful example of unselfishness in

sorrow we have in our blessed Lord Jesus. We never find any trouble or pain made Him forget others. In many instances we see this; but in one or two it is very remarkable. When the soldiers came to take Jesus, He thought of His disciples, and said to the men, 'If ye seek *me*, let *these* go their way.' *John* xviii. 8. And again, when on the cross, in all the agony of that dreadful hour, the Lord was not occupied with His own sorrow, but with others; He thought of His beloved mother, and told His dear disciple John to take care of her and be as a son to her. *John* xix. 26, 27. Though the Lord Jesus did not plainly tell John to take care of His mother, yet in the words, '*Behold thy mother*,' He evidently meant him to understand that He put him in His own place as a son, to care for her as He had done; and John quite understood Him; for we read, 'From that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.' *John* xix. 26, 27. Thus you see, dear children, however wise and good God's servants may be, we see some failure in all of them. In the Lord Jesus Christ alone, do we find a *perfect* example. He did *always* those things which pleased His Father."

"How very frightened Ziba must have felt, mamma, when he found out that David had discovered his lie and deception, must he not?"

"Yes, indeed, my dear," replied Mrs. Howard,

"we can easily imagine his feelings; he no doubt flattered himself it would never be discovered, but God's word is certain; 'Be sure your sin *will* find you out.' *Num.* xxxii. 23. It does not say *when*, it may be very soon, as in this case, or a long time may pass; but God never *forgets* sin, though we may do so, and the day of reckoning will surely come. Do either of you remember the case of another servant, whose covetousness led him to lying and deception, which was very quickly discovered and brought a very dreadful punishment upon him?"

The children thought for some minutes and looked at each other: at last Ellen said, "I think I ought to know, mamma, but I can't recollect; but if you tell me which book the story is in, I think I shall remember it."

"It is in the 2nd Book of Kings," replied Mrs. Howard; "and we read it a very short time ago, in our morning reading."

"Oh! was it Elijah's servant, mamma, when his master cured the leper? I forget his name."

"I see you have the right *man* in your mind, Annie, but in a confused way; it was *Elisha*, not *Elijah*, that cured Naaman, the Syrian, of his leprosy; and his servant was the one I referred to. But you had better open your Bibles at the 5th chapter of 2nd Kings, and find out the servant's

name for yourselves, and then I think you will remember it another time."

The children did so, and Ellen exclaimed, "Oh! mamma, I have found it in the 20th verse. *Gehazi* was the servant's name."

"Yes, my dear," said her mamma, "and I should like you to try and tell me the story, unless," added she, "Herbert can do so instead."

And she looked at the little boy, who shook his head, and was obliged to own he never heard that story before, upon which his cousin Annie said,

"There, Herbert, you see you don't know all the bible stories as you—"

Her mamma, however, stopped her finishing her sentence by saying, "My dear Annie, is Herbert the *only* child you could name who sometimes thinks he knows rather more than he really does?" Annie looked rather ashamed and hung down her head, while her mamma continued, "It is a mistake we are all very prone to make; and the older and wiser we grow, we learn how *many* things there are about which we *think* we know a great deal and *find* we really know very little. And when we see how often we make mistakes ourselves, it should make us very gentle with others, particularly when younger than ourselves. But now, Annie, you may try and tell us the story of *Gehazi*."

Annie begged her mamma would tell it them, as they would all understand it so much better.

Mrs. Howard smiled, and agreed to do so. "But," said she, "suppose, before we begin this story, we sing a little hymn together."

"Oh yes, mamma; that will be very nice!" exclaimed both the little girls.

"Will you like to sing a hymn, Herbert, dear?" said Mrs. Howard, taking her little nephew by the hand and leading him to the harmonium.

"Yes, very much, Aunty," replied the child.

"Which shall it be?" added she, as she took her seat at the instrument, and looked round upon the little group.

"Shall we sing, 'Around the throne of God in heaven,' mamma? that is a very pretty one, I think," said Ellen.

"Yes, my dear, it is; we will sing that first."

They then together sang the following favourite hymn :—

"Around the throne of God in heaven,
Thousands of children stand :
Children whose sins are all forgiven,
A holy, happy band,
Singing glory, glory, glory.

"In flowing robes of spotless white
See every one arrayed ;
Dwelling in everlasting light,
And joys that never fade—
Singing glory, glory, glory.

- "Once they were little things like you,
And lived on earth below,
And could not praise, as now they do,
The Lord that loved them so,—
Singing glory, glory, glory.
- "What brought them to that world above.
That heaven so bright and fair,
Where all is peace, and joy, and love?
How came those children there,
Singing glory, glory, glory?
- "Because the Saviour shed His blood
To purge away their sin;
Now wash'd in that most precious flood,
Behold them white and clean,
Singing glory, glory, glory."

When it was finished, Herbert asked for another ;
and at his aunt's desire, chose one himself. He
fixed upon the following, which was also sung.

- "Among the deepest shades of night,
Can there be one who sees my way?
Yes; God is like a shining light,
That turns the darkness into day.
- "When every eye around me sleeps,
May I not sin without control?
No; for a constant watch He keeps,
On every thought of every soul.
- "If I could find some cave unknown,
Where human foot had never trod,
E'en there I could not be alone ;
On every side there would be God."

When it was finished, Ellen said, "If Gehazi and Ziba had known this hymn, mamma, perhaps they would have been afraid to act so wickedly."

"Well, my dear Ellen, I can hardly agree with you," replied her mother, "because I see so many children and grown-up people too, who do know this hymn and many others like it, and many Scriptures which teach the same solemn lesson that God always sees us, and yet they try to deceive as much as Ziba or Gehazi did. If that truth had acted with power on their consciences, it certainly would have prevented their falling into sin."

"But what did Gehazi do?" said Herbert, "I want to know."

"Well, my dear," said his aunt, "we will now return to the sofa, and I will tell you the story of Gehazi. But look, Herbert," added she, as they passed the window, "are we going to have a wet *day* now, do you think?"

"Oh no, aunty, the sun is coming out quite brightly, and the garden looks nearly dry; how different to the morning! oh, I am so glad!" cried the child, skipping about with joy, "we need not stay in the house all day long."

"No, indeed, my boy; I hope we shall be able to go out after dinner. I want to inquire for one or two sick people, and you shall go with me, and your little cousins will like to shew you our pretty lanes about here; and then, as we come back, we will

look in at the school and see all the children ; you will, I am sure, like to hear them sing and repeat their verses."

"Oh, thank you, aunty dear, that will be beautiful !"

"But come," said Mrs. Howard, "it is nearly dinner-time, we shall hardly have time to tell you the story of Gehazi."

"Dinner-time !" exclaimed all the children, "why how very short the morning has been ; I did not think it was twelve o'clock !"

Mrs. Howard smiled, and looking at her little nephew, said, with rather a droll face, "Why, Herbert, I thought Sunday was always such a very long day ; how is it the morning has been so short ?"

"I don't know, I am sure," said Herbert ; "I can't think how the time has gone ; we seem only just to have sat down."

"Well, dear, I think the secret is, you have been fully occupied ; and time never passes so quickly as when we are very busy, and it never seems to pass so slowly as when we are idle and have nothing to do. If you remind me, Herbert, to-morrow, I will tell you a story about using up spare minutes ; but now I will tell you about Gehazi." Mrs. Howard then proceeded as follows.





Chapter Sixth.

THE STORY OF GEHAZI.—2 Kings v.

“**G**EHAZI, my dear children, as you have already found out, was the servant of Elisha, the prophet of God; he had seen many miracles performed by his master, but, evidently, did not partake of his master's spirit. This teaches us the solemn lesson, that living with God's people and enjoying many privileges, will never make us love God, or the things of God; *our hearts* must be changed before we can really love and serve Him.

“In the chapter to which we have referred, we find Elisha had, by the power of God, cured Naaman, the Syrian, of a dreadful disease called *leprosy*: it was a terrible complaint which no doctors could cure—only *God* could cure it; and when he found he was made quite well, Naaman, who was a very rich man, wanted to make Elisha a

very handsome present to shew his gratitude ; but the prophet would not take *anything*, he wished to shew Naaman that God gives freely, and that His gifts, either for this life or for life eternal, can never be purchased by anything that man can give. He wished Naaman to understand that God must ever be the *giver*, and *man* must be the *receiver*. And Naaman understood this, for after offering the prophet the present and finding he would not accept it, he asked Elisha to *give him* something ; What do you think this was ? it was two mules' *burden* of *earth* ! What could this be for ? Why it was to make an altar to the true God, when he reached home, of the earth from the land of Canaan, which was God's own land. For this Naaman, you must remember, had been a worshipper of *idols* ; but now he had learned that the God of Israel was the only true God, for only He could cure the leprosy, and so he wished to build an altar to Him. You may be sure Elisha was very glad to give Naaman this present, and after this he started on his long journey. Now Gehazi had seen the present that Naaman had offered to Elisha, and he thought to himself, What a pity my master has let this Syrian go home without taking any of his presents ! This was his *first* thought, then came the next wicked one—I will run after him and take something from him. You see, Gehazi should have checked the *first* thought, it was a covetous one,

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and shewed he had no care that the poor Syrian idolater should know that the gift of God was without money and without price; then followed the *next* wicked thought, and then! What came after that? he ran after Naaman's chariot. Naaman saw Gehazi running after him, and got down to meet him. He thought he was come with some message from his master, and he felt so grateful to Elisha that he wished to shew his respect for him, and his willingness to serve him, and his wish for his welfare, so he got down, and he asks Gehazi 'Is all well?' Gehazi said 'Yes, all is well.' And what more did he say? Ah! now he had to tell a *lie*: thus a wicked thought is the beginning of a whole list of *sins*. Think of this, my dear children, and refuse the first *thought* of sin. Gehazi said to Naaman, 'Two visitors (sons of the prophets) have just arrived at my master's house, and he begs you to give them a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.' Was there any truth in this message? no not one bit, it was a direct lie; but Naaman was well pleased to serve Elisha in any way, so he said 'Yes, I'll gladly send him *more* than that;' and he gave two of his own servants *two* talents of silver (you remember Gehazi had only asked for *one*) and two changes of raiment, and told them to carry them home for Gehazi, and they did so. And when they came to the tower belonging to Elisha's house, he took the things from the servants and they went

back to their master: then Gehazi put the things carefully away in the tower, and very likely thought to himself how cleverly he had managed the matter, and that no one knew anything at all about it. Was this true? Oh, no! God saw it all. Even the first wicked thought in his heart, God knew. And Gehazi might have remembered that God told his master many things that nobody else knew, and that he might tell him all this matter; but I suppose he did not think of this, for sin blinds our minds terribly, and often makes us do the most foolish things, as we shall see with Gehazi."





Chapter Seventh.

THE STORY OF GEHAZI—(*continued.*)

“**S**O when he had put all the things that Naaman had given him, very safely away in the tower, he went as usual to wait upon his master and see if he wanted anything. What do you think Elisha said to him, when he came in? He asked him where he came from. What a question for Gehazi! how he must have trembled before the searching eye of his master. Did he fall down before him and tell him all the truth? Ah, no! that would have been the best thing he could have done; and, perhaps, he wished he could do so; as, I dare say, you have all of you felt sometimes, when you have done wrong. You *wish* you could tell the whole truth, but you feel afraid, and then Satan makes you think it is too late, and you had better cover up one sin by another and deny your fault, and so one sin leads to another.

"The thing to *fear*, therefore, dear children, is the *first* wicked thought or inclination. What did Gehazi now do? Why, he gave a most foolish answer—he told the prophet he had not been anywhere! Did he forget his master was a prophet of God, do you think? It would look rather like it, to give him such a silly answer. Did he not remember all the miracles Elisha had done by the power of God? How he raised the dead, made the iron swim, multiplied the widow's oil, cured the leprosy, and many other wonderful things he may have seen; and did he think such a master could be deceived so easily? Ah, well; as we said before, sin is a very deceiving thing, and cleverly as Gehazi had managed all this matter, he had now to find out that his master was cleverer still; and you must try and fancy how he felt when Elisha said to him, "Went not my heart with thee when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?"

"Now, indeed, '*his sin had found him out.*' How short a time had he enjoyed his treasures! He had not had time to spend any of the money, or to wear any of the clothes: he had not had time even to pay *one* little visit to the tower to *look* at his treasures, before all his wickedness was brought out; and he had only to stand there and hear his awful doom and punishment from the lips of that master whom he had tried to deceive!

"And Elisha said, 'The leprosy, therefore, of

Naaman, shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed for ever!’ What fearful words, dear children, were they not? And you must remember, leprosy was a worse thing for Gehazi than for Naaman.”

“How, mamma, was that? I thought Naaman could never have been cured except by God’s power,” said Ellen.

“Quite true, my dear. I am not surprised that my remark should puzzle you a little, but I will explain it, and then I think you will agree with me that it was a heavier affliction for Gehazi than even for Naaman, though in both cases the sad disease was incurable by human means.

“Gehazi, you know, was a *Jew*, and Naaman was a *Gentile*. Now, Ellen, does that help you to answer your own question?” asked Mrs. Howard.

“No, mamma; I do not think it does.

“Was it because Elisha said Gehazi *never should* be cured, and Naaman may *have hoped* for a cure, aunty, dear?” said little Herbert, looking up in a questioning way in Mrs. Howard’s face,

“No, my little man, that was not the reason;” replied his aunt. “Though you are quite right in thinking that would have made a difference *if* there had been any room for *hope* of relief in Naaman’s case, but I rather think he had no such hope; because, as he was a heathen, and had never heard of the true God, he is not likely ever to have heard of such a thing as leprosy being cured.”

"How did he know Elisha could cure it then, aunty?"

"Oh! I see, darling, you have not heard the story about Naaman. I did not think of that, or I would have begun at the beginning; but it is now too late, so we must leave it till another day. And I will only tell you now, that he heard leprosy was cured in the land of Israel through a little Jewish girl that he had carried away in war from that country, and taken home to wait upon his wife. The reason why it was worse for a Jew to be a leper than it was for a Gentile, was because God made laws about leprosy that all the Jews had to obey. Among them, a leper had to live alone, far from any one, and wear a cover upon his upper lip; and when any one happened to come near him he had to call out, 'unclean! unclean!' to tell them he was a leper, and they must not come nearer. Now, Naaman was a great general, and much loved and valued by the king his master, and able to live at home with his wife, and only had to bear the sad disease, but no sorrowful consequences. Now, do you understand the difference?"

"Oh, yes, quite;" exclaimed the children.

"And did Gehazi turn a leper *at once*?" inquired Herbert.

"Yes, my dear. If you look at the last verse of the chapter you will find, as soon as Elisha had pronounced his dreadful sentence upon Gehazi, that

'he went out from his presence a leper as *white* as as snow!'"

"Oh! how dreadful, aunty."

"Very dreadful, indeed, my child. And oh, how Gehazi must have wished he had never had the covetous thought, that he had never told the lie to Naaman, or tried to deceive his master; but that he had, instead of this, remembered those solemn words, '*Thou God seest me!*' Let us all try to remember them, my dear children, and fear the first step in sin. But now run away and prepare for dinner, or you will not be ready when the bell rings."

Mrs. Howard then kissed them all, and they ran off, greatly pleased with the way in which they had passed the wet Sunday morning.





Chapter Eighth.

AN ERRAND OF MERCY.

AFTER dinner the children were quickly ready to accompany Mrs. Howard in her walk; and as their way lay through some beautiful Devonshire lanes, with the hedges full of pretty wild flowers, the little visitor from the busy streets of London, greatly enjoyed his ramble.

Mrs. Howard directed her little girls to take care of Herbert, and show him some ducks in a pond, while she went in to see her aged friend, Mrs. Gregory, who had long been a great sufferer, and confined to her bed for many years. While Mrs. Howard was conversing with her, a heavy shower coming on, the children were called in for shelter. The old lady greeted the two little girls with pleasure, and evidently was no stranger to them. Herbert looked about, as if

he wondered at finding himself in so new an atmosphere.

After the shower had passed, the little party returned homewards; not forgetting, however, to call at the school, as Mrs. Howard had promised, that Herbert might see all the happy children singing and reciting together. When they reached home it was tea time.

While making tea, Mrs. Howard asked Herbert if he had enjoyed his walk. He replied that he had done so, only it was very stupid sitting so long in that old woman's cottage. What do you go to see her for, aunty?" said he.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Howard, "poor Mrs. Gregory is a sufferer, and has long been one, and we feel it a pleasure and a privilege to minister to her in any way we can. She is a very patient and happy christian, who is longing to depart and be with her Master; but till He sees fit to remove her, she desires to glorify and honour Him in suffering here."

"But what's the use of Ellen and Annie going to her, aunty? they cannot do anything for her, I am sure."

"Indeed, my dear boy, you are quite mistaken; they greatly cheer the old woman by their visits, and they are as fond of going to her as she is to have them; and I like them to go, for they may learn many lessons from seeing her."

“What lessons, aunty? I don't know how a poor old woman like that can teach young ladies.”

“I will tell you then, my dear boy. They see that Mrs. Gregory is very poor, very old, and very suffering, and yet that she is very contented, and patient, and happy; and they know that this is the result of God's grace in Mrs. Gregory, for she was a very different person once, as all her neighbours can tell you; but it pleased God to teach her what a sinner she was in His sight, and how unable to save herself. And it also pleased Him to shew her, that what she could never do to save herself from eternal ruin, the Lord Jesus had done for her. That He had paid the heavy debt she owed, and that now there was nothing but peace and joy for her. And since God's Holy Spirit has taught her this, she has been quite a new creature, and as happy as the day is long, only waiting the summons to her heavenly home. Though she is a great sufferer, when your little cousins go to see her, it cheers her, for she is very fond of them, and she will tell them a hymn or a verse of Scripture, and sometimes they tell her one, which pleases her greatly. Then, occasionally, I send her a little present by them, and sometimes they take a message or do an errand for her; and all this not only helps the poor old lady, but gives them the pleasure of serving others.”

“I don't think *that* is a great pleasure, aunt; I

like other people to wait upon me," said Herbert. "It's only servants and poor people that have to serve others, and of course it is their duty."

His aunt was very sorry to hear her little nephew speak in this way, but she knew it was the result of his training at home, where, as I before said, he was so over-indulged, that he thought of nothing but himself; and she was very anxious while with her he should learn the happiness of living for others; but she knew she could not teach him this all at once, so she only said, "I see, my dear boy, you have never tried the plan of trying to make others happy, or you would not say there was no pleasure in it; but I hope some day you will do so, and then I think you will agree with me, there is no greater source of happiness in this world than in being useful to others."

These words sounded very strange to Herbert, but as his little cousins came into the room, and tea was by this time quite ready, they all took their seats without any further reference to poor Mrs. Gregory.

The weather being quite fine, the children had the satisfaction of going out in the evening; and on returning home Herbert asked his aunt to tell them another Bible story, one of those that David *may* have told Mephibosheth about Jonathan, he should like best; but Mrs. Howard said she thought he had heard quite enough for that day, and as it was

nearly bed time, he had better have his supper with his little cousins, and wait till the next day to hear the story which she would then tell him with great pleasure.





Chapter Ninth.

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE next morning Herbert did not forget to remind his aunt of her promise to tell him another story ; but Mrs. Howard said, "My dear boy, I will not forget it, but this is not the time for it ; I have many things to attend to this morning."

"I thought it was holiday time, aunty, and you had no lessons?"

"That is quite true, my love. We have put aside our lessons for a whole month, but we must not, therefore, be idle ; there are a great many things to be done, and you may either come and help me, or you may amuse yourself with your cousins."

"I wanted to hear the story," muttered Herbert.

"That, my dear, you cannot now do ; but you may run in the garden and play, and when you are tired, come to me, and I will find some nice little job for you to do for me." So saying,

Mrs. Howard went to the door and called her little girls, and told them to take their little cousin and amuse him in the garden.

"Oh, mamma, may we not help you?" exclaimed both Ellen and Annie; "there is so much to be done this morning, and you always let us help you!"

"Yes, my dears, I know you like to assist me, but as Herbert is a stranger here, he would like to play, so you can play with him this morning."

"Oh, but let Herbert help you, too, mamma;" interrupted both at once. "I am sure he will like it; won't you, Herbert?" said they, turning round to their little cousin.

"I want to hear the story aunt promised to tell me," persisted Herbert.

"Oh, never mind that now, dear," replied Annie; "you know we cannot always have what we want, and you shall hear the story in the evening."

However, as Herbert seemed unwilling to do anything but listen to the story, Mrs. Howard said, "Well, my dear Herbert, I am sorry to see you so unamiable, but I cannot lose any more time now; and I am going to the garden with your cousins, if you like to come and help us, you can, and if not, you can remain here and amuse yourself."

So saying, Mrs. Howard left the room with her two little girls.

"How very disagreeable Herbert is, mamma!"

said Ellen ; " I do not know what we shall do with him for a whole month."

" My dear," replied her mamma, " I have already told you your cousin is to be much pitied, and I hope you will try and be very kind and patient with him. He is the only one at home, and has had very delicate health ; and his mamma has feared she would not have him long, and has tried to meet every wish and fancy that he has expressed. I think this is a great mistake ; for instead of making him really happy and cheerful, it makes him a trouble both to himself and other people. But I hope he will not have come to us in vain ; and if he return home a happier little boy, with more power of enjoying life himself, and some love for making others happy, I am sure we shall all feel rewarded for any little trouble we have taken with him. Remember, my dear, with you the case has been very different ; you have been blessed with very good health, and living in the country in the way we do, you have always had many objects of interest round you, and have never known what it is to be by yourself, and only yourself to think of."

" But why does not Aunt Ellen teach Herbert to think of others, and to give up his own will, mamma ?"

" People have different opinions upon these matters, my dear. Some parents think children of your age are too young to be made useful ; and

because they cannot do things very *well*, they do not let them do them at *all*."

"I am sure you do not think so, mamma, for you always like us to be usefully employed."

"No! my dear child, I certainly do not agree with those who think children cannot be expected to think of others, or to do anything for them while young. On the contrary I think, with a little instruction, they can be made very useful; and I am quite sure they (like grown-up people) are never so happy as when usefully employed. You know the little hymn says,—

‘For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do.’

"And another reason for teaching young children to be useful is, that they require so much care and kindness from other people themselves, that they learn to be very selfish, and to think, as your little cousin does, that everybody's business is to attend to them, unless they are at an early age taught to feel how much they owe to other people, and how pleasant it is to try and do something for them in return. Moreover, our hearts are so naturally selfish, that we cannot too early seek to cultivate an opposite spirit; and this is not a difficult task, for God has graciously ordered it that labour has its own reward in success; and I think you have found out already how pleasant it is

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to feel you have succeeded in something you have attempted to do for another."

"Oh ! yes, mamma," said Annie ; "I always feel so much happier when I have been doing something of *real* use than when I have been idle, or only pleasing myself."

"Well, my dear, I hope Herbert will soon find out this secret ; and taking no notice of his humour will, perhaps, be the best way to help him to recover himself ; so you may pick some peas for dinner, Ellen, as the cook is busy this morning ; go and ask for the garden basket : and you, Annie dear, may give the fowls their corn, and then come to me in the front garden ; I am going to speak to the gardener."





Chapter Tenth.

THE PLEASURES OF INDUSTRY.

WHILE the little girls ran off on their different errands, Mrs. Howard went to speak to Thomas, who was mowing the grass. She told him that she expected to have the school children the next day, and then they should like a large dish of strawberries for tea. "The children can help you to pick them if they are pretty ripe, Thomas; only I am afraid they may pick those that are not quite ready."

"Oh, ma'am," replied the man, "I think they may come. They always like to help, and I will just see that they do not pick those that are unripe."

"Very well, then, they shall come after dinner to-morrow."

