

AGNES HOPETOUN'S
SCHOOLS AND HOLIDAYS.

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UNCLE JAMES.

AGNES HOPETOUN'S
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THE
EXPERIENCES OF A LITTLE GIRL.

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AGNES HOPETOUN'S SCHOOLS AND HOLIDAYS:

The Experiences of a Little Girl.

CHAPTER I.

THE FAMILY.

AGNES HOPETOUN was the third child in a family of four, and her mother was a widow. I think her father had been the surgeon in Ardsley, and died early. Mrs. Hopetoun had somewhere about a hundred pounds a year to live on, which was pretty well considering all things. The family had never been rich. All the difference when the father died was, that they removed out of the square house with the surgery at one end, which was in the centre of the

village ; and instead of having one stout woman servant, and the boy who used to manage the pony and clean the knives, had only a girl of seventeen for their maid-of-all-work. Two of the four children were girls, and two were boys. Fred was fourteen, Lucy twelve, Agnes ten, and little Arty, the funny little fellow, came a long way behind all of them, and was only three. They had lived all their lives in that village where they were born—and now you shall see what sort of a place Ardsley was.

At the west end of the village towards the sun-setting there was a common full of little heights and hollows, bushes of gorse, and bits of heather, where the children played and where the men held cricket-matches. Then came some single detached houses, dropped here and there in a straggling line ; then a large old-fashioned handsome red brick house with gables, half-covered with creeping plants, and surrounded by a beautiful trim garden and some fine trees, which was the Rectory. Immediately opposite was the church—and then the houses fell into continuous rows and became a street, with some shops on either side,

and a very irregular line of buildings on the right-hand side of the way. The inn, for instance, stood back far from the street, and had a great sign-board swung up upon a very tall elm, which stood directly before the door. Above the inn, going eastward, all the "genteel" people lived; and at the very east end two small houses stood together without any garden or trees in front of them, pressing their doorsteps close upon the pavement, and so near that you almost brushed the windows with your sleeve. One of these houses was Mrs. Hopetoun's. I will tell you presently what it was like; but in the meantime you must know that Ardsley had a river, a pleasant rapid stream, which you could always hear in the mornings and evenings when the place was quiet. Those trees yonder, slanting away towards the hills, mark where it runs, and that little eminence with the windmill upon it, is the opposite bank. The windmill goes spinning round and round with a will all day long when the wind blows, and often when the wind does not blow, in little Agnes Hopetoun's dreams.

For Mrs. Hopetoun's house was just opposite the

windmill, though at some little distance. It was a prim little house, two stories high, with an oak-painted door and a brass knocker, like a house in a town, and green venetian blinds at that low parlour window which is so near the street. On the ground floor there was this parlour and a kitchen—such a tiny parlour!—with Mamma, and Lucy, Fred, Agnes, and Arty, all squeezed into it, one cannot tell how; and nobody in the nice little kitchen behind but Jane, who was only a servant. Half-way up the stairs there was a little room, built over the scullery, which was Fred's room, with Fred's cricket-bat, and kite, and fishing-rod in the corner, and a quantity of other boy's property, which took up quite as much space as his bed. Above that, on the first floor, came the best room, which all the children thought very large and very grand, and two little bedrooms behind. Mamma slept in one of them, and Lucy and Agnes in the other. Arty had his crib in Mamma's room—and I cannot tell you what Jane made of herself at night. I suppose she must have slept down-stairs. But the windows were open all day—and sometimes, when

it was warm weather, all night; and though the rooms were so little, nobody complained of them; and Agnes would not have understood you if you had told her it was a small house.

The windows in front looked over—there were no houses on the other side of the street—a field which was called the Dairy Field; on the other side of that was the river, just visible from the best room, and beyond that again the high bank and the windmill. The back windows had the garden beneath them, and another field and a little bit of the common in the distance; no houses opposite, either one way or the other; and plenty of the sweet fresh air on every side.

Now, Mrs. Hopetoun was a very active person and loved to see everything in the house as bright and fresh as a picture; and Jane, the servant, was stupid, and did not by any means like her work; so you may suppose that the girls, when they were at home, had a good many little things to do.

Fred, who was the eldest of all, was a very good boy in his way; but a great trouble in the house, as all

these big boys are, you know. He was fourteen, and began to think himself quite a man—and he was tall enough to give Mamma his arm to church, which pleased her very much, and yet made her cry. I suppose when she cried she was thinking of poor Mr. Hopetoun, who was dead; but she was very proud of Fred. He was very good-natured and honest and kind to his sisters; but you would not believe how he pulled off his buttons and wore through his stockings, and what a litter he made everywhere. He had a fancy for making boats, just at the time I am speaking of, and pestered Lucy's life to hem his sails, and kept poor little Agnes sitting for hours trying to make rigging for him. For Agnes had learned how to net and how to make watch-guards at school: and her brother thought it was much better to twist cord rigging for his ships than to do watch-chains that nobody would ever wear. When the boats were making, Mamma's scissors were always borrowed and always lost—and everybody blamed Agnes; but Agnes knew it was Fred.

As for Arty, he was the dearest little fellow you

ever saw. I am not so sure as his Mamma was, that he was tall of his age ; but he had legs like two little brown pillars, so strong, so active, and so firm. He tumbled off the sofa ; he bumped against every angle of every piece of furniture in the room ; he fell down-stairs once a month or so ; but it never made any difference to Arty. From six o'clock in the morning, 'when he used to trot into the girls' room with his little pink feet, in his little white night-gown, to rouse them out of their last half-hour's sleep—down to seven at night, when he was put to bed, and when sleep used to fall upon him in a moment, almost before he would give in and lie down,—Arty was never quiet for a moment. The others had their own places in the parlour, and sat always there ; but Arty's place was everywhere. And he never seemed to disturb anybody either. Fred, who used to make quite a disturbance in the house if Lucy and Agnes whispered over their work while he learned his lessons, did not mind Arty's noise the least in the world—and, though he came right in her way twenty times a day, Mamma was

never angry. I am afraid they were almost proud sometimes of his very naughtiness. Arty was everybody's pet; the king of the house.

These were the boys; who, being the eldest and the youngest, were quite the principal persons, and had most regard in the family. You must not think that Mrs. Hopetoun made favourites, or thought her sons better than her daughters: but you all know very well that the boys are always more attended to than the girls, and have more done for them; partly, of course, because they are so useless, poor fellows! and cannot do things for themselves as we can. People speak about us poor girls as if we had the best of it, and were always flattered and praised and made a great deal of all our lives; but I rather think *we* know better. The boys "rough it," as they say, out of doors, perhaps; but we know who has to give way and to keep quiet at home. To be sure they are always in trouble or in mischief, these big brothers; I dare say they could manage better than we could out in a storm, or shipwrecked on a desolate island, or anything like that: but the poor boys can't

do much for themselves among civilised people; and so it comes quite natural to take care of them and give them the most important place. Little Arty did not have it because he was a boy, but because he was the youngest, and a darling little fellow; but Fred Hopetoun was quite a big brother: the girls had always to yield to Fred.

And now I suppose you would like to know what kind of girls Lucy and Agnes were. Lucy was twelve years old; she had fair hair, very thick and long, which she wore in two long plaits doubled up and tied with ribbon on each side; one behind her ear and the other in front. These ribbons were commonly light brown, but when Lucy was dressed they were always blue, and that was the colour in which she looked best. By Lucy's fashion of wearing her hair, you will see that this story is of a good many years ago—about fifteen years, I think, before some of us were born. Her dresses were old-fashioned too,—they were almost all made low in the neck, and she wore a little silk handkerchief with them, which was pinned down to the front of the

dress. She had rosy cheeks and bright eyes, and looked like a cheerful country girl as she was. She could walk five or six miles, and never think of being tired. She was not at all hasty in her temper, but rather slow, if anything; not so clever at her lessons as Agnes, but I think the best needlewoman of her age in all Ardsley. She had a little workbox of her own, with thread, and scissors, and buttons, and tape, and a needle-book full of needles; and kept it—oh, so tidy! They tell me she never once lost her thimble, but I can scarcely believe that. She was very handy, too, about the house. When Mamma had to go anywhere, Lucy was always left in charge, and Mrs. Hopetoun said she could trust her as well as if she were twenty, and even Fred did what she told him then, and laughed, and called her his big sister. But I think Lucy, when she was housekeeper, was not quite so firm as her mother. She used to go and make them cakes for tea, when they teased her *very* much; she could not send them off to their work or their lessons like Mamma.

And then Agnes. I do not very well know what to say about Agnes; because, you see, all this story is to be about her; and it does not seem any good describing her before we begin. She was almost ten; tall and thin, and brown—brown all over—brown-eyed, brown-haired,—I am sorry to say, rather brown-complexioned too. She was not by a long way such a good girl as her sister; somehow she was always in the wrong, as everybody said, and often went mooning about without seeing what was before her eyes; though I cannot tell what she was thinking of, and neither could she. She got into disgrace with Mamma very often, for she forgot things she ought to have done, and went off out of the middle of one thing into another, without making a finish anywhere; and was, I am afraid, very careless, and always going astray. She used to be very very sorry for it often, and made up her mind with all her might that she never would do wrong again; but at the very time she was thinking so, before she knew, she had fallen into the same fault as ever; for her thoughts were so busy about being always good,

that she had no room in her mind to remember what she ought to have done at that very moment, to show her obedience. Now Mamma knew that Agnes was always forgetting, and that she forgot almost all the same after she was punished as before; but Mamma did not know how much her poor little daughter wished to do well, and how disgusted and vexed at herself Agnes felt when she failed; and Mrs. Hopetoun thought the little girl was perverse, and did not want to be good. That is always the way; for you know even our mammas, when they love us most, cannot see into our hearts. We know worse of ourselves than any one else knows, but sometimes we know better too; and I believe the naughtiest of little girls feels at the bottom of her heart sometimes as Agnes used to do;—that if mamma, who is displeased, and has cause to be displeased, could only once for a moment see down into that poor little heart, and understand how well the unfortunate child meant to do—how bitterly ashamed she is—and how her little sulk comes more from disgust at herself than anything else—that

mamma would think differently of her perverse little girl. That is very true ; but Mamma cannot see into your heart, poor little naughty one ! No one ever will see quite fully into it all your life ; and you will go through the world secretly sore with many a condemnation which does not half belong to you. But never mind ; take courage ! The only Eye which does see makes account of the repentance and the self-disgust as well as the fault, and all will be right in time.

Here is something for you to think about, all you girls, before you come to Agnes Hopetoun ; but remember that will be no comfort to you, unless you feel sure that God is your Father in heaven, and has a great deal to do with you, more than anyone in the world. And now you shall hear how Agnes, just before she was ten, went blundering, and dreaming, and getting scolded through one day of her life.

CHAPTER II.

ONE DAY.

IT is just half-past six o'clock of a splendid August morning—August, holiday time, when there is no school to go to, and no lessons to learn. Everything is very still in this little bedchamber—such a little place!—just room in it for the bed, the two chairs, the little dressing-table and drawers, and a little bit of vacant space beside, covered by a bit of bright coloured carpet, where two little girls can pass each other, and no more. The bed has some white dimity hangings just over the head, and a very clean coverlid; the dressing-table has a white cover too, and an ornamental pin-cushion; the window is open, and there is a pretty old jug full of flowers outside on the window-sill—it was on the table last night when Mamma found it, and being an old-fashioned person,

afraid of flowers in sleeping-rooms, she set it there despite the remonstrances of the girls—and there is not a sound in the room just at this moment, but the wind lifting and dropping with a faint rustle the little muslin blind.

Because Lucy is saying her prayers—that is the reason of the stillness; however, there is a little figure in a white nightgown, sitting upon the side of the bed, which is not saying prayers. She has put her slippers upon her naked little feet, and sits balancing one of them off and on, as if that were quite a serious occupation. She has been doing so for about a quarter of an hour. Perhaps you suppose she is thinking. Not at all! She knows, as well as I do, that it is getting late, and means to get dressed, and rush down stairs, and be *so* busy to-day—only somehow it is pleasant to sit quite idle, feeling the air through the window, poising the slipper on her foot—and feeling quite certain that Mamma will be here immediately to find her in her idleness, and that very likely she will get the scolding she deserves. Agnes even gives a little start when Lucy rises up, thinking

Mamma has come ; but, instead of taking warning and getting ready, begins once more to balance her slipper. She is really a very tiresome little girl.

Lucy has risen up like a good girl from her prayers, with kind thoughts to everybody, feeling happy and lively, and ready for all she has to do ; but Lucy cannot bear to see her sister so idle, and feels herself grow impatient and angry against her will, just because she loves Agnes, and wants to see her do well.

“ Oh, Agnes, will you never do like other people ? If you wanted to go to sleep again, I could understand it,” said Lucy, who sometimes was a little sleepy herself in the mornings ; “ but when you are up, why do you idle your time away ? Is there any good in that ? ”

“ I don't know,” said naughty Agnes, balancing her slipper.

“ You don't know ?—Oh ! I'm sure I don't wonder that Mamma has no patience with you,” said Lucy—“ why don't you know ? I would do anything in the world sooner than vex Mamma as you do ; and it

makes me so unhappy when she scolds you—and then you lose all your time. Wouldn't it be better to make haste and get something done, and play in the evening?—then everybody would be pleased.”

“ I'll be ready directly,” said Agnes ; and then she began to sing these words over, all the time sitting upon her bed. “ I'll be ready directly—I'll be ready direct-i-ly—I'll be ready directly. Oh, Lucy, that's the tune of Emmy Fox's new song ! ”

“ No, it isn't ! ” said Lucy, flatly—for Lucy was angry to find her sister so careless of what she said.

When suddenly another voice sounded into the room which made Agnes jump. “ I suppose you are ready, Agnes,” said Mamma, from her own room—“ as I hear you singing. Put on your bonnet, and you may go down to the orchard with Jane to bring the fruit.”

Then you should have seen how Agnes jumped off the bed, and plunged into her things. She did not call back to say, “ I'm not ready, Mamma,” as she should have done ; but instead of that hurried on her dress, dipped her face into the cold water, brushed her hair just in front, flung on her bonnet, and ran

down stairs tying it on, and seeing nothing in the way. She said to herself that she had not time to say her prayers, and that she was obeying Mamma, which was a good excuse; but I don't think she quite believed that at the bottom of her heart. And rushing down the stairs she never saw Arty, who was climbing up by the rails with a message to Mamma. Agnes went sweeping past, thinking of nothing but of being in time to go to the orchard, and the first thing that brought her to herself was Arty's cry, at the sound of which Mamma and Lucy came running to see what was the matter. Agnes had stumbled over him, and he had fallen down stairs. Fortunately Arty was used to that, and was none the worse. Mamma told her not to be so careless, and let her go without another word; but Agnes held her hand upon that big bump on dear little Arty's forehead, and was very near crying. She thought she was the most unlucky little girl in the world; such things did not happen to anybody else; but she was sure it was not her *fault* that she tumbled over Arty on the stairs.

However, when Agnes got to the kitchen, she found Jane was not ready, and had to wait so long, that she might have had quite time to say her prayers; but she did not go up-stairs again to compose herself and ask God's blessing, as she should have done. She said to herself that there would be time to do it after she came in, before breakfast, and that Jane was just ready, and that it would be very wrong to hurry it over now. So she loitered about the kitchen, swinging a little basket, and teasing Jane with questions.

“What do you put on that big shawl for?” said Agnes; “do you think it is winter? Don't you think you should have Mamma's boa too?”

“I never put on a thing of Missus's in my life,” said Jane; “my shawl's a very good shawl—and if I wear what I have it ain't no matter to you.”

“But I wish you'd talk better grammar though,” said the little plague; “two nos mean yes, except in French. Oh, I say, I'll teach you my French lessons, Jane—every day, if you like—wouldn't it be fun?”

“ I won't be made game of,” said Jane angrily, “ not if you was Missus's daughter twenty times over. I'm not a black slave, I tell you ; and I won't put up with it, if you was the queen.”

“ But you *are* black enough sometimes, for all that,” said Agnes, quite quietly ; “ I've a great mind to black my face, and see how it feels. I wonder what the people would say. Oh, I know ! they'd think Uncle James had come home from Barbadoes and brought a black little girl.”

“ Come along with your black little girls ; I'm ready, and I'm not agoing to wait,” cried Jane, bustling out with her great basket and slowly subsiding out of her wrath.

When Agnes got out into the fresh morning air her guilty and unhappy feeling wore away. She forgot to excuse herself in her own mind, and even did not take the trouble to tease Jane. The air at other times, however sweet, never feels like the air at early morning, when the world is only half awake ; and the sun and the fresh breeze intoxicated Agnes, who could have raced about like the young colt in

the field for mere joy. I don't think her gambols, as she went dancing along, were a bit wiser than the colt's. He scampered from one end to another of his field, frisked, and neighed, and kicked up his heels, because he felt happy and could not tell why; and she skipped along, running into the long roadside grass, which was wet with dew, running up other people's door-steps, doing the most foolish things you could suppose. In those days the little girls knew very little about natural science: nobody had found out about sea-anemones, or ferns, or fossils; but there was beginning to be a little talk of older, and, I am afraid, more cruel scientific sports. So Agnes set off in wild chase of a butterfly, trying to catch it in her handkerchief. She felt sure she could catch it, because she had read of somebody hunting insects so—and carry it home to Arty, who, I doubt, would have used the poor butterfly very roughly. When Agnes came to the door of the orchard, she almost tumbled in, hot, and out of breath; but she did not catch the butterfly, which was all the better for both.

“The orchard” was only to be reached through a great trim market-garden, so regular and orderly that it almost made Agnes feel ashamed of herself; for there, in the shining morning sunshine, were rows of little girls and boys, no bigger than herself, weeding the beds. Everybody was busy in this early place; and Mr. Grafter the gardener’s man was loading the cart with vegetables for the market. The garden was divided by a beautiful trim holly hedge, with two arches cut in it; one of which led into the grassy sweet-smelling orchard where the apples were ripening on the trees, and one into a smaller enclosure, a thicket of currant and gooseberry and raspberry-bushes, where—and not among the fruit-trees—Agnes was going. Mrs. Hopetoun was to be about a very great business to-day, no less than making her preserves; and inside the holly hedge stood a vast round basket, lined with large, cool, smooth cabbage-leaves, and full of juicy, dewy red currants which made one’s mouth water. These were transferred, cabbage-leaves and all, into Jane’s basket, and Agnes got a fragrant load of raspberries

in hers. Still they could not carry them all, so another basket had to be brought, which Jane and the little girl carried between them. So they went home heavily laden, and much quieter than they came; till Agnes, hearing the voices of boys on the common, set down her burden, and made Jane stand still, and ran off to call Fred, who was there. As it began to get near breakfast-time, Fred came very good-naturedly, and took his share of the carrying. And so they all got home.

But when Agnes glanced into the parlour before running up-stairs, the breakfast-table was set and ready, and the bread and milk for the children and Mamma's teapot had just been placed upon it. She flew to her own room, smoothed her hair a little, and flew down again. Alas! there was not a moment for her prayers.

But then there would be plenty of time in the forenoon, when it was Agnes' turn to put her own bedroom tidy. So she consoled herself. The forenoon came, and Agnes went lagging up-stairs, talking to Lucy at the top of her voice all the way.

“Mamma said I was to write the labels for the jam,” cried Agnes over the banisters, “and I *will*, whatever you say.”

“But you can't; no one could read them,” said Lucy.

At which Agnes began to cry, not with sorrow, but with anger. “I *will*! Mamma said so. I can write better than you,” cried Agnes. Lucy, down-stairs, laughed a little to herself quite softly, and Agnes rushed up in a great passion and slammed the door of the little room. Do you think she could go down on her knees just then? After she heard the sound of the door, she stood looking at it, ashamed of herself; the noise startled her; and then she thought how wicked her passion was, and sat down on a chair with her little brush in her arms and cried still more. But as she cried, her eyes, wandering about the room, lighted on two china shepherdesses upon the mantelpiece; they were not standing nicely, and they wanted brushing with soap and water to make them look bright. Agnes jumped up, threw her brush on the bed, and began to scrub the shep-

herdesses. You have no idea what a long time they took ; and when they were done, she thought all at once of a doll's bonnet which she had promised to make for another little girl's doll, and threw open an ottoman-box which Lucy and she kept all their sundries in, and began to rummage through it for a little piece of silk which she felt sure was there. She was still doing this when Mamma came into the room.

“Have you done nothing at all, child, since you came up-stairs?” said Mamma.

Agnes jumped up very red and ashamed, and held down her head. She was so disgusted with herself when she thought of it, that she did not know what to say.

“And your nightgown lying on the floor, and your slippers one in each corner, and the feather-brush which Lucy wants to dust the china ornaments, lying on the bed, and all this rubbish dragged out of the box! Agnes,” said Mamma, severely, “what *do* you mean?”

What could the unfortunate little girl do? her own

conscience was saying all that, and a great deal more—she only stood crying, and ashamed to look up; she had not a word to say.

“You will not answer me! What am I to do with you,” said Mamma; “must I punish you, Agnes? Do you think you will ever be good for anything if you go on just as you are now?”

“Oh, Mamma, I will never do it again!” said Agnes.

Mamma shook her head, and took up the feather-brush and went away. She felt pretty sure that the little girl would do it a great many times again, but she did not wish to punish her. So Agnes, after another little cry, pushed back all her scraps into the box without finding the bit of silk for that bonnet, and began to set everything right in the room. She got on very quick as soon as she really tried; but I am afraid this time she was rather too orderly. She took down Lucy's morning-wrapper, which hung upon the door, and stuffed it into a drawer, because it did not look pretty there; and she carried off the bandbox with their best bonnets to the dark closet at

the top of the stairs, for the same reason. Then she spent a great deal of time fastening up a book-shelf which Lucy and she had hung up with ribbons, like the book-shelf in a story they had been reading—but which always tumbled down again—and setting all the books straight : then she put the pins into the pin-cushion in an ornamental device of her own inventing ; and at last left herself so little leisure before dinner, that she could just change her frock and brush her hair, and still had “no time” for her prayers. She could have done it all in half an hour if she had been a good little girl ; and then Lucy would not have had to hunt through the drawers for her morning-dress, nor to wander over all the house next day seeking her bonnet ; and I think the room would have looked just as well.

After dinner Agnes set to writing labels for the jam against Lucy who was writing them too. Mamma said Agnes might do part of them if she tried to do them very well. So the poor child sat leaning almost double over the table, fired with emulation, trying to write as well as Lucy. The

first she did was like this, "Rasp Berry jam"—that would not do; then she reversed it, "rasp Berry jam": at last she took a peep at Lucy's and managed to get the first line right. So she tried for the date, which ought to have been August, 1843—and I cannot tell you what extraordinary looking things she made for figures. When she had managed it at last, she smeared over two or three with her arm in her haste and rivalry; and I think, after an hour and a half's work, there were only two at last which could be used. Poor Agnes was very much mortified at this, especially as Lucy was in the kitchen with Mamma helping to make the preserves, before Agnes had managed even to get those two satisfactory labels. The little girl could not make out at all how it was—she was sure she had it in her mind, but it would not come into her fingers. When she got done with these, the preserves were almost all made, and she was too late for that. All the rest of the day she kept being too late for everything. After tea, Mamma gave her some paper to cut to cover the pots—nice white paper vandyked all round—just

what Agnes liked to do ; but Lucy got hers done while Agnes was playing with the scissors, and so was out in the garden, playing with Arty and watering the flowers, and talking to Mamma and Fred who were all out of doors, while poor Agnes still sat in the parlour cutting her paper and pricking her fingers in her haste. Shall I tell you why Agnes pricked her fingers, and was always behind everybody? Because she lost that good, sweet, fresh hour in the morning, and was running after it, and chasing it, and never able to catch it all day. One cannot get one's day into good order if one cannot find time for one's prayers.

CHAPTER III.

A LITTLE GIRL'S THOUGHTS.

NEXT evening, Agnes was out, playing in the great field behind the house. The field belonged to Miss Pounceby, who lived next door, and to whom Mrs. Hopetoun's house belonged also. Miss Pounceby's niece, Alice, had come to spend the day with her aunt; and that was how Agnes and Lucy were in the field.

They were sitting in a corner all three together. They were all tired, and were having a rest. Alice had her doll with her; and Lucy was contriving, with a bit of ribbon, to make a hood for the doll. Agnes, for her part, was looking up at the sky, lying back on the grass; and little Alice, who was a very simple little girl, kept looking at her, and asking her what she saw. Agnes did not know

what she saw ; she scarcely could tell whether those white clouds were sailing over her or if she was sailing ; and she gazed and gazed, and wondered at that beautiful deep sky.

“ It looks as if you could never see into it,” said Agnes ; “ it looks as deep—as deep—as if it was made of water like the sea.”

“ Made of water ! how could it be made of water, when it is above us ? ” cried little Alice. “ Water pours out ; if it was water, we should all be drowned.”

“ The people in the world were once all drowned,” said Agnes.

“ Oh, Lucy, hear what she says ! I should be frightened to death to think so,” said Alice.

“ To think what ? It’s in the Bible ; it’s quite true. And doesn’t it rain out of the skies ? ” said Agnes ; “ there must be water there.”

“ God lives in the skies,” said little Alice, looking up half afraid.

“ Mamma says God is everywhere—close by us—in the wind, and in the air,” said Agnes.

Just then, a little breeze came freshly over them, lifting their hair and moving their dresses. The little girls looked at each other, and grew rather pale, wondering in their own minds if perhaps that was God.

“Are you afraid to think of God, Agnes?” said little Alice, under her breath.

To which Agnes did not answer anything. But it set her thinking in her own mind.

“Hush!” said Lucy; “Mamma says we ought to be afraid of displeasing God, because he loves us and is grieved when we do wrong.”