Thomas touched his hat, and his mistress went into the house, where she met Annie, who had just returned from the fowl house.

"Oh, mamma, there are four eggs in the nest; may I go and take them out?" exclaimed the child.

"Yes, my love, here is the key," said her mamma. But at this moment her eye rested upon Herbert, who was standing peeping out at the dining-room door, looking very miserable. "Perhaps, Annie, *Herbert* might like to see the fowls and help you to bring in the eggs."

"Will you come, Herbert, dear?" said Annie, going up to her cousin and taking his hand.

He did not answer, but slowly went with his cousin; his aunt merely adding, "Take care and carry the eggs very carefully, one in each hand, Annie; and be sure and don't break them." Mrs. Howard, in passing the passage window, saw that Herbert had quickened his steps, and raised her heart in prayer for her dear little nephew, that God would bless his visit to her, and enable them to act in wisdom towards him. She then sat down to write a note. As she was folding it up, Annie and Herbert came in at the window, each carrying two fine eggs, one in each hand.

"Look, aunty," said Herbert, "here are two such fine ones, and this one is quite warm—the large grey fowl had only just left the nest."

"There's a useful little man," said Mrs. Howard,

kissing the little face which had by this time lost its unhappy look ; “and now, Herbert, would you like to carry your eggs a little further, and bring them into the china pantry? and then I will shew you where we keep them.” His aunt then crossed the passage to the china closet, where she opened a cupboard and shewed Herbert a shelf with a long row of eggs upon it. “Now,” said she, “we will write the day of the month upon these new eggs and put them at this end of the row, and then when Mary wants eggs for her pudding, she will take them from the other end, and so all will be used in their turn. But bring me a basin, Annie, and you shall take in the eggs that Mary will want to-day into the kitchen ; and then, if you like, you may take a little basket to Mrs. Browning, I hear she is not quite so well this week.”

“Oh, thank you, mamma ; what will you send her?”

“Bring the basket first, and then you shall see, my love.”

Annie ran off, and was soon back with a covered basket in her hand ; in which her mother placed two eggs, a little pat of butter, a little rice, and a small basin with some strong broth which was in a jelly, being cold, but which she thought would make the poor woman a nice dinner when warmed.

Annie ran off. “Would you like to go, Herbert,

or would you like to run and see what Ellen is doing in the garden?"

"I will go in the garden, aunty, please," said the child.

"Very well, my dear, do so, and I will come shortly."

Mrs. Howard then ordered dinner, told Mary she should want some large cakes made for the children's tea party on the next afternoon, and then, taking a large pan in her hand and a basket on her arm, she proceeded to the garden, where she found Herbert busily employed picking peas with his cousin Ellen.

On seeing his aunt, he ran up to shew her his lap was nearly full. "I have picked all these *myself*, aunty, dear; and Ellen says I may help her to shell them in the arbour."

"That will be very nice, I think," said Mrs. Howard, "and as the same idea occurred to me, you see I have brought a pan to shell them into, and also some lunch for some hungry children," added she, smiling. She then led the way to the arbour, where she placed her basket upon the table and shewed the children how to shell the peas, putting all the shells into the basket and all the peas into the pan, "and be sure and pick up any you may drop, because I do not like waste, you know, in anything," said she, smiling.

The two children sat down, much pleased with this arrangement, and having taken out the lunch

and eaten it, they began the business of shelling the peas.

Mrs. Howard then went to the study, where she locked up all the school-books, slates, and inkstands, where she was soon joined by Annie, who had just returned from her errand. "Well, my love, how did you find poor old Mrs. Browning, to-day?"

"Oh, she seems rather better, mamma, and very much obliged to you for sending her such a nice dinner. Now may I help you to get this room ready?"

"I am just putting away the things we shall not want, as you must turn out all your little presents here this afternoon, you know; and then we must see what pieces we have left to work up, for I think we shall want several more things."

"Oh, you know, Aunt Louisa said she would send up some this afternoon by my cousins; and they have some of their own, I know, for they shewed me a large bag of pieces, which they have been collecting from their friends all the year for the school."

"Are all three of your cousins coming?"

"Yes, mamma, Charlie said he would come with his sisters, because he can make bookmarkers and paper pillows."

"I am glad to hear it, my love; perhaps seeing another little boy at work may make Herbert take a fancy to it; or if not, he will have a nice playfellow in the garden."

"Oh, I wish to-morrow were come, mamma," exclaimed the little girl, jumping and skipping about; "it will be so nice to see all the little children so pleased and happy."

"Well, my dear Annie," said her mother, "I cannot say I join in your wish, that to-morrow were here; for as we are by no means ready for your company, it would rather alarm me to see them all appear."

Annie laughed at the idea of seeing forty school children come in without things being ready for them, and assured her mother that, on second thoughts, she did *not* wish the next day were come; "but what shall I do now, mamma?" said she.

"Well, on this table I would lay all the pieces for doll-dressing, I think; and on that table, all your pieces of coloured cloth and flannel, for penwipers and bags. All the waste paper, envelopes and letters, and such pieces, put in my rubbish basket; and here, I have six pieces of new chintz for the pillow cases; then bring the little needle books, pincushions, and bookmarks you have made, and set them upon the mantelpiece with all the dolls that are dressed, and those yet to be dressed, and all the little pictures and magazines in my portfolio; and then if you bring your own work boxes and mine, I think we shall have all we shall require."

"Yes, mamma, I will." And off ran the happy child, and soon returned with her arms full of all

the required additions, which, with her mother's help, were all soon arranged in their proper places, and little Annie looked round with great satisfaction. She then counted the chairs, to be quite sure there were enough for her "*Dorcas meeting*," as she was pleased to call it.

"I do not think it deserves the name of a *Dorcas* meeting, Annie, though it is for needlework; because, you see, it is not for making *clothes*, and you know Dorcas made clothes for the poor."

"Yes, mamma, I remember; but this work is for the poor children, so I think it will do to call it a *children's Dorcas* meeting."

"Very well, my dear, so it shall be if you wish it; but do you know, I think in the long winter evenings we might have a *real* children's Dorcas, and make children's clothes. What do you think of that?"

"Oh, it would be beautiful! only you must cut out and fix the work, mamma."

"Oh yes, I think I must undertake that part of the business," said mamma. "I once was at such a meeting, and the children accomplished a great deal of work for their poorer neighbours."

Annie again declared the idea was a capital one, and having arranged everything, ran off to the garden to announce to her sister her mother's proposal. "Have you finished the peas, Ellen?" said she.

“Why, I should think it was time to *eat* them now, Annie; for Herbert and I have had a long game since we took them in to Mary.”

Then they all had a run together down the garden to shew Herbert the two cows in the meadow, and then returned to the house to prepare for dinner, which they found was very nearly ready.





Chapter Eleventh.

THE CHILDREN'S DORCAS MEETING.

THE dinner things were hardly cleared away before the children declared their cousins were coming up the hill, and they ran joyfully to meet them ; they soon returned with two little girls, Louisa and Edith, a little older than themselves, being about twelve and fourteen, and their brother, a fine little fellow about ten. -

"Good afternoon, my dears," said Mrs. Howard, advancing affectionately to meet them ; "so you are kindly come to help Ellen and Annie to prepare the presents for to-morrow !"

"Yes, dear aunt ; and we have brought such a large basket of pieces, and mamma sends a dozen more little dolls and some little tiny books, which she thinks will please the boys."

"And Charlie has come to help us too," said

Mrs. Howard; "well, I have a nice little companion for him to-day. He does not know this little nephew of mine from London; you had better run in the garden and make acquaintance, I think, while your sisters go and take off their bonnets."

The two boys soon disappeared, and the four girls adjourned to the school room, where they were soon deeply involved in the mysteries of doll-dressing. While they are discussing the various colours and materials, we will just tell our little readers what all this preparation is for.

Mrs. Howard's husband was in India, and since her return home, on account of her health, about three years before, she had devoted herself very much to the training and teaching of her two little girls. We have already heard some of her thoughts on education. She felt she could not begin too early to check the tendencies of our fallen nature in her children, for she did not believe, as many do, that children will naturally love what is good unless taught to love evil; but she knew from Scripture, that from their infancy they will shew evil tempers and passions, and would need all the constant prayerful training she could give them to lead them to love what is good. So, as we already have heard, she tried to cure them of selfishness by constantly keeping alive their interests for others, in little ways, in which she taught them to assist them themselves, or in making them her helpers in similar things in

which she was herself engaged, though beyond their powers alone. The children had, by this means, many more interests than what belonged to themselves, and their hearts and sympathies were enlarged. One of these interests was the village school. Mrs. Howard paid a weekly visit there, in which she was generally accompanied by one or both of the children, who soon knew the best scholars and the neatest workers, and the best behaved children. If one were missed, enquiry was made into the cause, which was often followed by a visit to the cottage home of a sick child.

And once in the summer it was the great treat of Mrs. Howard's children, to have all the school to tea in their garden. So during the year they had an object of interest, in making numbers of little presents, which were carefully stowed away till the annual visit came; when each child, whether boy or girl, received some little token of love and interest from the children at Beechgrove. To complete the necessary number and a few more, their cousins always joined them for an afternoon's work; and as they were rather older than Ellen and Annie, they were supposed to have more knowledge of how to make pretty things; and this afternoon had been fixed upon to complete the number of presents required for the next day. Then, all old pictures and scraps, which were saved during the year, were produced on this important occasion; and many a

pretty contribution for a cottage picture book was sent home for the amusement of a younger child, by an elder brother and sister.

Another thing Mrs. Howard was very particular about, was *idleness*. She never liked to see even a little child *idle*. She liked to see them playing or amusing themselves as they liked best ; for she used to say, "An idle child would soon be a *cross* child, and perhaps something worse."

We must now return and look at our party in the school-room. "Many hands," they say, "make light work ;" and this would appear to be true, by the large addition made to the table of *finished* things. The two boys have also come in, to know what there was for them to do. Mrs. Howard had set them to sort and divide the pictures, and then she shewed them the box full of papers, torn up very small indeed, which she kept to fill pretty chintz cases with for pillows.

"What funny pillows, Aunt," said Herbert ; "I don't think *I* should like to sleep upon one of them."

"Very likely not, my dear, because you have a better one ; but to the poor, they are very valuable : and I can assure you I know some ladies who *always* use paper pillows themselves because they are so cool, who have plenty of feather ones."

"Why, aunt, I could make one all alone."

"Yes, my dear, to be sure you could ; and much

younger children than you are have made them ; it only requires a large bag or box to put the paper into as you tear it, and be careful to make no litter about the room."

"I will shew mamma when I go home, and ask her to let me make a paper pillow all myself for some one who has not a better one."

"Do, my dear boy ; I am sure dear mamma will be very pleased to see you so nicely employed. And perhaps your own nurse might like one as a keepsake. Think how much she has done for you when you could do nothing for yourself ; and how pleased she would be to have something of your making for a keepsake, when you are grown a big boy."

Herbert seemed struck with the idea, and repeated his intention of carrying it out as soon as he went home.





Chapter Twelfth.

PREPARATION, AND ITS PLEASURES.

BY five o'clock, Ellen thought they must have things enough prepared. So she commenced counting, and arrayed in a long row on the mantelpiece, fifteen little farthing dolls, all attired in very gay costume; twelve larger ones, sent by her aunt Louisa, for which they selected the smartest dresses their store afforded, these took their place by the side of the others; then six penwipers of scarlet-and-black, were arrayed in a row on a side table; next came eight little needle boxes; and then twenty-two pincushions, of various shapes and sizes; for Mrs. Howard thought *every* tidy little girl should carry a pincushion, as it not only made her independent of others when she wanted a pin, but made her careful in picking up pins if she had a pincushion to put them in,

and then she was also able to help a less tidy neighbour when in want of one. So every little girl was to have a pincushion in addition to the other present; then twelve pretty bookmarkers were ranged in order, with different texts and mottoes on them; and twenty-five pretty little books followed, and many parcels of scraps and pictures; so that with the six paper pillows, the table presented quite a gay appearance.

When they decided they had quite enough, the clearing away of scraps was begun. Herbert was about to throw away all the cuttings of cloth. But Ellen stopped him, saying, "Oh, Herbert, do not throw away *one bit* of cloth."

"These bits of selvidges are of no use, I am sure, Ellen," replied Herbert.

"Oh, indeed they are; in the winter, the poor women like little capes for the school children, and my aunt and cousins make many for them, and this winter mamma says I may try and see if I can manage one. When you go to the school, I will shew you the capes, and you will see how tidy they are; for though they do not need them this summer weather, some of the children still wear them because they have nothing else. Then the edges of the cloth do for something else, Herbert. Some clever people make very warm rugs, by knitting in all the pieces with thread; and they look so warm and pretty, with a grey centre and red-and-black

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borders—you would never guess how nice they look. I will try and shew you one before you go home, and then you can ask Aunt Ellen to give you all her scraps, and you can keep them for some poor woman, and I will give you a little pattern, and then she could try and make one. Now, all the bits of silk and ribbon we will put into my piece box, and another day you shall see what we will do with them; the papers are all used up, I see, so we will put back the basket in its place to begin again."

Herbert carried it back to its place; and as Ellen pronounced the room *quite* tidy now, they went into the dining-room, where they found Mrs. Howard making the tea—

"I hope you have left the school-room quite tidy, my dears," she remarked.

"Oh yes, aunt," said Herbert; "Ellen would put everything away. I wondered she did not leave it for the servant, as I do at home."

"We have but two servants, my dear child, and, therefore, we each try to *save* work and not to make it: but if I had a great many servants, I should still like my children to do everything they could for themselves, and to be independent."

"But why, aunty? If you had plenty of servants you need not do things yourself, like poor people; it looks as if you couldn't afford it, and nobody would take you for a lady!"

Mrs. Howard could not help laughing at this terrible conclusion that Herbert had arrived at ; but she replied, "Well, my dear boy, I understand what you mean, and I am very thankful for the help we have from Mary and Thomas ; and in the present state of society in this country, it would be almost impossible to do without servants ; but still, my love, we must remember God's word says, 'Riches make to themselves wings and fly away.' Now, I always think it right to teach my children to do all they can for themselves ; because much of their future happiness may depend upon being able to help themselves and others also. You know, there is a very true saying, 'Knowledge is power : ' we need never be afraid of knowing too much of what is good and useful. My dear mother, I remember, used to say to me when I was a child, '*My dear, have a little help in yourself,*' and many, many times have I thanked her since for the advice. Then, Herbert dear, as to what people think of us, it does not much matter ; they may very often think too well of us, and sometimes the reverse ; but never be ashamed of anything but *sin*. Let it be your one desire to be approved by God, and never mind losing the approval of those who will only esteem you because you are rich and have servants to wait upon you."

After tea, the cousins amused themselves for some time in the garden · and then the Beechgrove party

accompanied the others part of the way home, and then took leave of them, charging them to be there in good time next day, to join the school children. As they returned to the house, they saw their mamma sitting at the window enjoying the lovely sunset. They were soon by her side.

"Is it not a lovely evening, mamma? Don't you think we shall have a fine day to-morrow?" were questions which quickly followed each other.

"Yes, my dears, I think there is every promise of a fine day, and I am glad of it; for I should be very sorry for the poor children to be disappointed."

For a few minutes all seemed disposed for silence, and were occupied with the beautiful tints of the setting sun, which cast a golden hue on all around. When they had been sitting quietly some minutes, Mrs. Howard remarked, "I think, Herbert, there would be just time, before the prayer-bell rings, for a story, if you are not too tired to enjoy it."

"Oh no, aunt, not at all too tired, if you will tell us one."

"What shall it be?"

"I should like best to hear what David *may* have told Mephibosheth."

"Very well, my dear, it shall be about Jonathan, for he was a very lovely character."

Mrs. Howard then begun as follows.





Chapter Thirteenth.

THE STORY OF JONATHAN.—I *Sam.* xviii.

“**I** HAVE already told you that Jonathan was the son of Saul. The first time we hear of his meeting David, was after he had returned from killing Goliath, which you remember. We read, ‘It came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father’s house. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the *robe* that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his *garments*, even to his *sword*, and to his *bow*, and to his *girdle*.’ What a beautiful description of unselfish love! *nothing* was too much to give to him he loved.

“So you know it was with a greater than Jonathan. Our blessed Lord laid down even His own life for those whom He styled His friends and His brethren. And those who know Him, ought, we are told, to lay down their lives for the brethren. It must have pained the kind heart of Jonathan to see how his father hated David: and you may suppose how he felt, when ‘Saul spake to Jonathan and all his servants, that they should *kill* David.’ (*chap. xix. 1.*) Jonathan kill David, in whom he so much delighted? Quite impossible! What did he do then? Why, he told David that his father wished to kill him; and then proposed to him to hide in a field until next morning. And he promised to talk to Saul about him, and see if he seemed *really* determined to kill him, and then to let David know. Jonathan did as he promised, and talked to his father about David; and reminded him how kind and good he had been, and how he had killed the great giant that everyone so feared, and he begged Saul not to slay him without a cause. Jonathan spoke so nicely and wisely to his father, that Saul’s heart seemed touched; and he felt sorry, and perhaps ashamed, of his wicked desire to kill the young man; and he said, ‘As the Lord liveth, he shall *not* be slain.’

“Oh! can you not fancy how very happy it made Jonathan feel, to hear his father say these words about his beloved friend? You can easily imagine how quickly he went to find David, and to tell him

that he might come out of his hiding place, for his life was now quite safe, and Saul did not want to kill him.

“And you can think how grateful David felt to Jonathan, for all his love and care for him. This was the first time he saved his friend's life, but it was not the *last* time, as you shall hear. After Jonathan had told David he was not to be killed, he took him to Saul, and he was in his presence just as he was before. I suppose Saul did not know that David had been told he wanted to kill him, or he must have felt very uncomfortable at having him with him again.

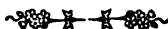
“Some time after this, the Philistines fought against the Israelites; and David went to battle with them and slew a great many, and the rest ran away from him. No doubt they remembered their great champion Goliath being killed by that same young hand, and they thought they should be killed also. Do you not think Saul must have been very much pleased with David, for fighting for him so bravely against the Philistines?

“I think he *ought* to have been very pleased, but, I am sorry to say, he was *jealous* of David; and you remember we are told, that ‘Jealousy is cruel as the grave.’ And so it was with Saul. He had an evil Spirit upon him, and David was playing his harp to do him good, for his soft music often made Saul much better. Saul was sitting with his javelin

in his hand, which was a small short dagger; and with this javelin he tried to smite David to the wall to kill him! Was not that very cruel of Saul? Did God allow him to be killed? No, David saw his danger, and slipped away out of the room, and the javelin stuck *in the wall!* Ah, you see no one can hurt a child of God, unless God *allows* it. You remember, in Job's case, Satan could not go a bit further in injuring Job than *God* permitted.

"So David fled, and escaped that night; and his wife Michal, who was a daughter of Saul, and sister of Jonathan, said to him, 'If you do not leave home to-night, you will be surely killed to-morrow.' So she let him down from a window, and he escaped to a place named Naioth, in Ramah.

"How, do you think, Michal knew David would be killed in the morning? I will tell you. When Saul found the javelin was sticking in the wall, and that David had gone out of the room, he supposed he would go home; so he sent men to watch his house all night, that they might kill him in the morning. But his wife suspected the plan, and sent him away. Some one told Saul David was ill in bed, so Saul said, 'Bring him up to me in the *bed*, that I may kill him.' Did you ever know such cruel hatred?"





Chapter Fourteenth.

THE STORY OF JONATHAN—(*continued*).

“**W**E are not told where Jonathan was when Saul tried to kill David ; but David soon found him and told him about it, and said to him, ‘What have I done? What is my iniquity, and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh to kill me?’

“Jonathan could not believe David's story. He said ‘God forbid—thou shalt not die. My father never does anything, great or small, without telling me ; and why should he hide this thing from me? It is not so.’

“Jonathan could not believe that Saul really meant to kill David. But David answered, ‘Your father knows it would grieve you ; and that must be the reason why he does not like to tell you, because

he knows how you love me. But, truly, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but *one step* between me and death.'

"I suppose Jonathan felt that what David said was, perhaps, true ; but he offers to do whatever he can for him. What did David ask him to do? He said, Saul would expect to see him at table the next day, and finding his place empty would, perhaps, inquire for him. So he asked Jonathan to allow him to hide himself for three days in the field, and if, when he excused David's absence to his father, Saul merely answered, 'Very well,' Jonathan was to know that his father did not any longer wish to kill David ; but if he were very angry at his absence from table, then Jonathan was to be sure he still determined to kill him.

"Poor David said to Jonathan, after he had arranged this plan, 'If *you* think I have done wrong and deserve to die, slay me thyself ; for why shouldest thou bring me to thy father?' And Jonathan answered, 'Far be it from thee ; for if I knew that my father certainly meant to kill thee, would I not tell thee? Then David wondered how Jonathan should let him know whether Saul was angry or not. And he was also afraid whether his father might not be angry with Jonathan, for excusing David.

"Jonathan proposed they should go out into a field, where they made a solemn covenant or agreement, that Jonathan would tell David all he could

find out about his father's plans. And David, on his part, promised, if they never met again, he would remember Jonathan; and when he came to be king, would shew the 'kindness of the Lord' to him while he lived, and to his children after him; and you have already heard how faithfully he fulfilled this promise in his kindness to Mephibosheth.

"Now, I must tell you the clever plan these two dear friends arranged for conveying the news to David. Jonathan might not be allowed, perhaps, to go to David: or his doing so might have revealed his hiding place to Saul; so it was agreed he should remain in concealment for three days, and then he was to go to a certain place where there was a large stone. Jonathan said, 'Thou shalt remain by the stone, and I will shoot three arrows on the side thereof, as though I shot at a mark; and behold I will send a lad, saying, Go find the arrows. If I expressly say to the lad, Behold, the arrows are on *this* side of thee, take them; then come thou, for there is peace to thee and no hurt, as the Lord liveth: but if I say thus unto the young man, Behold, the arrows are *beyond* thee—go thy way, for the Lord hath sent thee away.'

"So, after they had settled this plan, Jonathan returned home, and David went to hide in the field. You may fancy how anxiously both of them waited for the third day. No doubt, David committed his path to God, who had so delivered him before.

“As they expected, Saul inquired of Jonathan the second day where David was, that he did not come to table; and when Jonathan apologised for his absence, his father was very, very angry with him; and told him, while David lived, he would never come to be king. This was, no doubt, why Saul so hated him. But did this matter to Jonathan? Oh, no! he was a man of faith. He knew it was God’s purpose that David should be king after Saul; and he was quite satisfied to be *next* to him. When he saw his father so very angry, he asked what evil David had done, that he should be killed. This, I suppose, made his father more angry: For what do you think he did? He actually cast a javelin at his son, to kill him, just as he did before at David.

“By this shocking act, Jonathan saw clearly that his father had made up his mind to kill David; and he rose from the table in great anger, and eat no food that day, because he was so grieved and shocked at the unjust treatment of his beloved friend.

“At last, the third morning arrived; and Jonathan called a little boy to wait upon him, and went out at the appointed time to the field he had agreed upon with David. And he said to the boy, ‘Run, and find out the arrows that I shoot.’ And as he went, he shot an arrow beyond him; and when the lad was come to the place where the arrow was shot, Jonathan cried after the lad, and said, ‘Is

not the arrow beyond thee?' And Jonathan cried after the lad, 'Make speed, haste, stay not.' And Jonathan's lad gathered up the arrows and came to his master. But the lad knew not anything, only Jonathan and David knew the matter.

"Poor David, when he heard the words to the lad, how sad he must have felt! He knew he must part from the one who loved him as his own soul. Did they see each other to say good bye? Yes, you shall hear. Jonathan sent the boy home with his bow and arrows, and when he was quite gone, David came out of his hiding place, and they kissed one another, and wept over one another; and at last, Jonathan reminded David of the covenant they had made before God, to remember each other—and then said, 'Go in peace.' And David departed, and Jonathan returned home to the city."





Chapter Fifteenth.

THE STORY OF JONATHAN—(*continued*).

“**A**FTER this sad and sorrowful parting, the two dear friends did not meet for some time. Jonathan, no doubt, knew how his father was hunting David, like a partridge on the mountains; but he could not do anything to help him. But one day he managed to find out his hiding place, and he went to him, ‘and strengthened his hands in God. And he said unto him, Fear not, for the hand of Saul my father shall *not find* thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee, and that also Saul my father knoweth.’ ‘And David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house.’

“This was the last occasion on which these two devoted friends met. The next time David heard

of Jonathan, that we read of, was, when a messenger told him that Saul and Jonathan were both *dead*.

“You may suppose what David felt on hearing this news. He made a most touching lamentation over them. He did not rejoice that his enemy was dead, because Saul had been the Lord’s anointed king; and he felt it was a solemn thing for him to be killed by the ungodly. He said in his lamentation, ‘I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was *wonderful*, passing the love of women.’

“No doubt, David felt he should never find another friend to love him as Jonathan had done. And now that you have heard this story, I think you will better understand his love to Mephibosheth, the son of this beloved friend and brother.”

“Oh yes,” responded the three children, “he must have been very glad to find out poor Mephibosheth. And I am sure Mephibosheth must have been very pleased to hear this story about his father.”

“Why, aunty, did Jonathan give David his sword and his bow?” asked Herbert.

“To shew his great love for him,” replied Mrs. Howard.

“But, aunty, I don’t think that shewed such *very* great love.”

“Yes, my boy, it did; he stripped himself, as I

before said, for his friend. But tell me, *why* you do not think it shewed great love?" added she.

"Because, aunty, I think if I had loved him *very* much indeed, I would have given him the *arrows* as well as the bow."*

Though the little fellow made the remark with all gravity, clearly shewing how poor he thought the present of the *bow* alone, it quite upset the gravity of his aunt and cousins; but though the latter laughed rather unmercifully at his objection, his aunt soon recovered herself, and kissing his forehead, said, "I am glad to see you think about what you hear, Herbert, it is the only way to learn. When we read of a *bow*, the arrows are always included, my dear, simply because the one would be quite useless without the other. So, saying Jonathan gave him his *bow*, is really the same as saying he gave him his bow *and arrows*. Do you understand, Herbert?"

"Yes, thank you, aunt," replied the child.

Mrs. Howard then told her little girls, that though she could excuse their smiling at their cousin's amusing censure on Jonathan's present to his friend; yet it was by no means a kind or polite thing to laugh at another's mistake. If you think for a moment, I am sure you will feel this; for you know it is not at all pleasant to be laughed

* This was the *real* expression of a child to the writer.

at; and true love, you know, will always lead us "to do unto others as we would they should do unto us."

The children kissed their cousin, and assured him they did not mean to be unkind.

The prayer bell now reminded them it was getting late; and rising, and closing the window, they all obeyed the summons for evening worship.





Chapter Sixteenth.

PREPARING FOR THE TREAT.

THE next morning the children awoke early, full of anticipation; and were somewhat disappointed to find a dull, hazy morning. But on inquiring Mrs. Howard's opinion as to the probabilities of a fine day, they were relieved to find that she had more confidence in a dull, hazy morning than in a very brilliant one, which sometimes becomes overcast before noon.

She thought the sun would be very bright by dinner time. And she was quite right.

The children found plenty of work to fill up the long morning; they helped to cut up cake and bread-and-butter; dusted all the regiments of little mugs, that only appeared upon this grand occasion;

gathered the strawberries; put all their playthings in apple-pie order; and amused themselves by looking over everything again and again, that nothing might be wanting at the time.

Ellen had been down to the school to borrow a number of hymn books. Then their mamma had two or three pretty little pieces for them to sing, which they were to remember verse by verse.

One o'clock at last came; but, strange to say, Mrs. Howard seemed the only one who wanted any dinner, the children all declaring they had no appetite. Herbert seemed to have caught the infection from his cousins, and had been so busy all the morning, that he had really forgotten himself, and had not once wished for anything different to what his aunt and cousins desired. This struck Ellen and Annie very much, and upon remarking it to their mamma, she replied,

"I am very glad to hear it, my dears; but I think you will generally find the best way to cure a selfish or bad-tempered child is to try and find them constant occupation and interest for others. *Activity* in itself, is useful to the mind; and when it is for some one else, it helps at the same time to lead the thoughts away from self, which is a great advantage."

The little girls seemed glad to think their mamma's plan was succeeding so well with their cousin, whom, we must own, they did not particularly admire; they

begun to hope he might be a more pleasing companion before he went home. As soon as dinner was over, our young friends ran to the gate to see if the long train of children was in sight; but, alas, alas, there was nearly another hour to wait before the appointed one of three arrived. So Mrs. Howard, knowing that time never seems to pass so quickly as when we are very busy, called the children to the window, and gave them each a little book which she advised them to read; adding, she should like to hear what they were about in the evening, as she had been told they were three beautiful stories.

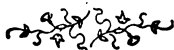
The three children ran off to the arbour to try and follow her advice. The little girls managed pretty well to think about what they were reading; but with Herbert, the case was different; he declared it was impossible to read, so very soon throwing down his little book, he made his escape, and seeing Thomas near, with a basket in his hand, ran off to see what he was about. To his great delight, he found he was going to pick some ripe gooseberries, and he invited him to help him. Herbert did not need pressing. Thomas told him he must not eat them, because he might make himself ill; as he would have some for tea when the children came, and he knew Herbert was not a very strong boy, and not being accustomed to live among fruit trees, he was afraid he might eat too much.

However, Herbert promised he would eat *very* few, only just about *twelve* gooseberries. So they proceeded to work.

The little girls found it rather pleasant to sit still a little, for they had been running about all the morning; and their little books were so very interesting, that they really were surprised when they heard the bell ring at the gate; and they quickly bounded off, fearing the children had come, and they had intended being down at the gate to receive them. However, it was only their three cousins who had arrived.

The children were very pleased to see them, and after taking them into the school-room and dining-room, to see how nice and pretty everything looked, they went to look for their mamma, whom they found resting in her own room. Upon looking at her watch, Mrs. Howard found it was just three o'clock, so they all walked down the lawn, to wait for the long train to appear.

Herbert having eaten *quite* a dozen gooseberries, was rather tired of *picking* them, and seeing his cousins across the garden, soon joined them.





Chapter Seventeenth.

THE SCHOOL TREAT.

HERBERT had hardly done so, when the children all came in sight, and he very soon had the pleasure of holding back the large gate while they all passed through; they then all gathered on the grass and took their seats, when Thomas placed a large table with fruit upon it in the middle of the lawn; and with Mrs. Howard's help, Ellen and Annie with their cousins divided it among the children. When they were rested and refreshed with their fruit, they all stood up and sung the following pretty piece of poetry.

“Morn amid the mountains,
Lovely solitude;
Gushing streams and fountains,
Murmur—God is good, God is good.

"Now the glad sun breaking,
Pours a golden flood ;
Deepest vales awaking,
Echo—God is good, God is good.

"Hymns of praise are ringing,
Through the leafy wood ;
Songsters sweetly singing,
Warble—God is good, God is good.

"Wake and join the chorus,
Man with soul imbued ;
He whose smile is o'er us,
God ! our God is good, God is good !"

After the singing was over, the question arose, What would be the best amusement to begin with ? As they numbered about fifty, they separated into parties for different games. Some of the elder boys declared nothing equalled cricket. They knew, from former occasions, that Mrs. Howard possessed bats and stumps ; though only used when some of her numerous little nephews visited her, or on this annual occasion.

The cricketers being drawn off into the adjoining field, another party was formed for croquet ; which Ellen and Annie thought, from their own pleasure in it, must be a general delight ; but as the school children had all to be taught this game, it did not seem quite such fun at first ; though after they understood it, they seemed to agree with their

young hostesses, that it was a capital game, and none seemed to wish to exchange it for the better-known pleasures of battledoor and shuttlecock, hide-and-seek, or any of the other favourites that were selected for the many little ones who were not able to join either cricket or croquet.

As there was a discovery of hay making in the next field to Mrs. Howard's, some thought nothing so charming as a romp in the hay, and asked leave to go. This was given, and very soon some of the children were busily employed there. The men, kindly entering into the children's pleasure, gave them some forks to help to fill the cart ; and then two of the elder boys were allowed to drive it across the meadow, with a group of little ones sitting and lying on the top, who were making the air ring with their merry voices. Then we must not forget that Annie secretly invited some of her favourites to go with her quietly and take a peep at all the grand display of dolls and presents in the school room, where the little girls gazed with wonder and delight upon the variety of beautiful things before them, and thought which they would like, and which they hoped might come to their share. Annie promised she would try and give each the one they most admired, if she could manage it. They then ran back to the garden, where their absence had not been discovered by their numerous company.

Mrs. Howard went from one party to another,

entering into the pleasure of each, and taking part, first in one game then in another. Many invitations she received from the little ones, to be their special partner.

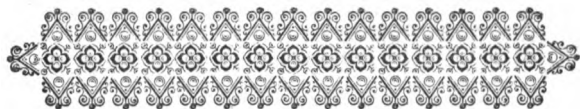
While all the merriment was at its height, a scream was heard, when every eye turned towards the side from whence the sound proceeded. Mrs. Howard hastened forward to find out the cause of the alarm. It was not at once discovered, as a turn round some shrubs shut out from sight of the lawn the little farm yard, containing cow house, duck pond, fowl house, &c. When, however, Mrs. Howard reached the gate of the yard, the cause of alarm was soon seen. Three little boys were close by the edge of the duck pond. Harry Stokes, a little fellow of about seven years old, was looking a miserable figure. It was very easy to see he had been paying a visit to the ducks in the pond, as his clothes were all soaking and his curly hair hanging like rats' tails over his face. Two of his little companions, Willy Thompson and Johnny Taylor, were busily trying to wipe and dry his face and hands when Mrs. Howard came up, followed by a large number of the children. She at once saw how the matter stood, and finding the child was safely out of the water, her fears were relieved.

"What has happened, my dears? Why, Willy, what has made Harry such a figure?"

The three boys all began crying and explaining at

once, so that it was quite impossible to understand how the accident had happened. She said, therefore, "Well! I must take Harry in to Mary and see if we can dry his clothes, and then you shall tell me how it all happened."





Chapter Eighteenth.

THE SCHOOL TREAT—*continued.*

MRS. HOWARD then proceeded to the kitchen, where Harry was found to be so wet through that the only thing to be done was to undress him and put him to bed while his clothes were dried. Mary undertook to see to this, so Mrs. Howard left him in her care while she went to inquire from Willy and Johnny how it happened. After some difficulty, they told her they were all playing at ball, when Johnny remembered that last year they had seen the ducks in the water. He told Willy and Harry about it, and said how nice it would be to see if they were there still, and then proposed they should leave off their play and go and look, as he knew the

way very well. The three little boys had wandered off from the others in search of the pond, and succeeded in finding it; and while kneeling down by the side, to try and reach the ducks, little Harry had slipped in; but being close to his companions they managed to catch hold of him, but not before he had a good ducking.

Mrs. Howard told them, they should not run away without asking leave, and said she would have been very pleased to shew them the ducks if they had asked to see them.

The poor children seemed very much distressed, but Mrs. Howard only added, "Well, we must be very thankful to God that Harry was not seriously hurt; and I hope it will be a lesson to you all, because you are older than Harry and should have set him a good example. Now, you see, he must lose some of his time in the garden, while his clothes are being dried; but you had better run away and play, as you have stopped all your companions, you see."

The little boys said they were sorry and they would stay with Harry. But Mrs. Howard thought they had better not, and said she would find him some amusement.

They then returned to their play, while she went to see after Harry. She found him comfortably in bed, though rather frightened and still crying. She took him some pictures and a little book, and told

him he should soon get up and play again. She then returned to the garden when she found all as busy and merry as if nothing had interrupted their amusement. At this moment, she was told a lady wanted to see her; so she returned to the house and found Mrs. Clarence, who had recently come to live in her neighbourhood, upon whom Mrs. Howard had called, and she was now come to return it. She had a daughter and a son with her, about fourteen and fifteen years of age. Mrs. Howard greeted them kindly, and after chatting a few minutes, she said,

“This is quite a gay day with us, for my little girls have their yearly treat of having all the school children to tea. I am glad you happened to come in, and I hope you will stay and take tea if you will not object to such a large company.”

The young people appeared much pleased with the idea, and Mrs. Clarence having agreed, Mrs. Howard led the way to the garden, where they went round and saw the many happy groups. Charles and Matilda Clarence soon joined the croquet party. Mrs. Howard told Mrs. Clarence of the little boy in bed, and begged her to excuse her while she went to see after him, as it was nearly tea time. She found her a seat where she could watch the merry children, and then went to the kitchen and finding Harry's clothes were dry, she took them upstairs and dressed him and then brought him down to the

garden, telling him to be sure and not go anywhere again without asking leave.

Soon after Harry had returned to the garden, the tea bell rung, and the children began to assemble on the lawn, where Mary and Thomas had spread three long tables, which looked exceedingly inviting with the large dishes of strawberries, gooseberries, cake, and buns, and several bunches of beautiful flowers. The children all took their seats in a quiet orderly manner. And Mrs. Howard having asked God's blessing upon their meal, they soon did justice to all the nice things with which the tables were covered. After tea, the games were resumed ; and the children did not seem tired when the great bell again summoned them to the house ; this time it was to the school room, where they were all ranged in rows. They then sung that favourite piece with the little ones :

- “Now Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow ;
And every where that Mary went,
The lamb was sure to go.
- “It followed her to school one day,
And that's against the rule,
It made the children laugh and play,
To see a lamb at school.
- “In vain the teacher turned it out,
Yet still it lingered near,
And waited patiently about,
Till Mary should appear.

“And then it came to her and laid
Its head upon her arm,
As though to say, I’m not afraid,
You’ll keep me from all harm.

“What makes the lamb love Mary so?
The eager children cry.
Oh! Mary loves the little lamb,
And that’s the reason why.

“And you each gentle animal,
In confidence may bind;
And make it follow you about,
If you are always kind.”—*Infant’s Magazine.*

Mrs. Howard then gave them a short address, inviting them to the Saviour who had laid down His own life for them, and reminded them they could never find true happiness and peace till they found it in Christ alone. She then asked for some texts from the children to shew why she was right in seeking to lead them to Jesus while young. Many nice answers were quickly given—amongst which were, “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,” &c. *Eccles.* xii. 1.

“I love them that love me, and those that seek me *early* shall find me.” *Prov.* viii. 17.

“Behold, *now* is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation.” *2 Cor.* vi. 2.

After this, she offered a short but earnest prayer, that God would graciously bless all the little party, and make them to know and follow Christ in their

youth ; and that they might be kept from the evil around them, and be found "Waiting for God's Son from heaven, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come." 1 *Thess.* i. 12.

They then all united in singing the following hymn :—

"See! when the gentle *Jesus* reigns
In little children's souls,
Then the sweet law of *love* constrains,
And *grace* alone controls.

"The blessed light of truth divine
He doth to each impart,
And pours the gospel oil and wine
On every wounded heart.

"Jesus, the Lord, is full of love,
How mild are all His ways ;
He hears His children's prayers above,
And loves their notes of praise.

"Through life He guides them by His word,
And if they come to die,
Loosens the little silver cord,
And lets the spirit fly.

"Thus from the gloomy world they rise,
To Jesus borne along,
And then above the starry skies,
They join the heavenly throng.

"There they behold the Saviour's face,
The Lamb who died for them,
And sing the wonders of His grace
Who did their souls redeem.

"And there they dwell for evermore,
Before Immanuel's throne,
And love, and worship, and adore,
The holy Three in One."





Chapter Nineteenth.

THE LOST CHILD.

WHEN the hymn was finished, Mrs. Howard told the children, that before the presents were distributed, Thomas wanted them all to follow him. "But before you go, I must count heads," said she, smiling, "that I may know there are no more wanderers to the duck pond. Let me see, there were forty from the school, were there not?"

"Yes, ma'am," sounded on many sides.

"Very well," she continued, "you can count that table, Ellen, and Annie can see how many there are at the other, while I will reckon those at this table."

Each begun their task; but when finished, they could only make out thirty-nine among the three.

They tried again and again, but no one could make more than thirty-nine.

As everyone was sure *forty* had come, Mrs. Howard became rather anxious, and said, "Can you not recollect, children, any one who came who is not here? Look round and try."

The children did so, and in a few minutes Susan Blake exclaimed, "Oh! little Esther Pope is not here."

This was a little child of four years old, whose sick mother had asked Susan Blake to take care of her. They looked around, and sure enough no little Esther was to be seen. The children looked much alarmed. Mrs. Howard said, "Now, do not speak all at once; but any one who can remember seeing Esther, tell me where they last saw her."

The children looked at each other, but no one spoke. At last, Tommy Smith said, "She went with us to the hay field."

"Oh! yes, so she did," said several others.

"Well, then," said Mrs. H., "we must go and search the hay field before we do anything else."

They hurried off as fast as possible, and hunted up and down. The hay makers were asked, but did not remember seeing little Esther. Some one thought the child must have wandered home, but then they remembered she did not know the way up, and that was why her mother had put her under the care of Susan Blake. This poor girl was in

great trouble. She was so much older than Esther, that they had been playing in different games ; so it was not to be wondered at that she had lost sight of her. The unfortunate *duck pond* came into some minds, but though several went with Thomas to look there, no traces of the child could be found. At this moment, when Mrs. Howard was feeling really anxious, Thomas crossed the field, looking so happy that his mistress felt sure he had good news for them.

"Well, Thomas, have you found our stray lamb?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Thomas, touching his hat, "thank God I have ; and 'tis such a pretty sight, that I came to ask you just to step across to the hay stack to see it."

"Yes, Thomas, willingly," replied Mrs. Howard ; "if you lead the way we will follow."

The man did so, and going round to the other side of the stack, he stood back, and putting his finger to his lips to shew the children they must not make a noise, pointed out the little toddling child, who had unknowingly caused them so much anxiety, sweetly sleeping under the shade of the stack ; and in its arms, cuddled up very tight, a little *kitten*, which seemed in as quiet repose as the child.

"I quite agree with you, Thomas," said his mistress, "it is a very pretty sight ; we must not frighten the poor little thing by standing round her when she wakes."

Some one wondered how the child came there all alone, when another remarked, she was probably playing with the hide-and-seek party when little Harry's scream called them so hastily to the duck pond: and as nobody came to "*find*" the little girl, she had made acquaintance with pussy; and overcome with heat and fatigue, had fallen into this long sleep.

Mrs. Howard called Susan Blake forward, and said, "We will all go away, Susan, and then you gently wake her and take her to the kitchen, where Mary will give her some tea, and then you can join the others. And now, my dears," added she, turning round to the whole company, "you may follow Thomas, who wants you for a few minutes; and when the bell rings, Ellen dear, you can lead them all in to the school room."

Mrs. Howard then offered her arm to Mrs. Clarence; but as Charles and Matilda expressed a wish to see the end of the children's amusements, they, with Annie, Ellen, and Herbert, followed the whole troupe of children, with Thomas at their head, to the bottom of the garden; after passing long rows of peas, beans, potatoes, gooseberry bushes, and strawberry beds, they came to a row of large trees covered with beautiful ripe cherries. Thomas stopped, "Now," said he, "I am going to shake this large tree, and you may all see how many cherries you can pick up; each may fill their pinafore to take home to mother for a pudding."

The children shouted for joy, and were soon busy at this new and pleasing amusement ; talking and laughing went on as fast as gathering. When the bell rang, the question was asked, what was to be done with the cherries while they went in for their presents ? Thomas thought they must all be put together and divided afterwards. He fetched two large baskets, and each child put in his cherries.

They then all fell into a long row of two and two, and walked to the house, singing the children's marching song :—

“Come, let us march and sing,
And music's voice obey ;
We shall not tire if all conspire,
With songs to cheer the way.

“The pleasures of this hour,
No discord will allow ;
With one design we'll all combine,
To raise our song of joy.”

When they were all assembled outside the house, they went into the school room, where they found Mrs. Howard and Herbert on one side the table, while Ellen and Annie with Charles and Matilda Clarence took their stand on the other side ; and while Mrs. Howard and Herbert gave the boys the books, pen-wipers, book-markers, and pictures ; the young ladies divided the dolls, and needle-books, and pincushions among the little girls. When

little Esther Pope's turn came, she appeared with pussy still hugged up in her arms.

Ellen said, "Why, Esther, I think you and pussy love each other so much, you ought to live together, and then you can have another nap under a shady tree. Would you like the kitten or a doll best for your present?"

"Oh! the kitten, miss, please," said little Esther, looking greatly delighted at the question.

"Very well, then; it's my own kitten, so I will give it you, if your mother will let you have it: but you must give it a little milk, and I need not tell you to be kind to it."

"Oh no, Miss Ellen, I will give it some of my breakfast and tea every day."

"Very well, my dear, I am very glad to give pussy to such a kind little mistress. I will try and find you a little bit of blue ribbon to tie round her neck, and then you will be almost like 'Mary and her little lamb.' But you must have a doll too, I think," added Ellen, who put a very smart one into the little thing's hand, as she passed out of the window at the other end of the room to the lawn, where the children were all assembling, ready to return home.

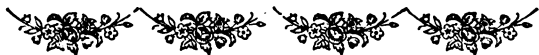
The six paper pillows were sent home to some sick mothers and grannys; and also many small parcels of pictures for little ones, with pieces of cake. Each child was so full handed, that when

Thomas appeared, carrying the large basket, he declared there was no room for the cherries!

The children were obliged to own this was true. While they were thinking how to manage, Thomas said they had better come up to-morrow morning before breakfast, and then he would divide them.

Mrs. Howard thought that would be the best plan. The children then all thanked their kind friends, and wished them good night; and Herbert having run on to open the gate for them, the merry little party set off; and it would have been difficult to say who appeared the happier children, the *givers* or the *receivers*.





Chapter Twentieth.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF PLEASURE.

AFTER she had wished each child good night, Mrs. Howard (with Mrs. Clarence) returned to the drawing-room, where the young people, who had by this time become quite well acquainted, soon joined them.

“We have had a very delightful evening, Mrs. Howard; and I am very much obliged to you for allowing us to join your party.”

“I am very glad, my dear madam, you happened to come in; in the country we generally know each other, and it is pleasant to join in any little arrangements for the benefit and good of our poorer neighbours. Your children, I dare say, have left many interests behind them, and will, perhaps, be glad to find some new ones.”

“The latter part of your remark, I believe, is

true; but I think I can hardly say they have left many interests in town. You see, they are very young, and have had only time to attend to their studies, and have required the attention of others."

Mrs. Howard said, smiling at the young folks, "Well, I suppose I have rather odd notions; but I think children are never too young to have interests in others, and never too young to do *something* for them. I consider it an important part of education to cultivate this idea."

Mrs. Clarence and her children looked surprised at this remark. Mrs. Clarence added, "Well, I believe I have generally supposed they must finish their education before we think of children doing much for others."

"I fear, my dear madam," said Mrs. Howard, "we should find it a very difficult task if we did not begin until then; but, perhaps your young people will like to pay my girls a visit, and then we shall be able to tell them of several plans that I think will give them pleasure to assist in, which are not beyond their years. Matilda is your eldest, I believe."

Mrs. Clarence said she was: but she had two younger girls and two little boys.