“Grieved! you mean angry,” said Alice. “I know better than that. I know everybody is angry, and scolds—and I am sure I cannot help it. Oh, I wish I was a big, grown-up lady, when nobody could scold me!—I wish I was twenty!—I wish I was as tall as Mamma!”

“Oh, Lucy! let us play at thinking what we shall all do when we are twenty!” cried Agnes. “What will you do, Alice?”

Alice thought for a long time before she committed herself—

“ I’ll ask Mamma to ask Lucy and you to come and stay with us, and then—Oh, I know,” said Alice, clapping her hands, “ I’ll ask Papa to take us all to London; and we’ll all wear white frocks and sashes every day as if we were going to a party; and never have any lessons to learn; and save all our money, and buy such a famous doll, as big as that, and some silk to dress it. Oh, what would all the school say!” said Alice; “ they’d everyone wish to be us.”

“ But when we are twenty, we shall not care for dolls. *I* don’t play with dolls now,” said Lucy, smiling at the other two; and feeling as if she were a great deal older and wiser than they.

Alice was a little discouraged by this—

“ Well, then, I know what we shall have—a pony!” said Alice; “ and all three riding-habits and switches like little Lady Mary—that *would* be fun! and ride about all over the country, without always being sent for at half-past seven to go to bed! I am to have some money all to myself when I am a grown-up young lady. Oh, Lucy, don’t you know anybody that would give you some too?”

"We don't know anybody that has got any money to give," cried Agnes, before Lucy could speak.

Now Lucy was older and wiser, and had begun to be a little ashamed of being poor; so her face grew rather red.

"We have plenty of money for what we want," said Lucy; "but not for ponies and riding-habits; and we don't want such things—and I never saw three young ladies riding upon one pony—I don't know how we should do."

"You are never pleased with what I say," said poor little Alice. "One could ride, and the others walk—time about.—Oh, Agnes, it is your turn—what will you do?"

Agnes took a still longer time to think. She was still lying back on the grass, gazing up at that wonderful deep sky which you may gaze at for hours and never see into. "I wonder," she said at last, after a very long time, "I wonder if it's all sky, up, and up, and up, and nothing beyond. Oh, I wonder what's beyond! Lucy, don't *you* know?"

"Jesus," said Lucy, very softly—and then was

silent—"and Papa," she said again, more softly still ; and so stopped what she was doing, and looked up herself, and thought of heaven.

Oh that heaven which one never can see ! where Jesus is, just as He is in the Bible—as He used to be in Jerusalem. Do you think you could have the heart to be wicked, and disobedient, and angry, if you could but look through that sky, and see how He lives, and walks, and speaks, and blesses the little children every day ?

When Agnes heard what Lucy said, her little heart was touched ; the tears came into her eyes, so that she could no longer see the sky. She thought of Papa, who was with the Lord, and she thought of Jesus himself, and of the life He lived in this world ; and then Mamma's words came into her mind, "Would she be good for anything if she went on in this way ?" Good for anything !—that was more important than thinking what she should do when she was twenty ; what if she should never be good for anything all her life !

"Oh, Lucy, I'll try, I'll try !" said Agnes, under

her breath. She did not know what she was to try; only she felt it was so intolerable to think of Jesus, and then to think of herself, that it was a relief to make some resolution. She did not make any answer at all to Alice, who stared and could not tell what to make of her; she only considered it, and thought it over in her own mind. She was only ten years old, quite a little girl; but what if she should never be good for anything? It was a dreadful thought.

“What do you think *you* are good for, Alice?” she said at last, in a very serious voice. She did not mean either to joke or to mock her companion; she wanted honestly to know.

“What am I good for? Indeed, Agnes, you are very unkind,” said Alice, pouting and looking very much displeased.

“But it is true—I think I am not good for anything,” said poor Agnes; “what is the use of us; oh, I wonder what God made little girls for!”

“I wonder what God made anybody for,” said Alice. “Grown-up people are very cruel. I know

some big boys that are good for nothing. I know some gentlemen—oh yes, Mr. Ashford at the mill; I have heard Mamma say he was good for nothing, many a time.”

“Girls *are* good for something. Mamma could not do without us,” said Lucy, in all the pride of usefulness. “Fred is of no use, just now; but we are different. God makes girls to help their mammas.”

“But then, *I* don’t help my mamma—what am I good for?” said Agnes, once more; “I never can do anything well—I am of no use to anybody. wish God would make me die.”

“Oh you wicked child!” said little Alice, in dismay.

“God made girls to grow up women,” said Lucy, and do whatever he tells them to do—but not to die.”

“God did not make girls to sit on the grass when the dew is falling, and get their death of cold,” said Miss Pounceby, sharply, appearing suddenly behind them, “You silly little child! get up and go in, and come to me to-morrow, and I’ll teach you better. Good for nothing!—I dare say you *are* good for

nothing, with all your fancies ; but come to me, and see if I don't teach you something to-morrow. Alice, come along, child. Betsey came to fetch you home half-an-hour ago ; bid Lucy and Agnes good night."

" I always am sent for at half-past seven to go to bed ! " said Alice—she thought it was very hard, and a great misfortune. Now, it sometimes does one person good to see another looking very melancholy over a very small grievance. When Agnes saw Alice look so cross and gloomy, she could not help thinking how foolish it was. " Angry because her Mamma is very fond of her ! " said Agnes to herself ; and went in, wondering and smiling, and full of her own thoughts. How to be good for something !—that was worth thinking about ; and Agnes recollected all the great people she had ever heard of, and remembered that it was not being good at everything which made anybody great. Good for something, if it were only one thing ; *very* good for something, if that were possible. This stirred to the very bottom of Agnes Hopetoun's thoughts.

CHAPTER IV.

A HOLIDAY.

EARLY next morning, while Agnes was thinking of going to Miss Pounceby to ask what she meant the night before, Miss Pounceby's servant came to the door to give her mistress's compliments, and to ask whether Master Fred and Miss Lucy and Miss Agnes could go with Miss Pounceby and little Alice and Willie to pic-nic in the woods, and whether they could be ready in half-an-hour. The young people, as you may suppose, embraced the idea with great delight. Willie Pounceby was almost as old as Fred; so that young gentleman, in the circumstances, did not feel the proposal beneath his dignity. Mamma, after considering a little, said they might go, and sent the girls upstairs to put on their pink muslin frocks, and to get a clean collar for Fred.

While they were gone Mrs. Hopetoun made a heap of sandwiches and packed them in a basket, with the remains of the cold pie, a bottle of milk, and some ginger wine. She put everything in which she could think would be wanted, except a drinking-cup, and set the basket on the table till they should come down stairs.

Now Agnes had risen this morning with her mind still full of the last night's thoughts. To be good for something!—she set her whole heart to it. She said to herself, that she did not mind what it was; but some one thing she was resolved she must be good for: so all these early morning hours she had been looking out anxiously for this one thing. Strange how hard it was to find it! To set the breakfast things handily and nicely upon the table, and to wash the cups and saucers after; that was all that Agnes had to do: was it worth while to be made and created—to *live* for such a thing as that? Agnes was very much puzzled, and became all the more so as she thought it over. She could not find anywhere the “one thing” which she could be good

for; there was nothing but a multitude of little things in Mrs. Hopetoun's house. What was the little girl to do? when she had put those pretty glancing cups and saucers into the china closet (Mrs. Hopetoun had a fancy that "servants" never made china and glass half bright enough, and thought washing the tea-things quite a lady's work; and I don't think she was very far wrong either), she went wandering about quite languid and disgusted, looking for something to do. If somebody would only have consented to be very, very ill for the moment, what a nurse Agnes would have made! or if somebody else had only been so charitable as to break his or her leg, how Agnes could have flown for the doctor! or if the house had taken fire that she might have saved them all!—but you see none of these things happened. There was no great single thing to do that whole morning; so the poor child went wandering about disconsolate: where was the something that she was to be good for? There was no possibility of finding it anywhere.

When Miss Pounceby's message came, Agnes of

course for the first moment danced and clapped her hands, and was as happy as possible; but then she stopped in dismay. — This was only pleasure, quite a good for nothing manner of spending the day. So she went up very slowly counting the stairs, and half-way up stood still; and then very slowly went down again backwards to speak to Mamma, stumbling once more, I am sorry to say, over Arty, who was behind her, and whom she would have seen had she been going straight forward, with her eyes before her, as ordinary people walk. She came to Mamma in the midst of the sandwiches, and then scarcely knew what to say.

“ Make haste—what is the matter ?” said Mamma. “ Remember, Agnes, Miss Pounceby said half-an-hour.”

“ But, Mamma—I think—I had better—” here Agnes made a very long pause, looking at the sandwiches, and thinking of the beautiful Beeches by the river-side, and the little parlour of green turf and mossy stones underneath these ancient trees, where they would eat their dinner; at last she got it out,

with great effort, "I think, Mamma—I had better—not go."

"Not go! What piece of nonsense is this, I wonder?" said Mamma; "Why shouldn't you go?"

"I want to be good for something; you said I should be good for nothing, if I went on in this way; and this is only pleasure, Mamma!" cried Agnes, with a sob out of her poor little palpitating heart.

Mamma turned round and smiled first; then stooped down and kissed her. "You are a little goose!" said Mamma; "and now run and get on your frock, or you will be too late; the pleasure won't hurt you, Agnes; try to be good for something all day."

"Can I, Mamma? even though it's only pleasure," cried Agnes, eagerly.

"Everybody can—always," said Mamma.

So Agnes went upstairs again, pleased and happy, but puzzled; everybody can—always—even though it was pleasure? She could not make it out. She put on her pink frock, and fastened Lucy's frock behind, as seriously as if she were going to some pain, instead of pleasure. And though she puzzled

her little brain about it all the while she was getting ready, still could not make it out.

At last they were dressed. Pink muslin frocks, and capes edged with narrow lace, and white cottage-bonnets trimmed with pink ribbon; that was how they dressed in those days. Agnes' bonnet was not at all large for "the fashion," but I think it would have made three bonnets for one of you little girls to-day. Lucy, who was very much pleased about going, ran to take the basket, and looked in to see if Mamma had forgotten anything. Mamma was at the door, talking to Miss Pounceby, who was just ready.

"There's nothing to drink out of!" said Lucy; and she ran to the china closet, and took out a little pink china jug or mug, a very pretty little drinking-cup which Mamma was very fond of, and which she had got when *she* was a child.

"Oh, Lucy, don't take that! suppose it should get broken?" said Agnes;—but Lucy thrust it into the basket, and gave the basket to Fred, and went out to join Miss Pounceby. And by that time Alice

and Willie were ready too, and they all went away.

The course of the river, which was called the Ard, was through the woods, after it passed the village; and they went along, a gay party, to the Beeches, which was their favourite spot. These seven trees stood on a little mound, almost quite close to the river-side. Four of them were quite on the top of this rising ground, and the other three, which were not so large, strayed down the side of the bank, towards the river. This bank was divided length-ways, if you can understand this description, almost as if it had been cloven in two; and one of the trees hung a little over this cleft. It was in that lovely, warm, grassy, sunny hollow, that they spread their tablecloth and had their dinner. Miss Pounceby sat on a beautiful mossy stone, leaning on the bank which rose above, so that she had quite an arm-chair; and just at their feet ran the Ard, tinkling and singing over those great stones which lay in the middle of its bed. When the weather was stormy, and the Ard flooded, you would have

supposed the water heaved at those stones and tried to fling them out; but he was only playing with them, and singing to them to-day.

Our little party was a very merry one—they sang too, and wandered about and gathered pretty mosses and flowers and acorns, and were as happy as possible. I think Agnes forgot how much she wanted to be good for something, and did not think about herself at all that whole day—which I think was the best thing she could have done. Just when it began to be evening, and it was time to go home, Lucy and Fred went to the river to dip for some water, half because they were thirsty, and rather, I think, half for fun; and what happened there nobody else saw; but Lucy looked very much vexed and troubled when she came back, and all the way home trudged heavily along by Miss Pounceby's side, and scarcely spoke a word. Agnes did not find it out till they were near home; then she wanted to know what had happened, and I fear teased Lucy with questions, "Had she lost anything? had she torn her frock? did her head ache?"

was she very tired?" and Lucy did not keep her temper as she usually did that night, but got angry and sent her sister away rather a little in a pet; that was the only thing that spoiled the pleasure of the day. But I think it was very fortunate it did not happen sooner. Some one falls out with some one else, almost always in a pleasure party, especially when everybody has got tired; is not that a great pity? This made a little cloud upon these children as they went home.

And when they came into the parlour and found Mamma waiting for them, with the candles lighted and the supper-tray on the table, Lucy and Fred both looked very uncomfortable, and scarcely spoke to Mamma. It did not last long with Fred, but Lucy went upstairs to take off her bonnet, and was a long time gone, and did not want any supper. Supper was bread-and-butter and jam, and some eggs and milk; and it looked very pretty with the white cloth and the china plates. Mamma liked pretty things though she was an old lady. But Lucy would not eat, and sat in the corner, and said she

was very tired, and looked to Agnes very much as if she had been crying—what could it all be about? When they went up stairs Agnes had to put away all her pretty bits of moss, and her nuts and acorns; but Lucy had dropped hers in the wood, and would not talk, and cried to herself as she said her prayers, and crept to bed long before her little sister was ready. What *could* it all be about? Agnes was quite sure Lucy did not go to sleep, but she shut her eyes fast and pretended, and would not say anything; and while Agnes was wondering over it, and trying to think what could be the matter, she fell fast asleep and never woke till morning—so there was an end of that long holiday.

CHAPTER V.

LUCY.

NEXT morning Lucy was up before any one else, and went out to work in the garden, while even Mamma was scarcely stirring. Lucy was a very steady sensible girl in comparison with Agnes. *Her* thoughts were not always wandering about like her little sister's; and she very seldom forgot anything. Then she was old—whole twelve years—and ought to have known a great many things. She was a very good girl, too. Mamma trusted in her completely; but, for all that, there was something very much the matter with Lucy that day.

However, nothing particular happened; except that Agnes—who, you know, was not very wise, but who loved Lucy very much, and could not bear to see her sad—kept always asking what was wrong? what was the matter? and made Lucy angry. But

everything went on as usual. Mamma had to go out in the afternoon about some business. I don't think she noticed Lucy's gloomy looks so much as Agnes did; for you know the mother of all these children, who had not too much money to keep them nice and comfortable, had often a great many things to think of, and her mind was not so free as the mind of a little girl.

The next day was Friday. They had all had breakfast and prayers, which Mamma read every morning. Fred had gone out to his lessons; for though it was holiday-time, Mamma thought it was not right to let Fred be idle, as he was soon going to business, and had not much time for his education. So he went every morning to read with the Curate. Agnes was in the parlour, washing the cups and saucers: she had a large fine towel in her hands, and was turning the pretty white china round and round, making it very nice, but taking *such* a long time to it. And Lucy had the same feather-brush which Agnes took up to her bed-room, and was brushing off specks of dust from the ornaments on the mantel-

piece, and from the frame of Papa's portrait; and, indeed, from every place where dust could lie. They were not talking at all to each other; but each, I dare say, thinking something in her own mind. And Arty kept running out and in from the parlour to the kitchen, and from the kitchen to the garden, making a noise which would have deafened a stranger. But they were used to it, and did not mind. Mamma was not in the parlour; I don't think the girls knew where she was when suddenly her voice sounded outside from the china closet, speaking to them. Lucy stood still, and ceased her work the moment she heard Mamma's voice. She grew pale to her very lips, and trembled all over. And Agnes looked up at her, holding a cup in her towel, and staring very hard at her sister. Agnes felt sure something was going to happen, but she did not know what it was.

“What has become of my little pink drinking-cup?” said Mamma; “I cannot find it anywhere. Did you take it in your basket, Lucy, when you went with Miss Pounceby to the wood?”

"No, Mamma," said Lucy.

"Oh, Lucy!" cried Agnes, thinking she had forgotten, "don't you remember I said you should not take it? I am sure we had it there."

"No, Mamma," said Lucy again.

Mamma was not there to see her face, and could not hear what Agnes said; so she never doubted Lucy's word for a moment, but went on searching for the cup—

"How very strange!" she said; "I am certain it was here on Tuesday; I would rather lose anything in the house than that; and it is of no particular value—nobody would *steal* it. Are you sure you did not have it upstairs? Are you *quite* sure, Lucy, that you did not put it into your basket when you went to the wood?"

"No, Mamma," said Lucy once more.

But not another word. She did not seem able to say anything but "no." And there stood Agnes, staring at her with her mouth and eyes both open, and her hands enveloped in the towel. Agnes could not make it out—she felt sure that the cup was put

in the basket—she thought she remembered drinking out of it—but then, Lucy was so positive, and looked so miserable—what could it mean?

All that day, Mamma went about, lamenting over the loss of her drinking-cup, and asking everybody about it. Only Fred was out most of the day, and never heard of it. All that day Agnes felt very dismal and unhappy. When she went up to her room, she sat down upon the chair, and thought it all over, and tried to recollect whether perhaps Lucy had taken that cup out of the basket and put in another one before going away. But still Agnes could not help believing that she had drank out of it at the Beeches, and wanted very much to ask Fred if he remembered. Yet, when she saw Lucy looking so unhappy, the little girl got quite afraid to meddle with it. She had never seen her sister look so before.

At last, on Saturday afternoon, Fred was in the parlour, doing something to his fishing-rod, and Agnes had quite made up her mind to ask him, as soon as Mamma was gone. But just then Mamma thought upon it herself, and began to speak. “ I wish

I could hear anything of my china drinking-cup," said Mamma, "even if it was broken or stolen. I shall begin to suspect somebody, if I do not hear. Do *you* know anything about it, Fred?"

"Mamma!" cried Fred—and he started up from his chair, and glanced round to look for Lucy—but Lucy was not in the room. Then he grew very red; "I can't tell a lie," he said; "I told Lucy I wouldn't tell unless you asked me; *I* broke it, Mamma."

"You told Lucy?—*you* broke it?—when?" said Mamma.

"That day we went with Miss Pounceby to the wood."

If you only could have seen Mamma's face!—she stood for a moment, looking at him, and then dropped softly into a chair, and put up her hands to her eyes. When she took them away again, there was such a sharp wrinkle of pain in her face that it would have grieved your very heart to see it, and the water stood in her eyes. She said, "Lucy knew!" with *such* a groan in her voice. Lucy knew! it was a dreadful thought to Mamma.

As Agnes stood looking at her, almost crying, and yet afraid to cry, she vowed in her own heart that she would never say anything that was not true—never, never, though she should die for it!—and I think you would have felt so too, had you been there. Just then Lucy came in; she saw in a moment by all their looks that it was found out. She stood quite still in the middle of the parlour, with Mamma's workbox in her hand. Her face grew pale with guilt and grief—quite pale—not red and ashamed, like Fred's; Lucy was too far in the wrong for that.

And the dreadful thing was, that Mamma did not say a word to her. After a moment, she took the workbox from Lucy's hand, and took out what she wanted, and began to work; but neither spoke nor looked at her; then there was a pause of breathless silence among them all. Lucy went and got her work too, and sat down like a creature turned into stone, looking so wretched that you would have cried to see her; and nobody dared venture to say a word. Little Arty, running about as he always did, came up against Mamma's knee to show her something, but

Mamma put him away with her hand, and took no notice even of *him*. When Agnes saw that, she was quite overpowered—she was a generous little girl, and very fond of her sister—she could not keep silent any longer. She rushed up to her mother, and cried out, with tears in her eyes, “Oh, Mamma, forgive Lucy; she did it to save Fred!”

“She did it to save Fred?” said Mamma, quite slowly, turning round in her chair, and looking only at Agnes, though Lucy was so near that she could have touched her. “What sort of a person must I be when my children are so afraid of me that Lucy tells a lie to save Fred?”

When she said that, she rose, and went upstairs and shut herself up in her own room. I don't think she had done that before since Mr. Hopetoun died; the girls knew she *never* did it but when she was very, very sad and troubled. Lucy, by this time, was choking with sobs and tears, and Agnes was crying too; but so full of awe and perplexity that she could scarcely speak. Fred took his cap and walked out of doors; the boys always do that; but as for the poor

little girls, when they have got into trouble they cannot run away.

“ Oh, Lucy, what will you do ? ” said Agnes, at length.

“ What should *you* do, Agnes ? I don't know— I shall break my heart ! ” cried Lucy.

Now, Agnes had never all her life been asked for advice before. “ If I were you I would go and sit down at Mamma's door, and never go away till she forgave me ! ” cried Agnes—that was how she did herself when she had been a naughty child.

“ But you worry Mamma, and vex her, ” said Lucy, “ and give her no rest. I think I ought to wait till she speaks to me. *You* never did anything, Agnes—oh never anything when you were most naughty!—so bad as this ! ”

“ You will be miserable if you wait till Mamma speaks to you first, ” said Agnes. “ I am sure *I* could not bear it. ”

“ But I can, ” said Lucy, with her trembling lips ; “ and I deserve it—only I did not mean to tell a lie. Fred and I agreed we were not to tell, if

Mamma did not ask—and *that* made me miserable; and then, when she had not found it out for a whole day, I thought how angry she would be because I had not told her—and then—oh, Agnes!—then she asked me, all in a moment—and I said No; and I shall never be happy again!”

And Lucy cried as if her heart would really break; but it was easier to bear her crying than to see her wipe her eyes and sit up and try to do her work, always saying, “I deserve it;” and so blind with her tears coming afresh, that she could not see to put in her needle. Agnes sat down on the stool and kept beside her for a few minutes; but Agnes was not so patient in her feelings as Lucy. She could not bear it: she sprang up, without saying a word to her sister, and rushed upstairs. Then she knocked very softly at Mamma's door—then when there was no answer, harder and harder still; and then she cried, “Mamma, let me in—Mamma, let me in!” with such an earnest voice that nobody could have resisted: for Agnes' whole heart was in what she was going to say.

So at last Mamma opened the door. Mamma was very grave, and I think she had been crying too; but Agnes went rushing in upon her, and clasped her round her waist, and would not take a denial. "Oh, Mamma," cried Agnes, out of her heart, "you *must* forgive Lucy! she did not mean to tell a lie—she is breaking her heart; and I know she will never never do it again!"

Mamma did not answer all at once; but she sat down upon her chair and held Agnes close to her, to calm her down; and the poor little girl cried, "Oh, Mamma; Lucy—Lucy!" and would not be comforted. Then Mamma spoke at last.

"You are quite right," she said, "I shall go to Lucy now; but, Agnes, do you know why Jesus came?"

"To save sinners," said Agnes, because she had learned it so; but wondering why Mamma should ask that now.

"To save sinners—what from?" said Mamma.

I think Agnes knew; but she did not understand at the moment, and gazed into Mamma's face,

thinking of death, and punishment, and terrible things.

“From their sins!” said Mamma; “if people keep on telling lies and doing wrong, it is no better for them that Jesus came.”

And so Mamma rose and went down-stairs to forgive Lucy for that lie: while Agnes sat still thinking it over.

If *she* kept on being disobedient and wasting all her time—if she told fibs and was idle and wicked—then it would be no better for her that Jesus had come. How dreadful that was!—to think He should have loved us and come out of heaven for us, and lived and died—and we to go on all the same and be no better for it. Agnes held her breath with fright and terror. What if Jesus had never come?—what if there had been no such wonderful tale as that of the Infant born in Bethlehem, whom the angels came to tell of—and of the Man who made dead people live, and calmed the storms, and died upon the Cross? What if that beautiful sky had been only a waste and wilderness, like the sea, with

no Jesus beyond to make us know that heaven was there? The little girl cried a few tears, and then was quite still, and then prayed in her heart. I think she asked Jesus to save her from that dreadful danger, of being no better for His coming; and afterwards went away very slowly and thoughtfully, thinking more of Him than she had ever done before; and I don't think Agnes Hopetoun after that ever said anything which she knew was not true.

I cannot tell what Mamma said to Lucy; but Lucy loved Mamma better, if possible, than ever she had done before, after that day, and hated the lie she had told with all her heart. But nobody goes unpunished for a sin like that. I think, Mamma for a long time after — though she tried never to show it — was not so sure of trusting Lucy's word.

CHAPTER VI.

SUNDAY.

THE next day after that was Sunday. Lucy felt like some one recovering from a great illness—every word that Mamma said to her she listened to as eagerly as if she had been estranged a year, instead of only an hour from her mother—and Agnes watched them with a very light heart, and just a little thought at the bottom of it—so far down that she scarcely knew of it herself—that Lucy's forgiveness was partly her doing, and that she had been peacemaker yesterday. Fred was the only one who felt uncomfortable; he knew it was for his sake that Lucy had said no, and he was rather ashamed of the whole business; but he thought better of it as the day passed on. Mamma had not said a word to him about breaking the cup. When he thought of that Fred blushed all over his face, and wondered

why he did not go directly to tell Mamma. How easy it would have been!—for you see people always find out after they have done wrong, how very much better it is to do right.

The church of Ardsley was a pretty old church even then—it is *restored* now, and has low open benches and tiles, and painted windows, and I cannot tell you how many nice things; but even at that time, when there were high old-fashioned pews up to the chins of the grown-up people, it was still a pretty church. Poor little Agnes could see nothing when she was at church, except the high wooden walls of the pew, and the red cushions of the seat all round, and the hassock which she sometimes sat down upon, out of sight of everybody during the sermon. The only thing visible except the roof was a window—a pretty old graceful window, all clustered and flowery in the top, as they used to make them in the old times—but filled with dull little dirty panes of glass, like any cottage window. Just outside there was a great tree, and the wind kept blowing and stirring in the branches through all the

preaching. Sometimes it made Agnes feel sleepy; sometimes, if the wind was brisk, it quite roused her up; sometimes, she watched the birds and the white butterflies come gleaming among the branches—but I am afraid she took more notice of the tree than of the sermon. So she used to feel very uncomfortable, when they went home, to hear Mamma talking of it, and afraid that Mamma would ask her questions about what the rector said, as she sometimes did to Lucy. Perhaps, it is true that the rector did not think of the children when he preached his sermon—but I think Agnes could have understood the most part of it if she had tried.