"Oh! I hope we shall see them all soon," replied Mrs. Howard. After this they all took their leave.

When they were alone, Mrs. Howard asked her little nephew how he had enjoyed his afternoon.

"Very much, thank you, aunty dear," replied the child.

"Have you ever been at such a large children's party, Herbert, before?"

"No, never; I liked to see all the children look so happy when we gave the presents to them."

"Yes, dear, you see there is great pleasure in making others happy, which you fancied could not be the case. I think I have heard you have very large birthday parties at home, have I not?"

"Yes, aunty, but it is very different to *this*; then I have all the presents given to *me*. Such beauties they are, sometimes."

"Yes, my dear, it is a very different occasion. I suppose you have not enjoyed this afternoon quite as much as you do your birthday?"

"Yes, aunt, I think I have, quite as much. I like having the presents, of course; but I liked to see how very happy the poor children looked when I passed them round the little gifts."

"I am glad to hear it, my dear Herbert. The Lord Jesus said, you know, 'It is *more blessed* to give than to receive.' It is not more *agreeable* to our natural hearts, for they are selfish and wicked: but it is a *better* part. We are told, '*God giveth to all, life, and breath, and all things.*' If we wish to be like God, we shall try to think of the good of others, and not of our own. Only think, dear, what a different world this would be, if we *all* tried to make others

happy instead of ourselves! But," said Mrs. Howard, as they entered the house, "I suppose you are quite tired and ready for bed, my dears."

"I am rather tired, certainly, mamma," said Ellen; but I am not ready for bed. Wasn't it nice, mamma, to see all those children enjoy themselves so much?"

"And didn't they all behave nicely?" were asked by both the little girls at once.

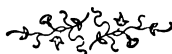
"Yes, my dears, it was a great pleasure to see so many happy; and I think, considering the number, and how young some of them are, they behaved very well, and did Miss Stevens great credit."

"Are you too tired, aunty, to tell us a story to-night?" asked Herbert.

"No, my dear boy, not if it is not a very long one. We have about half an hour before prayer time. What would you like to hear about?"

"You said you would tell me another day about Naaman, who had the leprosy, and went to Elisha to be cured."

"Oh yes, so I did; well, that will just do: because, as I told you the end of the story about Gehazi, the first part will not take us very long."





Chapter Twenty-first.

THE STORY OF NAAMAN.

“**N**AAMAN was a great general of the king of Syria, and had won many victories for the Syrians; so that the king his master honoured and valued him very much indeed: but, as you know, he was afflicted with the dreadful disease of leprosy, for which there was no cure, because the Syrians did not know or worship the true God. He did not live alone, because he was not a Jew. Once, when he had been leading the armies of Syria against the Israelites, among the prisoners which were taken in the battle he saw a little Jewish girl, who, he thought, would make a nice little waiting maid for his wife. When this little girl found her master was a leper, she knew he never could be cured in his own country; but she remembered there

was a prophet in *hers* who could cure him; so she said to her mistress, 'I wish my master were in my country, for then he might be cured of his leprosy by the prophet!'

"Such a wonderful speech as this soon reached the king's ears; and he thought, if it were possible for his favourite general to be cured, it should be done. But how to set about it he hardly knew. He thought, if anyone could really cure leprosy in a country, it must be the king; so he sat down and wrote a letter to the king of Israel, and he said in the letter, 'Behold, I have sent to thee my servant Naaman, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.' And then he sent Naaman off with the letter; and he took with him a handsome present for the king of Israel. He took ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment.

"When he arrived in Samaria, he took the letter to the king, who seemed in great trouble when he read it, for he tore his clothes, and said, 'Am I *God*, to kill and make alive, that this man doth send to me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.' 2 *Kings* v. 7.

"You see, the king knew leprosy was so incurable, that he might just as well have been asked to bring a dead man to life; and he thought the king of Syria wanted to pick a quarrel with him, by asking him to do an impossible thing, and then make war with

him for refusing it ; and this caused him to rend his clothes and appear in such distress. His servants knew what made the king so unhappy, and it was very soon known all over the city ; and among others, Elisha the prophet heard that the king was in great trouble about this leper. So he sent him a message, saying, ' Why hast thou rent thy clothes ? Let him come now to me, and he shall know there is a prophet in Israel.' *2 Kings* v. 8.

" You may fancy how delighted the king of Israel was to receive this message from Elisha. He sent Naaman to him at once. ' So Naaman came, with his horses and his chariot, and stood at the door of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.' Oh ! what glorious news for the poor leper ; only to go and wash seven times, and then he would lose his dreadful disease and be quite well ! Can you not fancy how gladly he would hasten to inquire where the Jordan was, that he might go at once ? as fast as possible ? What will you say when I tell you, that instead of hastening off with a glad heart to obey the simple command of the prophet, ' Naaman was *wroth*, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought he will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of

Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage.'

"Could you have believed, that after so long suffering from this dreadful complaint he would turn away so quickly, when the means of cure was so simple? It seems scarcely possible—yet so we know it was. He was too proud to be treated in this way; he thought he was a great man, and ought to be cured as a great man, instead of remembering his loathsome state, and being content to take the low place. This shews us how differently the Gentiles felt about leprosy to the Jews. A poor *Jew*, who was in Naaman's state, would not have been too proud to be cured in *any* way; but Naaman, you see, was ready to return home uncured. But though *he* was so silly and so proud, he had some servants with him who were a little wiser than their master, and they saw how sad it would be for him to return as bad as he came, when the cure was so simple. So they tried to persuade the proud man to think again about the matter, before he turned his back on the only thing that could heal him.

"'And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some *great* thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then when he says, Wash and be clean?'

"They knew quite well, that if Elisha had told

their master to pay a very large sum of money or to do some great work, he would have gladly done it. They saw it was only his pride that made him despise such a simple thing. Did he listen to his servants? Yes, I am happy to say he did. 'He went down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God.' And what happened, do you think? Was he disappointed? Oh no! no one who simply trusts God's word is ever disappointed. 'His flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was *clean*!' Quite clean, without one spot of leprosy! Oh, how joyful and thankful he must have been, that he had not followed his own proud heart, but listened to his servants' good advice.

"When Naaman saw that he was really healed, we may hope he felt more humble—we know he felt grateful, for he returned to Elisha 'and came and *stood* before him.' This shows he now looked *up* to the prophet, and did not expect him to come down and wait upon him; and he said to him, 'Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; now, therefore, take a blessing of thy servant. But Elisha said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused.' As I told you before, Elisha desired Naaman should learn that the gifts of God are without money and without price.

"When Naaman found that Elisha would not *take* any present from him, he asked him to *give* him something; and a very strange thing it was that he wished for. Can you tell me what it was? It was two mules' burden of *earth*!"

"That was a strange thing," said Herbert; "but why could he not get that at home?"

"I will tell you, my dear. Naaman had resolved not again to worship any of the idols of his own country, but to worship the Lord. His words are, 'For thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods but the Lord;' (ver. 17.) and he wanted to build an altar of the earth thus taken out of the land of Canaan, because that was the country that the Lord had chosen for His habitation in the midst of His people Israel. When he had received the two mules' burden of earth, he set out on his homeward journey, which is where the terrible story of Gehazi comes in."

"Thank you, mamma," said Annie; "but can you tell us why Naaman so despised the river Jordan? I should have thought he would like to see it, and to think of the many things that happened there."

"You forget, my love, that Naaman was a *Gentile*, that he knew nothing of the true God or his works; and, therefore, had no interest, such as you feel, in the Jordan. He had the natural *jealousy* of a Gentile, and thought the large rivers belonging to his country were much more noble and grand than the

small river Jordan : in his pride of heart he thought it would not be so humbling to wash in *them* as in Jordan. Then, no doubt, he felt he had come a long journey, and it seemed foolish to do nothing more than take a bath at the end of it.

“Naaman’s cure and pride always reminds me of ‘the *foolishness* of preaching,’ by which it is the will of God now to save poor lost sinners. Many who would *work hard* to save their own souls, cannot accept the good news, that they have only to *believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ, who has done the whole work for their redemption on the cross. This is *as* humbling a doctrine to proud man now, as the message to wash in Jordan was to Naaman. Still, we know that *as that only* cured him, so the apostle tells us, ‘There is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ.’ *Acts* iv. 12. If a sinner is washed in His blood by faith, he is as perfectly cleansed from sin as Naaman was from his leprosy. For we read, ‘The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us *from all sin.*’ 1 *John* i. 7.

“I have a very beautiful poem, my dears, describing the wretched state of a young Jewish noble, who was a leper ; which, though rather beyond your understanding, I will read to you ; as I think, with a little explanation, you will be able to enter into some of its beauties, and it will impress upon your minds the miserable state of a leper.” Mrs. Howard

then went to the bookcase and took down a book, from which she read the following poem.

THE LEPER.

“ ‘Room for the leper ! room !’ and as he comes
The cry passed on—‘ Room for the leper ! room !’
‘Room for the leper !’ and aside they stood,
Matron and child, and pitiless manhood—all
Who met him on his way—and let him pass.
And onward, through the open gate he came,
A leper, with the ashes on his brow,
Sackcloth about his loins, and on his lip
A covering ; stepping painfully and slow,
And with a difficult utterance, like one
Whose heart is with an iron nerve put down,
Crying ‘unclean ! unclean !’

“ ‘Twas now the depth
Of the Judean summer, and the leaves,
Whose shadows lay so still upon the path,
Had budded on the clear and flashing eye
Of Judah’s loftiest noble. He was young
And eminently beautiful, and life
Mantled in eloquent fulness on his lip,
And sparkled in his glance ; and in his mien
There was a gracious pride, that every eye
Followed with benisons—and this was he.
With the soft air of summer there had come
A torpor on his frame, which not the speed
Of his best barb, nor music, nor the blast
Of the bold huntsman’s horn, nor aught that stirs
The spirit to its bent, might drive away.
The blood beat not as wont within his veins ;

Dimness crept o'er his eye; a drowsy sloth
Fettered his limbs like palsy, and his past,
With all its loftiness, seemed struck with eld.
Even his voice was changed—a languid moan,
Taking the place of the clear silver key;
And brain and sense grew faint, as if the light
And very air were steeped in sluggishness.
He strove with it awhile, as manhood will,
Ever too proud for weakness, till the rein
Slackened within his grasp, and in its poise
The arrowy jereed like an aspen shook.
Day after day he lay as if in sleep;
His skin grew dry and bloodless, and white scales,
Circled with livid purple, covered him.
And then his nails grew black, and fell away
From the dull flesh about them, and the hues
Deepened beneath the hard unmoistened scales,
And from their edges grew the rank white hair,
—And Helon was a leper!

“Day was breaking
When at the altar of the temple stood
The holy priest of God. The incense lamp
Burned with a struggling light, and a low chant
Swelled thro’ the hollow arches of the roof
Like an articulate wail, and there alone,
Wasted to ghastly thinness, Helon knelt.
The echoes of the melancholy strain
Died in the distant aisles; and he rose up,
Struggling with weakness, and bowed down his head
Unto the sprinkled ashes, and put off
His costly raiment for the leper’s garb;
And with the sackcloth round him, and his lip
Hid in a loathsome covering, stood still,
Waiting to hear his doom:—

“ ‘Depart ! depart ! oh child
Of Israel from the temple of thy God ;
For He has smote thee with His chastening rod.
And to the desert wild,
From all thou lovest, away thy feet must flee,
That from thy plague His people may be free.

“ ‘Depart, and come not near
The busy mart, the crowded city more,
Nor set thy foot a human threshold o’er ;
And stay not thou to hear
Voices that call thee in the way ; and fly
From all who in the wilderness pass by.

“ ‘Wet not thy burning lip
In streams that to a human dwelling glide,
Nor rest thee where the covert fountains hide ;
Nor kneel thee down to dip
The water where the pilgrim bends to drink,
By desert well, or river’s grassy brink.

“ ‘And pass not thou between
The weary traveller and the cooling breeze ;
And lie not down to sleep beneath the trees
Where *human* tracks are seen ;
Nor milk the goat that browseth on the plain,
Nor pluck the standing corn, or yellow grain.

“ ‘And now depart ! and when
Thy heart is heavy and thine eyes are dim,
Lift up thy prayer beseechingly to Him
Who, from the tribes of men,
Selected thee to feel His chastening rod ;
Depart, oh leper ! and forget not God !’

“And he went forth—alone; not one, of all
The many whom he loved, nor she whose name
Was woven in the fibres of the heart
Breaking within him now, to come and speak
Comfort unto him. Yea, he went his way,
Sick and heart-broken, and alone to die;
For God hath cursed the leper!

“It was noon,
And Helon knelt beside a stagnant pool
In the lone wilderness, and bathed his brow,
Hot with the burning leprosy; and touched
The loathsome water to his parched lips,
Praying he might be so blessed—to die!
Footsteps approached, and with no strength to flee
He drew the covering closer on his lip—
Crying ‘Unclean! unclean!’ and in the folds
Of the coarse sackcloth, shrouding up his face,
He fell upon the earth till they should pass.
Nearer the stranger came, and bending o’er
The leper’s prostrate form, pronounced his name.
——‘Helon!’—the voice was like the master tone
Of a rich instrument—most strangely sweet;
And the ‘dull pulses of disease awoke,
And for a moment beat beneath the hot
And leprous scales with a restoring thrill—
‘Helon, arise!’ and he forgot his curse,
And rose and stood before Him.

“Love and awe
Mingled in the regard of Helon’s eye,
As he beheld the stranger. He was not
In costly raiment clad, nor on his brow
The symbol of a princely lineage wore;

No followers at his back, nor in his hand
Buckler, or sword, or spear;—yet in his mien
Command sat throned serene; and if he smiled,
A kindly condescension graced his lips,
The lion would have crouched to in his lair;
His garb was simple and his sandals worn,
His statue modelled with a perfect grace,
His countenance the impress of a god,
Touched with the open innocence of a child;
His eye was blue and calm, as is the sky
In the serenest noon; his hair unshorn
Fell on his shoulders, and his curling beard
The fullness of perfected manhood bore.
He looked on Helon earnestly awhile
As if his heart was moved; and stooping down,
He took a little water in his hand,
And laid it on his brow, and said, ‘Be clean!’
And lo! the scales fell from him, and his blood
Coursed with delicious coolness thro’ his veins,
And his dry palms grew moist, and on his brow
The dewy softness of an infant’s stole.
His leprosy was cleansed, and he fell down
Prostrate at Jesus’ feet and worshipped Him.”

WILLIS.

The children were quite able, with a little explanation, to understand most of the poem, and all agreed they should never forget poor Helon, or read of leprosy without thinking of him and Naaman.

“To impress the sad character of this disease upon your minds even more,” said Mrs. Howard, “I will read you a description of the complaint

which I met with the other day, from a very trustworthy source, that so struck me, that I shall not soon forget it ; and it has increased power when we bear in mind that God selected this fearful disease as a type of *sin*, that leprosy of *soul* from which, by *nature*, we *each of us* suffer."

While speaking, Mrs. Howard rose and took up a book, which was lying on the table, and read as follows :—

"The disease of leprosy is said to begin *within* the body,—in the marrow, bones, and blood. A sanious moisture is thrown out. Then it makes its appearance in small spots on the skin. These increase in number and in size, and at last completely cover the whole body, making the leper a disgusting spectacle.

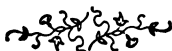
"One speaks of it in these terms :—'The disease advances from one stage to another with slow and certain ruin. Life still lingers amidst the desolation. The joints, and hands, and feet lose their power, and the body collapses or falls together in a form hideous and awful. There is a form of the disease in which it commences at the extremities ; the joints separate ; the fingers, toes, and other members one by one fall off ; and the malady thus gradually approaches the seat of life. The wretched victim is thus doomed to see himself dying piecemeal, assured that no human power can arrest for a moment the silent and steady march of this foe to

the seat of life. The disease is contagious and hereditary. It is easily communicated from one to another, and is transmitted to the third and fourth generation.'

"Another, who was an eye-witness, thus describes it:—'Its commencement is imperceptible. There appear only some few white spots on the skin. At first they are attended with no pain or inconvenience; but no means whatever will remove them. The disease imperceptibly increases for many years. The eyebrows swell; the nose swells; tumours appear on the jaws; the points of the fingers, as also the feet and toes swell; the nails become scaly; the joints of the hands and feet separate and drop off. In the last stage of the disease the patient becomes a hideous spectacle, and falls to pieces.'"

British Herald.

When Mrs. Howard had finished reading, the children looked very sad and solemnized; but further conversation was prevented by the bell ringing, and by the time evening worship was concluded, they were all quite ready for bed (a fact that few children generally allow), and they were soon after fast asleep, dreaming of the wonderfully interesting incidents of the day.





Chapter Twenty-second.

OBEDIENCE TO GOD; OR THE FOUR CAPTIVE BOYS.

THE next morning, when Mrs. Howard met her little nephew at the breakfast table, she thought he looked rather pale; and finding he did not eat much breakfast, she asked him if he felt poorly.

"Not much, thank you, aunty; but I do not feel quite well."

"I think, perhaps, you ate too much fruit yesterday, dear. Does mamma let you eat fruit at home?" asked Mrs. H.

"Yes, strawberries and currants; but cherries she does not like me to eat, because they make me poorly."

"Oh, why did you eat any then, Herbert?"

exclaimed both his little cousins, "when you knew your mamma did not wish it?"

"Because I liked them, and mamma was not here."

The two little girls looked at each other in astonishment, and then they looked at their mother to see what she would say. She understood their look, and remarked,—

"But, Herbert dear, surely you do not mean to say you only try to do right when your mamma is near to see you? I always tell my little girls they should be much *more careful* to think of my wishes and obey me when I am away than when I am at their side."

"Oh, aunt!" replied Herbert, looking very much astonished at this strange doctrine.

"Yes, indeed love," replied his aunt; because obedience to parents is a duty *God* commands: and He is always able to see us whether other people do or not. So if we obeyed *Him*, we should be always equally careful to do what we know is right. If you only do what your parents wish when you are *with* them, I should be afraid you only did it *then* because you *must*, and not because you *wished* to be good and obedient. The apostle Paul felt sure that the Christians at Philippi, who had been very obedient to his wishes when he was *with* them, would be *much more* careful to do what was right when he was *absent*. You will see this if you get your bible and

look at *Phil.* ii. 12. And I hope you will try and remember this, and make it your example. I know it is very difficult to little children to refuse nice things to eat when there is no one near to prevent them; but a child that remembered God's eye is upon him, would try and do so, however hard he found it.

"Can anyone remember a story in the bible, where four children honoured God in not eating nice things when they were offered to them, and begged for dry bread and water instead—and how God honoured and rewarded them?" said Mrs. Howard, looking round upon the little group. All were silent for a moment; Ellen and Annie owned they could not tell, and Herbert said if there was a story about *that* in the bible, he thought his aunt might find one about *anything*.

Mrs. Howard smiled, and said, "Well, my dear boy, I think there are *very* few things that we cannot find either a warning or an example about in God's wondrous book. And I am not surprised at this, because we are told that the Scriptures are given us *on purpose* that the man of God may be '*perfect, thoroughly furnished* unto all good works.' And, also, we are told the Holy Scriptures are profitable or useful '*for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*' 2 *Tim.* iii. 16, 17. And I think I cannot better impress upon your minds this lesson of obedience, to what you *know*

is right even when away from control, than by telling you the story of the four captive boys, who honoured God in most difficult circumstances, and whom God honoured according to His own word.—‘Them that honour me I will honour, and those that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.’”

“Oh, thank you, aunty!” exclaimed Herbert, “another story! I do so like your stories, and I don’t think I shall ever forget them.”

“I hope not, dear,” replied his aunt, rising from the table, “because you know, though I tell you them in a simple way, they are from God’s own book, and therefore ought to be remembered.”

Mrs. Howard then took her bible, and told the children to find the 1st chapter of Daniel, when she begun the story of

THE FOUR CAPTIVE BOYS.

“You know, dear children, that God’s people Israel, who ought to have worshipped the true God, often fell into idolatry and worshipped idols. God sent many prophets to tell them He should punish them if they did not repent: but they still went on sinning, and at last God sent Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to fight against Jerusalem; and he took the king Jehoiakim and all the people of Israel into his hand, and he carried them all prisoners to Babylon. When he got home, he told one of his

servants to look over the Jewish captives, and take some of the finest, strongest, and healthiest of them from the poor captive *king's* family, and separate them from the rest of the prisoners.

“Now what do you think Nebuchadnezzar meant to do with these boys? To kill them? Oh, no! He intended to feed and bring them up very well, and to educate them very well, and to teach them the language spoken in Babylon; and then he meant to choose the wisest and most beautiful to stand before him. The Jewish youths were often very handsome, and were different to the people of Babylon, so I suppose the king considered they would be an ornament to his court.

“The king was so anxious that these captives should have the best food, that he arranged himself that they should eat and drink the same things that he did. And this was to be done for three years, and then he would see them himself and choose those whom he liked best.

“No doubt the captives were very pleased to find such a comfortable lot in a strange country, so different to what they expected. We are not told how many children Ashpenaz separated from among the prisoners; but no doubt a good number: but we are told the names of *four* of them—they were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; these were their *Jewish* names, that their parents had given them at home; but Ashpenaz changed their

names, and he called them Belteshazzar, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego."

"Oh! mamma, I remember them," exclaimed the two little girls, "they were cast into the fiery furnace and not burnt."

"They were, my dears; but that is not the part of their history I now wish you to hear."

"*What* did Ellen say, aunty," inquired Herbert, "they were thrown into the fiery furnace and not burnt?"

"Yes, my boy; and though it may seem impossible to you, yet, you know, with *God* nothing is impossible: and that part of their history is another proof of how God delights to honour those who honour Him."

"I should like to hear that story best, aunty," said Herbert.

"We will finish what we have begun first, dear; but you shall hear about the other afterwards. What I am going to tell you about happened when they were *children*, and therefore is the more beautiful and instructive for children, and the other happened when they were grown up. Now, to return to our story. When Ashpenaz had given the four children their new names, he put them under the care of Melzar.

"When Daniel found they were to be fed upon this beautiful food and wine from the king's table, you may fancy he and his companions would be

very pleased, and think themselves very fortunate and well off. But how surprised you will be to hear that instead of this, Daniel made up his mind he would not eat anything from the king's table if he could help it. How strange! Why was this? Did he not like it? Oh yes, no doubt he did; but I will tell you the reason.

“Daniel knew he was a *Jewish* boy, and that his parents were *Jews*, God's own people; and that God had given His people laws about a great many things that he had not given to other people. Some of these laws were about things to eat; and Daniel knew that the king of Babylon would eat many things that an obedient Jew ought not to eat, and could not eat without being *defiled* or unclean in *God's* sight. So ‘Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not *defile* himself with the king's meat.’ *Dan.* i. 8.

“It sounds very strange to hear a young captive think the *best food* in the country from the *king's* table would *defile* him! Was he not very proud? Oh, no! Daniel was not proud, but he wished to be obedient to *God*. You must remember what sad circumstances Daniel was in. He was not at home, with his parents teaching him God's holy law and helping him to obey it, but he belonged to those Jews, who on account of their sin God had sold to be slaves among strangers. So if *anybody* could have been excused for eating forbidden food, these

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children might have been forgiven. But Daniel had been taught God's word and law, and therefore he felt responsible himself to obey God, although *no one* else did so. He did not say, 'I know if we were in our own land we should not eat this food; but then, we cannot do as we wish; we are prisoners, and must take what is given us; and my mother and father are not here, so *they won't know*; and it is *so very nice, I do not like to give it up*, and perhaps we shall be starved if we don't eat this. Or he did not say, *God* has brought us into this place, and therefore He *wishes* us to eat these things. No, 'Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat.' Beautiful words, dear children, when you consider the peculiar circumstances in which he was.