After afternoon service they had tea—and after tea they came to the table with their Bibles, and spent the pleasantest evening of the week all together. For one thing, there was nothing to do. Mrs. Hopetoun always sent Jane, after church, to spend the evening with her mother—so there was nobody in the house but themselves;—and if Mamma had been displeased with any of them through the week she was always sure to think of it, and say

something, and make an end of that on Sunday. Then Mamma was always so gentle on Sunday—and passed over things which she used to be angry about on other days. So instead of being dull, they were always very happy on the Sabbath night. They used to have *a kind* of lessons—I say a kind of lessons, because it was so pleasant, that they felt it no trouble. They used to seek out anything they could find in the Bible about some one's life, and Mamma asked them about it in questions. I don't know whether people use these question-books now-a-days—they were called "Scripture Biography" when I was a little girl, and the children liked them very much—then they read verses about one of the parables—a different one every week till they had got through them all, when they just began again—but never were tired. This night they were reading the Good Samaritan. I am afraid you would be surprised if you heard the way in which Fred spoke of that story; but then you know he was only a boy, and not so proper as the little girls.

“Don't you think you can see that snuffy old

priest," said Fred, "turning up his nose at the poor fellow on the road? and that prig of a Levite going to look at him!—as if it wasn't bad enough to be wounded and robbed, without getting stared at into the bargain. I shouldn't wonder if the poor fellow tried to get up and knock him down."

"Oh, perhaps he was fainting just then, and didn't see," said Lucy.

"If I had been there, I should have told the good Samaritan of him," said Agnes, quickly. "What right had he to go spying upon the poor man?"

"Why should you have told the Samaritan, Agnes?" said Mamma.

"Oh, I think he would have gone and punished him!" cried Agnes, getting quite red in her cheeks.

"You little children always want people to be punished," said Mamma. "I dare say you think such men should have been killed or put in prison; but I don't know what would become of us if God were to do so."

At this Lucy hung her head a little, and Agnes

looked very grave; but I am sure Mamma did not mean Lucy, she meant us all.

“That Samaritan was a famous fellow!” said Fred. “I suppose he was a merchant, mother; I don’t mind so much going to business now; I should like to be a merchant like the good Samaritan.”

“There are a great many merchants like the good Samaritan, Fred,” said Mamma.

“But if he had been a merchant—a great merchant,” said Fred, laughing a little, “he would not have travelled like that, with no servant nor anybody with him. I’ll tell you what he was, he was just a pedlar—but a famous fellow for all that. What do you think, Arty? wasn’t he?”

“Arty think he was—a ’amous ’ellow!” cried little Arty, with a shout.

And they all laughed as if Arty had said the wittiest thing in the world; but Mamma would not allow that the good Samaritan was only a pedlar. She said perhaps he traded in jewels, and had them in his turban or his sash, or somewhere about him, as the Eastern people do: or perhaps he was not a

merchant at all ; or perhaps his men were behind him coming another way with his goods ; or perhaps he was only coming to see some of his friends and had no merchandize just then to sell. The girls were much best pleased with the idea that he was a jewel merchant, and had some shining diamonds lying safe in his sash, and I rather think Fred liked that notion too.

“ But whatever he was, he was a famous fellow,” cried Fred, once more ; “ that priggish fellow, that Levite, would not have spoken to him, I suppose ; but he saved the poor Jew’s life.”

“ And pleased Jesus,” said Mamma, in quite a low voice.

With that I think the tears came into all their eyes, and Fred glanced up quickly at his mother and looked down again, and did not speak for some time after. And pleased Jesus ! It was worth while binding up the poor man’s wounds and walking all that long way instead of riding upon his ass, to please Jesus. But Fred was not thinking of that ; he was thinking that Jesus was the very dearest

friend his mother had, and how all those things in the Bible that pleased Jesus were things that made the heart swell and the eyes weep, and how somehow every tenderness and kindness that man could think of seemed all implied in His name. Fred could not tell how it was, but it went to his heart.

After they had quite done with their reading, the supper-tray was brought in, that Arty might have something before he went to bed; Sunday was the only night that Arty stayed up so long. I have told you already how pretty the supper-tray looked; the cloth upon it was as white as you could imagine—I will not say as white as snow, because that is chilly to think of—there were two little loaves and some cakes in the basket—Sunday bread, finer than usual—a great china jug full of milk, and a cut glass dish—a good large one—full of fragrant raspberry jam. There was something more substantial for the others a little later; but that was how it looked when Arty had his bread and milk. Then mamma went upstairs with the little fellow and put him to bed; by the time she came down again, Jane was in,

and it was time for prayers; and then they all sat down to supper as gay and merry as possible, though they tried not to be noisy on Sabbath night. I meant to have told you a great deal more of what Mamma said, but we must leave it now to another day.

CHAPTER VII.

FRED.

WHEN Mr. Hopetoun was alive, it was intended that Fred should be brought up for a doctor, like his papa—and, perhaps, to succeed his papa when he grew old. So they thought; but Death makes great havoc with arrangements: and Mrs. Hopetoun, when she was a widow, soon found out that it would be impossible, without injuring the other children, to do this for Fred. So she made up her mind that he must accept the offer of Mr. Hopetoun's old friend, Mr. Settledon, and go into his office to learn to be a clerk. She knew the clerks got very little money, and found it very hard to get up in the world—but she could not help that. Fred did not at all like going to business after he had thought so long of going to college; but he thought it all over indepen-

dent of his mother, and had made up his mind to the same thing before she spoke to him at all of it. Fred was a good boy, though he was full of mischief, and sometimes led the girls into scrapes—he would not consent that Lucy and Agnes should go without their education, and his mother give up her servant, and take a smaller house, on his account: so, when he was fifteen, he was to “go to business” in Mr. Settledon’s office, in Oldcastle. That big town was six miles off from Ardsley, so he would require to have lodgings taken for him, which sounded rather grand to Fred—and every Saturday he had quite made up his mind he would come home.

You see Fred Hopetoun was different from those boys who go to Rugby and Eton. His mother had scarcely so much to live on altogether as would have kept him there; but I think Fred had the makings of a gentleman in him for all that. Ardsley grammar school was a very good school in its way. Fred was not head-boy—he did not care much for Greek and Latin, but he was a very good scholar on the whole, and behaved well and did not shirk his lessons,

which I think is next best to being the best scholar. All his spare time, when he was not in school or learning his lessons, he spent out of doors, doing all sorts of things that boys do in the country. I dare say you little girls would not understand much about them if I told you—and I am not so sure that I *could* tell you, for *I* never was a country-boy. He was a famous cricketer, and had quite won the match for his school on that great day when the grammar-school and the great private school at Peda Gog Hill, played against each other on Ardsley common—at least Lucy and Agnes were quite sure of it. Then he was a great fisher, and sometimes brought in from the Ard a real trout—and you should have seen what splendid little yachts he made, to sail in the pond, with white silk sails of Lucy's hemming, and rigging netted by Agnes, who did not like the job. Any boy in Ardsley would have done anything for one of Fred Hopetoun's yachts—they were such famous sailers!—and had real masts, and each a real figurehead carved with his penknife. One of them was the Agnes, and one the Lucy—but the gem of all was the Arthur Hope-

toun, which was ornamented all over like an emperor's barge; and made its first sail out of Fred's pocket on Arty's birthday.

When Fred used to come in from school, he came like a gale of wind, disturbing everybody, and ordered the girls about sometimes till they got affronted, and quarrelled with him; but always made it up presently, and were very good friends, and proud of him too—for not another boy in Ardsley ventured to be saucy to Fred Hopetoun's sisters. Sometimes they scarcely saw him for days together, except at meal-times. Then again he would always be working in the garden, and having long talks with Lucy, and telling them, when he was a man, all he meant to do. He had a great contempt for "this old Ardsley"—and said they should all go to Oldcastle when he got rich, and have a grand house. So he would talk, though the girls did not like the idea of going to Oldcastle. Fred meant to have a carriage for Mamma when he grew rich—and to get her the handsomest house in the town, and a man in black, with a white neckcloth—"not one of your shabby flunkeys in

livery" to wait at table—"a regular butler," Fred said—and then he used to laugh, and say it would be a great bore, but Mamma would be pleased. And Fred meant to make such a man of Arty! *He* should never go into a stupid office, nor do anything he did not like! He should be sent to Cambridge or Oxford if he wished—or have a commission, and turn out a great general. Fred knew Arty would be something great—the man of the family! And so the boy would go on romancing, prancing up and down the garden with Arty on his shoulder, or sitting over the fire in the winter nights when Mamma went up to put that little man to bed.

From all this I think you will see that Fred was a very good fellow for a big brother; and, except just when he affronted them right out about girls never being good for anything, and always in the way, and that sort of thing—which, of course, he did not mean at all, but thought it great fun when his sisters got angry—Lucy and Agnes would have done anything for Fred. But if you knew that you had darned that big fellow's stockings, and put on ever so many buttons

for him, to be sure you would be angry if he said you were good for nothing. So one little quarrel or another blazed up every day or two for a moment, and then was over—and they did not love each other a bit the worse for that.

At present Fred was much more in the house than was usual for him. He was reading with the Curate, as it was holiday-time at school—learning French and making Latin verses, though I don't know what good Mamma supposed these last were likely to do him when he went to the office. Besides that, somebody had given him a "System of Book-keeping," and so Fred spread himself across the table in the parlour half the day, and kept all the inkstand to himself, writing upon big ruled paper in half-text hand, teaching himself book-keeping as he thought. The girls got quite tired of seeing John Smith, Dr., and Richard Brown, Cr., in those great big flourishing letters—and, I dare say, Fred tired of it sometimes; but Mamma encouraged him, and he went on bravely, and felt sure that he would have nothing to learn when he went to Mr. Settledon's office. I am not quite so sure of that

myself; but Fred was very grand about it, and thought himself quite a man of business already. Sometimes he put down a splendid account—John Settledon, Esq., to Fred Hopetoun, debtor,—a thousand, or five thousand, or a million pounds—and thought it a famous joke; and called Lucy and Agnes to look at it. Mamma only smiled at that fun, and thought it was helping him on in his studies—and everybody said Fred would be clever at business, and was sure to get on.

Fred himself had not the least doubt about it. He did not like going to the office much; but he thought he was quite sure to grow very rich, and get everything she could wish for Mamma. It never came into his mind that people grow old before they grow rich. He thought Mamma would be just as she was now when he was a great merchant; and after that affair of the drinking-cup, he made up his mind to have a whole set of the most beautiful pink china, all made like the little jug he had broken. He was sure he never could forget the pattern, and would design them all himself; and this he kept secret from every

one. But his thoughts ran a great deal more upon the time when he should be rich and have a great house for his mother, than upon how he was to work in the office. He thought *that* the easiest thing in the world—playing at work—a long way easier than making Latin verses; and went back to laugh over his book-keeping—and John Settledon, Esq., debtor to Fred Hopetoun—and thought it all the best fun that ever was. He was fourteen and a half—and had only six months longer before he went to the office—but if all things had gone on as they expected, I doubt if Fred would have had just the same opinion a year later, when he was fifteen and a half.

CHAPTER VIII.

SCHOOL.

I THINK we will now skip over the rest of the holidays, and show you where Agnes and Lucy went to school, and what they learned there. You must not suppose, however, that Agnes learned nothing when she was at home: so far from that, she got her very most important lessons when she was not learning anything out of books. She learned to help with whatever was wanted, which is a great thing for a girl—I wish you all would learn that—and she learned to take pleasure in having everything *nice*, and to know that cleanliness and order may come the length of grace and positive loveliness, when one pays attention to them. Perhaps you think that is quite a housemaid's lesson and

not a young lady's; but I do not think so. These things come natural to women, and it is right and pleasant it should be so. I think the greatest lady in the land, at the bottom of her heart, would be glad to *serve* her own if she might. I think all you little girls, when you are not naughty, feel just the same. It is more blessed, you know, to give than to receive; and I am sure it is often far more delightful to serve than to be served.

But Agnes learned still more important lessons at home: she found out what a dreadful thing it was to tell a lie, and she got into her mind that wish to be good for *something*, which was not satisfied yet. For, you know, I have never said that Agnes was very wise—she was just like other blundering little girls. She was looking over everybody's head, trying to find out that one thing which she could be good for; and it never came into that foolish little head of hers that life itself was the something, and that all her little duties had to be done out of an honest and kind heart, as if they were done to God.

However, now she is going back to School. She had her books in a large bag—reading-book, spelling-book, grammar, geography, and her French grammar and copy besides. Lucy had a music-book in addition; but Agnes was not learning music. They went all the way down the village street, just after breakfast, in the fresh pleasant morning, when the air was touched with frost and the autumn morning mist was floating off to the hills. Other little girls came out of the other houses and went the same way. A long way down the street, very near the Rectory, quite at the other end of the town, was a house, with a window on each side of the door, built of very red brick, with two lime-trees growing before it, and a brass plate with “Miss Thomson’s School for Young Ladies;” there the children all went trooping in, and took off their bonnets in a little unfurnished room which opened off the hall, and then went to the school-room to their lessons. The schoolroom was on the right-hand side—a long room, going the whole length of the house, with a large window in front looking right into one of the lime-trees; and at the other end two

windows which looked to the garden, and were covered up with thick white muslin blinds lest the little ones should lose their time looking out. There was a large table at one end of the room where they did their copies in the morning, and in the afternoon sat all round on the forms at their sewing; and a little one at the other, where Miss Thomson sat to hear the classes read and do their grammar and their French. There she sat in her chair when Agnes and Lucy came in, talking to all the little ones, while her niece, Miss Sophy, got the books in order to begin.

Miss Thomson was about thirty. I think she was quite a young lady, for my part, though I dare say you don't agree with me. She was very pretty, and had the most beautiful hair you ever saw. She used to wear a close-fitting merino gown, or sometimes a silk one, with funny little puffs at the top of the arms, and the sleeves coming down from that quite tight to the wrist. Round her neck she had a large collar nicely worked; and white cuffs turned up at her wrist, and a big black silk apron with pockets in it. I think Miss Thomson had tried to

find out the something she was good for, like Agnes ; and had made up her mind it was teaching, and was happy in doing that, which is always the best way to do anything well. So when people were sorry for her, because she was always shut up in the school-room, she used to laugh to herself softly and was not at all sorry. *She* liked it, and that was why she did it so well.

The first thing they all did was to read a little lesson from the Bible ; that was Miss Thomson's way ; and there was something in the lesson which puzzled Agnes a great deal. It was about Mary and Martha ; that time, you know, when Mary did not get up to help Martha in her housekeeping, but sat listening to Jesus. You can easily find the place, if you want to look it up. But this was what puzzled Agnes : it says there,—“One thing is needful.” That one thing was sitting at Jesus' feet, not doing anything at all, only listening ! Agnes could not make it out.

But then the second class went to their copies while the first class read. Next to Agnes, Mary Grafter, the

gardener's daughter, was sitting. She was a clever girl, and wrote her copy very nicely; but Agnes made such pothooks, and dabbled her fingers so in the ink, and was so disgusted with herself! and Mary kept whispering all the time—

“ Agnes! oh, do you think your Mamma will let you and Lucy come to-morrow night, to tea? we are going to have tea in the orchard, and Johnnie has put a new rope to the swing—whisper—do you think your Mamma will let you come? ”

“ Oh, I'll ask her,” said Agnes. “ Is anybody else to be there? ”

“ Only Emmy Fox, and she will sing. Emmy does not mind for anything else as long as she's singing. Don't you think she's very proud of her voice? ”

“ No,” said Agnes, boldly.

“ Miss Thomson will hear you; why can't you whisper like me? Oh, *I* think she is!” cried Mary. “ I would not be as vain as she is, not for the world.”

“ But you are a great deal vainer,” exclaimed

Agnes, quite forgetting to whisper. "You are proud of your frocks and your papa's money. I had a great deal rather be Emmy Fox than you."

Just then Miss Thomson rang her little bell, and cried, "There must be no talking there," which made Agnes quite breathless with silence, afraid to move for a moment; then she got on with her copy a little bit, but with all her mind full of Mary Grafton and Emmy Fox.

After a while, Agnes regained her courage; she gave Mary the very least little poke with her elbow. "I would not ask Emmy Fox, if I were you," said Agnes, "if I thought her vain."

"Oh, she can sing," said Mary, tossing her head a little. Mary was one of those unfortunate little girls who envy everybody who does better than themselves.

"And I would not go if I were Emmy," cried Agnes.

"Oh, but she likes to come; she likes cakes and apples," said Mary, with a little laugh.

Agnes was very much vexed in her honest little

heart ; she put down her pen altogether, and looked in Mary's face. " You are not kind nor true ; do you love anybody ? " said Agnes, like a little judge.

" Somebody loves *me* ! " cried Mary, who did not care the least in the world for what Agnes said. " You are a cross little thing. Oh, such a copy ! what will Miss Thomson say ? Don't let the other girls see, and I'll write the rest for you."

" That would not do me any good ; I'll write it myself," said Agnes. But I confess, when she looked at Mary's unblotted copy, the little girl was tempted. She snatched up her pen again, and began to write very fast to get out of temptation. " It would be as good as telling a lie," said Agnes. I think she meant as bad as telling a lie ; but then she was by no means perfect in her grammar.

" Well, will you come ? " said Mary, after a little pause.

Agnes had a great mind to say no ; but then somehow the fragrant orchard came breathing over her imagination, and the swing among the trees ; and she began to think a little better of Mary ;

perhaps she did not mean what she said—perhaps she was not envious of Emmy's voice—perhaps it was only "her way." "I will ask Mamma," said Agnes, at last, rather slowly. So you see this little girl at school yielded to do just what the grown up people do, to visit Mary Grafter on account of the swing and the orchard, and not because she liked Mary or was her friend. Just as Mary asked Emmy because she could sing. That is a very common thing to do; but I don't think we should be likely to do it if we were all true from our hearts.

When Miss Thomson came to look at the copies she was not at all pleased with Agnes', and this was the first thing she said when she looked at it: "Agnes, when you were writing you were not thinking of your copy; you were thinking of something else."

Agnes hung down her head, thinking that surely Miss Thomson knew everything, and saw right into her heart. She said, "Yes," quite low, under her breath.

"I wonder where this little girl's wits are always running off to—does anybody know?" said Miss

Thomson. "She cannot write very well, but she can do better than this. Come here, Agnes, and let me tell you something. People do not write with nothing but their fingers;—it is very funny, but it is true—people have to write with their head, and with their heart, before they ever learn. Now, how do you suppose they can do that?"

Agnes looked up, with her lips falling a little apart and her brown eyes wide open; and I think half of the other little girls opened their eyes and their mouths too.

"The head *tries*, and the heart *wishes*," said Miss Thomson; "and the little fingers stop getting crampy, and turn *so* clever! Are you listening, little Nelly?—with your mouth open? I wonder if Agnes Hopetoun's thoughts fly away out of her mouth! But come now, let us all to work."

So they went to work quite heartily, and Agnes got through her other lessons with credit. She was never behind with reading or geography, but stuck a little in the grammar, which she thought was invented for the confusion of little girls. I am not

quite sure that I don't have the same opinion; but never mind! let us learn it all the same, and be very thankful we have not quite so much of it to puzzle our brains with as the boys.

When they went to dinner, Agnes and Lucy both asked Mamma to let them go to the orchard to tea the next night; for Mary Grafter had asked Lucy too. Mamma was not quite sure about it. She was rather jealous of her children's friends, and not much pleased with the Grafters; not because they had just been common people, and Mr. Grafter had made all his own money, but because they were trying to be fine, and did not know how, and were vain of having fine furniture in their house and being rich.

"I thought you did not care for Mary Grafter?" said Mamma, not wishing to disappoint them, though she rather wished they should not go.

"Oh, I am sure I don't like her," cried Agnes, imprudently, "she is spiteful! She pretends to be fond of Emmy Fox, and envies her; and pretends to think Miss Sophy is not so good as her sister because she teaches in our school! No so good as her

sister! I am sure *she* will never be a lady all her life!"

Mamma listened to Agnes with rather a funny smile; then she turned to Lucy—"Perhaps *you* like Mary Grafter, Lucy, my love?" she said.

Lucy smiled, too, and held down her head a little, but looked vexed; for she was older, and understood better than Agnes what Mamma was going to say; but still she was honest, and told the truth,—“No, Mamma,” she said, in quite a low voice.

“Then you don't go to see Mary Grafter, but only to have tea in the orchard? No, my dear children, I cannot let you go for that,” said Mamma; and she went away without another word. When she was gone, Lucy and Agnes looked into each other's faces. Agnes was so disappointed and surprised that her face got quite overcast, and she let fall two or three tears.

“It is all because of what you said!” cried Lucy; and Lucy was disappointed, and rather angry, too. “You ought not to have spoken so of Mary, if you wished to go.”

It was only then that Agnes understood why Mamma refused ; then she thought a long time over it to herself. "I am not sorry," she said at last, very slowly,—then she made a pause ; "I am glad I said it," she cried out again, "because it is quite true, and I shall *never* wish to go there any more."

But I am afraid that all that afternoon, when she sat working her sampler, she kept thinking of the orchard and the swing, and was rather ashamed to tell Mary that Mamma would not let them go. I don't know if you little girls work samplers now-a-days ; but Agnes' sampler was quite a splendid one,—fine white canvas, worked with silk, with all kinds of letters, and such beautiful ornamental lines between every row. She liked it very much, but got on very slowly with it. I cannot tell you how many collars Lucy stitched for Fred while Agnes did that last row from W, with the flourish after the Z ; but I know she thought in her own mind that it would quite deserve to be framed and hung up in the parlour when it was done.

CHAPTER IX.

UNCLE JAMES.

A LITTLE after that, it happened, one evening, about six o'clock, that all the family were out, except Agnes. Mamma had gone in next door to sit with Miss Pounceby for half-an-hour; Fred was out on the common; and Lucy had gone to the baker's with an order, and taken Arty with her. There was nobody in the house, save Jane in the kitchen, and Agnes. It was close upon tea-time—idle-time, when people get restless, especially such small people as Agnes Hopetoun. She threw down her lesson-book, and ran out to the garden to see if there were any chrysanthemums out yet, then up to her bed-room to rummage out the silk for that long-forgotten doll's bonnet, then to the best room to look out and see if Lucy was coming. But I think you have never yet been into the best room.

Agnes thought it one of the grandest rooms in the world. It was neither a drawing-room, nor a dining-room, nor any kind of room in particular, but had all Mrs. Hopetoun's best furniture in it from her old house. Red damask curtains to the two windows, an old Turkey carpet, encircled with Indian matting, on the floor; the sideboard, a slippery old-fashioned article of black, bright, shining mahogany, standing at the end of the room, and the piano between the windows. Nobody ever went into the room,—except when there were visitors, or to clean it,—save Mrs. Hopetoun, who put fresh flowers on the table once in two or three days. There were some china-asters, and African marigolds, and straggling weedy mignonette there now. On the sideboard stood a pretty old silver liqueur-stand, which was reflected in the mirror over the mantelpiece. And there was cut paper on the grate, and pictures on the walls. So you perceive that it must have been a very handsome room.

The windows were a little open. I do not think Agnes would have ventured upon such a thing, had

Mamma been at home; but with a sense of awe upon her, she went up to the furthest window, and leaned out, kneeling on the floor, with her arms resting upon the window-sill. All down that long village street, where the setting sun shone aslant and long shadows fell to the east, there was nothing to be seen of Lucy. Agnes leaned down her head upon the window-sill, and gazed till the little girl fell into one of her dreams. The sun came in her eyes, and she put up her hand to shade them. And the wind, which began to get a little cold, swung about the signboard of the inn which hung from the elm-tree and tossed Agnes' hair about her ears. She could hear the boys' voices from the common coming quite sweet and indistinct from that long distance, and saw the Rector's wife walking up the street with her long shadow stalking on before her, and noticed all without thinking of anything; and quite forgot how she had thrown down her grammar on the floor, and had never told Jane about getting the tea ready, though she knew that Jane never remembered unless she was told.

Careless little Agnes! Perhaps Mamma would come in and find no tea-tray set ready to welcome her, but the grammar-book instead lying open on the floor. Perhaps Mamma would go upstairs to look for Agnes, and find the box in the girls' bed-room open and some of their bits of ribbon and muslin dropped out on the floor—perhaps would come in here to the best room to find Agnes leaning over the window! But for that once Agnes was not found out—for *something happened*. I will tell you what it was.

As Agnes watched the Rector's wife walking up the street, she noticed, too, a postchaise lumbering slowly down, looking about it—if a postchaise can look about—and trying to find some place which it only half knew. By and bye the postchaise came to a dead stop near Miss Thomson's, and somebody got off the box and walked up this way asking questions. Presently the door of the postchaise opened, and somebody else—a tall, lame gentleman, leaning on a stick—came out with a lame awkward leap, and followed the other as if he had not patience to wait. Agnes got interested, and began to watch him—for

Agnes knew everybody in Ardsley, and wondered who they were asking for; she was sure *she* could tell them. Then she found out that the first one was a black servant—that was very odd—quite black, like the negroes in books, with woolly hair. He had stopped at the inn, and was talking to somebody there who did not seem to understand him, when the lame gentleman came limping up, and pushed him aside and asked the question—whatever it was—himself. Then Mrs. Potts of the inn came quite out into the street, and pointed the gentleman the way; and made gestures with her hand—as Agnes thought—to the street behind, where Mrs. Hopetoun had used to live, and then here. “Oh, he’s coming here!” cried Agnes to herself; and she leaned out over the window, and watched the lame gentleman, and his black servant, and the postchaise lumbering slowly up behind. Her heart began to beat. Her cheeks grew red. Who was it? Somebody coming to tell them some wonderful grand news; that they had got a fortune left them; that Mamma had some great rich friends whom nobody knew of; that somebody

was going to send Fred to college after all. Up they came; the lame gentleman limping, and looking in at all the windows; the black servant a little behind, and the postchaise last of all. And neither Lucy nor Fred nor Mamma to be seen on all the way.—“I am *sure* he is coming here!” cried Agnes to herself, this time with a cry of terror; coming here when nobody was in but Agnes! What should she do?

But though there was plenty of time to have run into Miss Pounceby's for Mamma, Agnes did not even leave the window, she was so much absorbed watching this stranger. He came straight up, limping all the way, till at last he was close upon the door; then he happened to look up, and saw her. The moment he saw her he stopped, and looked at her very earnestly, then smiled. “Are you watching me, little girl?” he cried. “Are you a little Hopetoun? To be sure you are like your mother. Come down directly, and tell her I'm here.”

Agnes got up from the window without saying a word, and dropped down the stairs bewildered and

full of amazement. Who was he? She did not run, but went very quietly to the door and set it wide open, opening once more, as she did when she was surprised, her mouth and her eyes. He was a very tall thin gentleman, looking rather delicate, stooping in his shoulders, and with a lame leg. He had long grey hair, very grey, one lock of which used to come dropping into his eyes, and he had a little habitual motion of his head every five minutes so as to shake it back. He held out his long thin arms to Agnes, as if she had been a baby. "What's your name, eh? You're like your mother," said the gentleman, and had kissed Agnes before she was aware. Now Agnes had great objections to being kissed, especially by people she did not know. Some little girls kiss anybody, whether they care for them or not; but Agnes was not one of these. She jumped out of the stranger's arms with great indignation, and retired behind the door. "If you please to come in," said Agnes in a dignified manner, "I will send Jane for Mamma."

“Who is Jane?—have you a sister called Jane?” said the gentleman.

“It’s the servant!” said Agnes, quite angrily. A sister called Jane! as if everybody did not know that Agnes had but one sister, and she was Lucy.

But he quite laughed at that, and came in; and was about going to the little parlour, where Agnes’ grammar was still lying on the floor. “Not there, please. Oh, Mamma will be angry,” cried Agnes, darting forward to stop him. “You must come upstairs to the best room.”

“Must I? But I am a great friend of Mamma’s; she will not mind me; and I am lame—I can’t climb stairs,” said the gentleman.

“If you were a great friend of Mamma’s, I should have seen you before,” said Agnes with a little suspicion, still keeping close to the door of the parlour, where she was resolved he should not go.

“Come, then, I’ll make a virtue of necessity—but you must help me up the stairs,” said the stranger; and went up limping and laughing. Agnes’ heart smote her at the first; but the laughing

made her angry. She was full of wonder and confusion. He seemed to think he had a right to the house and a right to her, and leaned upon her shoulder all the way. Who could he be?

Meanwhile Lucy was coming up the street with a little paper bag of cakes, one of which Master Arty was eating; and Fred was racing from the common at full speed because it was teatime; and Mamma, a little agitated as she caught sight of the black servant, was hastening in from Miss Pounceby's. Mamma was saying to herself, "Can it be possible?" and was afraid to suffer herself to feel happy. She came into the parlour a great deal quicker than usual; but, quite disappointed to find no one there, went upstairs quite slowly, sighing and repeating over to herself, "I knew it could not be him." She did not think what a watchful guardian of the house Agnes was.

But when Mrs. Hopetoun looked into the best room and saw the tall gentleman sitting there, with Agnes standing rather unwillingly by his knee, she ran up to him, and took both his hands, and

called out his name, and cried, and looked as if she did not know what to do for joy. Agnes stood looking on very much surprised. James! Then it all flashed upon her in a moment—the black servant, the lame gentleman!—to be sure it was Uncle James from Barbadoes! who else could it be? She rushed downstairs the moment she found it out, to tell everybody. “Oh, Jane, it’s Uncle James!” she cried; and then ran to the door and repeated the news, “Oh, Lucy, Uncle James has come! oh, Fred, it’s Uncle James!” till I think all the people who were passing knew of it as well as Lucy and Fred.

“And there was nobody in but me,” cried Agnes, when Lucy, out of breath with running, came up to the door, “and I did not know who he was. I thought he was only somebody come to call, and made him go upstairs; and he is lame, and it hurt him; and oh, Lucy, I wonder, must we have tea in the best room?”

“If it’s Uncle James, and he has come all that long journey, of course he wants something,” said Lucy.

“You have not even had the tea set; make haste! and I think you should make it—don't trouble Mamma—but make it very good, for gentlemen like it strong.”

So saying, Lucy ran upstairs to see Uncle James; and poor little puzzled Agnes went racing about the kitchen to help Jane to set out the best cups and saucers, and very nearly scalded herself making the tea. I think she put nearly a quarter of a pound into the teapot—there never was such tea made in Ardsley—and she was still dreadfully busy setting it all upon the table, when she heard the whole of them coming downstairs; every one of them! Uncle James limping and holding by the banisters, and little Arty jumping after him, pit-pat upon every step. Agnes stood still in the middle of the room with the jam in her hands; she was not half ready for them—and what would Uncle James think of her for making him go upstairs?

“What a famous little housekeeper it is!” said Uncle James; “is the other one the ornamental one, Mamma?”

“Lucy! Lucy is a better housekeeper than I am,”

said Mamma; "poor little Agnes is not very great at that. Why, I think you have scarcely spoken to your uncle, child."

"Oh yes, she has, when nobody else was here," said Uncle James; "an inexorable little watch-woman, and made a poor old lame fellow trudge upstairs. But, after all, I rather think she was in the right of it. There's six of us, I think, isn't there? Does my excellent sister suppose we're all to find room here?"

"There are five of us every day," said Mamma, not a bit offended, though the young people were a little; "it would be odd if we could not squeeze together and leave a place for Uncle James."

"A chair for Uncle Dames!" shouted Arty, trying with all his might to wheel Mamma's easy-chair out of her corner. Uncle James was quite delighted. He dropped into the chair with a lazy comfortable look, and looked round upon them all, rubbing his long thin hands. You could see by a glance that Uncle James was very fond of an easy-chair, and was not the most active man in the world, and accus-

tomed to servants always about him. After he had talked a little to Mamma, he chanced to glance out of the window, and saw the postchaise still standing. Then he turned his head round and called Fred to him with the least motion of his finger. He looked so indolent and so easy, and yet so commanding, that Fred jumped at once to do what he wanted, and the girls looked on in great wonder and astonishment. He looked like a lazy kind old king, with somebody always ready to do everything he wished.

“Call my black fellow outside there,” said Uncle James, “and tell him to pay the postchaise, and take himself off to the inn and see what rooms I can have. He can come back when he’s had his dinner—his name’s Cæsar. What, my boy! won’t you do it?”

“I was waiting for the money, Uncle,” said Fred, blushing to his very hair.

“The money! Oh, I dare say he’s got enough for that,” said Uncle James, laughing, as Fred ran off to do what he was told. And the girls more and more admired and wondered at Uncle James.

“But these children are offering you tea, and you have not dined yet,” said Mamma.

“I had rather have your tea than all the dinners in the world,” said Uncle James; and had Arty’s chair set beside him, and ate his bread and butter like a boy. The young people were quite excited about him; it was something entirely new in their life.

CHAPTER X.

A BIRTHDAY.

THE next morning, as it happened, was Agnes' birthday, and both Lucy and she had holiday on account of that; but the great novelty of Uncle James' arrival rather put out all their little festival preparations. When a birthday happened, there always was a great home-made cake, which was cut at tea on that important day; but Mamma gave Agnes a little present in the morning, and they all kissed her and wished her many happy birthdays the very first thing. Then Fred gave her a pretty little pleasure boat, with two little dolls in it, dressed by Lucy like oarsmen, which Agnes was very proud of; and she wore Mamma's present, a little gold locket, round her neck on a ribbon, and kept looking at it every five minutes, and felt very happy. But still

there was scarcely any time to think about Agnes' birthday; everybody was thinking of Uncle James.

Uncle James came limping along from the inn about one o'clock, just when they were going to sit down to dinner. He had just got his breakfast, for he had been long an invalid, you know, and was indolent and dawdled over everything; and people who have lived long in hot climates are never very active. But he sat down quite good-humouredly in the easy-chair, and talked while they were eating their dinner; he talked a good deal in his slow easy way, and was very full of plans what he was going to do.

"You must take a larger house, and let me live with you," he said; "I want to have the children about me. I dare say there's plenty houses to be had. We'd better look for one to-morrow."

"Houses are not so plentiful at Ardsley," said Mamma.

"Oh, I dare say we'll find one," said Uncle James, as people speak who are rich and think they can buy everything. "A pretty roomy place, with a good-

sized garden, and space enough to turn round in. I suppose this is a very nice place, sister; but it seems rather small to me."

"The purse was rather small, James, and the house had to be in proportion," said Mamma, smiling.

"Ah, well; that's all over now," said Uncle James. "I've got plenty for both of us. We'll look about for the house to-morrow—and servants. Cæsar's a famous handy fellow: he can do a little of everything. I like to be well served; it's half the comfort of life."

"I am very well off in that respect," said Mamma; "here are my two little maidens;" and she laid one hand upon the shoulder of Agnes and one on Lucy's. Uncle James smiled at them too, but shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

"That must not be any longer; these girls ought to be brought up very differently: they must go to a good school," said Uncle James.

"I don't know," said Mamma. "A good school is a very good thing; but I don't like to send girls away from home."

“Then, we’ll have a governess,” said Uncle James; “and Arty shall worry the life out of her. Is not that what governesses were made for? don’t you think so, Agnes?”

“I think anybody who could be worried by Arty, deserves it,” cried Agnes indignantly. “Arty can be as good as possible, when he tries!”

“Ah,” said Uncle James, laughing, “so could I; but then, the trouble is to try. I wonder if little girls keep trying always; Arty and I don’t. There’s Fred, too, what are you doing with him, sister? He grows a big fellow. I suppose he has plans of his own.”

“He is going to Mr. Settledon’s office, in Old-castle, when he is fifteen,” said Mamma, with a little sigh; and Fred looked up suddenly with an anxious glance, which Uncle James saw.

“And does not like it, eh? Never mind, you sha’n’t go to the office, Fred; you’d rather go to school, wouldn’t you, and then to the University? I’m an Oriel man myself, though I don’t remember much about it; for you know they meant to make me a parson, Fred.”

"I should like to be a physician, Uncle," said Fred, boldly.

"A doctor? Pshaw! don't have anything to do with lotions and pill-boxes," said Uncle James. "I beg your pardon, sister; I forgot about poor Hopetoun. Well, well; you shall be a physician if you like: be a gentleman, my boy, and you'll please me."

"I hope my Fred will be that wherever he goes," said Mamma.

At which Uncle James laughed a little softly, thinking that because Fred was Mamma's son and she was fond of him, he always would seem a gentleman to her eyes: for Uncle James did not at all know what it was to have children, and thought the papas and mammas could not see any fault in their sons and daughters; which is a great mistake, as *we* know. But because he was quite ignorant, Uncle James, like a great many other people, thought himself very wise—a great deal wiser than Mrs. Hopetoun—and laughed at her "partiality," as he called it. But Mamma was not a bit angry; she

smiled too, and *knew* that she knew better than Uncle James.

He sat lounging there in the easy-chair all the afternoon, talking of the new house, and how they should live, and all that was to be done, to the great delight of the young people, who could have listened to him all day long. But they could not help noticing that Mamma made very little answer to him, and said nothing at all about the new house, which vexed Fred and Agnes, and made Lucy curious. *She* knew Mamma best, and felt sure she meant something by it. However, there he sat, the long lame old gentleman, with his grey hair falling into his eyes, rubbing those soft long hands—which were white but at the same time were grey—softly together, and talking so kindly and pleasantly that they all grew quite fond of him. He was still lounging there when tea-time came, and Agnes' birthday cake. Uncle James would not have any tea to-day, because he was just then going to the inn to have his dinner; but when Jane came in carrying the big cake, with Arty dancing after her, Uncle James wanted to know

what it was. It was Agnes' cake; this was Agnes' birthday. He made her come to him, and kissed her forehead, and wished her a great many birthdays. He was very kind.

When Agnes had gone to cut the cake, as a birthday-girl should, Uncle James took out a very pretty pocket-book, and took something out of it. When Agnes passed him again to go to her seat, he stopped her and put this into her hand. The little girl held it in her open hand looking at it, a crisp rustling piece of paper: can you guess?—a five-pound note! When Agnes saw what it was, she got quite frightened. She looked at Mamma and then at Uncle James—she did not know what to do.

“That is too much,” said Mamma; “let it be only a sovereign, and I will consent.”

“But I did not ask you to consent, Mamma,” said Uncle James. “You have nothing to do with it: put it into your pocket, Agnes.”

“But oh, please Uncle James, what am I to do with it?” cried Agnes.

“Why, you little goose! spend it, to be sure. I

wish I was you—five pounds clear, and nothing to do with it!” said Uncle James, laughing.

“Spend it?” Agnes opened her eyes still wider; she thought all the things in all the shops in Ardsley might be bought for five pounds; but there was nothing very pretty to be had there.

“I’ll tell you what you shall do,” said Uncle James; “you shall go to Oldcastle and spend it. Cæsar shall order a postchaise, and we’ll go to-morrow.”

“To Oldcastle! Oh, we never were there!” cried Agnes in the greatest rapture; and then looked at Mamma, afraid that such a vision of delight could never come true.

“Then you must all get ready early,” said Uncle James; “and mind, it is on condition that you spend it all, every penny, to-morrow.”

You may suppose how Agnes felt; to spend it all! There was something glorious in the thought; and yet she was half afraid.

“The child will buy nothing but nonsense,” cried Mamma—“things that are of no use in the world, if she is left to herself.”

“And to be sure so she should,” said Uncle James; “and I shall be there to see her budget. It will be capital fun to see what Agnes buys; I won't have anything useful; when I want to see sensible purchases made, I will go with *you*.”

“But perhaps it should be given to the poor,” said Agnes, with rather a pang in her heart.

“What would become of all the poor workmen who make those foolish, pretty things you are going to buy, if everybody was wise?” said Uncle James. “It is not to be given to the poor; and Fred and Lucy are to be ready to go with Agnes at eleven o'clock.”

So they had all to submit; and I think there never was a birthday girl who went to bed happier than Agnes Hopetoun. To go to Oldcastle to spend five pounds upon whatever she pleased! Oh, all you little girls who have birthdays, would not you like to do just the same?

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER HOLIDAY.

YOU may suppose that Agnes woke up very early that next morning—so early indeed that it was just daylight. You may think also that her first idea was to wake Lucy, and talk over all the great things that were to be done that day; but Agnes stopped herself just in time, though it was not easy, and said to herself how very selfish it would be to disturb her sister's sleep; so she kept quiet, and lay watching the light how it grew by degrees brighter and brighter, till, no one could tell how, out of the grey dawn of the morning it came to be full day, warm and sweet with the early sunshine. All this time there was only one trouble in Agnes' mind amid all the excitement and pleasure. She had got five pounds, all to herself, to do what she liked with; was it not her duty to give it all to the poor?

Now that is a very hard question, and not easy for anybody to answer. Some people think it would be better to do away with all the pretty things and buy nothing but what we want, and give all we can spare to the poor; but I don't think I am quite of that opinion. God, who knows best, does not straiten our liberty so; and there are a great many honest working people just as good as we are, who would be brought down, out of their comfort, and made very poor indeed, if nobody were to buy anything that was not necessary. However, Agnes did not think of that, and lay puzzling her brains very much as the morning grew brighter, and brighter, looking in at the window. Should she go to the Rector, and give it all to him, to buy blankets and flannel for the winter, and some tea and sugar for the old women? Agnes thought she could make up her mind to do that if it was right; but she was nearly crying when she thought of it. Going to the Rector was not half as pleasant as going to Oldcastle in a postchaise with Uncle James, and spending five pounds all upon delightful things that were of no

use. I should like to spend five pounds myself upon things that are of no use; and if all you girls would not do the same, you are not of my mind.

Then Agnes thought, which was much more pleasant, of what she should buy. That beautiful little working-case that Miss Thomson had, with the gold scissors, and gold thimble. To get just such a one for Mamma!—but then, that *was* of some use; or a beautiful gold brooch, with all the children's hair in it—but Mamma never wore anything but the black mourning brooch, with Papa's name underneath; and a silk umbrella, with an ivory handle, and a little silver plate engraved "L. H." for Lucy—just what Lucy had been wishing for; and then a *splendid* cricket-bat for Fred; and for Arty— But Agnes launched into such glorious visions of toys for Arty, that I think all her five pounds would have gone directly, without going into any other shop; and by the time she had got that length she could not contain herself any longer—she felt quite sure it must be time to get up; so she called "Lucy! Lucy!" at first very softly—and then got impatient, and shook

her sister's shoulder. Then Lucy opened her eyes as if nothing particular had happened, and it was just a common go-to-school day! No wonder Agnes was impatient. She was herself half dressed by that time, wondering what time it was, and how she ever could manage to endure these hours till eleven o'clock.

"Oh, I remember, we are going to Oldcastle," cried Lucy, at last—and even Lucy, though she was twelve, and serious, and sensible, clapped her hands, and turned round on her toes, with a great skip and flourish—"and you are to spend your five pounds! Oh, I wish I were you! I never heard before of anyone getting five pounds on their birthday—never, all my life!"

"But, Lucy, what if I ought to give it all to the poor?" said Agnes.

Lucy was a little damped by this, and puzzled. "Mamma never said we were to give all our six-pences to the poor," she said, after pausing to think of it; "not *all*, I am sure—but perhaps part."

However, Agnes did not like this view; she thought

of giving it up altogether, like a little martyr, or else keeping it all to do as she pleased with—she did not like that sensible way of dividing what she had.

“ Uncle James said it was all to be spent to-day—and I was not to buy anything that was of any use,” said Agnes, rather slowly; “ but think ! if anyone in the village should be starving, while we are spending all this lot of money just to please ourselves? I almost think I ought to give it all up to the Rector for the poor.”

Lucy took a long time to think of that. Certainly it would be very nice to have five pounds to give to the poor; but then—“ I think if I were you,” said Lucy at last, drawing a very long breath, “ I should ask Mamma.”

Mamma had just got up as it happened; and Agnes, who could not wait, rushed into the bedroom, where she sat in her dressing-gown, reading her Bible. The little girl grew rather frightened when she saw that. She was ashamed of herself for breaking in all panting and breathless, and full of thoughts about her five pounds, upon her mother’s reading. She went

gliding up to Mamma's side, and held down her head, and spoke very low. I think Mamma must have just finished her reading, for she put the book away, and looked at her little girl, and said, "Well, Agnes?" without being at all displeased.

"Oh, Mamma," cried Agnes, under her breath, "must I give all my five pounds to the poor?"

Mamma smiled a little at first, but by and by became quite serious and talked to Agnes, and told her how there were some people in the world who gave up everything for their poor fellow-creatures, great, wonderful men like Howard; but that God did not say we were to do that. God did not tell us to give everything to our neighbours, but only to share with them and have a tender heart. Mamma did not want her little girl to think herself a little martyr and heroine; and besides, Uncle James, who gave her the money, had said something quite different.

"But I will tell you what you shall do, Agnes," said Mamma. "You shall give a tithe to the poor—a tithe is a tenth; run away and count up how much that will be—and, besides, you may buy old Widow

Harris a warm gown. That would be better than giving all to the Rector; and now go and count up how much a tithe is."

But I am sorry to say Agnes found that a very difficult matter indeed, for she was not at all clever at figures. She had been in division and out of it again, at school, two or three times, but was very little the wiser; and even could not remember the multiplication table, though she learned it once a week or so, and puzzled her poor little brains over 7 times 8 and 5 times 7. She got a piece of paper and a pencil, and had not quite made out by breakfast time what the tenth part of five pounds was—though it was very simple, was it not? and we all know that Agnes' tithe was one whole gold half-sovereign and no more. She was terribly afraid at first that it would be much more than that, but quite clapped her hands when she found it out. So after breakfast Lucy and she went down to the grocer's to get the note changed, and Mamma put four sovereigns and a half into an old purse and gave it to Agnes, and kept the tithe in her own to give to

the poor people in Ardsley; and the girls began to get dressed in their best frocks and bonnets, and to look at the clock and wish it was eleven.

But eleven came, and no Uncle James. They sat ready with their bonnets on, waiting for him before the hour struck, and when it was a quarter to twelve they still sat there, so disappointed and tired, sometimes looking out from the window, sometimes running to the door; but he was not to be seen. At last, a little after twelve, they heard the sound of wheels, and sure enough up came a postchaise, and Cæsar sitting beside the driver, with his black face and his white teeth, and a great bunch of Michaelmas daisies in his button-hole. But Uncle James had only sent a note; he was not coming himself; and this is what the note said—

“MY DEAR SISTER,

“I am rather late and lazy this morning. Tell Agnes she must be as discreet as half-a-dozen Uncle Jameses, but that I never will forgive her if she buys anything useful with her five pounds. On

second thoughts, I believe the children will enjoy it better all by themselves. Cæsar will take excellent good care of them, and knows that they are to go to the confectioner's and dine upon cakes and buns, so I don't see that there is any occasion for me. I'll be up presently to have a chat with you about our new house. Now don't be over-careful; let the children go.

“ Affectionately,

“ JAMES BUTLER.”

When Mrs. Hopetoun read this note, she shook her head, and smiled, and sighed and said to herself, “ Just like James ! ” and I think she was rather afraid to let them go all by themselves ; but Fred made himself look so big, and was so very grand upon the subject of taking care of the girls, that Mamma consented at last. You may fancy how frightened and how delighted Lucy and Agnes were. They had never been anywhere by themselves before ; they had never in their lives been at Old-castle ; and to go in a postchaise, with Cæsar waiting

upon them ; to drive about from shop to shop, and buy, and do exactly as they liked ; did you ever hear of anything so delightful ? They could not look in each other's faces without laughing out loud for pleasure ; it was like a fairy tale.

But poor little Agnes by and by came to be rather puzzled ; she did not want Lucy to know about the silk umbrella, nor Fred to suspect that famous cricket-bat which she was to buy for him. She did not know what to do. She became quite serious and thoughtful as they reached Oldcastle, because, you know, she had a great responsibility ; for it was she that had to spend the five pounds.

Oldcastle was not a very great town ; but Lucy and Agnes thought there was not such another place in the world ; such quantities of shops, such crowds of people ! such heaps of things which they would like to buy ! When they got really into one of the shops, they were quite struck dumb, and did not know what to do ; everything was beautiful, everything they saw would please Mamma, it was quite impossible to choose ! Agnes particularly, went wan-

dering about with her mouth open, holding Mamma's old purse very fast in her hand ; and wishing, oh so much ! that somebody would tell her just what to buy ; for you must know, little girls, though perhaps you will not believe me, that it is very much easier to do what you are told, than to choose for yourselves. It happened just so in every shop they went to, and I don't think they made very good bargains ; but they bought *such* a number o' things ! Parcel after parcel went into the postchaise, and at every new parcel Cæsar grinned the more, and showed all his white teeth, and rubbed his black hands ; and Agnes' purse grew more and more empty, and you shall see what she had bought when she gets home.

Then Cæsar took them to the confectioner's, and got them more nice things than Lucy and Agnes liked to eat, for thinking of what Mamma would say ; but I don't think Fred was so particular. *He* made a famous dinner upon pies, and tarts, and jellies ; after that, they had nothing to do but to buy old Widow Harris's gown, and then they set off on their return ; and there was just five shillings

then in Agnes' purse, which she meant to give to Cæsar as soon as they got home.

"Oh Lucy," cried Agnes, "do you think Mamma will be pleased?" Agnes began to be quite frightened about that as they drew near Ardsley; she sat in a corner hugging up a great horse in her arms which she had bought for Arty, and thinking of the little box in her pocket which was for Mamma. Oh, if Mamma should not like it! The little girl grew so serious and anxious that she did not venture to speak a word; for it is not all pleasure buying pretty things and spending money. Agnes felt quite troubled and sad in her own mind: what if all these things should not please Mamma?

"But I would much rather you had not bought me this—only it is so nice and pretty; oh, I am sure Mamma will like *this!*" cried Lucy, who held her new little silk umbrella very close to her. At which Agnes brightened a little; but grew melancholy again as she reflected that the umbrella was certainly of some use.

"Nothing of the sort," cried Fred, who was lean-

ing on his cricket-bat. "Agnes would rather buy things for us than for herself; and why shouldn't we let her. *She* likes it: I like it too. I'll keep my bat, Aggie, as long as I live."

"Oh, will you, Fred?" cried poor little Agnes. The little girl thought she would like to go and kiss him for gratitude and pleasure; but that big horse held her fast in her corner. Oh, and what would Arty say? Arty at least was certain to be pleased; and old Widow Harris, whose warm winter gown lay in a long brown paper parcel at Agnes' feet; and perhaps — Agnes began to think — perhaps Mamma too.

CHAPTER XII.

PRESENTS.

THERE was light in the windows of the best room—cheerful ruddy light, as if there was a fire there—and the red curtains were partly drawn. As the post-chaise drew up at the door, Lucy looked out. “Oh!” cried Lucy, with a little awe in her voice, “we are to have tea upstairs to-night—in the best room. Look, Agnes!” That was a very grand conclusion to all the splendours of this wonderful day.