"I think, Herbert, it was harder for Daniel to give up all the nice dinners from the king's table, than for you to give up the cherries, which you knew mamma would not like you to eat."

Her little nephew looking rather ashamed at this application to himself, his aunt proceeded—"What do you think poor Daniel did? How should you think he got over his difficulty? Well, I suspect he *first prayed to God* about it, and then very likely he talked the matter over with his three companions; I think, perhaps, they had not thought about it before, but certainly they did not disagree about it, as we shall see."



Chapter Twenty-Third.

OBEDIENCE TO GOD; OR THE FOUR CAPTIVE BOYS—*continued.*

“**D**ANIEL told his trouble to Ashpenaz, and asked him to give them some plain food. What did he say? Was he angry with the poor boys? Did he think them proud and troublesome? No! something very different. ‘Now, GOD had brought Daniel into *favour and tender love* with Ashpenaz. Notice this, my dear children, Daniel had already become a very great favourite with his new master: no doubt his conduct in other ways had been good and honouring to God. And He who sees the *heart* saw that Daniel had purposed *in*

his heart, that he would not defile himself with the king's meat nor with the wine which he drank. And God also saw the difficult task he had to perform, and He had graciously gone before him and smoothed his way by thus making Ashpenaz so fond of him, that he would be willing to do what he wanted. What does he tell Daniel? 'And he said to him, I fear my Lord the king, who has appointed your meat and your drink; for why should he see your faces worse looking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.' This was as if he had said to Daniel, *I* should be very willing to grant your request, only I fear the king who gave me orders to feed you like the others; and of course, when he sees you all together, if you are fed for three years upon common, poor food, you will not look half so healthy and strong as those that have been fed upon the best food from the king's table, and then when the king finds out I have not obeyed his orders, he will be so angry that he will very likely cut off my head!

"Surely now, when Daniel has *tried* to do what he thinks right and finds it will endanger Ashpenaz's life, he will be willing to eat the nice food and wine, and be satisfied? Oh, no! he knew the true God; no doubt he had heard *many many* wonderful miracles God had done for His people in trouble if they looked to Him; and no doubt he thought the

same God could come in and help him now. So he said to Melzar, whom Ashpenaz had put over him, 'Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked at, and the countenances of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat; and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.'

"*Pulse*, dear children, was a kind of plain, common food, such as bread or potatoes with us. So it was like saying, Give us nothing but bread and water for ten days, and see if we do not look as well as those who eat the king's meat; and if we do look as well, then let us have it always; and if we do not look so well, then give us the king's meat.

"Surely, Daniel thought, *God* can bless the pulse and water, and make us grow strong and healthy upon it as much as on the other food. So I suppose Melzar thought *ten* days would not do any harm; and perhaps he thought that would satisfy them, and that then they would give up their strange notion; or perhaps they would look very thin and half-starved, and be obliged to eat the meat. However this was, 'He consented unto them in this matter, and proved them ten days.' I expect *no* children ever felt so pleased with the change, from the *nicest food* to the plainest, either before or since, and *only*, you remember, because what they *would*

like was contrary to God's law. How many of *us* prefer *God's* will to our own pleasure? The ten days soon passed, and then the examination was to take place. Do you think you could have found out which were the four boys who had been living upon bread and water among those present, by their pale wan looks? I suppose we could have done so in a general way; but certainly we should have been mistaken in this instance, for these four children all looked '*fairer and fatter* than all those who did eat the *king's meat* !'

"Now, had not God honoured those who honoured Him? Had He not come to their help in all their difficulty? Surely He had. Now, of course, Melzar could make no more objection; so he took away the meat and wine and gave them pulse. And for three years they went on living on this, and seeing all their companions living on the good food; they never changed their mind and took the meat. Their companions might have said, We are Jews as well as you—we don't think it wrong, you need not be so particular. But Daniel and his friends knew they must be willing to stand alone in doing God's will. We must not look at what others do. We must obey God ourselves, and try to lead others to do so also. The three years came to an end as well as the ten days. And now Ashpenaz took them all in before Nebuchadnezzar for him to make his choice; and the king talked with them all, but

you remember, he knew nothing of Daniel's secret.

"Can you not fancy that Ashpenaz would feel rather anxious, wondering whether the king would think Daniel and his three friends looked as well as the others, and whether he would ask any questions that might let out the secret and make him still 'endanger his head to the king?' And after conversing with them, who does the king select? he chooses *four*, whom he finds so clever, and pleasing, and beautiful, that they are not to be compared to the rest of the party, and he appoints them to stand before him.

"And I need hardly tell you, my dears, that these four were the four who honoured God in such difficult circumstances, and who God thus honoured before men.

"These four Jewish captives afterwards became great rulers in the province of Babylon, and still continued to honour and serve the God of their youth."

After Mrs. Howard had concluded her story, little Herbert crept to her side and whispered, "I am very sorry I took the cherries yesterday, but I will try and be like Daniel another time, aunty."

Mrs. Howard was pleased to see her story had taken effect, and kissed him, saying, "God bless you, my child, and teach you to walk before Him in all your ways."

“Will you tell us about the men being in the fire without being burnt, aunty? I cannot think how they escaped.”

“Very well, my dear,” replied Mrs. Howard, “you shall hear how it was and why it was.”





Chapter Twenty-fourth.

THE BURNING FIERY FURNACE.

“**T**HE people that lived in Babylon, you remember, were heathen—they worshipped idols and not the true God. Some time after king Nebuchadnezzar had put Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the province of Babylon, he had a great golden image made, and made a law, that when the people heard the sound of music they were to fall down and worship this image. His own people, of course, did so: but could the Jewish captives do it? No! they knew it was idolatry. And though they knew the king had said, that anyone who did *not* fall down and worship the image was to be cast alive into a burning fiery furnace—yet they would not do it. Very soon, some of the Chaldeans (the people who lived in

Babylon) found this out, and they went to the king and said, 'Oh, king! there are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the kingdom; these men have not regarded thee, they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.' When the king heard this, instead of being sorry he had made such a cruel law, he got into a great rage and fury, and desired them to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to him. And when they came, he asked them if it were true that they did not worship the image he had set up, and told them, if they still refused, they were to be cast into a burning fiery furnace—and then he added 'And who is *that* God that shall deliver you out of my hands?' He knew very well that none of the gods that *he* knew of could deliver, because they were only idols. He did not know the true God, the God of those Jews, to whom he was talking.

"Did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego hesitate a moment what to do? No! they said, 'Oh king, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God, whom we serve, *is able* to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of thine hand, oh king. But if *not*, be it known unto thee, oh king, that we will *not* serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.'

"How bold they were! To please *God*, rather than think of themselves, was still their habit.

They honoured God, and you will see God did not fail to honour them.

“The king was so enraged at their boldness and firmness, that he not only commanded them to be thrown into the fiery furnace, but he ordered them to make the furnace *seven times* hotter than it usually was. Only think what hatred and anger this proved! Then he commanded some of the strongest men in his army to bind these three Jews and cast them in. I do not think they need have bound them, but they did, with all their clothes on, and threw them in; and the heat of the furnace was so very great, that it killed the men who went near to throw them in. And Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.”

Mrs. Howard paused, for she saw tears running down her little nephew's cheek. “What is the matter, dear?” said she.

“Oh, how very dreadful, aunty, to be thrown alive into the fire! what wicked, wicked men!”

“Oh! but you forget, Herbert; they were not *burnt*, as the king intended they should be, when they were thrown into the fire. Wait a little and hear the end of the story.”

This reminder led Herbert to wipe his tears, while his aunt continued. “I should not envy the king's feelings, now that he had satisfied his rage, ‘For he was astonished, and rose up in haste, and

said to his counsellors, Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? And they answered and said, True, O king. And he said, Lo, I see *four* men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like unto the Son of God!

“Only imagine how terrified the wicked king must have been, to see the men not hurt, but *walking* about in the fire. How could they walk when they were bound or tied up, do you think? Why, God had allowed the fire to burn the ropes that bound them, but did not let it burn even *their clothes*. And they were not walking alone? No, some one was with them in this dreadful furnace, and he was like the *Son of God*! How terrified Nebuchadnezzar must have been to find their God could go down *into the fire* to them. This was more than any of his gods could do. What did he do next? He went near to the furnace and called them out, and told them to come to him. Did they obey him? Yes, they came out; and all the people saw that neither their bodies nor their clothes were touched, not a hair of their head singed, and that they did not even smell scorched, which you know you very soon do if you only stand near a small fire. No, their God, whom they had so faithfully served, had been with them *in the fire*; and when God is with His people, they may go through terrible fires and furnaces, but nothing can

hurt them then, who are God's care. The hot furnace only burns their bandages."

"What did Nebuchadnezzar say, aunty, to these men?"

"Well, my love, his conscience was convinced; and though we are not told that he became a worshipper of the true God, yet he owned there was no other God that could deliver like this God; and he made a law, that if any one spoke a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they should be cut in pieces and their houses made a dunghill. And then he gave the three faithful Jews higher posts in his kingdom than they had before; and though we do not hear of them again, we may believe they continued faithful to the God they had so served for the rest of their lives."

"Where was Daniel, mamma, at this time?" said Ellen. "We do not hear of his being with his companions in refusing to bow down to the image."

"No, my love, we do not hear of him; but we must not therefore conclude that he did fall down. We know not only how faithful to God he was when a boy, but we find after this that his life was so holy and beautiful as to excite the jealousy of the people of Babylon, and they wanted to find some accusation against him; and owned they could not, unless it was about the law of his God. For in the matters concerning the kingdom, he was without error or fault. You remember how they managed,

and the trouble they took to betray him to a cruel and dreadful death."

"Oh, you mean the den of lions, don't you, mamma?"

"Yes, my dear, and though the circumstances were different, the faithfulness of the servant and the faithfulness of the Divine Master were pretty much the same, and were only another instance of our text—'Those that honour me I will honour.' As Herbert may not have heard it, I will tell you the story; and then you will have the *three* stories of the captive boys always associated in your minds, though the last *two* cases occurred when they were grown up; and we may also learn this lesson, that those who begin to love and serve God in childhood's days, are not likely to be overcome by the trials of after life.





Chapter Twenty-fifth.

THE LIONS' DEN.

“**I**N course of time, Nebuchadnezzar died, and his son came to the throne ; he was a very wicked man, and God took his kingdom from him and gave it to Darius, the Mede. This new king made Daniel the first prince in the kingdom, and put him over all the other princes and rulers, because he was so very wise and good ; for God had given him great wisdom and skill. The other rulers were very jealous of Daniel, and tried to find out some fault to complain of to the king, but they could not. Perhaps they remembered the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and the golden image ; and thought, if some law were made about religion, Daniel would be sure not to obey it in worshipping idols. So they thought and

talked over the matter, and then they contrived a very wicked plan. They told the king they wished him to make a law that no one in his kingdom should make a request of any god or man, except from the king himself, for thirty days. And that if any one did, he should be thrown alive into a den of lions! Only think what a foolish law. The king did not know why they made this foolish law, but I suppose he was flattered by it; and he signed the paper the nobles had written, and then it became a law; and in that nation the king could not change a law as we can do. When it was once signed with the king's seal, it must remain a law, however bad it might be. This should have made the king *very careful* how he signed anything.

“You will soon hear what trouble poor king Darius was in on account of this law. The nobles only made it in order to catch Daniel breaking it. They knew his habit was to pray to his God in heaven, and they did not believe any law would prevent him doing so; and they thought rightly, for we read, in *Dan. vi. 10.*, ‘When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his window being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a-day and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, *as he did aforetime.*’

“Now notice, dear children, Daniel did not do anything unusual. He did not go out of his way to

provoke his enemies, neither did he try to *hide* his religion for fear of the consequences, he just continued his usual godly way of living."

"Why are we told his windows were open toward Jerusalem, mamma?" said Annie.

"I am glad you have asked, my love; the reason is very beautiful. You know Jerusalem was God's chosen city, and you remember Solomon built God a beautiful temple; and if you turn to the *1 Kings* viii., you will see that Solomon prayed that God would meet and bless His people, and hear all prayer offered in that beautiful temple: and Solomon also prayed, that if God's people sinned, and He allowed them to be *carried captive* into another land, yet, if when *they were captives* in a strange and distant land, yet if *there*, any one repented of the sin of his people, and prayed to God *toward* their land and *toward* the temple, then Solomon prayed that God would hear their prayer and pardon their sins. And God promised to do so.

"Now Daniel remembered this, though he had been so many many years in Babylon. And though he was a great ruler, next to the king, we see he did not forget Jerusalem; but three times a-day he kneeled down and prayed, looking towards the beloved city. This was pleasing to God, because it shewed that though far off, his heart was still in God's land, and on God's house, and in God's work.

"That beautiful temple was a type of something, Ellen—can you tell me of what it was a type?"

"Of the Lord Jesus Christ, mamma?"

"Yes, my dear: you know when He was here, He spoke of Himself as the temple, saying, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again; he spake of the temple of *his body*.'

"As God pledged Himself to Solomon to hear all the prayers offered in that temple, so God has promised pardon and life to everyone who comes to Him by Christ. But to return to our story.

"The wicked nobles, of course, were closely watching Daniel, and soon found him praying. They then hastened to the king, and accused him of breaking the new law which the king had made. Did Darius get into a great fury, as Nebuchadnezzar had done? No! he at once saw through the wicked scheme of the nobles, and he 'was sore displeased with *himself*, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him.' You see, he found out now how foolish he had been to sign such a law, and now he knew he could not alter it, 'for the laws of the Medes and Persians alter not.' And he was very soon reminded of this fact by his nobles, who came to tell him that Daniel must be thrown into the lions' den. So poor Darius, with an aching heart, was obliged to give the order. But he did not say, as Nebuchadnezzar had done, 'Who is that

God that shall deliver you out of my hand?' But he said to Daniel, 'Thy God, whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.'

"You see, Daniel's life in that heathen land had been one *continual* witness for God; not only on great occasions, but *daily*. Everyone knew well whom he served, and so now the king counted on God's faithfulness to his servant. The king was in such distress, he went to his palace and passed a sleepless night. A great stone had been put against the lions' den, and sealed with the king's ring, that no attempt might be made to save Daniel.

"Very early in the morning, the king rose and hastened to the den of lions. What for? to see if Daniel were living; and when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel, and said, 'Oh, Daniel, servant of the living God, *is thy God, whom thou servest continually*, able to save thee from the lions?'

"Can you not fancy, dear children, how hope and fear must have mingled in this question—how his heart must have bounded—when he heard Daniel's voice from the sealed den, saying 'O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of

the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, *because he believed in his God.*' Then the king determined to punish those wicked men who had tried to destroy Daniel, and had them all thrown into the lions' den, and their bones were crushed to pieces before they reached the bottom of the den ; which shews us more clearly how distinctly it was *God's* hand that shut the lions' mouths in Daniel's case."

"I suppose they had to move away the great stone, mamma, before they let Daniel out?"

"Yes, my dear, all their trouble was vain in sealing the stone. They might have remembered that the one like unto the Son of God, who walked in the fire with Daniel's three companions in former days, could surely penetrate the sealed den. This reminds me of another cave that was sealed with a great stone by some wicked man. Can you remember it, Annie?"

"The grave of Christ, mamma?"

"Yes, my dear ; you know the Jews feared the disciples would try to carry away the body of the Lord, and thought to prevent it by putting a great stone against the cave. But whether it was the lions' den or the Lord's tomb, man's folly was proved in struggling against God."

"But an angel rolled away the stone for the Lord Jesus to leave the grave, mamma," said Ellen, "did he not?"

“An angel certainly rolled away the stone, my child ; but not to let the Lord Jesus *out* of the cave, but to let the *disciples into* it. He who rose from the grave, as the Lord of life and glory, and appeared twice afterwards in the midst of His disciples, the doors being shut, needed not that the stone should be removed for Him to leave the grave ; but in tender compassion to His weak disciples, God sent an angel to open the grave, that they might go in and see for themselves that their Lord and Master no longer lay among the dead. The angel sitting quietly on this stone by the opened grave, always reminds me of that verse in *Ps. ii.* ‘He that sitteth in the heavens *shall laugh* : the Lord shall *have them in derision.*’ But now, my dears, we have been sitting very long over our story this morning, but I hope you will not forget it ; and now I think you had better say your verses, and then go into the garden.”





Chapter Twenty-sixth.

THE HAPPY BLIND WOMAN.

IT was the custom at Beechgrove for everyone to repeat a verse of Scripture after breakfast. Mrs. Howard told her children they would hardly guess with what an amount of Scripture they could store their minds by this simple means. Herbert did not quite understand the use of this, though, since he found his aunt and cousins did it, he had followed their example; but the morning after the school party, he was not prepared with a verse, as he had been rather late in getting up, and he had no store in reserve upon which he could draw. His aunt asked him if he could not re

member any ; but he replied he did not know one, but what he had said that week.

"Well, my dear boy," said Mrs. Howard, "I should like to take you with me to see a poor sick woman, to-day, if it were only to shew you what a joy and comfort it is to her, that she stored her mind with scripture before she became blind, which she now is."

"Shall we go this morning, mamma?" interrupted Ellen."

"I am going, my love," replied her mother ; "but I think it would hardly do to take Herbert, though, as I said, I should like to do so ; so I thought you could amuse him in some other way."

"But why will you not take me, aunty?" said the little boy. "I should like to go with you."

"My only reason, my boy, for thinking it better not, is, that poor Sarah Clarke is a very sad object, and I feared it might startle and pain you to see her."

"How, aunty?" persisted the child.

"Why, my dear, for many many years she has been terribly paralysed ; that is, she has nearly lost all use of one side of her body, and has very little strength in the other. You can hardly understand her speech, and she is half an idiot ; then she is very poor, and lives with an ungodly brother and sister who neglect her sadly. Though the parish make her an allowance, they often go out to work without giving her any food ; and they know she

cannot get out of bed alone and can hardly feed herself."

"Oh, how very cruel, aunty!" exclaimed the child.

"Yes, my dear boy, it is very sad to think of her. Then her large vacant eyes and long grey straggling locks, hanging over her face, really give her quite a frightful look. I remember, when I first went to see her, I went into the room alone, and not being prepared to see such a miserable object, I was quite startled; but a nearer acquaintance soon proves poor Sarah is quite quiet and harmless. She has long been a Christian, and a very happy one; and though her faculties are so greatly impaired, that her face often shews no signs of intelligence when you ask her about her health, or if she has had any breakfast; yet, only mention the name of *Jesus*, ask her if He is with her, or if she is longing to see Him, and such a radiant and heavenly smile comes over the poor idiotic, haggard, old face, that it looks quite *beautiful*. Until she lost her sight, she spent most of her time in reading her bible and committing whole chapters to memory. *Now* she has the further trial of loss of sight, she finds the great use and comfort of this habit, for she can go on repeating chapter after chapter, as if she had the book before her. And the same way with hymns; if you go in without letting her know, you may stand by her side and hear her address the

word in praise, and in the repeating of the sacred Word, in a way that shews you she is really conversing with a person.*

"Then you never hear a single murmur from poor Sarah. I often think she is a silent reproof to us who, with all our many mercies, are so often found grumbling and murmuring."

"Won't you take me, aunty, dear?" again asked Herbert. "I should like to see this poor woman very much indeed."

"Well, my love, if you wish it, you may go. Now that I have described our poor friend to you, you will not receive a sudden shock; and, remember, you need not be afraid of her, for she can do you no harm—she can scarcely guide her food to her mouth."

"Shall we go, mamma, as well as Herbert?" asked Ellen.

"I think, my dear, we shall be too many for the small room; but you may call and read that little story I gave you yesterday, to Widow Proctor: you remember, we promised you should go this week."

"Oh yes! so we did: very well, then we can meet you and Herbert afterwards."

"That will do very well, my dear. So now amuse

* This is a literal account of a poor sufferer known to the writer, who is now "Absent from the body, present with the Lord."

yourselves until eleven o'clock, when I shall be ready to start."

The three children then ran off to see Thomas, and inquire whether all the school children had been for the cherries, and heard that not one had forgotten this important errand; and that little Esther Pope had come up with Susan Blake, and the *little kitten*.

"Oh!" said Ellen, "that reminds me I promised her a bit of blue ribbon for pussy's neck; I will go and find a bit and leave it with her mother as we pass. Oh! here, I have a piece in my *minute bag*."

"In your *what*, Ellen?" inquired Herbert.

"In my *minute bag*, Herbert: does that puzzle you?"

"It sounds very funny, Ellen; I cannot think what you mean."

"Well, I will tell you then, it is this little bag which I carry about with me, at my side. I always have a little piece of work in it, which I take up when I have to wait a few minutes for anything."

"What a queer idea, Ellen! You are not an old housekeeper. You are not so very busy, that you cannot waste a minute. I do not see the use of driving so hard when you are only a child."

"Well, Herbert, I learnt it from mamma, who did it when she was a child at school, just my age; and she says she accomplished so much more

work than anyone else did who did not use up their minutes, that she thinks it a very good habit ; because you remember the text I said this morning, ' Redeeming the time, because the days are evil : ' but we will ask mamma to tell you about it, then you will understand it better ; it is time for us to get ready now, or we shall keep her waiting."

So saying, the two little girls ran off to put on their bonnets. On their return to the hall, they found their mamma waiting for them, and Herbert by her side, asking for an explanation of Ellen's queer little "minute bag."





Chapter Twenty-seventh.

THE MINUTE BAG. VISIT TO OLD SARAH.

AS they walked along the lane, Herbert begged his aunt to tell him about her minute bag, and why she liked to see people work so hard.

“My dear boy,” replied Mrs. Howard, “I do not wish anybody to work too hard; but there is a great deal of difference between *over-work* and idleness, or waste of time. Now, I consider *time* one of God’s gifts, which He gives to us all, and for which *everyone* will have to give an account. This world is not going to last for ever. And God tells His people to remember this and to *redeem* the time—this means to make the best use of it and not to waste it. Of course, there are a great many ways of using the time for everyone. Healthful play for

children, at proper seasons, is one of the best ways of employing time for them; it fits them, like exercise and study, for future usefulness.

“Now, *habits*, good or bad, are said to be stubborn things. What you learn *early* in life, you generally remember *all* your life; and, therefore, it is a very good habit while young to learn to use up every *minute*, *never* to be really *idle*. I could tell you of some people, who, if you ask them, ‘What are you doing?’ always answer, ‘I’m just *going to do* so and so.’ This always tells me a tale—such people generally lose *many* minutes between finishing one thing and beginning another; they have not the habit of “*redeeming the time*.”

“Ellen has heard me tell the story of my minute bag, and I am pleased to see she has begun the same thing; perhaps you would like to hear what made *me* think of a minute bag when I was her age.”

“Oh yes! very much, aunty, please.”

Mrs. Howard then told the following little story:—

THE MINUTE BAG.—(*quite true.*)

“When I was a child, my boy, I was blessed with very strong active health, and natural quickness and energy. About twelve years old I was sent to a very nice boarding school, conducted by two beloved Christian ladies; whose one desire was

to form our characters on the principles of God's own word, and to train us first of all for eternity. Now, you know in schools, where there are so many, everything must be done by rule ; dressing and undressing, everything has its time appointed. Now, so it was with us, and as sufficient time was given for *slow* girls, it is clear that quick girls were always done first and had some minutes to spare, before the next bell gave them permission to leave one room or occupation for another. These little odd minutes were very tiresome to one of my active turn, and I resolved I would *always* have something in my pocket to fill up these spare minutes ; and as a piece of worsted work (which was the favourite play work then) was found too large for the pocket, I made a bag to carry it, which I *always* carried with me. I was laughed at by many, but this mattered not, I found I accomplished many a present (and as we had very little time for play-work this was a great pleasure). And I quite well remember, when on exhibiting some pretty bag or mat completed—some slow companion remarked, 'Why, when *did* you make that? I never saw it before.' The pride with which I answered, 'Oh, I have only done it when you have been drying your hands, putting away your books, or lacing your boots.' I doubt not it was said in rather a conceited manner—and perhaps this called forth the contemptuous remark, when any surprise was expressed

at a piece of work again, 'Oh! no doubt it came out of Mary's *wonderful minute bag!*' And thus my bag became christened the '*minute bag.*' I never lost the habit, even when I returned home, and did not do things so much by rule. Long after my marriage I had my minute bag; but since I have had children," said Mrs. Howard, smiling at her little girls, "I do not find *many* spare minutes; though," added she in a confidential tone, "I would not say whether a little tiny bag, with a bit of crochet edging or something equally small, might not even *now* be found at the bottom of a spare pocket, if strict search were made; and I quite confess I never like to be without some little book to profit either myself or a neighbour, while waiting a few minutes at a railway station or on any such occasion."

"Well, Herbert, do you think my minute bag a very foolish thing now?" inquired Ellen.

Herbert could not say he did; but he replied, "Boys cannot have work bags. What can they do?"

"Well, I think a little book is rather more suitable for them. But I think, my dear boy, when anyone has a *desire* to redeem the time, they will not be at a loss to find some means of employing it; but see, my dear girls, you are passing Widow Proctor's door."

"Oh dear! so we are," said Ellen.

"The little girls then stopped and tapped at a

little cottage door, while Mrs. Howard and Herbert continued their walk. In about ten minutes they also stopped at a cottage. Mrs. Howard knocked, but receiving no answer she lifted the latch and walked in. Everyone down stairs had evidently gone out, so she went up the little staircase followed by her nephew; who, we must confess, felt rather a shrinking from seeing poor Sarah, though at the same time he had a wish and curiosity to do so.

When they reached the top of the stairs, Mrs. Howard opened a door and walked in; Herbert followed slowly and peeped in quietly before he went in. He felt his aunt had truly described the poor unfortunate sufferer! He could scarcely believe she could understand anything. She looked so lost and wandering. When Mrs. Howard asked kindly after her health, the answer seemed nothing more than a *noise* without meaning. His aunt sat down and beckoned to him to come near. He did so, she then said;—

“Well, Sarah, you know your Saviour loves you, you know who sends your trouble.”

Upon this, the poor creature’s face became quite brilliant and intelligent; and she mumbled out, trying to raise her poor paralysed hands, “Yes!

“It is *Thy hand*, my God,
My sorrow comes from *Thee*,
I bow beneath Thy chastening rod,
’Tis love that bruises me.

"I would not murmur, Lord !
Before Thee I am dumb ;
Lest I should breathe one murmuring word,
Helpless to Thee I come."

This was a favourite hymn, and constantly was the way in which she expressed her patient submission to God's holy will.

Mrs. Howard then said, "You are very glad now, Sarah, you learnt so much Scripture, are you not?"

Again the bright smile lighted up her poor old face, and she replied, "What should I do now? I liked to see the words when I could read, but now I say them—and it does *as well*."

Then she begun the 14th of John, and went through with it, while Herbert stood gazing in astonishment.

When she had finished, Mrs. Howard said, "Well, Sarah, you have this precious peace of which Jesus speaks."

Again the bright smile appeared, and a mumbled "yes," and then again the old idiotic look returned.

Mrs. Howard then placed a few little things on the bed, put a beautiful rose into her hand to smell, and bade her farewell.

As they walked back, Herbert seemed very silent; his aunt rather wished him to think over what he had seen. They called for Ellen and Annie, and as

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they went on, his aunt asked Herbert whether he had felt frightened of poor Sarah.

"No, aunt, not *frightened*, but it is very sad to see her."

"It is indeed, my love ; but she is in a state in which I do not think she suffers so much herself as those do who see her ; her faculties are so much impaired, that intelligence only comes, you see, for a few minutes, and then goes again. I trust, if it please God, she may be soon removed to her heavenly home, where the bright smile will remain, while she dwells for ever in her Saviour's presence."

"But how wonderful, aunty, when she is so very silly, she can understand so much about religion, when that is such a *hard* subject."

Mrs. Howard smiled at her little nephew's remark, and said, "Well, dear, I do not think she can *understand* much of *religion*, but she *knows Jesus in her heart* ; that is a very simple thing, even a little child can know Jesus loves it, and be happy in this knowledge. And God's word tells us that. 'God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ; and things that are despised hath God chosen.' 1 Cor. i. 27.

"Such an one is poor Sarah. No one that sees her can doubt that God's Holy Spirit is her teacher. Did you ever hear the story of a poor little idiot boy, named Matt?"

“No, aunty, never ; do tell it me.”

“Well, it is a little book, my love ; I will see after dinner if I have one to give you, and if not I will tell it you, for it is a wondrous story and teaches us a beautiful lesson. But see, here we are, and there is the table laid, so run and take off your bonnets and make haste down to dinner.”





Chapter Twenty-eighth.

MATT, THE IDIOT BOY.

IN the afternoon Mrs. Howard had some letters to write. When she had finished them, she called Ellen to take them to the post; and leaving Annie at the piano to practise, she went to a drawer to look for the little book she had promised to try and find for her little nephew; not having one left, however, she took her work basket and went into the garden to seek him. She found him talking to Thomas and telling him of his visit to poor Sarah. He found Thomas knew her, and regarded her as a wonderful instance of God's grace; for Thomas and Mary were both among those who had found peace for a guilty conscience in the blood of Christ, and were those who loved to find out any who knew Jesus, or to speak to

anyone who had not yet found Him to be the Saviour of their souls. When he saw his aunt, Herbert ran to meet her, and inquired what she was going to do.

"I thought I would sit in the arbour and finish a little work I want done ; and as I find I have not the little book I spoke of, I will, if you like, tell you the story while I do my work."

Herbert declared that would be a capital plan, and ran on to the arbour to clear away some litters he had left there, and when Mrs. Howard had taken her seat and begun her work she commenced the following story of

MATT, THE IDIOT BOY—(*true narrative*).

"A lady was once walking by the sea shore, when her attention was called to a poor little boy, standing staring up into the sky. The clouds were passing quickly along, and the sun was shining out between two clouds. This seemed to rivet the child's attention. When the clouds passed before the sun, the boy turned away disappointed, and attended to the question the lady had asked several times in vain—What he was doing?

"He replied in a sad voice, 'Matt look for God ! Matt want to see God !'

"The lady saw by the poor child's face he was weak in mind, and looked round to see where he lived. He seemed to wish to go home, so she

followed him and soon saw a little girl coming to meet him. She curtsied and asked the lady to walk in and rest, which she did, wishing to make a little inquiry about the poor boy. She found he was an orphan, but lived with his grandfather; this kind neighbour seemed to care for him like a mother, and little Becca, as the girl was called, seemed quite to understand his wants; she washed his hands and gave him his dinner. They told the lady he would spend hours on the shore, 'looking for God,' as he said.

"The visitor felt a deep interest in the poor child, who was evidently an idiot and could not be taught anything in the usual way. She visited the cottage occasionally in her walks; and one day was present when the clergyman was reading to the poor sick grandfather. He was reading *Matthew* xviii., and when he came to the parable of the 'king who would take account of his servants,' Matt was listening with great attention. When he had finished, Matt turned to him and said, very earnestly, 'Parson, read some more!' The clergyman then continued, 'A great king said, (and he pointed upwards as he spoke) bring my servants to me, and I will make them pay all the pounds they owe me. And they brought one servant who owed a *great, great, great* many! and he had no pence to pay, and the king said he should be put in prison and never come out any more till he had paid *all* the money.' He had

got so far, when he saw the poor little idiot boy tremble and look terribly alarmed. The clergyman stopped when he saw how troubled the child was, and they spoke cheerfully to him and tried to comfort him, but in vain.

"The lady left, and next day found him on the shore again. She asked him what he was doing.

"The boy replied, 'Matt was talking to God.'

"'What did poor Matt say,' she asked kindly.

"The boy joined his hands and looking up with a piteous expression of submission and fear, said, 'God, God, Matt has no money to pay,' and then shaking his head, he told her with great distress, he was going to be put in prison—God was going to put Matt in prison.

"The lady said, cheerfully, 'God is not angry with Matt now. Jesus Christ has paid all Matt owed, and God is not angry with Matt any more.'

"The boy looked at her, and then got up off the sands and went a few steps away. The lady thought he had not understood her and wanted to go away from her; but to her surprise, when a few steps off he raised up his hands to heaven, and said, 'Man that paid, man that paid! Matt says thank you! thank you!'

"The lady was amazed. God had evidently given the poor boy to understand the great truth that Christ had paid his debt, and that he had nothing

to fear from a holy God. She could only raise her heart in joy and wonder at this great sight.

"The boy still stood looking up to the sky, as if not satisfied. The lady tried to find out what he wanted now; at last he again said, 'Matt wants God, Matt wants to see God.'

"She told him then, as plainly as she could, 'Matt shall see God *some* day; not now, but very soon God will send and take poor Matt home. Then Matt shall see God.'

"The child seemed relieved and appeared to take it in, and looked pleased when the lady repeated, 'God would send for Matt, and Matt must be *ready*, and Matt should go and see God *some* day.'

"Soon after this conversation, the boy seemed to want to go home, the lady went with him; when he saw Becca, he was very anxious to have his hands washed; she washed his hands to please him, then he asked for his new cap; this she said he could not have, it must be kept for Sunday; the poor boy cried so piteously upon being refused, that the lady begged he might be indulged by having his best cap, that she might try and see what his idea was. The cap was put on, and then poor Matt was quite pleased and contented, saying, 'Matt ready *now*: God send for Matt *some* day—*Matt must be ready*.'

"The lady saw Matt several times after, and found him always waiting for God to send for him. .

"On one occasion, he asked the lady if anyone

would beat him when he went to God, as some cruel boy did here. The lady told him no one would be unkind to Matt when he went to God. He then asked whether he should be *cold* any more (for he suffered very much from the cold here), and being assured he would never be cold or beaten any more, but be happy with God, seemed to speak full comfort to the heart of the poor child. His grandfather died, and they told him he was gone—God had sent for him. He appeared much disappointed at being left behind, and still kept up his one desire to see God.

“His desire was soon granted, though in a sad way. One very stormy night he could not sleep, he said he wanted to go out and ‘*talk to God.*’ The door was fastened to prevent him, but he managed to get out; and when Becca woke and found him gone she went to a cave which he was very fond of, to seek him; there she found him, half frozen, still praying, ‘Oh God, send and take poor Matt away.’ The girl threw her shawl over him and ran to get help; when they returned, Matt was no longer suffering with cold, but his happy spirit had passed away from this cold and unkind world, to the presence of the ‘God he longed to see,’ and ‘the Man that paid his debts.’”

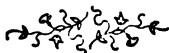
Mrs. Howard finished her story, and looking up from her work saw the tears running down her little nephew's face.

“What is it, Herbert ; why do you cry ?”

“Oh aunt, what a sad, sad story—poor Matt !”

“It is sad, Herbert, but very happy also ; think what a beautiful lesson we learn of God’s taking up the poor idiot, and teaching him the grand lessons of the bible—the debt we owe God—the debt Christ has paid for us. And then, how he was taught—‘To wait for the Son from heaven.’ Three blessed truths, which many people who have all their senses and can read God’s word know nothing of. And how few of those Christians who know that Christ has paid all their debt are like poor Matt, *waiting* for the Son from heaven—(1 *Thess.* i. 10) ‘*ready always* ; ready, because God will send for them some day, they do not know when.’

“May you, my dear Herbert, learn these precious lessons that Matt learned ; and rejoice in the prospect of ‘seeing God *some* day.’ This you can never do until you, like Matt, know Jesus as the ‘Man that paid.’ I will try to get you this little book and send it you when you go home, and then you can read it for yourself. Let us go and see what your cousins are doing now,” said Mrs. Howard, rising ; “I have finished my work, and I think tea must be nearly ready.”





Chapter Twenty-ninth.

IMPROVEMENT AND PLAN OF USEFULNESS.

THREE weeks had passed since the wet Sunday with which our story begun, and Herbert's return home was being spoken about. He seemed in no hurry for it himself, as he was greatly enjoying life in the beautiful county of Devon. He was feeling a happier little boy, though perhaps he could hardly have told you what made him so if you had asked him. We believe the secret was, he had been constantly and usefully occupied, and had less time to think about himself. And he had found out, while with his aunt, there were *many* ways in which even a little child could serve and comfort others; and he had also found there was a *pleasure* and satisfaction in knowing he had been of use to others. He was complaining

one day he should have nothing to do when he reached home, because he was all alone. His aunt said she thought his mamma would be able to find him something to do for her, "when I tell her," added she, "how useful a little boy you can be. And when she comes to fetch you we can show her some of the pen-wipers and book-markers you have made for little Patty's basket; and perhaps she may know some little child or poor woman in your neighbourhood, who may be very thankful for such a basket. And then, you know, with a little help from her and your kind nurse, you could keep it set up *all* yourself; and I have no doubt, with a little practice, you would become as expert a dresser of small dolls as our little friend Tommy, whom you saw here the other evening."

But our little readers may complain they have not been introduced to little Patty, and that they do not know what her basket is like, or who little master Tommy is, of whom Mrs. Howard thus reminded Herbert. We must tell them then that "little Patty," as she was always called by the neighbours, was a poor crippled child, about fourteen years old; but owing to the accident which lamed her, she had not grown as other children do, and therefore she did not look more than ten years old at most. She was an orphan, and had been kindly cared for, since her parents died, by a neighbour; who declared she should always share the last crust

with her own children. She was a Christian woman, who knew that God had promised to be a Father to the fatherless, and a Judge of the widow ; and she used to say her barrel of meal would not waste while little Patty was with her. And so it seemed, for all the village seemed to watch over the poor widow, whose simple faith in God had led her to open her heart and home to the poor little crippled orphan. When Patty was about twelve years old, she very much wished to do something to help the widow ; she had learned to knit at the school, and to make very pretty baby shoes and mats, in both cotton and wool ; and Mrs. Howard one day asked her if she would like to have a little basket for her work, and take it round to the ladies she knew to sell ?

The child was much delighted with the idea ; and at their mamma's suggestion, Ellen and Annie dressed a great variety of smart little dolls, such as they had for the school children, and added many needlebooks, pincushions, iron holders, and various other useful things to Patty's basket, as well as pen-wipers and book-markers, for which she found very ready sale among the ladies who knew her all round.

A few days before this she had been sent for by Mrs. Howard, to have a fresh supply of things made, and to inquire what she most wanted. Herbert had been very much interested in hearing her story,

and seeing how a poor little cripple, not bigger than he was, could provide for herself happily and thankfully. As she said her stock of little things was very low, Ellen and Annie begged they might have a little "Bee," as the Americans call it, to fill it again. Their mother readily consented, and they had asked their cousins and Miss Clarendon, and two little neighbours to tea to help them in their work; little Tommy Tomkins had shewn such skill in dressing dolls, that Herbert told him he ought to have been a girl, but Tommy did not agree in this opinion.

Herbert added his contributions to the basket in pen-wipers and book-markers, which he considered more suitable for boy's work; and fully rewarded all the children felt when the basket, with baby shoes and mats of all sizes, received their contributions of work, and looked quite tempting, either for little doll-loving folks or for kind mammas and aunties. They all answered Patty's grateful thanks, by saying they hoped she would soon empty it again, and then they would be ready to make her some more.





Chapter Thirtieth

CONVERSATION AND ARRANGEMENTS.

WHEN Herbert and his aunt were speaking of his return home, she reminded him how in many ways he could help mamma at home, if he only kept a good look out ; and she told him she should hope to hear what a happy, useful boy he had become ; and that if it pleased God to spare him, she hoped he would pay them another visit before long, when she should expect to find that he had found out for himself the truth of many things that he had heard and seen there. “I hope, my dear boy,” said Mrs. Howard, “you will continue to learn a verse from Scripture every day. To help you to remember this, I have a little daily text-book for children, which I will give you. The texts are

very simple ones, and you will try to think of your morning verse often in the day, and seek to walk according to what you learn; that is, obey the precepts they teach: and if, sometimes, you feel disinclined to learn your verse, and are ready to think ‘what’s *the use* of it?’ then remember poor Sarah, and what a joy and comfort it is to hear that she has God’s word stored in her mind—and what is still better,” added Mrs. Howard, “stored *in her heart*. You know, king David said, ‘Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I may not sin against thee.’ If we wish to serve God, you know, my boy, His word (that is the Bible) must be ‘the light unto our feet and the lamp unto our path.’”

“I shall miss your bible stories, aunty,” said Herbert, “they are newer than those I have at home.”

“Well, love, you will not forget Mephibosheth, and the kindness of God; or Naaman the leper; or Gehazi the covetous servant; or Ziba the deceitful servant.”

“But, aunty, you will tell me some more before I go away, won’t you?”

“Yes, dear, we shall have time for one or two more. What would you like to hear about, a disobedient prophet that a lion slew, or a disobedient prophet that a whale swallowed?”

“Oh aunty, I know who that was!” exclaimed Herbert, “it was Jonah.”

"It was; and can you tell me what he did that was disobedient?"

The child thought a minute, but could not; so Mrs. Howard repeated her question, which he would like to hear about; he owned he was puzzled, they *both* sounded so interesting, he did not know which to choose.

"Perhaps," said his aunt, smiling, "you would like *both*."

"Oh yes, that would be best, aunt," replied the child.

"And then," added Mrs. Howard, "there is another story of which I am very fond; it occupies the whole of one of the books of the bible, and is all about God's care for his people Israel when in great trouble, and yet the *name* of *God* is never once mentioned *all through* the book."

"Oh dear, how can that be, mamma!" exclaimed Ellen and Annie, who had just joined Mrs. Howard and her little nephew.

"So it is, my dear; and when I tell you the story and you read it for yourselves, I think you will agree with me that it is a very wonderful thing, that in a book *all* about the way in which God ordered the affairs of a kingdom for the blessing of his people, His *name*, as acting for them, should never once appear?"

"Will you tell me all three before I go away, ainty?"

N

"I will, my dear, if we have time ; and if not we must remember them on your next visit—unless," added she, "you read them for yourself, and tell me about them when next we meet. Tea is coming in now. We will begin one, if you please, this evening."

After tea was over, and Mrs. Howard had taken her work, and Ellen and Annie had followed her example, she begun as follows.





Chapter Thirty-first.

THE STORY OF A DISOBEDIENT PROPHET WHO
WAS KILLED BY A LION.—I *Kings* xiii.

“**Y**OU perhaps remember, that after the wise and good king Solomon died, *ten* out of the twelve tribes of Israel revolted from his son *Rehoboam* and set up a very wicked man for their king, named *Jeroboam*.

“From this time, the *ten* tribes under *Jeroboam* were named *Israel*, and their chief city was *Samaria*; and the *two* tribes of *Judah* and *Benjamin* that remained under *Rehoboam* were called *Judah*, and their chief city was *Jerusalem*.

“I hope you understand this and will try and remember it; for unless you do, you cannot understand the stories in the Books of Kings. Always

think of *Judah* and *Jerusalem* together, and of *Israel* and *Samaria* together. Remember, they were *both* God's own people : but they had divided, and Israel (or the ten tribes), under the wicked king Jeroboam, very soon begun to worship *idols* instead of the true God, and built altars to idols, and did as they chose, and *not* according to God's laws which they had been taught. So they were far more guilty than the poor Gentiles, who worshipped idols, because the Gentiles had never known the true God ; and you know we read, "To him that *knoweth* to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin," and "To whom *much* has been *given*, of the same shall *much* be required." God had given Israel His law, and had sent them prophets ; and, therefore, it was *very* wicked of them to turn to idols. But you will see what happened to this wicked king Jeroboam, who led others into sin. God wanted to send him a message—Who could He send? Did He send a prophet belonging to Samaria? No—they were all mixed up with the sin, so God could not use them. God never uses any one who is mixed up with the sin ; they must '*cease to do evil*' before they can '*learn to do well*.' *Isaiah* i. 16, 17.

"God sent a prophet, or, as he is called, 'a man of God,' from *Judah*, to bring a message to Jeroboam, who was at Bethel, and was burning incense at the altar. Now, the king and all Israel

knew that *God* had made a law which said, that only *priests* should burn incense, and Jeroboam was was not a *priest*, he had therefore no right to burn incense ; but as I told you before, he was doing what *he* liked, not what *God* liked.

“As he was standing by the altar, the man of God, from Judah, arrived ; and he cried out against the altar in the word of the Lord, ‘Oh altar ! altar ! thus saith the Lord : Behold a child shall be born to the house of *David*, *Josiah* by name, and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men’s bones shall be burnt upon thee.’

“This was a prophecy of dreadful judgment ; you see it was to be a king of the house of *David* who was to do it, this shewed Jeroboam and Israel that they would not always be able to go on in their wicked ways, but that a king of *Judah* would punish them, by burning the wicked prophets of Baal on *this very altar*.

“The man of God then gave them a *sign*, by which they might know he was speaking by the word of the Lord— because Israel knew that God had said, long before that, when any one pretended to come with a message from Him, they might know it was true if the signs he gave came to pass, and if they did *not* come to pass, then they were to know God had *not* sent him. *Deut.* xviii. 22.

“So this man of God gave them a sign, it was

this, 'Behold, this altar shall be rent and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out.' That meant it should be destroyed—he did not say *when* it should happen, but merely that it *should* happen. You may suppose this sign made the wicked king Jeroboam *very* angry; he stretched out his arm and said to the people round him, 'Lay hold on him,' that meant, take him prisoner. No doubt he meant to punish him for speaking against the altar. But Jeroboam seemed to forget *God* had sent him, and might *judge him* if he touched his servant. But so he found it, for the hand that he stretched out was dried up, so that he could not pull it back again! Was not that a terrible judgment? And what happened next? Why 'The altar was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the Lord!'

"How *soon* the sign was fulfilled—how astonished the wicked Jeroboam and the people of Israel must have been, to see the altar rent and the king standing there with one arm quite dead and useless. Did they send for a doctor to cure the king's arm? Oh no, Jeroboam knew very well that would be of no use. God who had smitten it was the only one who could cure it, and so he asked the man of God to pray to God for him, that his hand might be restored to him. Do you not wonder he was not ashamed to ask the prophet this favour? You see,

he does not express any sorrow for his sin against God, or any intention of forsaking his wicked ways, neither does he express any sorrow for his behaviour towards the prophet, he only begs that his *hand* may be restored to him. Did the prophet grant his request? Yes, indeed he did; he shewed his God was a God of mercy, he prayed for the king and his arm was made well again. How gracious and merciful of God! Did this mercy touch Jeroboam's heart? Oh no, he went on sinning, and not only sinning *himself*, but *he led others into sin*; and God always mentions him as 'Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, *who made Israel to sin.*' 1 Kings xv. 34.

"This teaches us that God takes notice when we try to *lead others wrong*, and holds those who do so responsible to Him for it. We all have some influence over others, though we may not know it.

"Even a *child* may lead others to do right or wrong by his influence and example; how *very careful* then should we try and be never to lead others wrong, that it may never be said of us, as it was of Jeroboam, that we made '*others to sin.*'"





Chapter Thirty-second.

THE STORY OF THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET.

Continued.

“**Y**OU will like to know how the king treated the man of God after he had restored his hand. He invited him home with him to refresh himself, and promised him a *reward*. A reward for what? I suppose for restoring his hand. Do you think the prophet would take a reward? No, indeed; like Elisha with Naaman, he wished the king to know that God's mercy was full and free, without money and without price, and could not be *bought*. Did he not accept his invitation to go home and have some refreshment even? No, this was his answer, ‘If thou wilt give me *half thine house* I will not go in with thee, *neither* will I *eat bread* or *drink*

water in this place ; for so was it charged me by the word of the Lord, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest. So he went another way and returned not by the way he came unto Bethel.'