It was no small business getting all the parcels carried in; and then Agnes gave her five shillings to Cæsar very shyly, as if she were ashamed of it. Cæsar grinned with all his white teeth, and touched his hat and said, “Thank you, Missie;” and Agnes ran in with the big horse still in her arms, blushing very much. Mamma stood at the top of the stairs

calling them to come up ; but Lucy and Fred went up quicker than Agnes, who still kept thinking to herself what Mamma would say. Coming into the light dazzled the little girl—the fire was burning so brightly ; the tea—Mamma's best china too—was on the table, and Uncle James sat in the easy-chair, softly rubbing his long, thin, indolent hands. Fred had his cricket-bat raised in his hands, as if he meant to knock down Uncle James with it—though he only meant to show everybody what a famous bat it was ; and Lucy was putting up her pretty umbrella, that Mamma might see all its beauty. The moment Agnes came in, Arty rushed upon the horse—he put his arms round its neck and hugged it, and was so delighted : if it had been a real pony, Arty could not have been more happy. It was so big, he wanted to get on its back immediately. He had no time to thank Agnes for it, nor to ask if it was for him. He forgot the biscuit which he had just been crying for—though nobody else should be pleased, Arty certainly was.

And then Agnes, with very blushing cheeks,

brought that little parcel wrapped in silver paper out of her pocket. When the silver paper was opened, it was a little morocco box—when the box was opened, there was a silver thimble; an emery cushion, red velvet with silver ends; a piece of wax for thread, also with silver ends; and, prettiest of all, a little silver acorn with a yard measure in it; nicely fitted into four little divisions all cushioned and lined with red satin. “ Oh, Mamma, please do you like it?” cried Agnes, as if she was asking a very great favour. Mamma took the little box in her hand—she did not speak just for a moment. Agnes began to be afraid that she was displeased. At last Mamma bent down suddenly all at once and kissed Agnes; “ My good little girl!” she said—that was all; but Agnes did not know whether to sing aloud for happiness or to cry. She recovered all her spirits in a moment; she flew downstairs to bring up the other parcels like a wild creature—she was afraid for nothing more.

Now you may suppose that Mamma's box, and Lucy's umbrella, and Fred's bat, and Arty's horse, had made a great hole in Agnes' money; but she

had contrived to buy a good many foolish things for all that—funny little ornaments for the mantelpiece, that were not good for anything: little Swiss cottages, and globes of coloured glass, and queer little china dogs, and scent-bottles, and ornamental boxes, and all sorts of useless things. Then she had such a huge packet of little penny story-books, and one of Mr. Hofland's stories that cost half-a-crown, and a little roll of gilt and coloured paper, and a box of coloured wafers, which people at that time used to ornament boxes, and cardracks, and such things with. Indeed I could not tell you all the things which Agnes had collected. They covered the whole table, and even strayed on to the tray among the cups and saucers, as Lucy and Agnes took them out one by one from their wrappings; and at every fresh thing that appeared Uncle James clapped his hands, and laughed a great laugh, "Ho, ho!" as if it was the best fun in the world. Mamma smiled too, but looked a little puzzled; she could not help thinking within herself, what a pity it was to waste the money so: but the little girls were so pleased, and kept calling so, "Oh,

Mamma, look at this! oh, Mamma, isn't it pretty?" that Mamma did not like to disappoint them and say it was all rubbish, though she thought in her own mind that Agnes must never be trusted to spend money all by herself again.

"Come now, these things must not be on the tray—clear them off to the side-table," said Mamma, "and come and have tea—are you not hungry, you extravagant children? We have all got something sensible, but Agnes. Has Agnes nothing for herself?"

"Oh yes, Mamma, this!" cried Agnes, holding out with great pride a little reticule made with strips of black leather and white straw—things which are not made now-a-days;—Mary Grafter had one, and Agnes had long sighed for the like.

"This!" cried Mamma with a little shrug of her shoulders.

"And all these," said Agnes, quite proudly, pointing to the other rubbish. Mamma shrugged her shoulders once more. Uncle James laughed again.

"Don't be wise and disagreeable," said Uncle James, "and put us out of pleasure with our pur-

chases. Ah, I know; Agnes endured buying the other things because you would like them; but *these* are after her own heart."

"Oh, Mamma! don't you think them *very* pretty?" cried Agnes.

"Put them all on the side-table, my love, and come and have tea," said Mamma.

"But Arty will reach them on the side-table;—oh, Arty, you must promise not to touch," cried Agnes, who was quite anxious and uneasy about all her riches. She carried one little load and then another, to lay them on the sideboard, which was higher, and got up on a chair to set some more on the top of the piano. Uncle James was quite right; Agnes was pleased to get that box for Mamma and Lucy's umbrella; but all the little boxes and bits of glass and china, and the coloured paper, and picture-cards, and Swiss cottages, were what she really enjoyed at the bottom of her heart.

She kept looking at them all the time she was getting tea, thinking where she should put them, and how they would show best, and trembling

lest Arty should knock against the piano or the sideboard, and throw some of them down. Arty's big horse was rather creaky on its wheels, and he kept drawing it round and round the room all the time of tea, with a great piece of bread-and-butter in one hand; and all the pieces of paper that Agnes' purchases had been wrapped in, still lay all over the floor; and Widow Harris's gown, half opened out of the paper, was on the sofa, and Lucy's umbrella in one corner, and Fred's bat in another. So you may suppose that for that night at least it was not a very orderly room.

"We went to a new shop first, Mamma," cried Lucy, "such a big shop, with everything! umbrellas and toys, and patterns for worsted work, and silver pencil-cases, and everything you could think of; and then we went to another just like it, full of the most beautiful things you ever saw; and then—"

"Oh, the place where we got my reticule, Lucy!" cried Agnes.

"That was the grandest shop of all; it was called a bazaar; such quantities of things; you never saw

so many things together all your life ; I am sure even Mamma never did," said Lucy ; " such a splendid pattern for a cushion ! all in beads and silk ; I am going to tell Miss Thomson of it. Oh, Agnes, shouldn't you like to work something for Mamma just like that ? "

" Oldcastle is a decent sort of a town—but *I've* been there before," said Fred. " One can't get good bats, nor balls either, in a little place like Ardsley ; everything's best in a big town. But I suppose, Uncle James, Oldcastle does not look anything after London ? "

" It's not so big, certainly," said Uncle James.

" Oh, Uncle James ! but you did not drive through it as we did ; we were in six streets ! " cried Agnes ; " is London really bigger than that ? But I am sure there are not grander shops anywhere—do you think so, Fred ? "

" To be sure," cried Fred, who was watching his Uncle James, and wanted to be like a man who knew better, among the girls ; " how should you know, you small little girl ? do you suppose you

could get a dressing-case like Uncle James's in such a place as Oldcastle?"

"I never saw Uncle James's dressing-case," said Agnes, with humility; then she cast her eyes upon her own treasures; "but there were such quantities of things," she said to herself under her breath; and Agnes, though she had heard of London, did not really believe in her heart that there was another place like Oldcastle in the whole world.

"Now Arty must go to bed," said Mamma. But there was such a trouble to get Arty to bed; he ran round and round, dragging his squeaky horse, and would not give it up; he hugged it round the neck when Mamma got hold of him; at last it had to be carried into the bedroom along with Arty, and they could all hear it there creaking along the floor. Uncle James laughed, and put his fingers in his ears.

"You must oil the wheels of Arty's Pegasus, Agnes," said Uncle James.

"Pegasus? what is a Pegasus, Uncle James?" said Agnes.

“Pegasus was a horse with wings, I know; it means something about people who make poetry,” said Fred.

“But Arty does not make poetry. Oh, Uncle James, do you think he will be a poet when he grows old?” cried Agnes. “Oh, Lucy, only think! wouldn’t it be grand? I would rather Arty was a great poet than a soldier. I would rather he was that than *anything*. Do you love poetry, Uncle James?”

I am sorry to say Uncle James made rather a face at that, for you know he was an old gentleman. “When you come to live with me, you shall have a little bookcase full of poetry, since you like it,” said he; “all the poetry books that were ever written, and read them all day, if you like. No washing of cups and saucers, then, Agnes. But you must all look out and see where we can get a house.”

“Oh, Uncle James, Mr. Beckett’s house at Ardham Hill is going to be empty directly—the Becketts are all going away—Jane knows!” cried Lucy. “It is quite a splendid house!—such gardens!—and looking

down on the river. Jane's sister is nurse there. Oh, wouldn't it be nice to live at Ardham Hill!"

"We'll see after it," said Uncle James; "but I must have you to go to school, both of you girls."

"We are at school now, Uncle, at Miss Thomson's," said Lucy.

"At Miss Thomson's! You must go to a first-rate school—and your mother and I will keep house at home together," said Uncle James.

Then Agnes and Lucy looked at each other. To go to school away from home—to a boarding-school, the same as if Mamma were rich! The girls felt a little proud and a little anxious—liking, and yet not liking the thought; to leave Mamma and Arty!—to leave Ardsley and all their playmates—to go away from home! They did not know whether they were most glad or sorry to think of it. After that, when Mamma came back, and indeed for the whole evening, Uncle James went on talking of what they were to do. Fred was to go on with his education, perhaps with a tutor—perhaps at one of the great schools. Lucy and Agnes were to go to the very best ladies'

school they could hear of. Mrs. Hopetoun and Arty were to live with Uncle James, at such a beautiful house, with a pony carriage to drive about in, and everything that anybody could wish ; the eyes of the young people grew quite bright thinking of it, and Uncle James enjoyed himself very much in his easy-chair, planning it all out, and meaning to make everybody happy. But Mamma always shook her head, and listened to them—she never said anything herself—I wonder what Mamma could mean.

CHAPTER XIII.

PLANS.

“BUT, Mamma, don't you wish to live with Uncle James?—he is your brother—you are very fond of him, are you not?”

It was Lucy who asked this question—they were all in the parlour, just finishing breakfast. It was on a Saturday, and Saturday was a holiday at school. This was very fortunate for Mrs. Hopetoun's daughters, because they had a great many little things to do at home on the last day of the week; for Jane, as I have told you before, was not so very good a servant as to do everything just as Mamma wished it to be done. So perhaps they took rather a longer time to breakfast on that day, and talked more than usual, and put every imaginable question they could think of to Mamma.

“Yes, Uncle James is my brother, and I am very fond of him,” said Mamma.

“But you never say anything when he speaks of the new house—you let us all speak, but never speak yourself—and sometimes you shake your head, Mamma.”

“Is it so strange a thing that I should shake my head—perhaps, because somebody is naughty?” said Mrs. Hopetoun.

And now the girls perceived that Mamma did not wish to tell them, which, I am afraid, made them all the more anxious to know.

“But, Mamma, are you determined not to go with Uncle James?” said Agnes.

“Determined not to go, because I shake my head?” asked Mamma, smilingly.

“Oh but tell us, please!” said Lucy; “we don’t know what is going to happen so long as you never say anything, Mamma. What do you mean?”

When Mrs. Hopetoun found herself thus in a corner, she sat down again, and spoke very seriously to the girls. She said, “Your Uncle James is very

kind and good—he is fond of you all, and would do anything for you, and he quite means everything he says—but—”

And here Mamma stopped again,—I think it was rather provoking of her, when Agnes and Lucy wanted so very much to know.

“Your Uncle James is very indolent,” she said at last; “though I am very fond of him, I cannot trust in him, my dears. He does not always do what he means to do; he *often* does not do what he promises. He is very kind, and wishes to make everybody happy; and anything that can be done by talking my good brother will do; but he talks so much of a thing over-night, that he feels quite as if he had done it when he wakes in the morning; and so just goes on again. He is very anxious about this new house; but I know that he will always put off seeing after it, and never will get one; so that I do not care to talk of it till I see—”

“Oh, Uncle James means what he says. I know he does,” cried Agnes.

“Very likely, my dear,” said Mamma, with a

little smile. "We shall see what he *does*, and then we can decide. My dear children," she said, after a little pause, "you must not think too much of Uncle James, and what he means to do. I don't know if he is rich; he is a great deal richer than we are; but perhaps he is not *so* rich as you think. His wife's father left him all the money he has."

"His wife! Oh, Mamma, is he married?" cried both the girls.

"She died long ago; he never had any children; he has no friends except ourselves," said Mamma. "But Uncle James did not *work* for his money, Lucy, it was left to him; and I think he spends a great deal himself; and it would be very sad if we were to leave our little house, and change all our habits; and you to think yourselves quite rich, and too fine to help your mother; and after all your Uncle James to change his mind, or take no trouble about it. It is better to keep as we are, than to return again after deceiving ourselves for awhile."

"But nothing, Mamma, nothing!—if the Queen were to make us great ladies and as rich as prin-

cesses—oh nothing in the world, I am sure," said Agnes, "would make us too fine to help Mamma!"

"My dear, nothing would make you *intend* so," said Mamma; "but if you had poetry-books to read all day, as Uncle James says, and were sent away to a fine school, and made to think yourselves rich, how should you like, do you think, Agnes, to wash the cups and saucers then?"

"I should like to do whatever you told me," cried rash little Agnes, who did not know what she was saying.

"And she would not need to wash cups and saucers then," said Lucy.

Mamma shook her head. "I want you to grow up good girls; I do not care so much about seeing you great ladies. We must just go on as we are, children," said Mamma; "and then we will see what Uncle James really means to do."

And when Mrs. Hopetoun had said this, she went quietly away about her usual business; but the girls did not like to have the matter settled so; they had been talking between themselves all this morning

about what they would do in the new house, where there were to be plenty of servants, and everything that anybody could desire; and they had talked so much about the boarding-school they were to go to, that at last they grew quite anxious about it, and could scarcely feel content to return again to Miss Thomson's. When Agnes washed the cups and saucers that evening, she took longer time than ever to it, and somehow felt ashamed of doing it, and wondered why Mamma did not make Jane do these things. Afterwards, when Agnes had to go out to the grocer's for something Mamma wanted, she was almost saucy about it, and thought within herself that it was not a proper errand for her. When she was just going out, she found her cloak wanted brushing, so instead of doing it herself, she took it down to the kitchen, and made Jane stop in the midst of scouring the kitchen things, to wash her hands, and brush it for her; then she walked down the street holding her head quite high and proud, and thinking how small and shabby the houses looked. She met one or two of her schoolfellows, and scarcely took any

notice of them ; and when she got to the grocer's, she felt quite angry because Mr. Cinnamon was attending to some one else, and did not give her what she wanted in a moment. Agnes was so naughty and bad-tempered, that she actually pushed in before the Rector's housekeeper, who was speaking to Mr. Cinnamon at the counter. "Presently, Miss, presently," said the grocer ; treating Agnes as if she were no better than a servant ! she felt so angry, so unhappy, she could almost have struck him with her hand ; she could almost have cried ; and she said to herself in her heart, "It is all because we are poor !"

But we all know very well it was not because they were poor. It was because Agnes had got a mean idea of being rich in her little head, and thought that being rich would make her better than other people ; and then she became offended and displeased and vexed when she found that nobody gave her the respect she wanted. But you see, this was a very poor shabby idea of Agnes'. I dare say the shop-keeper *was* more respectful to her because she had a rich uncle ; but I don't think her rich uncle made

her deserve to be better thought of: nay, it was just the other way; for when Agnes came into Mr. Cinnamon's shop, feeling herself quite a great person, and thinking everybody should run to get what she wanted, I think she was a meaner, poorer little girl than I ever knew her to be before.

But as she went back again, she felt very unhappy. She felt quite proud and injured, as if everybody tried to vex her. "If Mamma were rich it would be very different," said Agnes to herself,—“people are so rude because we are poor;” and the tears came to her eyes, and she thought all the family were very ill-used, and was quite sorry for herself. “But they will all learn better by-and-by,” she said once more in her own thoughts, and began to dream about the great house at Ardham Hill, and the pony-carriage, and all the servants they should have—and how much better she would be then than all these people who were careless of her. I do not think myself, that having a pony-carriage, and a great house, and a rich uncle would make Agnes better than Mary Grafter—do you?

But as she was thinking so she met Cæsar, Uncle James's man, who was standing at the door of a very nice house, one of the best houses in Ardsley, where a widow lady lived. This lady was not rich, though she lived in a fine house, and sometimes took lodgers to help her a little—and you may fancy how surprised Agnes was when Cæsar told her that Uncle James had left the inn and was gone to lodge with Mrs. Sutton. The little girl stared up at the windows with such trouble in her eyes. What could it mean? Had Uncle James given up thinking of the house on Ardham Hill?

Agnes ran all the way home; she burst into the little parlour without minding who was there. "Oh, Mamma, Uncle James has gone to live at Mrs. Sutton's! Did you say you would not go to live with him? Are we never going now to Ardham Hill? Oh, Mamma!"

And Agnes began to cry,—she felt as if it must be Mamma's fault, and that Mrs. Hopetoun had done it without thinking of her children. She cried because she was so angry, and hurt, and disappointed.

She was a very presumptuous little girl—she meant to find fault with Mamma.

And Miss Pounceby was there! Miss Pounceby saw it all, and smiled to see Agnes in such a passion; for this old lady did not think at first how very wrong it was—she only thought it was so ridiculous and foolish; but Mamma was very serious, and did not laugh. That makes the difference between people who love us and people who don't care; because we always look ridiculous when we behave badly—and people who don't love us, laugh at us.

Mamma allowed Agnes to cry, and did not say a word to her. After a little while, she bade her go upstairs and take off her bonnet. I think Agnes felt a little ashamed of herself as she went upstairs. She began to see how foolish and wrong she was as she took off her bonnet and brushed her hair; and by the time she came downstairs again, she was quite ashamed to look at Mamma, and did not know what to do to show how sorry she was. She crept softly into a corner and got her bag with her sewing; but Mamma did not leave her so. She said, "Come

here, Agnes;" and Agnes went, holding down her head, and stood at Mamma's knee.

"If Uncle James had been poor, what should we have done, Agnes?" asked Mamma; "suppose he had come home tired and hungry, and without any money, what should we have done?"

"Oh, Mamma!—everything we could; and loved him and taken care of him!" cried Agnes.

"Then what a pity he is rich—for now we don't love him; we only want him to make great people of us," said Mamma.

Agnes hung down her head very much, and grew very red, and was *so* ashamed, she could not say a single word. For what Mrs. Hopetoun said was quite true.

I think Mamma, somehow or other, must have seen into the little girl's heart. Mammams do sometimes, just for a moment. She said, "Do you think you would be a better child, Agnes, for living in a great house and having a pony-carriage? Mary Grafter is a great deal richer than Emmy; the Grafters' house is finer than ours, and a great deal finer

than Mrs. Fox's; but tell me which you like best."

"Oh, Mamma! Emmy!" cried Agnes.

"Do you think you should like Mary better if she lived at Ardham Hill?"

Agnes did not speak just at first. "I should not like *her* better, Mamma," said Agnes; "but I should like to live in a great house like that—or I should like to have a friend there. Mamma, is it wrong? I would rather go to *see* Mary if she lived at Ardham Hill."

Miss Pounceby clapped her hands. "Now I call that honest," cried Miss Pounceby; "we all feel so, only we don't confess it. I am glad you are honest, little girl."

"But, Mamma, is it right?" said Agnes.

Mamma shook her head. "I am afraid, my dear child," said Mamma, "that Uncle James has done you all a great deal of harm."

That was all. It did not satisfy Agnes. She went out to the garden and wandered about among the chilly chrysanthemums, thinking of it. How had

Uncle James done them harm?—and then, would Mary Grafter really be a better, a pleasanter, a *nicer* girl if she lived in the great house at Ardham?—would she herself, little Agnes, be better? She kept thinking of it, but could not make it out—it was all a great puzzle; and I think we must leave settling that question until another day.

CHAPTER XIV.

LESSONS.

THE next day was Sunday; I think I told you before, that Sunday was always Mrs. Hopetoun's day for settling any trouble. She did not say anything till the evening. They all went to church as usual in the morning and the afternoon. It was getting quite cold now, and every week the leaves were thinner upon that tree at the window of the church which Agnes used to look at, instead of listening to the sermon. There were only some leaves now on the ends of the boughs, looking so thin and cold as the wind blew them about, that one almost felt sorry for them. Agnes felt a little sad in her own heart as she sat watching how they dangled from the branches; sometimes serious thoughts came into her mind—she thought it was very melancholy that the

leaves always must fall—even though the tree was green again in spring, the leaves were all new and different: and Agnes opened her brown eyes and gazed at the thin branches, and wondered within herself if there would be trees in heaven; for if there were, she thought the leaves would not fall *there*.

And all this day Agnes was very quiet and humble, because, though she still wished for the house at Ardham, she knew she had been wrong about it on Saturday, and almost guessed that she had brought her trouble on herself. But Agnes found out that day that Mamma's seat was not by a long way the best in the church; that nobody could see very well out of it, and that the pew-opener did not curtsy to *them* as they went out at the door. Agnes had never found that out before, and but for her proud thoughts she never would have found it out now. But when she saw Mr. Beckett's family from Ardham going up to their nice red-cushioned pew in the middle aisle, and could not help noticing what a pretty frock little Miss Beckett had on, Agnes was very much ashamed of herself, but felt as though

she could not help it. She scarcely said anything at dinner, nor even in the evening when they were reading their parable; there was indeed a great deal less conversation than usual that night, for I am afraid that some thoughts like the thoughts of Agnes were in Lucy's mind too, and even in Fred's.

After they had all closed their Bibles, Mamma looked round upon them. She said, "Children, you have not been nearly so cheerful as usual to-day. Agnes looks as if she did not care for anything. Are you not happy to-day, Agnes?"

"Oh, Mamma! it doesn't matter," cried Agnes, who scarcely knew what she was saying.

"But I think it does matter a great deal," said Mamma; "you ought to be happy, all of you. You were happy last Sunday: I should like you all to know what is wrong now. I will tell you what once happened to a friend of mine. She was like me, she was a widow, with two little children; she had not much money to live upon, and she had been brought up quite a lady, and thought it would be dreadful to be poor. She had another sister who was a widow

too, and was rich, but they were not very good friends, for the rich one was gay and careless, and did not think much of her family. However, when my friend's husband died, this rich lady was sorry for her sister, and asked her to live in her own house, and the poor one was so frightened for being poor that she went. It was a great large beautiful house, and there was a carriage and everything nice. But you know my poor friend could not do as she wished, either for herself or her children. She did not get time to teach the little ones their prayers, she had always to be seeing company, or going out with her sister, and the children were left constantly with the servants. Their mother did not know what to do: she grew paler and paler, and thinner and thinner; she thought everybody was unkind to her, and she used to cry whenever she could get by herself, and say it was because she was poor."

"But it was not, Mamma!" cried Agnes.

"How can you tell, little girl? you who say it doesn't matter. What do you think, Fred?"

“It was because she was discontented,” said Lucy, with a little blush.

“I understand you, Mamma,” said Fred. “It was a very shabby sort of thing altogether; she hadn’t the heart to put up with anything; she’s not worth telling a tale about.”

“Yes, she was,” said Mamma. “I loved her very much. She was a good woman. But she was afraid of being poor.”

“Oh, Mamma!” cried Agnes, “I am not afraid of being poor. I am not discontented. Oh, Mamma, just forgive me. I will never speak a word about Uncle James again.”

“My dear child, that would not be any better,” said Mamma. “I want you to love Uncle James; but not, for pity’s sake, because he is rich, and can do something for you. Having a fine house does not make any difference to happiness. We can be quite as happy here as at Ardham Hill; and happier when we don’t think of Ardham. Uncle James tells me he has gone to Mrs. Sutton’s, because it will take some time to get a house. My dears, that is your

uncle's way. We must not let it affect us. He will be very kind to you all; and he is fond of you, I know. But he talks about the house too much ever to take it. We are just as we were when your uncle came; and I think we have been very happy here."

"But, mother, are we to put *no* dependence upon Uncle James?" said Fred with some anxiety; while Agnes and Lucy looked at each other, and thought of the school they were to go to; and hoped, and almost believed that Mamma must be wrong; and trusted in Uncle James all the same.

"I will accept anything in the way of education that he offers for any of my children," said Mamma. "I believe *you* may depend on him for going to school and college, and the girls too. He can send you all to school without taking much trouble. But remember, children, every one, you are to be content to come home *here* and live as we are living now. You must not cheat yourselves with hoping for a grand house, or to live like rich people. We are very comfortable. I will not have you grow up envying your neighbours, and despising your home, and

fighting with everybody for respect and consequence, because of Uncle James."

Mamma's face quite flushed as she spoke. She was so earnest. She was ashamed to think how Uncle James's promises had troubled the minds of her children. She was quite resolved she would not suffer it. But I am not sure that the young people quite understood her. They were astonished, and did not know what to make of it. They thought to themselves that Mamma was angry; and they all believed still in Uncle James.

When Mamma went upstairs with Arty, they all got together over the fire, whispering about it. "I can't tell what makes Mamma so serious," said Lucy. "Uncle James never would talk of taking us all to live with him, unless he meant it; and Mamma is fond of him; it is so strange!"

"Oh, I wish we were really to live at Ardham Hill," cried Agnes; "for we are just as good as the Becketts, I am sure."

"And perhaps just as naughty, too," said Lucy, who was sensible; "but that does not matter; it is not who is good, but who is rich."

"I shouldn't like to have to change again, and put up with old Settledon's *now*," said Fred. "I wonder who knows about Uncle James beside Mamma. I daresay he's all changed since he was a boy; why, I am! I wasn't at all like what I am now when I was twelve. A man learns better as he grows old."

"Oh, Fred! you're not a bit changed!" said Agnes.