"What a solemn lesson for the king and his people ! They were *so wicked* that God would not allow His servant even to *take a draught of water* in their city ! Eating and drinking, I must tell you, expresses *fellowship*, and God meant them to see that His prophet could not have the *slightest* fellowship or communion with them. We are told in the New Testament, "Have *no fellowship* with the works of darkness, *but rather reprove them.*" (*Ephes. v. 11.*) These Israelites were walking in *darkness* away from God, who is *light*, and, therefore, the man of God must not even go to the king's palace or take a glass of water in the place. Ought not this to have struck Jeroboam and humbled him ? Surely it ought ! but, alas ! it did not. *Judgment* and *mercy* had both been tried by God, but all in vain. How very solemn a lesson—how beautiful a contrast is the simple obedience of the man of God to his Master's will ! No matter how tired or how thirsty he was, he would not disobey the word of the Lord—not even a draught of water would he touch in that wicked city. The word of God you see was his simple guide, and following that he was quite safe. And so it is with us now ; as long as we follow the simple word of

God, we are safe from all the snares and temptations of the world, even though they come from a *king*.

“I should like to finish my story here and have nothing more to tell you about this ‘man of God,’ who had been so faithful and obedient; but, alas! like *all* human patterns he failed, and the rest of his story is very sad; but I must tell it you, because it teaches us some very solemn lessons. You will observe that as long as he kept *close to the word of the Lord*, he was honoured and blessed; and it was only when he listened to *some one else* he got into trouble. But I am sure you will be ready to say, after refusing the temptation of the *king*, did he listen to any one else? You may well ask the question—but so he did.

“Who could have been the tempter? Some one greater than the king? No, that could not be; but a *religious* man, a *prophet*: one who lived in Bethel, and had become so mixed up with all the idolatry, that God could not use him to take his message to the king, but had to send this ‘man of God’ from Judah. I must tell you how it all happened. This old prophet of Bethel had two sons, who were present when the man of God uttered his message from God; and when the king’s hand was smitten and healed, and when it was all over, they went home and told their father all that they had seen and heard, and how the prophet had refused to go home with the king. We can hardly tell what effect their

tidings had upon the old prophet, for he did not tell them, he only asked his sons if they knew which way the man of God went; and they said yes, they saw him take a particular road. On hearing this, their father told them to saddle the ass for him, and they did so, and he went after the man of God. I suppose he felt it was a reproach to him, that God had sent some one from *Judah* with the message; and whether he wanted to use his influence over the prophet to make him as bad as himself, I cannot tell you; or whether it was to hinder God's testimony by the man of God, I do not know; but he went after him and found him "*sitting under an oak.*" He may have been tired and needing rest, but I think it shews us he was not quite in such a hurry to leave the neighbourhood of the wicked place as he might have been—his sitting under the oak; at any rate it was here he was caught in the snare: had he not stopped to rest, the old prophet *might* not have been able to overtake him; at any rate, even now, if he had *kept close to God's word* he would have escaped the snare. But I must go on with my story—when the old prophet rode up to the tree and saw a man sitting under it, he stopped his ass and spoke to him, and he said,—

“‘Art thou the man of God who camest from Judah?’

“And he answered, ‘I am.’

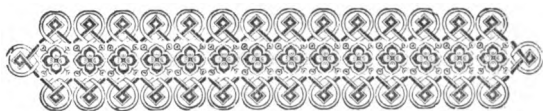
“Then he said to him, ‘Come home with me and eatbread.’

“And he said, ‘I *may not* return with thee nor go in with thee, neither will I eat bread or drink water in this place; for it was said to me by the word of the Lord, Thou shalt eat *no* bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest.’

“So far you see the man of God kept close to his Master’s orders. He says just the same thing he had said to the king.

“But now observe what the old prophet says to him—it reminds me of ‘that old serpent the devil,’ who when he found he could not tempt our blessed Lord Jesus to make the stones bread when He was hungry, tried to tempt Him by quoting *God’s own word*. We know, with our blessed Lord, the temptation failed, because He was without sin; but with this poor man of God, you will see the trick was only *too* successful.”





Chapter Thirty-third.

THE STORY OF THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET.

(continued.)

“**T**HE old prophet said to him—‘I am a prophet also as thou art; and an *angel* spake unto me by the *word of the Lord*, saying, *Bring him* back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water.’

“*But he lied unto him.* Did the man of God believe him? Yes, indeed he did. *Ought* he to have believed him? No, he ought not. And why? Because he told him God had said something to *him* quite opposite to what the man of God *knew* God had said to him; and he ought to have said, I *know* what God told me, and I must do it; and I know what you say must be false. He ought not to

have cared for what even an *angel* said, if it were contrary to *God's* own word to *him*. St. Paul said, 'If even an *angel from heaven* preach any other gospel to you than that *we* have preached, let him be *accursed*.'

"We learn this solemn lesson from the poor man of God being betrayed by the old prophet, when he had faithfully resisted the tempting offer of the king. That a child of God may resist the temptation of the *world*, and yet fail when the same temptation comes through a *religious professor*, because he claims to be a *servant of God like himself*. And we also learn that the people of God may be our greatest snares and trials if they are not walking *uprightly before God*.

"Now we must come to the sad sad end of this man of God. He went back with the old prophet and *did* eat bread in his house and drank water. Mark the instant result. The word of the Lord came to the old prophet and He made him say to the man of God, 'Thus saith the Lord, because thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, but camest back and *hast* eaten bread and drunk water in the place of which the Lord did say to thee, Eat *no* bread and drink *no water*; thy carcase shall not come into the sepulchre of thy fathers!'

"Oh how sad! for this honoured servant of God

to hear this judgment of God upon him. He was not to be buried with his fathers—and this to a *Jew* was a great punishment. After the meal was over, the old prophet saddled the ass for the man of God and sent him home. And as he was going a *lion* met him and killed him! Do you think this was a chance accident? No, nothing ever happens by accident. *God* is over all, and permits everything that happens. And He permitted this lion to slay His disobedient servant. You know a lion is a *wild* beast, and *eats* men as well as kills them; but this lion did not touch the man of God after he was dead, neither did he kill the ass—How was this, do you think? Because God did *not* permit him. How do we know this? We read, ‘Some men passed that way, and saw a dead man lying in the road, and a lion and an ass standing by the dead body: and they came to Bethel and told the wonderful thing they had seen.’

“*They* had no idea who the man was, or why the lion had not eaten him and the ass. But when the old prophet heard the wonderful story, *he* knew at once; and he said, ‘It is the man of God, who was disobedient to the word of the Lord!’ And he told his sons to saddle the ass for him again. And a second time he followed the servant of God; but with what feelings he must have gone this time! He knew *he* had been the cause of this good man falling into temptation.

“He, you see, like Jeroboam, used his influence to lead a godly man into sin; and he came to the spot and saw the dead body as the travellers had said, and ‘the ass and the lion standing by the carcase: the lion had not eaten the carcase, nor torn the ass. And the old prophet carried home the dead body and buried it in his own tomb, and told his sons when he was dead to bury him in the same grave. *For*, said he, the saying of the man of God against the altar shall *surely come* to pass. I suppose he thought if he were buried with him, HIS bones would not be burnt upon the altar by Josiah.’

“Of course Jeroboam heard of this history of the man of God after he left him—did God’s judgment warn him? No! we read, ‘After these things Jeroboam turned *not* from his evil way, and this thing became sin to *destroy* the house of Jeroboam from the earth.’ *Destruction*, you see, must be the end of all who refuse mercy and will not heed God’s judgments now. God’s servants may *fail* and sin, and God must chasten them for it as he did Eli and David and many others, but they are never *destroyed*.

“If we turn to the 2 *Kings* xxiii. 15, we shall read of *Josiah*, king of Judah; and how he fulfilled the prophecy of the man of God from Judah. He had been very active in clearing away idols and had burned the bones of all the prophets of Baal he could find on that very altar; and had taken the

bones out of a great many sepulchres to burn them. Then he saw one more name on a grave, and he said to his servants, 'What title is that that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulchre of the man of God, who came from Judah and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against this altar of Bethel. And he said, Let *him* alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria' (that is, the old prophet of Bethel).

"You see, God took faithful care of his servant. 'Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His saints.' Feeble and failing as they are, He watches over their dust till that day when the Lord Himself will raise it again.

"In concluding this touching and solemn story, my dear children, let me again impress upon your minds the deep necessity of keeping closely to the word of God. *Now* we have the *written* word, the prophets of old had the living, that is the *spoken* word; but in either case, let us believe no one—even an angel from heaven who speaks contrary to that divine word, which is to judge us in the last day."

The three children all seemed solemnized by the sad end of the story, and by Mrs. Howard's earnest manner; and we will hope its deep lessons were not lost upon them.

As Mrs. Wilmot was expected to arrive at Beechgrove the next evening, Herbert asked his aunt to

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tell him the story of the other disobedient prophet in the arbour the next afternoon, and as she was pleased to see the interest that he took in her stories, she was very glad to satisfy his desire; so after an early dinner, when they were comfortably seated in the pretty arbour, where the sweet honeysuckle scented the air, Mrs. Howard began the story of the other disobedient prophet.





Chapter Thirty-fourth.

THE OTHER DISOBEDIENT PROPHET—(*Jonah*).

Jonah i. 1, 2.

“**T**HE Lord spoke to his servant Jonah, and told him to take a message from him to the people of Nineveh, a very large and very wicked city. What was the message he was to deliver? He was to declare that in forty days Nineveh should be destroyed for its great wickedness. Jonah did not do as the man of God from Judah did, but he tried to get away from the presence of the Lord; and instead of going to *Nineveh*, he went down to Joppa and found a ship ready to sail for *Tarshish*, which was quite in a different direction to *Nineveh*. So he paid his fare and went on board to go with

them to Tarshish *from the presence* of the Lord! Only think of a servant of God wanting to *get away* from the presence of the Lord! How foolish! Did he not know that God is *everywhere*, and that we can never get away from Him? Poor Jonah, he had to learn this lesson that David knew so well when he wrote the 139th Psalm, 'Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? The darkness and the light are both alike to thee.'

"*Why* did Jonah wish to go away from God's presence? He was in a proud, naughty spirit, and did not wish to deliver the message. And why not? The end of his history tells us the secret. He knew God was a God of mercy, and he reasoned with himself in this kind of way, 'If I go and tell the people of Nineveh that God is going to destroy their city in forty days, perhaps they will be very sorry for their sins, and perhaps they will humble themselves before God and confess their sins and pray to Him to forgive them and not to destroy their city; and then I know God is so merciful, He will listen to their prayer, and He will forgive them, and then *my message will not be fulfilled.*'

"This was the point in Jonah's mind; he did not like his credit to be affected; and, therefore, knowing God's merciful character, he did not choose to deliver a message that he believed would not be executed. How full of himself he was; how little he entered into God's joy, if those poor people

turned from their sin; how little he cared if that immense city, full of people, were saved from sudden destruction. What a shocking picture of the selfishness of our natural hearts, even in a servant of God! Well, Jonah starts on his voyage. I wonder whether he ever thought about God following him; whether he thought about it or not, you will see God *did* follow him. But how? 'The Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be *broken*!'

"Poor Jonah, his troubles soon began on this errand of *his own choosing*. And so it ever is, if the child of God chooses his own path, he *is sure* to get into trouble. The storm would seem an accident, that might occur at any time. But was it so? No! God specially sent out the wind that made the storm. The sailors were heathen, and worshipped idols; so each begun to call upon his god to deliver them and save them from a watery grave, then they threw all their goods out of the ship to lighten it. And what did Jonah say or do? Oh, he was down in the ship *fast asleep*! The sailors, though heathen, thought this very strange conduct; they felt the storm was the voice of God, and each one should be looking to God for deliverance, and not thinking of sleep; then they agreed to cast lots to see for whose sake this great evil was come upon them. They did so, and God ordered the lot should

fall upon the guilty man—even poor Jonah! Oh, how convicted he must have felt when he stood before them, marked by God as the man who had brought all this dreadful trouble upon them. I think he must have learnt then how impossible and foolish it was to try and flee from the presence of the Lord! When the sailors found out the guilty man, they of course begun to question him as to what he had done and why this judgment was sent upon him; then poor Jonah had to confess to these poor heathen men that he was a servant of the great and true God, and that he had taken this journey to get away from God's presence. Oh, how ashamed he must have felt as he told them! Then they said, 'What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?' for the storm was still very high. What had Jonah to tell them? Why, his own lips had to pronounce his terrible sentence of death.

"He said unto them, 'Take me up and cast me *into the sea*, then shall the sea be calm unto you; for I know that for *my* sake this great tempest is come upon you.'

"What a sad confession for a servant of the true God to have to make to poor heathens—was it not? Did the men do as he told them? No, not at once; they rowed hard to try to bring the boat to land, but they could not succeed, for the wind and sea were against them. So at last they cried to God and prayed that He would not judge them for killing Jonah, as they

did not wish to do it, and then they took him up and cast him into the sea, and immediately the storm ceased and the sea was calm ! Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord and made vows. They felt that God had done more than *their* gods could do. We do not know how long they remembered their vows : I suppose not very long, because all resolutions pass away that are made in our own strength, just because something for a moment has made us feel God's power. We must really know our own utter vileness, and know Jesus 'As the way, the truth, and the life,' if we wish truly to know and serve God. I dare say those sailors never forgot that voyage from Joppa to Tarshish. You will see, if you look at the map, that it was not a very long voyage ; and I suppose, in due time, the sailors arrived at Tarshish. And poor disobedient Jonah, where was he ? *At the bottom of the sea ?* No, the same God whose merciful character had so offended him, still watched over him in mercy, for we read, 'The Lord had *prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah.*' And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

"Poor Jonah ! *now* he felt what a bitter thing it was to be disobedient and self-willed. Still, *now* he became humbled, and cried unto God ; his prayer was a very beautiful one. He saw where his sin would have led him if God had not come in and

brought him to his senses. And at the end of his prayer, he said, 'I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of *thanksgiving*; I will pay that which I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.'

"When Jonah came to this point, God spoke to the fish and it vomited out Jonah. Where? into the deep water? No, but upon *the dry land*. So you see, God again mercifully provided for the need of His servant. Now he was once more upon dry land, what did Jonah do? The word of the Lord came to him the *second* time, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that *great* city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.'

"You see, God brought him back just to the *very thing* in which he had been disobedient. Now he has learnt the lesson, and he arises at once to go to Nineveh. It was such a great city that it would take a person three days to go through the whole of it; but by the end of the *first* day that Jonah had proclaimed — 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed,' 'the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.' And when the king of Nineveh heard of it, he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, and put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes, and commanded all his people to leave off their wicked ways and to cry mightily unto God to spare them: and God heard their cry and saw they turned from their wicked

way, and He had mercy upon them and spared their city!

“What goodness in God! how thankful Jonah ought to have been to know so many sinners were spared. And now he has known his own need of God’s mercy, perhaps you will think he was ready to rejoice in that same mercy being shewn to others. I am sorry to say this was not the case: on the contrary, the mercy God had shewn to Nineveh ‘displeased Jonah *exceedingly*, and he was very *angry*!’ Angry with whom? displeased with whom? With *God*! Does it not seem wonderful, that after being saved from that dreadful storm and from the fish’s belly, he should still dare to rebel against the will of God? And does it not show the fearful wickedness of the human heart, that he would rather **120,000** people should have been destroyed than that he should be supposed for a moment to have been wrong in his prediction; for everyone knew it was on account of their repentance and prayer that God had saved them—they never doubted He had sent Jonah.

“We find out now that this was the secret of his going to Tarshish, for in his angry mood he prayed to the Lord, and said. ‘Was not this my saying when I was in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish; for I *knew* that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore

now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me : for it is better for me to die than to live !

“I think God indeed shewed Himself a God of grace and mercy, very slow to anger, that He did not do as Jonah said and strike him dead at once. What daring irreverence and pride does he show in this speech—and this, after all he had already suffered. How it shews us how *very* hard and proud our hearts are, and what a great many trials and afflictions it takes to make us humble and ready to allow God to do whatever He chooses with us. How different to God’s perfect servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, ‘Not my will, but thine be done.’ *Luke* xxii. 42.

“We must now see what God did to this naughty servant of His. He said to him, ‘Dost thou well to be angry?’ What a gentle, loving rebuke ! it surely ought to have broken Jonah quite down ; but it did not, he does not answer God at all, but he went out of the city, and sat on the east side till he might see what would happen to the city. I suppose he hoped God might yet change His mind and destroy the city, and that would have pleased this wicked, proud man. But no, God was not thinking of any such thing, He had settled Nineveh was not to be destroyed.

God was thinking of Jonah, and how he was to be taught to be more tender-hearted and pitiful—more like his Master and more fit for His service.

How did God teach him? Oh, in such a gentle, tender way, which I will now tell you. The country was a very hot one; and as Jonah sat watching Nineveh, and wondering what would become of it, he felt the heat very much; and God prepared a plant called a gourd, which has very large leaves and grows very quickly; and it came up over Jonah's head and formed such a nice shade from the sun, and delivered him from his grief. So Jonah was *exceedingly* glad of the gourd. I suppose he did not think *God* had made it grow on purpose for him; he must have known well he deserved no such care and favour from God.

“But God prepared something else besides the gourd—He prepared a *worm* that smote the gourd, and by the next morning it was withered and dead! ‘And it came to pass when the sun did arise that God prepared a vehement *east wind*, and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah that he *fainted* and wished to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.’ And God said to Jonah, ‘Dost thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I *do* well to be angry, even unto death!’ Not only was he sinning against God in being angry, but he *justifies* it and thinks it right: *still*, you see, Jonah is unbroken. Then the Lord *again* speaks to him in great gentleness, and shews him by his own actings how right he had been in sparing Nineveh.

“‘Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity (or been

sorry) for the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured neither madest it grow ; which came up in a night, and perished in a night : and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand ; and also much cattle ?’

“And here, ‘my dear children,’ said Mrs. Howard “we take our leave of Jonah. We are not told whether God’s gentle dealings had any effect upon him ; we never hear of God using him again, or teaching him any more. This is a very solemn lesson for us all ; God’s word says, ‘He, that being often reprov’d, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy.’ Let it be our constant desire to be taught and used of God, and for this purpose we must seek to have our wills entirely conformed to His. I hope you will remember the many things that God *ordered* and *arranged* in the history of Jonah. I will name them again and you can count them. ‘*The Lord sent out a great wind.*’ ‘*Now the Lord had prepared a great fish.*’ ‘*And the Lord prepared a gourd.*’ ‘*God prepared a worm.*’ ‘*God prepared a vehement east wind.*’”

“*Five,*” exclaimed the three children at once.

“Yes, five,” said Mrs. Howard, “five things that man would call accidents or chances, Scripture tells us ‘*GOD prepared ;*’ and there are five thousand

things now-a-days that are really prepared by God, that we speak of as *accidents* and matters of course. God's people should recognise God's hand in *everything*. We lose many blessed lessons by not doing so. Let us all try to remember this great lesson from Jonah's history, and also that it is of no use to try and run away from God or what He appoints for us to do."

"I am sorry, aunty, the story does not tell us whether Jonah learnt the lesson after all, and whether he was sorry and ashamed of his behaviour to God when his anger was over."

"That I cannot tell, my dear boy. God, for wise reasons, has not told us, and we must be content to learn what He has taken so much pains we should know. But come," said Mrs. Howard, looking at her watch, "we must go and see about tea, or dear mamma will be here before we are ready for her."

The little party ran off to busy themselves in various ways, towards "*getting ready*" (that operation in which all children so delight) for Mrs. Wilmot's arrival. And when the tea table was ready and ornamented with some beautiful strawberries and cream, and a Devonshire junket, and a vase of lovely flowers, Herbert skipped about, declaring everything looked charming, and while thus employed, the sound of carriage wheels was heard and the three children ran off to open the gate, and

Herbert was soon folded in his mother's arms. He could hardly allow her time to greet his cousins, so wild was he; but in due time they reached the house, where Mrs. Wilmot was warmly greeted by her sister; and after having taken off her bonnet was soon seated at the tea table—where there was so much to be said and heard as well as to be done, that the long evening was drawing in before the tea things were dismissed. Mrs. Wilmot thought her dear child looked much better in health and much happier. She inquired how he had behaved, and was very pleased to hear Mrs. Howard thought him much improved. "I fear he will feel lonely when he goes home," she remarked, "all alone again."

"Oh, I hope not," replied his aunt; "I think he knows one or two secrets now, that will be a charm against idleness and loneliness."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Wilmot, "what may they be?"

"Oh! they are *secrets* you know, and not to be told, aunty, said Annie; you must *see* and *find* out if you can, and let us know, when you do, if you do not think they are capital ones."

Mrs. Wilmot promised not to be inquisitive, but remarked she should feel truly indebted to her sister and nieces, if they had cured her child of many things that troubled her.

"Well, you know, habits are stubborn things," Mrs. Howard replied; "we will not *boast* of *cures*,

we will only hope he has found out *some secrets*, and knows the true source of wisdom and happiness, and that when he goes home he will learn many more, so that on his next visit we shall be quite surprised at all we have to observe."

The prayer bell now rung and closed their long talk, after which the younger heads were quite ready for their pillows.





Chapter Thirty-fifth.

THE STORY OF ESTHER.

THE next evening Herbert was very anxious for *one* more bible story from his aunt, and begged for her favourite, which occupied a whole book of the Bible, where the name of God was never once mentioned, though it was all about God's ordering and over-ruling events for His people.

Mrs. Howard replied, that as Mrs. Wilmot was there, it was hardly a suitable time; but Herbert, turning to his mother, replied he knew she would like aunty's stories quite as much as he did, and that they were very different to what he had at home. Mrs. Wilmot at once assured her sister she should be very glad to listen to a story which, from

Herbert's description, she could not say she recognised herself.

Mrs. Howard smiled and said, "You know it well, though perhaps *that* point may not have struck you ; but I always like to put some *leading* feature foremost to children's minds, and it is always associated with the story afterwards." She then began as follows :—

THE STORY OF ESTHER.—*Esther* i.

"Ahasuerus was a *very great* and rich king, who had an immense empire. On one occasion he made a very grand feast to all his nobles, and when there had been a great deal of drinking one day, he ordered his queen Vashti to be brought to shew his company her great beauty. Now, it was the custom of the Medes and Persians that women lived quite apart from men, and wore veils, and were never seen by strange men. So Vashti knew her husband must have been drinking too much, or he would never have thought of such a thing as sending for her at such a time, she therefore refused to go. This so offended the king and his nobles that he removed her from being queen and never forgave or restored her. After some time the king thought of poor Vashti, and perhaps felt he had been wrong and wished he had her again. His servants saw this,

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and begged him to give an order for the most beautiful young women who could be found in the empire to be brought for the king to choose another queen instead of Vashti. The king agreed to the plan and the order was given; and a great great many young women were brought to the care of Hegai, the king's chamberlain. They were all to remain under his care for twelve months, and then each was to go to king Ahasuerus in turn for him to select a new wife.