"Hush," said Lucy. "I am sure if Uncle James had not been kind, he never would have given that money to Agnes, to spend as she pleased. Perhaps Mamma forgets about him; but we must wait and see. Oh, I hope he'll take Ardham Hill! I hope he'll have us all to live with him! for I can't help thinking of it now."

And so they went on talking the whole evening every time they were by themselves. They had always trusted in Mamma before, but they did not wish to believe her now. So it was not nearly so pleasant as usual on Sunday evening, and they all went to bed thinking, not of their parable, nor of Jesus who taught them, but of Uncle James and the house on Ardham Hill.

CHAPTER XV.

A PARTY.

A FEW days after that, Miss Pounceby had a little party of children for her nephews and nieces. Miss Pounceby was rather a strange old lady. She was quite little and thin, and so sharp and lively. She had the merriest little black eyes you ever saw. If there had been a dozen different people in the room, all doing different things, Miss Pounceby would have seen them every one, and heard every word they said. She used to wear a strange round thing made of coloured gauze upon her head, when she was in full dress, instead of a cap. People do not wear such things now. They were called turbans then. And I cannot tell you how funny Miss Pounceby looked in hers, with her little black ringlets on her cheek. She was rather a joking, teasing old lady. When any

girl she knew said anything foolish, Miss Pounceby always remembered it, and kept laughing at it for years after. But she was very kind, for all that, and very fond of her own niece, Alice, and her nephews, Willie and George. I think that day was little George's birthday; and that was why Miss Pounceby had her party of children. There were a great number there, I cannot quite tell you how many. But Lucy and Agnes and Fred Hopetoun were chief among them; and even little Arty was allowed to come in to tea.

Agnes had brought in quite a little basketful of the things she bought at Oldcastle to show to Alice, and was standing in a corner with a number of little girls round her, telling how she went to spend five pounds—talking very fast, and feeling rather proud, I am afraid. Agnes had a white frock on, and her hair tied up with rose-coloured ribbons—because she was dark-complexioned—and a necklace of large amber beads round her neck. Little girls used to wear such things in those days. She did not tell about her presents; but she told them about

Oldcastle,—how splendid the shops were, and what quantities of people were there. The little girls kept crowding round her, asking about everything, and looking at Agnes' things that she had bought. Some of them thought she was the most fortunate little girl they ever heard of ; some of them admired everything. But some were envious and vexed, and made Agnes angry, tossing about all her pretty things.

“ I should not have gone in that old rumbling postchaise,” said Mary Grafter, “ *I* should have had a pretty open carriage if it had been me.”

“ Oh, I never was in a carriage in my life, only the coach !” cried Emmy Fox.

There were no railways then, and people used to travel in stage-coaches,—very nice for the boys who could get up outside, but not so pleasant for ladies and little girls, who were jumbled and rolled about within.

“ And *I* never was at Oldcastle !” said Alice Pounceby. Alice could not understand how anybody could have any pleasure which *she* never had.

“But we had Cæsar with us to take care of us,” said Alice; “Uncle James could not come himself, and he said Mamma was not to go; but Cæsar is such a merry fellow, and it is so funny to hear him speak. Do you know what he calls Uncle James? he calls him Massa! and he is never angry when any one laughs.”

“A black man—augh! I can't endure a black man,” cried Mary Grafter. “I would rather do without a servant than have a black one. Our Johnnie calls him a nigger. I wouldn't have him in our house, not for the whole world.”

“Then it is very naughty of you,” cried Agnes, growing very red. “Cæsar is just as good as all of us. It is not his fault he is black; the people are all black in his country, and God made them so; and he is *so* kind and *so* merry. I love him because he takes such care of Uncle James.”

“Do you love a servant? I wouldn't love a servant,” said Mary, again.

Some of the little girls stared very much when Mary said that; some had nurses whom they were

very fond of, but none of them spoke. When a person is bold and speaks out, the other people always give in to that one a little. This Mary Grafter was not a good girl; she thought it was like a lady to despise the servants; and even the little girls who felt quite differently yielded to her because she spoke out loud and was not afraid.

Now Agnes grew redder and redder while Mary spoke. Agnes was getting *so* angry in her own mind; for Mary had been mocking at all her pretty things, and trying to make nothing of her visit to Oldcastle, and aggravating the little girl. So Agnes spoke out quite loud—so loud that Miss Pounceby heard her at the other end of the room.

“You think it sounds grand to say so,” cried Agnes; “but it is not at all grand; it is mean and spiteful; I know it is! It is because Cæsar is *my* uncle’s man and not yours; and it is a great sin, besides,” said Agnes, stopping a little and speaking lower. “When our old Mary went away I cried, and so did Lucy; and Mamma cried a little too, and Mary did not want to go. She was almost as kind

to us as Mamma, when we were little ; and we would have been—oh, so unkind and bad and ungrateful if we had not loved her !”

“Then why did you send her away ?” said the spiteful Mary, who knew very well why.

Then Agnes stopped again before answering, and grew so red that her poor little cheeks burned and tingled, and the water came to her eyes. She could have cried, she was so vexed and hurt in her heart ; for Agnes had thought so much of Ardhm Hill and the great house, that she felt ashamed of being poor, and it was so very cruel of Mary to ask her why ; but Agnes was rather a brave little girl after all, when she was moved to it, and was determined in her own mind never to tell a lie.

“We sent her away because Papa was dead and we were poor—because Mamma could not afford to keep her any longer,” said Agnes. When the little girl had said these honest words, two big tears came tumbling out of her eyes, and she could not keep in a little sob.

Mary Grafter tried to laugh, but I think even

Mary was ashamed of herself; and the very moment she had spoken, Emmy Fox threw her arms round Agnes and kissed her, and was nearly crying too. When Emmy kissed her, Agnes felt quite happy, for she knew she had done right.

“Agnes Hopetoun is a very honest little girl,” said Miss Pounceby; “I don’t know any one so honest; she says what is true whether she likes or not; Agnes shall sit by me at tea. Come, children; and I hope no one will ask ill-natured questions, or try to make other people feel uncomfortable. Come and tell me about your journey to Oldcastle. I wish I had been you, you lucky little girl! Oh yes, Lucy told me about it, and Fred told me about it, and Arty told me about it, and Mamma told me about it,—everybody but Agnes! Come and let me know all that you did; but why did not Uncle James go with you himself?”

Agnes made a little pause this time again before she spoke. She was so pleased with being called honest, that she forgot that she had no right to tell stories of Uncle James: “Mamma says it is

because he is indolent," said Agnes, "and does not always do what he says."

Miss Pounceby laughed,—she laughed as if it were something very funny,—and Agnes was very much astonished,—for she did not think it at all funny that nobody could trust to Uncle James. "I shan't tell Agnes what I think of my neighbours," cried Miss Pounceby; "so Uncle James does not do what he says?—is there anything else that Uncle James has said without doing it? for I think it was very kind of him to give you such a nice holiday, and Alice thinks so too."

"Oh, Auntie! *I* never was at Oldcastle," said little Alice—she thought she ought to go now when Agnes had been.

"Uncle James is very kind to us all," said Lucy, who knew better than Agnes, and knew that Miss Pounceby ought not to ask a little girl about the family affairs; "he did not go to Oldcastle with us because he was not well, and he wished Agnes to spend her money all out of her own head."

“And I did!” said Agnes; “nobody told me what to buy.”

“Oh Agnes, weren’t you frightened!” cried Alice Pounceby.

“I shouldn’t have been frightened; because papa often gives me money,” said Mary Grafter.

“There, that will do; we will talk of something else,” said Miss Pounceby. “Willie, you must see that everybody is attended to at your end of the table, and Sarah must cut some more cake,—we have not half enough cake. Now, have you all got places? Willie must say grace, and we shall have tea.”

Miss Pounceby’s parlour was a great deal bigger than Mrs. Hopetoun’s, for it was all the breadth of the house, and the kitchen was built out from behind, which gave more room. There was a large long table in it, with chairs set on each side, where all the young people sat; they had tea downstairs, and then they were to go up to the drawing-room to dance and to play. Agnes sat quite close to Miss Pounceby at the head of the table. I think she would much rather have been between Lucy

and Emmy Fox, but she could not help herself. Agnes was very much afraid that Miss Pounceby would begin to laugh at her; but she was proud to be praised and sit at the head of the table. People are often proud of an honour which does not make them happy, and so it was with Agnes at Miss Pounceby's side.

"Now I think upon it, little girl," said Miss Pounceby, "you were very anxious once to be good for something; do you remember lying on the grass, looking up at the skies and wishing? *I* heard you. Now tell me what you are good for, Agnes? I suppose you have found out now."

"Oh no, indeed, Miss Pounceby!" cried Agnes with trouble in her voice.

"What, not yet! what an odd thing that is; it was quite summer then, before your Uncle came. Ah, I am afraid Uncle James has upset all your good thoughts—hasn't he, Agnes?" said Miss Pounceby.

Agnes was very much confused and did not know how to answer, and then all at once all her

old trouble came back to her mind; what was she good for? Oh dear, to think of a little girl whom God had made, who had a Bible and a kind mother, and a great many people teaching her, and yet she was not good for anything! Though it was a party, and Agnes had her white frock on, and meant to be very happy, she could not help getting quite sad when she thought of that.

“Oh, Miss Pounceby!” she said, “ought I to go home?”

“To go home? you little goose! what for?” cried Miss Pounceby, laughing.

“Because this is only amusing ourselves—it is not doing anything at all,” said Agnes; “oh, I do want to be good for something! Perhaps it is Uncle James,” said the honest little girl, thinking a little, “because there have been so many other things to think of since he came; but I have not been trying for a long time; oh, Miss Pounceby, what should I do?”

“Why, you must be good for something, Agnes,” said Miss Pounceby with another laugh.

For, you see, Miss Pounceby did not know how to be kind to people who had trouble on their minds. Agnes was quite serious—as grave as possible—but Miss Pounceby only laughed; she thought the little girl would forget it directly, and play with the rest, and was not in earnest at all; but that, you know, only showed that Miss Pounceby could not see the very least little bit of Agnes Hopetoun's heart. She got quite puzzled when Miss Pounceby laughed; it seemed so odd that anybody should laugh; and Agnes looked round at all the children, and wondered in her own mind what *they* were good for. For she was only a child, and she was not at all wise; little girls are not often wise, if we must tell the truth; and still Agnes kept thinking of being good for some one thing, as if she wanted to be a great man instead of a good child. There is a great difference. I do not think, if she had been very good at drawing, or at singing, or at knowing languages, that *that* would have made her a better girl; but her poor little head was all in a mist about it. She sat quiet by Miss Pounceby's side among

all the children, with a great many thoughts in her mind, sometimes remembering Mary who sat at Jesus' feet, and wondering how to sit still and listen and do nothing, was to be good for anything. I think Agnes learned to know better after a while; and I do not suppose that she would have had so many thoughts if she had been sitting between Lucy and Emmy Fox; but all by herself, beside Miss Pounceby, when Miss Pounceby stopped speaking, Agnes began to think.

But she did not lose the fun of the party for all that. When they went upstairs, and Agnes got among the other children, she danced and played blind-man's-buff like the rest, and enjoyed herself very much; but when they all went home, though it was only a step from Miss Pounceby's door to Mrs. Hopetoun's, Agnes, looking up just for that moment, saw the beautiful stars shining bright in the frosty sky, and felt the night wind quiet and low, but cold with winter, on her face, and grew serious again in a moment. But there was not a great deal of time to think that night—Mamma

would not let them even sit up long enough to talk of the party; she was afraid of Lucy and Agnes catching cold in their white frocks; and so that holiday, too, ended like every other holiday, and nothing remained of it but the thoughts in Agnes Hopetoun's heart.

CHAPTER XVI.

CHANGES.

I AM afraid you will all be very sorry to hear that after all Mrs. Hopetoun knew best, and that things turned out just as she said. Uncle James, who had not been at all comfortable in the little inn at Ardsley, got very nice lodgings at Mrs. Sutton's; a pretty sitting-room with a bow window, and a very pretty view from it; a nice cosy little dressing-room, where there were no draughts; and a sleeping-room within all, which was not quite so pretty to look at, but was very comfortable. Mrs. Sutton did not know anything about the house at Ardham Hill. Uncle James just suited her for a lodger, so she was very attentive to him, and made haste to get everything he thought of or wished for. She had easy-chairs put in every room on purpose for him; and in his sitting-room, one at the bow window, placed just

nically so that he could see everything in the village street, and one at the fire. Uncle James dropped into his place there, as if it had been made for him and he had lived there all his life. Every day, about two in the afternoon, he slid lazily out of his dressing-gown into a coat—nay, into three coats, for he felt the cold very much—and went up to his sister's, where he used to sit talking till his dinner-time, which was six o'clock; talking still about the great house, and looking quite interested when he heard of any place to let, and quite resolved to go and see after it immediately. But, in the meantime, though Mrs. Hopetoun's parlour was very much smaller than his own sitting-room at Mrs. Sutton's, Uncle James had got quite accustomed to it, and lounged back in Mamma's chair, rubbing his long, soft hands, and looked so pleased, and so kind, and so affectionate, that it was not possible to be angry with him. *He* never thought what great fancies he had raised in the minds of the young people, and how little he had done to carry them out. *He* believed in the great house after even Agnes had given up all thought of

it. It was quite one of Uncle James's pleasures to sit in Mrs. Hopetoun's chair, telling them all what they should do when they had "found a house." To hear him speak, you would have supposed that he spent all his time looking for that house, and that nowhere in the world were houses so very hard to find as in the neighbourhood of Ardsley.

Now, I am obliged to confess that this made all the Hopetouns rather dull, and took away their pleasure in their present life. The girls went to Miss Thomson's school rather unwillingly, always thinking of the other school which, perhaps, they were going to; and Fred became quite unsettled, not knowing whether he was to go to Mr. Settledon's office, or to his studies, as Uncle James had promised. Fred grew quite disheartened over his book-keeping, which Mamma would not let him give up, and began to hate the very idea of going to business, and became rather ill-tempered and unsettled. It was very wrong, but still it was natural. Fred could scarcely keep silent when Uncle James talked about all he was going to do. A hundred times in a day he was

ready to exclaim, "You do nothing but talk and make us sick of our life!" which, I fear, would have been quite true, though a wrong thing to say. And so it happened that their rich uncle, instead of doing them good, did them a great deal of harm. They had never been so discontented as they were in the early part of that winter before Christmas. Uncle James was very kind, he gave them all little presents very often, and sometimes had them to tea with him, and often took the girls and Arty out for a drive, and he had not the least idea how much harm he had done them in their own minds and hearts.

At last, one day a little before Christmas, Mamma put on her best dress, and went down, before dinner, to call on Uncle James. Mamma could not keep silent any longer; she saw the children so disheartened and unsettled, always looking for some change which never came, that she resolved not to let it go on. It was nearly one o'clock, but Uncle James was just having his breakfast; he looked so kind and so good-humoured that Mrs. Hopetoun almost felt ashamed to blame him—and she did not

blame him. When she sat down opposite to him, looking very serious and a little troubled, he grew so anxious and so kind. "Something is wrong, my dear sister," said Uncle James; "nothing very serious, surely—nothing that cannot be set right; come, tell me, and we'll have it mended at once."

That was his easy way of treating everything, as if a few words would set all the troubles in the world right.

"It is rather a serious matter to me," said Mrs. Hopetoun—and a little colour came to her cheek, for she had never asked anybody's help before, and did not like to do it now. "I wish to speak to you, James, about Fred. He was to have gone to Mr. Settledon's office in spring, you remember? I told you when we saw you first."

"But that is all over now," said Uncle James, rubbing his hands; "we quite understand all about that."

"You promised," said Mamma, "to help him on with his studies for the profession he has chosen; that is more than three months since, James. You must

forgive me; we are poor, and I cannot let Fred lose his time; unless you think of carrying out your kind intention, I must send him to Oldcastle, to the office, as we had decided before you came."

"Carry out my kind intention! of course I shall," said Uncle James; "I've been losing time, have I? I always did lose time, and always shall, I fear—you know that well enough. Is this serious face all to remind me of my old weakness, sister? I'm too old to mend."

"Yes, James; but my boy is too young to be unsettled and disheartened, waiting for a help that never may come," said Mamma.

When Uncle James heard that, he raised himself up in his chair, and grew rather red for a moment, as if he were half disposed to take offence. But he was too indolent even to take offence. The next moment he dropped back in his chair, and laughed and rubbed his hands. "That is a very hard hit," said Uncle James; "and it's a mistake; at fifteen Mr. Fred can very well afford to wait; he can't be village doctor for a year or two to come; however, you shall have it

your own way. Find out the best school that can be heard of, and send him without delay. If I have nothing to do with it, except the bills, we'll get along famously. Consult the Rector, who ought to know about all these sort of things, and send the poor boy off the next day after Christmas, if you like. Do it yourself, sister, and don't wait for me."

"I will," said Mrs. Hopetoun, "and thank you, James."

"Nay, don't thank me; to be free from the trouble is enough for me," said Uncle James. "Is this the way you treat a poor fellow who has nobody to take care of him? By-the-by, I'd see after the girls at the same time; let's send them all off, girls and boys—nay, by-the-way, not Arty; I'll leave that little Turk for my own amusement and yours; he's just the age to spoil, and we'll spoil him, eh, sister? to make up to ourselves for sending the others away?"

"We'll see about that," said Mamma; "but as for Lucy and Agnes——"

"Of course you'll miss them," said Uncle James,

yawning a little, "so shall I; but never mind, send them all away."

Mamma got up, a little angry with that yawn. "I shall make inquiries about Fred's school immediately," she said.

"And the other—I insist upon the other!" said Uncle James.

Mrs. Hopetoun kept thinking it over as she walked down the street. She rather grudged sending the girls away; she did not like parting with them all; and she thought that perhaps they might learn other things at home quite as important as music and drawing. But then she knew that they had both been thinking of it, and rather despised Miss Thomson's school in consequence. Mamma felt very anxious about this matter. She had a long talk with the Rector by himself in his study, and at last decided upon where to send Fred; but as to the girls, that was not so easy. She thought over that a little longer. At last, however, after two or three days all was settled. Lucy and Agnes, as well as Fred, were to leave home after the Christmas holidays,

and nobody was to be left with Mamma but Arty. There was great excitement in the house when this was known. Fred was only going about thirty miles off, to Dr. Rood's great school at Woodburn St. Mary, but Lucy and Agnes were to be sent to a ladies' school near London—near London! and the Rector's wife, Mrs. Oxenford, who was going to take her little niece there, offered to take charge of them. When they heard of this, Agnes and Lucy looked at each other too much excited to speak. It seemed too wonderful to believe, too strange to think of. Going near London—into London—where even Mamma had never been; and with Mrs. Oxenford, who was quite a great lady! The girls could scarcely think it true.

But after that everybody had to be very busy in Mrs. Hopetoun's. Miss Blane, the dressmaker, came in, and sat working for days over two dresses for the girls, and each of them got a pretty new trunk all to herself, and an outfit of everything,—“as if they were going to be married, instead of going to school,” said Miss Blane. You may suppose that the girls

were very much pleased with all their new things. They were always getting into corners together to talk of going away, and to tell each other what they would do at school; and when they went to bed, instead of going to sleep as all proper girls should do, these two lay awake talking so long into the night that Mrs. Hopetoun sometimes had to come into their room to make them be quiet and go to sleep. They were never done wondering what sort of a house it was; if Miss More was a nice lady; and whether there would be any very nice girls there; and each of them had quite a little picture in her own mind of Hyde House, where they were going, and of all the young ladies and the governesses. I don't know how it was that Lucy and Agnes, though they were always together, still found so much to talk about that they could lie awake chattering for an hour or more after they were in bed. I am sure I have not half so much to say to any one as these two had to say to each other, and would think it quite a trial to talk after I went to bed instead of going to sleep; but I think all you

girls are rather of Lucy and Agnes' mind than of mine.

Mamma sometimes lay awake too in these long winter nights, when the girls, snug and cosy in their white bed in the next room, lay whispering and laughing, and trying to smother their voices lest Mamma should hear them. Mrs. Hopetoun was not so cheerful as they were; she lay thinking in the dark about all her children, what they should do when they grew up, and whether Uncle James would continue to be kind to them, and a great many other serious matters; and I think very, very often prayed to their Father in heaven for her fatherless children, and that He would take care of them, and guide them when they were away from home. As for Fred, he had nobody to talk to in his little room below. He could not keep awake thinking like Mamma. He went off to sleep directly when he laid his head on the pillow, and never woke up till half-past six in the morning, when Jane knocked at his door; but that did not prevent him thinking a great deal, and talking a great deal, about going to his school and his

studies. He was always speaking of his profession now-a-days, and longing to be done with school, and old enough to go to college; and now none of the young people were discontented—they were all so busy thinking of where they were going, and what they had to do.

At last the day came when Agnes and Lucy were to go to Hyde House to Miss More's school. I told you there were no railways then. Mrs. Oxenford was a great lady in the village; but she was not very rich, and had to travel to London in the coach like poorer people. Her niece was a little girl from India, whom Lucy and Agnes had never seen; and Mrs. Oxenford engaged all the places in the inside of the coach for her own party. She had her maid with her besides the three little girls, and the coach drove up with its four horses on a cold January morning, when the sun was quite red in the sky, and a mist hanging over the river, and all the little pools on the road were as hard as iron with frost—straight up to Mrs. Hopetoun's door to take up Lucy and Agnes, who were all ready, with little fur tippetts on, and caps

under their bonnets, and the keys of both their trunks in Lucy's pocket. At the very last moment they were breaking their hearts about leaving Mamma. But Mrs. Hopetoun would not let them see she was sad. She kissed them, and cheered them up, and told them to be good, and always to remember home, and stood at the door with a smile upon her dear face and the tears in her eyes, while they were helped into the coach. When Agnes, who was crying like a baby, got out into the street, and felt the cold wind on her face, she looked up through her tears at the coach ready to cry out that she would not go—she could not leave Mamma—when suddenly she saw a little pale face looking down so anxiously upon her with such a wonder in the blue eyes, that she stopped crying all at once, and bade her Mamma good-bye almost quietly. It was Mrs. Oxenford's niece, little Annie Oxenford, the little girl who came from India, who was looking out from the window of the coach. *Her* mamma was thousands of miles off. She was thinking to herself that Agnes had not very much to cry for—she who could come home again for the holidays in summer ;

and it was that look in Annie's face that stopped Agnes' tears.

. When the coach was quite out of sight, Mamma went in to her own little parlour, shut the door, and, taking Arty on her knee, cried a little, quite quietly, when nobody could see her. For the room looked rather dismal now that all the other children were gone. But the coach went rattling over the frosty roads, and the red sunshine shone, and everything was new to Lucy and Agnes. I think they very soon dried all their tears.

CHAPTER XVII.

HYDE HOUSE.

I AM afraid it would take up too much time if I were to tell you exactly what sort of a place Hyde House was. It was a large house standing in a large garden with a high wall round it, and looking out from the front windows upon one of the roads leading out of London to the country. It was only about two miles from London, but it was quite a quiet place for all that, with plenty of trees on the hill above, and always a fresh breeze blowing on that high ground. The coach came in, to a place away in the midst of the city, where the children, tired and bewildered with the noise of the streets, followed Mrs. Oxenford into the inn, and were very glad to go to bed directly. Next morning they drove through endless streets, as they thought—shabby, noisy,

narrow streets—always wondering where the grand London was, till at last they came out upon that long road with trees and houses on each side, and stopped at the gate of Hyde House. Little Annie Oxenford walked first, holding fast by her aunt's hand, and behind came Lucy and Agnes, feeling rather frightened and lonely. They went through such a long hall with doors on each side, and at last were shown into a little room with a large window looking into the garden. Such a proper, particular, tidy, little room! looking as if it never was out of order all its life, and never could be,—with worked cushions, and worked footstools, and worked bell-ropes, and I cannot tell how many other things done by the young ladies. Mrs. Oxenford sat down and made Annie sit beside her, and whispered to her to cheer up and not to be afraid; but there was nobody to say anything to Lucy and Agnes. They kept hold of each other's hands and sat together upon a little sofa looking at the door and watching for Miss More to come in.

When Miss More came in at last, she was not at all like what they supposed she would be. She was

a very tall old lady, with hair as white as silver. She did not say anything to the children just at first, but she *looked* at them ; and after that look, I cannot tell how it was, but Agnes and Lucy felt almost as much comforted as if Mamma herself had been there. Mrs. Oxenford was a very good woman, but she was thinking of her own little niece and not of the others ; and when Miss More came in she began directly to talk about Annie,—she was not very strong, she wanted to be so much attended to,—you would have thought Miss More should have nothing to do but to take care of Annie, to hear Mrs. Oxenford speak.

“ And these young ladies,” said Miss More, at last ; “ are they delicate, too ? ”

Then Mrs. Oxenford recollected, and told Miss More about the Miss Hopetouns. There was not very much to be said about them. They were to learn *everything*, Uncle James had said ; and Miss More smiled to hear that, and promised to see what they could do, and what Annie could do ; and so at last they were left all by themselves while Mrs. Oxenford went to see the children’s rooms and the schoolroom

before she went away. Annie did not seem grieved to part with her aunt; she did not seem frightened to be in a new place. She kept looking at Lucy and Agnes with her grave little face, and yet she did not try to make acquaintance with them. She was a strange little girl.

“Oh, Lucy, I like Miss More!” cried Agnes, the moment they were by themselves.

“Do you like people all at once?” said Annie Oxenford.

Agnes did not quite know what to answer, for she was very much puzzled about this pale little girl. “Some people,” said Agnes, very slowly; “Miss More smiles like Mamma.”

“I don't remember my Mamma,” said Annie.

“But we never were away from home before,” said Lucy Hopetoun, “and everybody that looks kind looks like Mamma, I think. Were you only a baby when you came from India? Are you never going out to your Mamma again?”

“When I am big, perhaps,” said Annie; “or perhaps Mamma will come home. But I do not

know Mamma; and—I think—she would not know me.”

And tears came into the blue eyes: Annie did not cry, but her eyes got quite wet and full, as if her little heart were sad.

When Agnes saw that, she ran across to her and took her hand. “Your Mamma *will* know you; oh, I am sure she will!” cried Agnes. “Will you be our friend? Oh, don’t cry! Lucy shall take care of you and I will help you, and we will both love you as if you were our sister. Oh, don’t cry! we shall all be friends.”

But Annie drew back a little, with her serious face,—“Oh, please, I don’t know you yet,” said Annie.

Agnes ran back again to Lucy immediately, and grew very red and felt very angry; but just then Miss More came in, and one of the maids with her. The first thing they had to do was to go upstairs and take off their bonnets. Miss More thought they were all friends, so she had put them into the same room. It was a good-sized room, with three little white beds

ranged against the wall, and one larger one in the corner. Their trunks were all there already, and the maid got the keys to put their things away in the drawers. Just beside the large bed there was quite a litter of things, tumbled out of a small box, and a dress lying upon a chair. It was a long, big dress, like a grown-up person's. When the maid saw it, she turned round and made a little speech to the new girls.

“It's Miss Mellor,” said Sarah. “Now I just tell you, young ladies, you're not to take after her; she's the untidiest, and the carelessest, and the roughest young lady in all the school: she's always a-getting into one scrape or another. I can't think what made missis send new children to this room. You're not to give in to her, now, I tell you, or else you'll do no good here.”

After she had said this, Sarah hurried them all downstairs before they had time to say anything; and so they all entered Miss More's room again, little Annie with her serious face walking first, as grave and steady as if she had been their Mamma. How-

ever, Miss More took Lucy first, and asked about all she had been learning, and how far on she was, and made her read a little out of a French book, and try over an exercise upon the piano. And then she took Agnes. She drew her forward with a smile, almost as if she knew what a blundering, dreaming little girl she was, and said, "Well, my dear, and what do you know?"

"Oh, please—I cannot tell," said Agnes, in a great fright, holding down her head.

"Can you write very nicely?" said Miss More.

How do you think Agnes could answer that question? And so the governess went on, till it turned out that Agnes was not sure of being able to do anything except read; she knew she could read, as long and as much as anybody pleased.

"I will tell you what I ask you for," said Miss More; "it is because your Mamma has sent me word by Mrs. Oxenford that she would rather you learned something very well, than everything a little; and I am to find out what you can learn best. Are you very fond of music, Agnes?"

“No,” said Agnes under her breath, and feeling very much ashamed.

Miss More smiled again. “Perhaps you will know better one of these days,” she said; “you shall tell me again, before the next holidays. Well, then, are you very fond of drawing?—should you like to be able to sketch everything you saw, and draw pictures of your sister and your little friend? Did you ever try to draw pictures when you were at home?”

“No,” said Agnes again, feeling more and more naughty and ashamed. She had never tried to draw pictures; she had never tried to play, though she was ten years old; she was not fond of either the one or the other. She thought to herself Miss More would think her a dunce, and stupid; and her cheeks grew so red with shame, that they quite burned—but still Agnes told the truth.

“Then, what *are* you fond of?” said Miss More, at last, with another smile.

Poor little Agnes! she stood thinking and thinking and thinking, and could not make anything of it. Oh, what was she good for! The tears came to her

eyes, and her cheeks burned more than ever. She was not fond of figures and arithmetic, she was sure ; and she durst not say she was fond of needlework. What *was* she good for? Agnes grew quite dumb and bewildered as she stood at Miss More's knee ; her very head began to ache, she was so puzzled and distressed ; and all the time Annie Oxenford kept looking at her with her quiet blue eyes.

At last Lucy, who could not bear that Miss More should think her sister stupid, came forward beside her. " She is very fond of reading," said Lucy, and stood waiting to see if that would do Agnes any good. Agnes looked up a little at that. " Oh, I am fond of reading," said poor little Agnes ; " but only because I like books." She ended with quite a little sob ; she had never been so much ashamed of herself all her life.

" That will do," said Miss More—and when Agnes ventured to look up, she found that the old lady was not angry ; " now, I will tell you what you shall do. You shall have as many books as you please, and read them all if you like—delightful books, the best

that ever were written—but they shall be in all sorts of languages, Agnes : French, and German, and Italian, and perhaps Latin too. Do you like grammar as well as reading? I suppose that is too much to expect?”

“ Oh no, please Miss More, not at all,” cried Agnes.

“ Very well,” said Miss More quite quietly ; “ there is a lesson for you all at once, you see. For the sake of the books which you are fond of, you must put up with the grammar, which you don't like. One must always do so, Agnes. First there is the disagreeable thing, and then the pleasant. You must learn the grammar, and then you shall read the books. I think I know how to answer your Mamma now.”

Then Agnes had to sit down while little Annie was examined. Annie had been watching all the time, and did not know what to think of this. Annie, I think, was not fond of anything. She had never been with anybody who loved her very much ; and she had been delicate, and always had to take

care, and never had been roused up to forget her own little self. She had learned a little of everything, like all the other children; but she did not care a bit about any of her lessons. I think she answered Miss More's questions a great deal better than Agnes did; but all the time she was thinking of what she had heard. While she was thinking, a little colour came to her pale little face; it was only with wondering over what Agnes and what Miss More had said. And Annie began to think that she would like to be great friends with the Miss Hopetouns now.

Presently they all went into the large school-room where all the girls were—I think nearly twenty girls—some of them quite tall, grown-up young ladies, some of them less than Annie. There was a French governess, and two English teachers—for Miss More did not teach herself—and another lady, who taught drawing and music under the masters, and took care of the practising. The new girls were quite confused at first, and did not know where to sit, or how to stand, or to which classes they were to belong; but Miss More set them right directly about that. The worst

was that she separated them, and set Lucy in one class, and Agnes in another, and Annie, though she was nearly as old as Agnes, quite down among the little ones; so they could not get whispering together, as I think they would have liked to do. However, by and by they all got out into the garden where the little ones played, and the big girls walked about two-and-two talking. They all had so much to talk about!—secrets too!—and kept laughing and whispering to each other as if it was the greatest fun in the world. I wonder very much what you get to talk of, all you girls at school.

“ Oh, Lucy! I wonder which is Miss Mellor?” said Agnes, as they stood together near the door watching all the other girls whom they scarcely liked to talk to. Lucy was looking out very anxiously too, but she shook her head, and could not guess which it was.

“ Will it be that big young lady yonder with the dark hair, I wonder?” said Agnes; when all at once some one seized her behind by the shoulders, and swung her aside with such a great laugh:—

“ Which of you is coming to sleep in my room ? ” cried a voice. “ I’ll torment you to death, you little girls. I’ll pinch you, and put pins in your bed, do you hear ? You shall never get any rest at night, nor any comfort in the morning. Go directly and tell Miss More you won’t sleep in the same room with me. Only think ! my room is to be the nursery, and hold all the little ones. I am not going to stand it ! I’ll get up a revolution ! Tell her you’ve heard of Mary Mellor at home, and you daren’t for your life sleep beside her. Do you hear ? ”

Half-frightened at first, Agnes looked up. Miss Mellor was tall and big, with a pretty, bright-eyed, flushed face, and thick, long, light-brown hair, which was always out of order ; her collar was awry, the cord and tassels that fastened her apron hung down in front, and the apron itself was behind, and it was quite easy to see when you looked at her that this was, as Sarah said, “ the carelessst, untidiest young lady in the whole school.” But then she looked so fresh and merry and good-natured ; though she was such a romp, one could not help liking her.

Agnes, after another moment, laughed and looked at her quite boldly. "I am not afraid of you!" said Agnes. Miss Mellor laughed too—rather too loudly for a lady. She seized Agnes in her strong arms and carried her off like a baby, and set her up in a high swing which hung between two trees. There she and one of her companions swung Agnes over the heads of the rest till the little girl was quite giddy and ill. Agnes cried, and begged to be taken down, and so did Lucy; but the big girls laughed, and kept swinging her till they were tired. Then Miss Mellor jumped Agnes down as roughly as if it had been a fall. "Now go and tell Miss More!" cried she, and all the other girls laughed and followed her. This was not a very pleasant beginning for the little Hopetouns. Agnes felt quite sick and dizzy, and could not stand; and Lucy was near crying with vexation, but would not yield to do so before the other girls. Nobody came to them just then, except little Annie Oxenford, who came close up to Agnes and stood by her, but did not say anything.

“Let us go in, Lucy,” said Agnes; and they went to sit at the school-room fire, little Annie following them. There they all laid their heads together and consulted what they should do: “I shall not tell Miss More; I am not afraid of her,” said Agnes. “Mamma said we were not to tell tales; I will not go to Miss More.”

“But she will put pins in our beds,” said little Annie, with such a sigh! The little girl did not look frightened, but quite serious and quiet as usual. “If she does—I do not mind for telling tales—I will tell Miss More.”

That was the first adventure they met with at Miss More’s school.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN EVENT.

BEFORE evening the girls had made some new acquaintances in the school. There was one little girl who came from India like Annie Oxenford, and made friends with Annie; but Annie, though she had not made any answer to Agnes Hopetoun's offer to be her friend, still kept very close to Lucy and Agnes, and seemed most happy when she was with them. Little Edith Lindsay, the other little Indian girl, came whispering up to them to talk about Miss Mellor. Oh she was so frightened for Miss Mellor; she would not for all the world sleep in Miss Mellor's room; she was quite sure they would come to some harm. She said so much about it, that at last the three new girls grew half-frightened too; at least Agnes and Annie did, though Lucy, who was twelve, and

a big girl herself, only smiled, and said Miss Mellor was not so very old, and she was not afraid.

However, it is all very easy to say one is not afraid when it is daylight and everybody is up; but when one has crept into bed, and lies down pretending to be asleep, knowing of a great mischievous girl who is coming into the same room to play tricks, one does not feel quite so comfortable. They had another talk about it before they went to bed.

“I think this is not a nice school,” said Annie Oxenford. “I think we should all write home and ask to come away.”

“Oh, I like Miss More,” cried Agnes.

“I dare say there is somebody who is mischievous and rough in every school,” said Lucy; “we ought not to give up till we have tried. I think Miss Mellor will soon give up being unkind to us.”

“Oh, Lucy! do you think she’s our enemy?” cried Agnes.

Now, you know, Lucy was very sensible—she laughed at that. “It is grown-up people who have enemies,” she said.

“What does an enemy mean?” asked Annie Oxenford.

“It is some one who wishes to do us harm. Miss Mellor does not wish to hurt us; she only thinks it is fun because we are not so big as she is. If we are good-humoured and don't get angry, she will very soon be tired of it,” said Lucy, “and then perhaps we shall be quite good friends.”

“I don't think I could ever be quite good friends,” said Agnes; then she stopped a little and thought of Miss Mellor's face. “I don't think she is cruel after all,” said Agnes again. “I'll be good-tempered, Lucy, I will indeed; she shan't make me angry; and I think, perhaps, I do like her a little after all.”

So they lay down; a little after two of them fell asleep, but Agnes was thinking too much to sleep. The big girls sat up later than the little ones, and Lucy and Annie had been fast asleep for half an hour, when Agnes saw a little line of light stealing in beneath the door, and heard some steps in the passage. She shut her eyes in a great fright, quite terrified to think that Miss Mellor was coming, and

tried with all her might to breathe quietly, and look as if she were asleep; but she kept one of her eyes a little open for all that, just to see what was coming. Miss Mellor came in with another big girl, who was one of her companions; they were almost quite grown up, both of them; they had both candles, and shut the door very softly, as if they did not want it to be heard. The first thing Miss Mellor did, was to step straight to the foot of the little beds, and throw the light of her candle full into the faces of the three little girls.

“Isn't it disgusting?” she said.

“Disgusting!” cried her companion; “pull them out of bed. But then they'd go right off and tell that horrid old More.”

Miss Mellor kept looking at them with her candle in her hand—the three little heads in their little white night-caps, resting on the three white pillows; Lucy rosy, Annie pale, and Agnes, between fright and anger, changing her colour from white to red, so that it was quite a wonder she was not found out. “Little plagues!” said Miss Mellor; “but they

look rather pretty just now ; and that little one did not tell after all. Here ! I'll play them an innocent trick, Amelia ; their clothes—let us hide them all, quick ! under this old ottoman ; there's nothing in it but rubbish. I'll tell them it has not been opened for years. Only fancy how they will look in the morning when all their things are gone ! ”

Only fancy how Agnes felt hearing all that ! The big girls pounced upon the three little piles of clothes, laughing so much under their breath that the room quite shook with it. Then Agnes heard the lid of the ottoman close ; and then Miss Mellor flounced down upon it with all her wide skirts spread round her, and her friend set her candle on the floor, and sat down beside it, and they began to talk. Agnes could not understand the half of what they talked about, and she was dreadfully frightened for fear they should find her out, and shocked at herself for listening ; but though she tried with all her might, she could not go to sleep. The two big girls were talking as Agnes had never heard anybody talk ; first about a book they were reading ; then about

some people they met in their walks, and somebody who Amelia said was "in love with" Miss Mellor. Miss Mellor contradicted her and said "No, no," but went on talking about that such a long time, and laughing, and always coming back to it; and how he used to visit somebody in a house which looked over the garden wall, and how he was always near the door or on the road when the school went out to walk. Agnes could not understand this at all, but wondered over it very much while she lay, keeping quite still for fear, and trying very hard to go to sleep.

"Oh, Amelia, if Miss More were to find it out! I should never dare look at her again, though I don't believe a word of all you say," said Miss Mellor; "but if Miss More finds out about that window, I'll run away."

"I wish I were you; I should run away too," said Amelia; "but I know other girls that have had friends come there, and Miss More never found them out. She never looks up to see anything, and she always trusts you. I heard her say something once

about you ; I did so laugh all to myself when I heard it—if she only knew !”

“ What did she say ?” asked Miss Mellor.

“ She said, ‘ Mary’s a great romp, but she will never deceive me ;’ wasn’t it fun ?” said Amelia.

“ And who said I was likely to deceive her ?” asked Miss Mellor again.

“ Oh, it was Miss Morton ; she is always spying out something. You remember the fair-haired one you used to call Strephon, who was always passing us while we were walking ; it was about him.”

Agnes could not see how red Mary Mellor’s cheeks were, but she heard her rise up in her noisy way from the ottoman. “ Oh, listen ; there’s somebody coming ; run, Amelia !” she said, as some steps sounded far off on the stairs ; and Amelia snatched up her candle and went off stealing on tiptoe. Now Miss Mellor, I think without remembering anything about the little girls this time, came and leaned on Agnes’ bed. Her face was quite crimson with shame and vexation. I think she could not bear to remember what she had heard, but still she could not help

thinking of it; she was only thoughtless, she was not a bad girl. She stood there thinking it over with such a troubled face; at last she darted away and began to fling the things about and get ready for bed, making a litter all round her, upon the chairs and the floor and everywhere.

Agnes was quite thankful when she put out the candle and was still for a little—but she was not *very* still for a long time. She kept turning about and making a noise long after all was dark, so that Agnes could scarcely get to sleep. The little girl did not know what was passing in the big girl's mind; but I think, after hearing that conversation between Miss Mellor and Amelia, I could tell you. Mary Mellor was ashamed of herself—ashamed all at once to think how wrong and unwomanly it was to make a sort of acquaintance with the people at that window which overlooked the garden, and to smile and recognise them when the school went out to walk; and ashamed, above all, to think that Miss More had said she trusted her. Perhaps the very sight of those three little girls all sleeping in their little beds, had

something to do with it. Mary Mellor could not endure herself that night; she knew she had deceived Miss More, and deserved nothing but to be found out, and that was why she could not sleep.

Annie Oxenford woke up first of all in the morning. It was January, and very cold, and this little girl was delicate and afraid of the chill. She looked all round her in the half-light, for it was not quite day, and could not see her clothes anywhere. Then a bell began to ring, and Lucy jumped up—Lucy was not afraid of the cold—she jumped up and began to search about with the greatest astonishment. Agnes had been so late of going to sleep, that she did not wake early; and Miss Mellor lay looking out of her bed, laughing and pretending to be so surprised! Lucy ran about everywhere in her white night-gown. Where were all the things? Poor little Annie Oxenford began to cry—she was very cold and miserable and angry; her teeth chattered and her little pale face grew blue, and she felt in her mind as if she hated Miss Mellor; for Annie felt sure *she* had done it. All this time Miss Mellor

leaned out of her bed laughing. "I wonder if they are below the table—I wonder if they are up the chimney," cried Miss Mellor. "What if a robber has been here and taken them all away!"

At the sound of her voice Agnes woke; as soon as she saw how Lucy was running about the room looking in every corner, Agnes recollected immediately. She sprang up and ran to the ottoman, where Miss Mellor's dress was lying; but Miss Mellor called out to her so loud, that Agnes quite started away.

"No one ever opens that ottoman—it belongs to Miss More—there's nothing there; do you hear, little girls?" cried Miss Mellor.

Agnes turned round and went right up to Miss Mellor's bed, her eyes shining and her cheeks burning; "Oh, Miss Mellor!" cried Agnes, "are you not afraid to tell a lie?"

"You little chit!" cried the young lady, springing up; "how dare you speak so to me?"

"Because I saw you last night," said Agnes; "and I don't mind what you do if it's only fun. We all

made up our minds we would not be ill-tempered, whatever you might do. But you are older than we are—almost a grown-up lady. Why do you say what is not true?"

"Never mind, Agnes; here are the things," said Lucy.

So Agnes drew back directly, and they all dressed themselves. Miss Mellor did not say anything, but kept quite still looking at them. I don't think now that she felt very pleased with herself; instead of laughing at them, they could all have laughed at her now if they had been inclined. But Annie Oxenford was very angry; and as for Agnes and Lucy, they had resolved in their own minds not to be ill-tempered, so they neither laughed nor spoke, but dressed themselves very quickly that they might go downstairs. When they were all ready Miss Mellor stretched out of bed and caught hold of Agnes: "Run off, the rest of you," she said; "I want to talk to *her*." Lucy did not half like leaving Agnes, but Annie Oxenford pulled her away.

"Now stand still, I won't hurt you," said Miss

Mellor ; “you’re a strange little thing, but I’ll not tease you any more. Here, I want to talk to you. Did you listen to us talking last night ; what did we say ?”

“I did not want to hear what you said,” said Agnes.

“Answer me properly,” cried Miss Mellor ; “what did we say ?”

“Oh, something about a window and deceiving Miss More : I did not understand it,” said Agnes.

“Let me go.”

“Something about a window ; I wonder what window it could be,” said the young lady, looking very closely in Agnes’ face.

But indeed Agnes did not know. Agnes, who was little, did not think what the big girls meant ; she was not curious about their secrets. She said, “I don’t know, indeed ; I don’t want to know. Please let me go downstairs.”

“You’ll go and tell Miss More ; but I don’t care,” said Miss Mellor, flinging herself out of bed.

“I will not go and tell,” said Agnes, very indig-

nantly ; " but if I were a great, big, grown-up young lady like you, I never would do anything that Miss More mightn't know."

" Run away, little girl," cried Miss Mellor, with a laugh. Agnes was very thankful to run away ; she did not think of it very much after she escaped to the nice cheerful fire downstairs, where all the girls were gathering for prayers. Miss Mellor was not ready for prayers ; she was too late even for breakfast ; but Agnes did not care for Miss Mellor now. She knew she had not done wrong herself, and she did not think it needful for her to take care of a grown-up big girl.

But little Annie Oxenford's pale face was glowing with anger ; she stamped her little foot, and clenched her hands, and said she *hated* Miss Mellor. I think that was very wrong of Annie, but then this little girl was very much vexed and offended. She wanted to punish everybody that troubled herself. However, Lucy and Agnes persuaded her not to tell Miss More.

And Lucy turned out to be right after all. Miss Mellor grew tired of teasing them directly ; she did

not hide their clothes again, and never put pins in their bed. For the truth was, she was too much taken up with her own affairs to mind them. Every time she went out now, she was terrified lest Miss More should see the young gentleman who used to meet the girls, and smile and nod to Amelia. Mary Mellor did not know anything nor care anything about him; she only thought it was fun; but she spent every day in terror now, lest Miss More should find it out—Miss More who trusted her! She scarcely ever went out to the garden when the others did, and never looked up at that window. She was but sixteen, though she was so tall. She thought a great deal more about this than she ought to have done. She thought she never should dare to look Miss More in the face again, if it were found out.

CHAPTER XIX.

MARY MELLOR.

WHEN the girls had been a few days at school they began to know the other young ladies, and were no longer frightened. Lucy was not a timid girl naturally, and she got on very well with the others from the first. And Agnes was very clever at her lessons, and soon began to like the school. But all the girls had something to say about Miss Mellor. They all wondered at her, and talked about her; some of them liked her, some of them could not bear her; there were all sorts of stories about this big girl. She did not trouble them in her room now, but took a great fancy to Agnes, which was rather tiresome sometimes. She took Agnes on her knee and talked to her as if she were quite a child; then she would begin to tell her of what she would do when she left

school, the balls and the parties she should go to, and the partners she should have, and promised that Agnes should be one of her bridesmaids when she got married. All this was very puzzling to a little girl of ten years old, whose thoughts were running upon her French grammar. But for all that, Agnes soon grew very proud of being Miss Mellor's favourite, and used to help her to dress, and wait for her often till she herself was late for prayers. But all this time Annie Oxenford could not bear her. I am afraid Annie was not a good girl; she kept on the watch to find out when Miss Mellor did something very wrong, that she might tell Miss More. Watching Miss Mellor did Annie a great deal of harm; sometimes I am afraid she listened when Miss Mellor did not know she was there, and was always ready to notice anything she did.

I will tell you now who this young lady was. She was so unfortunate as to be an orphan and an heiress. She had an estate, and a great house, and a great deal of money, that were all her own; and she had neither father nor mother, brother nor sister. Poor

girl! nobody had ever loved her much, but the servants and people about her had flattered her and let her do whatever she liked, because she was rich. So she had grown careless and rude and untidy, all because she was an heiress, and people told her that it did not matter what she did. She was very kind-hearted in her way; she used to give her favourites presents, and never could pass a beggar without throwing him something; but she was very rude to people whom she did not like, or who crossed her will, as we have seen. She never would take the trouble to learn anything, so she could not amuse nor occupy herself; and when she had nobody to talk to, and could not persuade the housemaid to fetch her a book out of the circulating library, she either flew about everywhere doing all sorts of mischief, or else she shut herself up in her own room and grew low-spirited and melancholy. Poor girl! she wanted to be always excited and kept in constant amusement, and so it was that she thought it good fun to smile at the young man who stood by the road-side every day when the school passed, and to

wave her hand to him when he came to that window which overlooked the garden. For a long time after that conversation with Amelia when she heard that Miss More trusted her, Mary was very firm and would not take any notice of the stranger; but by and by she forgot about that, and thought it "only fun" again. Once Agnes and Lucy saw Amelia and Mary in the garden: they were talking and laughing loud and running among the garden paths like wild creatures, pretending that they thought nobody saw them; then they would come close together and walk arm-in-arm and whisper to each other, and glance up at *that* window. Lucy and Agnes did not know what to think of it; they felt sure it must be wrong.

"Oh, I heard Amelia say somebody was in love with Miss Mellor," said Agnes. "Do you think, Lucy, it can be true?"

"I do not think we have anything to do with it," said Lucy; "but I am quite sure it is not right."

"Oh, but Lucy! Mary read me a book the other day about a gentleman who fell in love with a

young lady at school, and at last they were married," said Agnes. "Suppose Mary should be married! wouldn't it be fun? I am to be her bridesmaid."

"I don't think anybody could love Mary all in secret, and not tell Miss More. Miss More is instead of her Mamma," said Lucy; "and I don't think it is like ladies to whisper and laugh so, and look up at a window. Oh, I don't know, she is older than we are; but I am quite sure it is wrong."

Agnes followed Lucy in very quietly—the little girl did not know what to think—but somehow it made her ashamed in her own mind to see Mary, whom she began to grow very fond of, walking about so in the garden, and some people up above at that window overlooking her all the time. Agnes felt quite sad and sorry—she was not old enough to know about it properly—but she knew it made her feel ashamed for Mary's sake.

That very evening, Agnes was leaving Miss More's room, where she had gone with a message from Miss Morton, the English teacher, when Annie Oxenford ran against her in the passage. Instead of

being pale as usual, Annie was quite red and flushed. She caught Agnes' hand as she passed: "Oh, I found Miss Mellor in the garden, talking to some one: I'm going to tell Miss More," cried Annie, with a flush of excitement, rushing past. Agnes was startled for the moment, and did not know what to do. At last, feeling the cold night wind from an open door somewhere, she ran as fast as she could, so that no one should hear her, into the garden. It was quite dark—she could not tell where to look for Mary, for she could see nothing but the black branches of the nearest trees, and the swing dangling between them. She listened in great anxiety and trouble, terrified to hear Miss More following her—where could Mary be?

At last the sound of whispering voices guided Agnes. I think if her little heart had not been beating so, she would have been afraid to rush away out into those dark dark paths, among the trees and the bushes; but she never stopped to think—she ran out, striking against the cold branches, to find Mary. She had not gone far when she came suddenly upon

her, behind the great old yew tree. There was a man standing beside her, who was urging her to do something, while poor Mary stood crying and wringing her hands, and saying, "No, no, no, she never meant anything—he was to go away!" Agnes rushed upon her friend without a word of warning, and clasped her arms round her waist. Mary gave such a start that all the tree shook, and a little cry; and some one else who stood at a little distance ran away behind another tree; and then the gentleman caught hold of Mary's arm, and called to her to fly.