"Now, I must tell you, there were a great number of God's own people, the Jews or Israelites, in the empire at this time; they had been brought there as captives some time before from Jerusalem. One of them was a man named Mordecai, who held a post in the palace of Shushan, at the king's gate; I suppose he may have been a doorkeeper or something of the kind. Now, this man had an orphan cousin, named Esther, that he had brought up like his own child, and she was a very beautiful young woman. When Mordecai heard of the order for beautiful girls to be sent to Hegai, that the king might select a new wife, he thought, 'Esther is very beautiful, I will send her; perhaps the king may like her.' So he took her to Hegai, and as soon as he saw the young Jewish maiden he was pleased with her appearance, and he was very kind to her during the year she remained under his care. He did not know she was a captive Israelite, because Mordecai had told Esther not to

say what she was ; and Esther was a very obedient daughter to her adopted father, who no doubt had brought her up in the fear of the Lord—the true God. When the time came for each maiden to go in to the king, she might ask Hegai for whatever she liked and she had it. We may easily suppose how the different characters were shewn at this time, some very selfish and covetous.

“Esther asked for *nothing* more than was given her. Hegai was much pleased with this modesty ; indeed every one admired her who saw her, and the king seemed to agree in the general opinion, for he selected *Esther* as the queen in place of poor Vashti. We will hope she had a better end than she had. Of course the king did not know Esther was a Jewess ; no one knew this secret but Mordecai and herself.

“Mordecai still watched over this adopted child, and being in the palace he could always hear of her health and send messages to her. We may suppose he was very glad to think she was chosen for the new queen, and perhaps he had an idea that God had a purpose in so ordering it. Soon after Esther was made queen, she and Mordecai were the means of saving the king’s life. This was how it occurred. Two of the king’s servants, named Bigthan and Teresh, were angry with the king and laid a plan to *kill* him ; by some means Mordecai discovered their intention and told Esther of it, and she told

Ahasuerus; and when inquiry was made it was found to be true, and both the men were hung. You must take care and remember this plot against the king's life, because I shall have to refer to it again in the course of my story."





Chapter Thirty-sixth.

THE STORY OF ESTHER—*Continued.*

“**N**OW I must leave Esther to enjoy being queen, while I tell you something about the king's prime minister. His name was *Haman*, he was an *Agagite* or an *Amalekite*.

“This Haman was a great favourite with his master, and the king had raised him above every one else, and he had commanded ‘That all his servants should bow down to him and do him reverence.’

“Now, the Amalekites had always been great enemies to God's people Israel. If you look to *Exodus* xvii. 14, you will see God had said He would one day ‘utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.’ And also in

verse 17 He said, 'The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.'

"After reading this and remembering that *Haman* was an Amalekite, you will not be surprised to hear that *Mordecai*, being a Jew, would not bow down to him as all the rest of the people did.

"Haman did not at first notice that he did not do so, but some others did, and they asked Mordecai why he did not obey the king's command and bow down to Haman.

"Mordecai told them he was a *Jew*. And when they went on day after day, asking him about it, he did not make any answer; so they determined to tell Haman and 'see how his matter would stand'—that means, see if Haman would excuse his bowing to him because he was a Jew. They told Haman to observe Mordecai, who sat in the king's gate, and he did so; and when he found he did not bow to him when he passed '*he was full of wrath.*' He thought over this great insult and determined he would not submit to it. He was a very proud man, and all his honours had set him up very much; and knowing he was a great favourite with the king he thought of a plan that shews us he had all the hatred of the old Amalekites against the Jews in his heart. He found there were an *immense* number of Jews in the king's empire, and he made up his mind that he would not only kill Mordecai, but that he would destroy *all the Jews* in the

empire—only think what a wicked, revengeful man he was!

“Now we shall see how he accomplished his plan. He told the king that he found there were a large number of foreigners throughout the empire that were not at all profitable to the king, and he would pay a large sum of money into the treasury if the king would order them all to be destroyed. You observe he did not say a word about Mordecai not bowing down to him, which was the only true reason for his hatred to the Jews. The king, without making any inquiries, took off his ring and gave it to Haman, and told him he might do as he liked and have all the money he required! Oh how delighted this wicked man must have been now he had his heart’s desire—every Jew should be killed. But the empire was so very large, that as there were no railways in those days it took a long time to send orders through all the kingdom. So as Haman wished all the Jews to be killed on the same day everywhere, he sat down and called the king’s scribes or *writers* (for printing was not known) on the 13th of the 1st month—that is, as we should say the 13th of *January*—and he wrote orders to all the magistrates and governors in every town, that on the 13th of the 12th month—as we should say the 13th *December*—they should see that every Jew, whether man, woman, or little child, should be killed: and then he sealed these orders with the king’s ring, and sent them off as

quickly as possible and hastened them. After this, the king and Haman sat down to drink. I suppose Haman felt very satisfied with his plan, and only longed for the eleven months to pass rapidly, that he might gratify his wicked, revengeful heart. But 'the city of Shushan was much perplexed;' people no doubt thought it was a very wicked, unjust law, and some people of course knew it was only Haman's jealousy of Mordecai that had led to this cruel law being made. Still, it was done now; the orders were sealed with the king's seal, and there was no human hope of escape.

"Poor Mordecai! what did he do when he heard these sad tidings? Did he feel sorry he had not bowed down to the Amalekite? Did he think—Oh, to bow is a very little thing, and I had better do it than let all God's people be destroyed? No doubt these thoughts may have come into his mind, but he remembered God had said, "*He* would have *war* with Amalek from generation to generation.' And as a faithful servant of God, even though in captivity, he felt *God's enemies* must be his enemies; and not a *nod* would he give for the wicked Haman even to save his own life and those of all his people.

"Mordecai knew the true God, and he knew He had led his fathers through the Red Sea and done many wonders for them, and he knew God could do wonders again if He saw well, without his help, so

he would not 'do evil that good might come;' but when he heard of the cruel order, he put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and cried with a loud and bitter cry, and came *before* the king's gate, for no one might go *into* the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. Some of queen Esther's servants came and told her of Mordecai's distress. Then Esther was exceedingly grieved and sent some raiment to clothe Mordecai, but he would not put it on. She then sent a second time to ask the reason of his sorrow, and he told her messenger to give her a copy of the king's cruel law to kill all the Jews. And Mordecai told the servant to charge queen Esther to go to the king and beg him to spare the Jews and not allow them to be killed.

"Now, I must tell you, in Persia the kings and queens do not live together as they do in this country, each have their own house; and there was a law that the queen did not go to see the king unless he sent for her. And if *any* one went into the king's presence without being called they were to *die*, unless the king held out his golden sceptre (which was a *rod* he held in his hand); when he did so, they might know he was glad to see them and need not be afraid.

"This being the fashion of the country, you will not be surprised to hear that Mordecai's message rather puzzled poor queen Esther. She wished to obey Mordecai, for she still honoured him as a

father; but she sent him word that she had not been sent for by the king for a whole *month*, and reminded him if she were to go in uncalled for it might be *her death*. She perhaps remembered poor Vashti, and thought the king might be as much displeased to see her as he was *not* to see Vashti.

“When they gave Mordecai this message from Esther, he sent her back a very solemn one: he said, ‘Don’t you think that *you* will escape in the king’s house more than all the rest of the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, deliverance *shall* arise to the *Jews* from *another* place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed. And who knows whether you have been made queen for such a time as this?’

“Poor Esther, how troubled she must have felt when she heard these words!

“You see, Mordecai had confidence that God would interfere, though everything looked so dark. And, evidently, he thought God might intend to use Esther for the rescue of the Jews from death.

“The queen returned a beautiful answer to Mordecai, shewing her true piety and remembrance of her duty to him; even though she was now queen, she still obeyed God’s law—‘Honour thy father and mother.’ Her uncle had been like a parent to her, and she obeyed and honoured him as such, even at the risk of her life. What a beautiful lesson and example to children in these gospel days

who know God's word so well ! Esther sent word to Mordecai, 'Go and gather together all the Jews and fast ye for me three days : I also and my maidens will fast likewise ; and so will I go in unto the king, and if I perish, I perish !' And Mordecai did as the queen commanded."





Chapter Thirty-seventh.

THE STORY OF ESTHER—*continued.*

ON the third day Esther put on her robes and went into the king's house. You may fancy how she felt as she stood in the court of the king's house, knowing she might have a very short time to live, but no doubt feeling she was doing what pleased God: perhaps she was able to commit the whole matter to Him. Soon the king saw her, and was pleased, and held out the sceptre to her! Oh, how thankful and happy she must have felt. Then she drew near and touched the sceptre, and the king said to her, 'What wilt thou, queen Esther? And what is thy request? it shall be even given thee *to the half of the kingdom!*'

"Oh, what gladdening words to poor Esther's heart; she might ask for *half the kingdom*, and the

king had promised she should have it. So she might feel sure the Jews would not be killed.

“Do you think she asked her favour at once? No, she only asked the king if he and Haman would come that day to take a meal with her. How strange that she should ask *Haman*, the wicked man, who was the cause of all her distress! However, so she did. At the feast, the king again asked her what she desired. And she asked him and Haman to come again the next day to see her, and then she promised to tell him. You see the servant of God need never be hasty about anything. You may imagine how set up and proud Haman felt at the honour put upon him by the queen; he went home and boasted of it to his wife and friends, saying, he was the *only man* the queen had asked with the king; ‘But,’ he added, ‘all this availeth me *nothing* so long as *I see Mordecai* the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.’

“You see, Haman had indulged his wicked passions so much, that now, though he knew the sentence of death had passed upon poor Mordecai, and the day was drawing nigh for the massacre of all the Jews, he had not patience to let Mordecai sit at the gate any longer. If we indulge our evil dispositions, you see they grow stronger and stronger. Zeresh, Haman’s wife, and his friends recommended him to have a gallows made, and to ask the king next day to let Mordecai be hung upon

it without waiting for the end of the year, then Haman would have no drawback to his honour and happiness; and the thing pleased Haman and he caused the gallows to be made.

“Poor Mordecai! after all he is to be killed *at once*, not even allowed to live till the end of the year! after all his upright conduct in not bowing down to the enemy of God. God was letting his cruel enemy triumph over him in this way! How sad it must have seemed to him if he knew about the gallows; how hard to understand. He had told Esther deliverance ‘*should arise.*’ Where was his faith now? He was to die the *very next day!* the gallows was *made all ready.* Surely, as David said to Jonathan, ‘There was but *one step* between him and *death!*’ Wait a little, there was a *night* to come before the next day arrived, and *God* can work in the night as well as in the day. ‘The Shepherd of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.’

“On *that* night the *king could not sleep.*’ Was there anything very extraordinary in the king having a wakeful night? or was it only an accident? no doubt *he* thought it an accident, perhaps he often lay awake at night. I do not know how this was, but *I am quite sure* it was no *chance* that kept him awake *that* night. If you ever lie awake long at night, you know it is a very weary thing; and as kings can have all sorts of indulgences, Ahasuerus wished to be read to that night to pass away the time. His

servants brought some records to read to him, about things that had occurred in his own reign; and they *happened* to select the record of the two men who planned to kill the king, which I told you to remember, and which Mordecai had discovered. When the king heard the story he stopped the reading and said, 'What reward did Mordecai get for saving my life on that occasion?' And his servants answered, 'He did not get any reward.' In the excitement of the discovery, Mordecai had been forgotten, and he had never *asked* for any reward. No doubt, if he had reminded Esther of it, he would have had a very rich one. But he did not. Was this *chance*? I think not. An unseen hand was behind the scenes even then.

"When the king was told he had received no reward, it was morning, and he asked who was in waiting in the court. At that moment, who should come in but *Haman*. What had he come for so early? Oh, he wanted to ask the king's leave to hang Mordecai on the gallows he had made, before he went with the king to queen Esther's banquet. So they told the king Haman was in the court. Then he sent for him, and asked him such a curious question—it was this, 'What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?'

"Now you must remember Haman knew nothing of the bad night the king had passed, or what had been read to him; and knowing he was such a

favourite with his master, and being very conceited and proud, he thought to himself, 'To whom would the king delight to do honour so much as unto *myself*?' He thought *he* must be the man the king delighted to honour. So he said to the king, 'Let the royal apparel be brought which the *king* useth to wear, and the horse which the *king* rideth upon, and the crown-royal which is set upon his head : and let this apparel and horse be delivered into the hand of one of the *king's most noble princes*, that they may array with them the man whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.'

"I think you will agree with me, Haman could not have thought of much more honour to be put upon him if he had tried. What must he have felt when he found out that his master was thinking of honouring some one else! 'Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to *Mordecai the Jew*, that sitteth at the king's gate : *let nothing fail of all* that thou hast spoken.' Was it *possible* for the proud Haman to do all this? Yes, he was obliged to do it. But how he felt when he went to Mordecai and begun to dress him, and tell him what he was going to do with him, I cannot possibly describe, I must leave that to your own imagination;

as well as how he managed to walk before the horse all through the streets, while the wondering people stood by and saw the prime minister and king's favourite declaring the poor Jew, who they were accustomed to see at the king's gate, 'The man whom the king delighteth to honour!' Doubtless, many who saw them knew that Mordecai had refused even to bow to Haman; and knew also that he had obtained a commission from the king to kill the very man he was now leading through the city! What a very strange sight it must have been, and how people must have talked about it.

"Poor Mordecai! it is almost as difficult to picture his feelings, as Haman removed his sackcloth and put him on the king's own robes and crown, and set him upon the king's horse. He could hardly have believed it was all real. Still it does not appear to have upset him, for we read, 'And Mordecai *came again to the king's gate*: but Haman hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered. And Haman told Zeresh his wife and his friends everything that had happened to him.' What a different tale to the one he told them the day before! What comfort did they give him? They said to him, 'If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou *hast begun* to fall, thou shalt not prevail, but shalt surely fall before him.' What strange words! It seems they had some idea the Jews were a highly-favoured

people, and a knowledge that when God begun to fight their battles, all resistance was vain. However, while they were talking to Haman and giving him this very poor comfort, the king's chamberlains came to hasten him to the banquet of wine that Esther had prepared.

“We may imagine the feelings with which the proud man went to the feast, the very honour of which he had so vainly boasted only the day before.”





Chapter Thirty-eighth.

THE STORY OF ESTHER—*continued.*

“**W**HEN they sat down, the king again asked queen Esther what was her request, and this time she told him. She said, ‘If it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish.’

“What strange words for the king to hear from his beautiful queen. You must remember he did not know Esther was a Jewess, or had anything to do with Mordecai. So he was greatly astonished, and said, ‘*Who* is he, and *where* is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? And Esther said, The adversary and enemy *is this wicked Haman!* Then Haman was afraid before the king and queen.’

No doubt he thought of his friends' words, about falling before the Jews. The king was in great wrath and walked about, I suppose hardly knowing what to do ; when one of his servants said to him, 'There is a gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, in Haman's house. And the king said, Hang him thereon. So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.'

"Thus ended the life of that proud and wicked Haman ; a sad and solemn warning to all who indulge pride and evil passions, and seek to injure and despise the people of God. On the day that Haman was hung, the king gave all his property to queen Esther. And then she told him of her relationship to Mordecai, and what a kind and wise father he had been to her. And the king sent for him and took his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set him over the house of Haman.

"So far, queen Esther must have been very thankful and pleased ; but she remembered that orders had been sent through the country to slaughter all the Jews, and if they were to be saved no time must be lost in sending out *another* order to prevent their being killed. So she spoke to the king about this part of the matter ; and he told Mordecai to write another set of letters and forbid the slaughter of

the Jews, and to seal the letters with the king's ring.

“You may suppose Mordecai lost no time in collecting all the scribes to write the letters and in sending them out, and all the Jews heard of the change in the king's law. We may fancy the universal joy there was through all the kingdom, and the Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honour: and they all agreed to keep a grand feast at the very time that they had been rescued from death. And they agreed *always* to keep a yearly feast, called Purim; that their children might never forget the wondrous deliverance their God had wrought for them, when they were all condemned to death. ‘And Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, *seeking the wealth of his people*, and speaking peace to all his seed.’

“Now,” said Mrs. Howard, “do you not all agree with me, that this is a most wonderful and beautiful story?”

“Oh yes! oh yes!” was responded on all sides.

“It is indeed,” said Mrs. Wilmot; “I am sure I have enjoyed it quite as much as the children, and never saw so much in it, though of course I knew the narrative.”

“I believe,” said Mrs. Howard, “*simplifying* a story, to meet the understanding of children, often

developes many beauties to one's own mind ; at least, I find it so. And we know the beauties of Scripture are so boundless, that we can never exhaust them. And however much we may see in a narrative to-day, we may find more to-morrow. It is like the barrel of meal that wasteth not. And no wonder, when we remember it is the word of God, and expresses *Himself* to our finite minds.

"I am glad you have enjoyed our bible stories, Herbert, dear."

"Oh yes, aunty, very much indeed ! I am so glad I have heard so many of them."

"Well, you will not forget the great truth of God's acting wonderfully for his poor captive people without *any display* of power. And, remember, He does so still. He does not now work miracles, that all men can see ; but He works quite as great *hidden* miracles, if I may so call them, in the ordinary course of events. And in many a wakeful night, and little '*accidents*' and '*chances*,' as man calls them, the child of God may see a hidden hand wisely and wondrously guiding and arranging for his individual welfare and benefit ; and we may all learn to *trust* where we cannot *see*—to have faith in God and simply to obey Him at all costs, and to leave *results* with Him. As the little hymn says,—

'God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.'

“Again, in this story we see a striking proof of that word, ‘Them that honour me, I will honour ; but they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed.’ And it is very beautiful to notice that Mordecai sought the *wealth of his people*, not his own. His wondrous exaltation did not make him proud or selfish ; no doubt he still continued to walk in the fear of the Lord.”





Chapter Thirty-ninth.

THE RAGGED AMBASSADORS.

“**T**HERE is one more story I should like to tell you, Herbert,” said Mrs. Howard, looking at her watch, “if it is not too late, and you are not too tired.”

“Oh dear no, aunt,” exclaimed the child; “I am sure mamma will not mind my sitting up a little later to-night, as it is the last night in the country.”

“Indeed,” replied Mrs. Wilmot, “Aunty’s stories are so attractive I do not wonder at your not being tired of them; and as you will not have any more when we reach home, I shall be glad you should hear all you can if she is not tired.”

“I wish, aunty, you would *write* your stories,”

suggested Herbert ; “then I could read them when I am at home.”

His aunt smiled, and said, “Well, Herbert, if you remember them and do not pay us another visit very soon, perhaps I may send you a *written* story, and then you can write and tell me what you think of it, and what lessons you learn from it.”

“But what is the other story about—is it like the captive boys?” inquired Herbert.

“No, not at all like that, my dear ; but still it teaches us quite as important principles for children ; for as they have life before them, and many snares and temptations surround them, a story that tells of how God’s people were ensnared almost as soon as they settled in the land of Canaan, and were never able to recover from the effects of the snare, may be a useful warning to all, but specially to the young. I shall call my story, the

RAGGED AMBASSADORS.

The children all laughed at this strange title, and wondered in what part of the bible Mrs. Howard had discovered this story.

“If you read the 9th of Joshua,” said she, “you will find my story ; and I think you will agree with me that my title is a very suitable one. You remember, no doubt, that after God had redeemed His people out of the land of Egypt, He led them

through the wilderness for forty years, and afterwards brought them over the river Jordan into the land of Canaan, which He promised to give them. Now, at this time, the land of Canaan was inhabited by many nations who were very wicked, and whom God meant to turn out of the land as a judgment for their sins; and He told Joshua He would do so, gradually, by giving the Israelites victories over them. And God forbid them to make any league or agreement with any of the nations. Then God told Joshua to go and take Jericho, and they did so. Then they took Ai and some other towns at God's command, and God gave victory over them all. When the Gibeonites heard how Joshua and the Israelites were conquering and killing all their neighbours, they were very much afraid their turn would come next, so they agreed upon a plan to save their lives from destruction: it was very clever and cunning, like some of the snares of the devil, when he finds the children of God on the watch against *open temptations* to resist them. He lays a snare for them in some way, for which they are not prepared; and very often, if not walking in much dependance upon God, they fall into the snare. You remember the apostle Paul says, 'We are not ignorant of his devices.'

"Now you shall hear how these cunning Gibeonites acted—they dressed themselves like ambassadors, or messengers from a king; they took some *old sacks*

upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up; and old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and very old clothes they put on; and they took food that was all dry and mouldy. Just fancy what a wretched, worn-out set they must have appeared! In this state they came to Joshua at Gilgal, and said to him, 'We are come from a far country; now make a league or agreement with us. And the Israelites said, Oh, but perhaps you dwell near here; and how can we make any league with you? And Joshua asked them where they came from. And they said, From a *very* far country are thy servants come, because we heard all that the Lord had done for you, and how he had subdued your enemies round about you: and our people at home sent us to meet you, and to make a league with you, and to say, We will serve you if you will make a league with us. This our bread was *hot* when we left home, and now behold it is *dry* and *mouldy*; and these bottles of wine which we filled were new, and behold they be rent; and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the **VERY LONG** journey!' Can you wonder that with these many proofs before their eyes, the Israelites believed this clever story? No, we cannot wonder that they did. But what ought they to have done? They ought to have asked *counsel from God*, and then He would have told them not to mind what they said; but instead of this, the men looked

at the *food* and *old clothes*, and ‘asked *not counsel at the mouth of the Lord.*’

“So Joshua made a league with them to let them live, and the elders of the people sware unto them. Do you think they were long before they found out the trick that had been played them? No, *only three days*, and then they found they were neighbours and dwelt among them! Oh, how vexed Joshua must have felt, when he found out how cleverly they had been taken in; and all because they had trusted their own judgments, and not *asked counsel at the mouth of the Lord.* Now they found they had been entrapped into doing just what God had forbidden, they had made a league with the inhabitants of the land instead of casting them out. But perhaps you will say, Could they not kill them when they found out how they had deceived them? No, because they had sworn unto them in the name of the Lord, that they should live. So Joshua said they must keep their word, and let them live; so they made slaves of them to draw water and cut wood; but they never got them out of the land. And God said, as they did not cast out all the nations as He commanded, He would not allow them to do so afterwards; but these people that were left should be like thorns in their sides and *pricks in* their eye. You know how uncomfortable it is to have something in your eye. Well, so the nations were to Israel; and the Philistines, of whom we

read so much in the times of the kings, were descendants of some of these people that were left in the land. You see how much better and happier it would have been, if Israel had simply obeyed God's command, and not judged by what they saw.

"We are told, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall reign in this world, 'He shall not judge after the seeing of his eyes, or reprove after the hearing of his ears.' *Isa.* xi. 3. That is, He will not be deceived by *appearances*, but will have *God's* mind on everything. And if we, dear children, would 'ask counsel of God,' that is, walk in dependance and a spirit of constant prayer, we should be kept from the wiles or snares of the devil. You know, Scripture says, 'Trust in the *Lord* with *all* thine heart, and lean not unto *thine own understanding*.' And I hope, when you feel inclined to make up your mind about people or things by what they *appear* to be, you will remember how dearly Israel paid for 'not asking counsel at the mouth of the Lord;' and that you will think of my '*Ragged Ambassadors*.'"

All the children expressed themselves very pleased with this story. Herbert again thanked Mrs. Howard for the many she had told him, which he felt sure he should never forget. And though the parting with his aunt and cousins the following day was a sorrowful one, it was brightened by the promise of another visit to Beechgrove at no very distant period; and as they returned to the house, after seeing Mrs. Wilmot and

her little boy start, Ellen and Annie were quite surprised to find how much regret they felt in parting from the little cousin, with whom only one month before they were so little charmed. Perhaps they shared some of the pleasure their mother had in watching the improvement that had taken place in him, and his growing interest in the word of God. And they, doubtless, felt they had, in their measure, contributed to the pleasing change that was so evident in him, by shewing him the pleasure they had found in trying to minister to the happiness of others instead of living for themselves alone: and we will hope that any of our young friends who have not already learned this secret will not have read the "Children of Beechgrove" in vain; and that having tried the experiment themselves, they will also, like Ellen and Annie, try to influence others to follow their example.



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