"Miss More knows," said Agnes, when she had got her breath; "some one has told Miss More—she is coming here. Oh, Mary! come and tell her yourself! don't run away! She is coming; come and meet her, and tell her you have been wrong!"

The other figure, which had disappeared, came out again from behind the tree. "Run, Mary, run! there's time to get off yet," cried the voice of Amelia. "Mr. Howard, take her away!"

"Come! there is not a moment to lose; the car-

riage is just outside," said the gentleman, trying to draw her along by her arm.

But Agnes held her fast round the waist. "Miss More's coming here," cried Agnes, "to find you—Mary, Mary! come and meet her, and tell her you are wrong!"

It was hardly possible to say which of the two Mary Mellor would have done, when suddenly the light of a lantern came gleaming along the path, with some one behind. She turned her face away from the stranger, and turning round stood quite still, holding those little hands of Agnes' which were clasped round her waist. Amelia disappeared again in the darkness, behind the trees. The gentleman hurried away, but not soon enough to escape the light of Miss More's lantern, which flashed upon him, and the call of Miss More's voice, which bade him stay. He stopped quite short when the old lady commanded him, and that was how they were all standing when Miss More came up.

Mary Mellor did not speak a word—she stood with her head bent down in the darkness, without trying

to hide herself. Miss More stopped, and looked at her for a moment. "Mary," she said, quite softly and tenderly, "go in and wait for me in my room." Then, all dark and silent as it was, you could have heard Mary Mellor sob a great deep sob out of her heart.

She did not say a word, but turned round, with Agnes still clinging to her, and disappeared among the bushes, going to the house. Amelia, who was hiding behind the tree, and who was not a bit touched by Miss More's voice, stretched out her neck to watch Mary. Amelia felt sure *she* would not go to Miss More's room to be lectured—she thought even then that Mary would run away.

Then Miss More lifted up her lantern to his face, and talked to the gentleman. You shall hear afterwards who he was. Miss More made him tell, or said she would send him to prison for it—and he confessed that it was all a rick, and that he had done it because Mary was an heiress; but we need not trouble to think about this fellow, who stole away at last out of the gate, very differently from his

expectations. Let us go after Mary and Agnes, to Miss More's room.

That quiet, still, nice little room, which never could be out of order! The fire was burning, the candles were lighted, and there lay Miss More's work and her book on the table. I think when Mary Mellor entered that room she felt more ashamed than she had done yet, and kept fast hold of Agnes, as if to protect herself. But there was some one already there—Annie Oxenford, her cheeks still burning red, and her blue eyes shining, almost glaring at them as they came in. Annie did not look like herself at all; she was trembling with passion and anxiety—she cried out when she saw Mary come in, as if she had been cheated somehow. She wanted to have seen Mary punished, hurt, shamed; and when she saw her come softly in, she felt as if she had been deceived.

And there they had all to wait a long time for Miss More. No one said a word. They sat at opposite sides of the room, Agnes and Annie looking at each other—Miss Mellor taking no notice of

either of them, and not a sound to be heard but the soft ticking of the timepiece, and the ashes falling on the hearth. It seemed a whole hour or more before Miss More came in. When she did come at last, she had her shawl over her head, to keep her from the cold, and such a troubled look upon her face. The first one she spoke to was Annie—she turned to her the moment she came into the room. “Miss Oxenford,” she said, so coldly and gravely, “you will be good enough to wait in the school-room till I am ready for you.” Annie got up in a great hurry, and went away, looking very much astonished. She had expected to be praised and rewarded, while the others were punished. She could not understand it at all.

“I wish to know,” said Miss More, when she was gone, “whether Agnes Hopetoun has had anything to do with this business: tell me at once—I am waiting to know.”

When Agnes heard that question she started half up, but would not answer a word. It was dreadful to have Miss More think ill of her—but she could

not desert Mary when there was nobody else to stand by her. Agnes could not speak.

“Oh, Miss More, I don't deserve you should let me speak ; but listen !” cried Mary Mellor. “Agnes has saved me ! she came and begged me to tell you ; I would have come if there had been time. Agnes has nothing to do with any wrong—she came to save me !”

“I am very glad to hear it,” said Miss More ; “but why, I wonder, did you need to be saved ? you, a woman, by such a child. Oh, Mary, I trusted you ! must I never trust you again ?”

Mary sprang up, put Agnes away from her, and threw herself down at Miss More's feet : “I have done wrong, but I am not so bad as you think,” she cried, with sobs and tears. “I meant no harm ; I never thought of anything like this ; I listened when they talked about him ; I saw him when we went out to walk ; but I never, never, never said he was to come here. I never spoke to him before in all my life.”

“Who talked of him ?” asked Miss More, in her serious voice.

Mary made no answer; she leaned upon Miss More's knee and hid her face, and cried. "It was Amelia," cried out Agnes. Agnes knew no reason why *she* should not tell, and I am afraid she disliked Amelia almost as much as Annie disliked Miss Mellor. But there were two or three Amelias in the school.

"I know who it was," said Miss More, quietly; "will *you* tell me, Mary?"

Mary never looked up to see Miss More's face. "It was my own fault," she said; "I thought it was only fun. He supposed I was pleased and that I cared for him; but *I* never would have suffered him to come," cried Mary, suddenly lifting her head. "I could have died with shame when I saw him there. It was only something to laugh at—something to talk of—oh, Miss More, do you believe me? I could have died when I saw him there!"

"I believe you, Mary," said Miss More, quite sadly; "you are very young—a woman—a lady; and I have tried to keep you innocent and delicate of mind, as gentlewomen ought to be. But, Mary, only

for something to laugh at—something to talk about, you have placed yourself in such a position as this.”

Agnes could not bear to hear Mary crying—could not bear to see any one look at her so. She cried, “Oh, Miss More, she did not mean it!” out of her full heart. Then Miss More did what she had never done before—she stooped down and kissed Agnes. “My dear child, leave us,” she said; “I have more to say to Mary than you can hear; go to the school-room and wait for me.”

CHAPTER XX.

THE SCHOOLROOM.

THE schoolroom was a large long room covered with a carpet so worn with many feet that you could scarcely tell what its colours were. The girls might go there if they pleased, to learn their lessons in the evening, but that night so few were there that there was no light in the room except the light of the fire. Most of the girls were in the dining-room, where they had their meals, with Miss Morton, the English teacher. I think they had been playing and making a noise in the schoolroom, and were not allowed to stay any longer. When Agnes went in, as she did, breathless with excitement and wonder, Annie Oxenford was standing quite at the other end of the room, leaning upon the high fender and gazing into the fire. The fire was bright, and the warm light

flickered over all the room, and the cold, frosty stars looked in at the windows, for the blinds were not drawn down. Two little girls were in a corner whispering over something, and Annie Oxenford stood all alone by herself, scorching her face over the fire.

Agnes went up and stood beside her without saying anything. Agnes was disappointed to be sent away from Miss More's room and very anxious about Mary, and could not help wondering very much to herself what Miss More would say to Annie Oxenford. So she too stood by the fender and gazed into the fire, looking very serious and thoughtful; but she was not angry, and eager, and passionate, like the other little girl.

"Will you tell me what is going to be done to her?" asked Annie; "is she to be sent away?"

"Sent away?" Agnes quite stared at her; she did not understand what she could mean.

"Oh, you are her friend because she makes a favourite of you!" cried Annie; "you like her better than your own sister; it is mean of you; it is because she gave you a present—because she is rich!"

"She never gave me any present," said Agnes; "I like her because she is kind to me; but oh, it is a great story! I do not love her half so well as I love Lucy; I do not know what you mean."

"I know if she does not go away she will *kill* me. I told Miss More of her," said Annie, "for I never liked her, and I will never pretend to like her. I am not changeable like some people. You said you were to be my friend when we first came here; but you are *her* friend now, and not mine."

"She is a grown-up young lady—she is not like us," cried Agnes, in great astonishment. "I am as much your friend as though Miss Mellor were not here. Why don't you like her? She is very kind *now*, and she never did anything to you more than to the rest of us; but you would like to have her sent away!"

"I *hate* her!" said poor little Annie, and began to cry—not because she was sorry; because she was so angry and unhappy and vexed, that she could not help it. Her tears were all tears of passion; and Agnes stood looking on very sorry, very quiet, not

able to say anything, wishing very much in her own mind that Miss More was here.

I think, of all who were concerned in the adventure of this night, Annie Oxenford was the most unhappy. To be sure, Miss Mellor was very wrong, and was nearly breaking her heart with shame and distress ; but then, Miss Mellor had not intended to hurt anybody, and indeed did not mean to be nearly so foolish and wrong as she appeared. But Annie did her sin of purpose and intention, wishing to return evil for evil—which makes a great difference. Annie wanted to revenge herself and punish Miss Mellor ; but she punished herself in the first place, for she was so unhappy and wretched with her unkind thoughts that she could scarcely endure herself.

Miss More did not come in for some time longer ; when she did come, she did not bring any light with her, but drew a chair towards the fire, and sat down close to where Annie was standing. Miss More did not smile at either of them—she looked very serious ; neither did she call Annie by her christian name, which showed at once that she was very much displeased.

“Miss Oxenford,” she said, “tell me why you came to-night to let me know where Miss Mellor was?”

Annie made an attempt to keep quiet, and answer softly; but she could not, she burst out before ever she was aware, crying, and speaking fast in her passion. “Because she is cruel to us!” cried Annie, “because she plays us tricks and despises us, and does not want us to sleep in her room. Oh, I can’t help it, please! I don’t like Miss Mellor! She is cross to all the little girls!”

Miss More did not take any notice of Annie’s crying. She kept quite still, looking so serious, that Agnes was frightened, and she did not speak till Annie’s sobs were over. “So then,” she said, “it was not because Miss Mellor was doing wrong, nor because you wanted to save her, nor because I ought to know—but only for revenge; is that what you mean to say?”

But Annie did not say anything—she only cried.

“Poor little girl!” said Miss More, “you have done Mary Mellor good, and you might have had the

comfort of that, had you done it in a good spirit; but you meant to harm her, and you have only made yourself unhappy. Tell me what Miss Mellor did to you, to make you dislike her so?"

Annie made a pause then and stopped her crying; and was not willing to say any more; but Miss More asked her again, so that she was obliged to answer. For, to tell the truth, when Annie came to think of it, she could not remember anything very cruel that Miss Mellor had done.

"She stole away our clothes—and she said we were not to sleep there—and she told a fib—and she made Agnes Hopetoun quite ill the first day with swinging her," said Annie, dropping the words out of her mouth one by one. "Oh, please! she is very unkind."

"I think she must have been more unkind to Agnes than to you," said Miss More; "but do you think, Annie, that all this has anything to do with what happened to-night?"

Annie cried.

"And you kept watch over Mary, to find out and

tell me, that she might be punished?—poor child!” said Miss More; “do you think that was right, Annie?”

But still Annie kept crying, and did not say a word.

“My dear, you said, ‘Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us,’ at prayers this morning—are you willing that God should take you at your word, and forgive you just the same as you forgave Mary?” asked Miss More.

Annie looked up very quickly in her face—the little girl was startled, and had not thought of that.

“I will tell you a story,” said Miss More; “you have heard it before, but perhaps you have forgotten. There was once a great lord, who had a great many servants—some of them were upper servants, and some were not so far on; and there was one who owed his master a great deal of money; I cannot tell you how much it was, but I know it was more than all that servant had. His master called him one day, and said, ‘You must pay me;’ but the servant fell down on his knees, and begged his lord not to be

hard upon him. 'I will pay you if you will give me time,' said the poor man. So his master thought he was in earnest. 'I will forgive you the money,' said the great lord; 'be a faithful servant—no one shall ever ask you for it again;' and you may suppose how happy and thankful the man was. But that is not all, Annie; wait a little. This servant went out from the place where he had spoken to his master, and just outside he found another servant who owed *him* some money—only a little—just a few shillings, I think. So this man who had just been freed of his own debt, seized hold of the other one, and shouted out, 'Pay me what you owe me!' The second poor servant was quite frightened by this. He said, 'Wait a little, for I am poor; I will pay you if you will give me time.' 'No, I will not give you time; you must pay me now,' said the first servant, and put this poor fellow in prison, and sold off all his things.—Go to your own room, Annie, and look in your Bible if you can see a story like this, and tell me to-morrow what you think it means."

And with that Miss More went away.

"Oh, Agnes!" cried Annie, "what does it mean?" She was not crying any longer, but she was quite pale and frightened. I think she partly knew in her own mind what it meant, and was very much ashamed in her heart, but she wanted time to see what it was.

Now Agnes was not much older than Annie, and could not very well tell her, so they went and got the Bible, and looked for it. I don't think they quite knew where to look just at once; but after a long time, they found out that parable of the two servants, and read it all over, and put their two little heads together to find out what it meant; and then they asked Lucy; and I think among them they found it out, and Annie knew the meaning of Miss More's tale. Annie cried herself to sleep that night, and felt very desolate in her poor little heart—and called Mamma in her sleep—the Mamma that Annie did not remember, but was always thinking of. As for Agnes, she went to sleep very happy, for Mary Mellor had clasped her close in her arms, and kissed her, and whispered, "You saved me, Agnes! I shall always feel sure it was you!" Agnes wanted to write that very night and

tell Mamma, only Lucy would not let her ; but all the school could think of nothing else, and all the girls got into corners whispering about it. It was the strangest thing that ever had happened in Miss More's school.

CHAPTER XXI.

ANNIE'S PUNISHMENT.

I WILL tell you about this business at once, before we go back to our proper story. The gentleman who wanted Mary Mellor to run away from school, was not a gentleman at all, but a bad fellow who knew she was rich; and Amelia had said he might come; but Miss Mellor knew nothing about it till, quite suddenly, she met him that evening in the garden. Miss More sent Amelia home, and would not have her at Hyde House any more; and Mary repented her foolishness with all her heart, for you know she had meant nothing at all but "fun" and the pleasure of having something to gossip and laugh about with Amelia, a secret which they could whisper in corners, to make all the other girls wonder. That was very wrong; but perhaps some of you school-

girls like to have a secret too, and to whisper and laugh over something which the rest do not know, so you must not judge too harshly of poor Mary Mellor, who had suffered all her life, poor girl, for being born an heiress, and having neither father nor mother in the world. She was so bitterly ashamed herself, that you would have been sorry for her had you seen her then; and I think, though Mary cried, she never was so glad in her life as when Miss More found her out that night in the garden, and little Agnes Hopetoun held her fast and would not let her go away.

In a few days all the excitement calmed down, and everything got quiet again. Even Miss Mellor forgot how much ashamed she had been, and was no longer afraid to look the other big girls in the face; and as something new is always happening even at school, this began, little and little, to be forgotten. But there was one who did not forget it. She was the only one who seemed really the worse for what had happened. I think, myself, that Mary was the better for it. *She* learned a very hard lesson, and knew better all her life afterwards; but poor little Annie

Oxenford who had told Miss More—Annie who revenged herself—Annie who was Miss Mellor's little enemy, and wished to do her harm—she was not the better. Though she cried herself to sleep that night after what Miss More said, she got up with a dark little sullen face in the morning, as if she did not want to be good. She would not speak to Miss Mellor, or look at her. You would have supposed Mary had done something very dreadful to that poor little girl. I think it would have been better than a great many sermons on ill-temper to have seen her unhappy, angry little face. It is common to say, among grown-up people, that when anybody does you an injury you can forgive him; but if you have done him an injury you never can. It was just so with Annie. She had tried to hurt Miss Mellor, and now she felt as if she hated her at the bottom of her wicked little heart.

So it went on for a long time, more than a week, and during that time Annie got quite separated from her real friends. She did not come to her bedroom as long as she could possibly help it, but rather pre-

ferred to sit talking in somebody else's room ; and when it was quite bed-time went to bed, almost without speaking, and pretended to go to sleep directly, though she was often awake and crying in the dark long afterwards. Sometimes she lay listening to Lucy and Agnes, and longing to talk like them and with them again ; and then she got into a silent passion and used to clench her little hands under the coverlid, ready to cry aloud with rage ; but nothing could make Annie happy while she had that bitterness at her heart. Then the lessons went all wrong, like everything else, and one quite little girl went up above her in the class, and she got bad marks, and all sorts of unpleasant things happened to her ; all which made her only still more angry, for instead of thinking she had brought it all on herself, she was constantly blaming other people, and always thought it was somebody else's fault.

Now all this made Lucy and Agnes Hopetoun very sorry, for they both liked Annie, with her little pale face, and wanted to be friends, because she was far away from her Mamma and had nobody to love

her ; and I think sometimes without meaning it they made matters rather worse, for when they put their heads together, and whispered, and looked grieved, Annie knew just as well as though she had heard every word, that they were talking about her, and wondering over her ; and that made her still more angry and stubborn and proud ; for she determined in her own mind that she would let them see she did not care.

As for Mary Mellor, whom Annie would not speak to, and whom that poor little girl was always thinking of, I am afraid, if I must tell the truth, that Mary never thought at all of Annie Oxenford. Sometimes, perhaps, she might think in her heart what an ill-tempered child she was ; but that was all. And if Mary had known that Annie thought her an enemy, I fear the big young lady would have laughed ; for Annie was quite a child in comparison with Miss Mellor ; and Mary could not have believed what thoughts about herself were in Annie's heart.

Everything went on just as I have told you, for some days ; and Annie was very unhappy. She had

quite made it up in her mind that nobody cared for her—that all the girls at school were her enemies—and that even Miss More herself was unkind and unjust. She had so much to do thinking of these things, that she had no time to learn her lessons, and was always in disgrace in the schoolroom. One moment she thought she would write to her aunt, and say she would not stay at Hyde House. Another time she thought they would all rejoice to get her away, and that she should stay there to spite them. So you may see what an unhappy temper this poor child was in. She was always full of such thoughts. She could not even say her prayers without thinking of these things, which was very sad for Annie; for her mind was a great deal more upon Miss Mellor and what the school would say, than upon God.

One afternoon, about ten days after that, a message came, that Miss Oxenford was to go to Miss More's room. Annie got up very slowly, and laid her books aside, and went away, with her dark pale little face, feeling sure Miss More was angry with her, and

hardening her little heart. Some of the other girls looked after her, especially Agnes and Lucy, who looked at each other, and whispered something. Annie did not hear them, but she saw them. She thought to herself, "They think I am going to be punished;" and her heart throbbed and tingled with passion. She went along the passage very slowly, trying to look proud, and as if she did not care; but I think she only looked very sulky, and wretched, and ill-tempered, as she was. But when Annie came to the door of Miss More's room, something very astonishing appeared to her. Miss More was there, but it was not Miss More who wanted Annie; it was a lady dressed very nicely, with a grand Indian shawl on, and a pale face, and a white veil hanging over her bonnet; and by her side stood a little girl of three years old, a lovely little child, with long curls and blue eyes, who was playing with her Mamma's card-case. Annie saw them before they could see her. She stood quite still at the door of the room, with that unhappy little face, gazing at them. Oh! who were they? The poor child trembled so that

she could scarcely stand. She kept gazing at them with her heart in her eyes. Oh! who was it? What did it mean?

I suppose Annie must have made a little noise standing there, for the lady suddenly turned round to her and rose from her seat, holding out her arms, and moving forward *so* quickly—

“Is it my child—my Annie?” she cried out.

And before Annie knew, she was in her Mamma’s arms.

Her Mamma—her own Mamma! whom she sometimes thought she never would see again; and the pretty little three-year-old girl was Annie’s little sister, whom she had never seen. Annie thought her heart would break when she felt her Mamma kiss her, and heard her say, “My Annie!”—partly for joy, and partly because, at that moment, it came into her head all at once how sinful she had been. She could hardly help crying out, “Oh, Mamma, I am so wicked! it is all my fault!” as Mrs. Oxenford held her in her arms, and kept looking at her, and saying how she had grown, and kissing her again and

again. Mrs. Oxenford could not see how sullen and cross Annie had looked when she came into the room; she thought of nothing but of finding her dear little girl again. She thought she had grown nicely, and looked strong. She thanked Miss More for all her kindness to Annie. She was so tender and loving to the little girl—just as your Mamma would be if she met you for the first time for seven years. Do you think Annie was proud? I will tell you what I think. In the first place she was ashamed—ashamed to the very heart. To think God should be so good to her when she was so wicked!—to think that just at the very time when she was thinking nobody loved her, and making herself unhappy, her Mamma should come! Annie put down her head on her Mamma's kind breast, and cried. She was so happy that she could have stayed there all her life; and she was so unhappy that she could scarcely contain herself from telling her Mamma everything. Do you think it strange that one should be happy and unhappy at the same moment? perhaps it is: but it is true.

Just before dinner, when there were only a few

girls in the schoolroom, Annie rushed in quite breathless. It happened that Lucy and Agnes were there, and so was Miss Mellor, though quite at different ends of the room. The two sisters were near the door, putting all their books together—for it was Saturday; and Miss Mellor stood at one of the windows with two or three of the other big girls, talking; when Annie Oxenford rushed in past them, her eyes bright, and her cheeks wet with tears, and all her sullen looks gone. Lucy and Agnes did not understand how it was.

“Miss More has been talking to her,” said Agnes,—but I think even Agnes, though she was so young, knew that it is very seldom that anybody’s talking makes such a change, and suspected in her heart that something must have happened. Annie ran forward, without saying a word, to where Mary Mellor was, and caught hold of her dress, half afraid, yet too eager to wait: “Oh, Miss Mellor, look at me!” said Annie, “oh, listen to me! I am very, very sorry—I did not mean to be so wicked. Oh, forgive me, and I will never be so wicked again!”

“Wicked! what have you done, little girl?” said Miss Mellor, turning round.

When she saw it was Annie, she paused a little, and blushed very red, because then she remembered that Annie had something to do with that unfortunate night. “I don’t wish to hear any more of it,” she said very quickly, drawing her dress out of Annie’s hands; “I don’t know what you have done.”

I am afraid this was not quite true; for Miss Mellor was afraid of the other big girls laughing, and did not wish to have them reminded of what had happened.

“But only forgive me!” cried Annie; “Mamma has come, and I am very happy—and oh, I’m so sorry!—Oh, Miss Mellor, it was me that told Miss More! I beg your pardon. I will never do anything ill-natured again!”

“You did me a great service—I wanted nothing so much as to let Miss More know,” said Mary Mellor, a little proudly—and then her kind heart melted when she saw the little girl’s earnest face all shining with tears; she turned quite round, and stooped

down to her and kissed her. "But I dare say you meant to be very ill-natured," she said, with a little smile. "I quite forgive you, little Annie, with all my heart—there!—and I am very glad your Mamma has come."

Annie had just sense enough to know that Miss Mellor did not wish to have anything more said about that night. So she ran away with a light heart, and threw one arm round Lucy, and one round Agnes Hopetoun. "You have always been my friends," said Annie, calming down a little, and growing more like herself. "I went to Miss Mellor to say I was sorry, and that I would not hate her any more. Oh, I am so ashamed of being wicked—for Mamma has come."

"*Your* Mamma!—from India," cried Lucy and Agnes in the same breath.

"My very own Mamma, my beautiful Mamma!" cried Annie; "and God sent her though I was so wicked—though I deserved to have never, never seen her again! I wonder why God did not send and make me ill, and punish me. Oh, I am so ashamed!"

“Were you afraid your Mamma would hear?” asked Lucy, who was not quite sure that Annie was in earnest, and could not forgive her all at once.

Annie burst out crying and sobbed, so that they were frightened. I am afraid she was a little hurt at Lucy's question. “God knew all the time,” she said at last, “and yet for all that he let Mamma come.”

That was Annie's punishment. It filled her whole little heart all that day—to think that God was preparing so great a happiness for her, when she was making herself so miserable, and hating everybody! In her very joy she felt her shame. That is how God does with all of us if we only knew—and I think, if you remember how in the very midst of our wickedness Jesus came, you will feel like Annie. When we were fighting against Him, He was planning out happiness for us. This little girl never forgot that lesson all her life.

CHAPTER XXII.

BIG GIRLS AND LITTLE GIRLS.

IT turned out that Annie Oxenford was only to stay till the end of the half-year, and then to go home, and her Mamma took her away that very night for two or three days, to see her Papa and her little brothers and sisters; so there was one little empty bed that night in Miss Mellor's room. Annie's words had made Mary Mellor think; they brought up to her mind all the history of that unfortunate night. She could not get it out of her head; she tried to keep up talking among the other girls, for she was very much afraid of them laughing at her; but very soon went to her own room to be undisturbed. Agnes and Lucy were sitting together on the ottoman, with their arms round each other, reading a letter, when Miss Mellor came; they sprang away

from each other, and Lucy put the letter in her pocket when she saw the new-comer, for Mary had once taken one of Fred's letters from Agnes, "in fun," and read it aloud before Amelia, and laughed at what their brother said. They did not like that, of course, and that is why they both started off the ottoman when Miss Mellor came in. Mary understood that as well as if they had told her, and once more it made her cheeks quite red; for this young lady, who was very thoughtless and careless had still so much good in her, that when she saw she had done a wrong thing, she was always sorry and ashamed.

"You may go on reading your letter; I shall not touch it," said Mary; "is it from home?"

"We had just finished reading it," said Lucy; "we are going to bed now; we don't wish to read it again."

"I wonder now," said Miss Mellor, "what made Miss More put three little proprieties like you into *my* room. I dare say you all hate me; but it's not my fault; I like *you* very well."

“And we like you,” said Agnes, boldly.

“Yet you make haste to put away your letter,” said Miss Mellor, rather a little sadly, “because you can’t trust me, and I never mind anything so long as it’s fun. Well, I don’t pretend any better; you knew what you had to expect when you came here.”

The girls did not know what to answer to this; they began to prepare for bed without saying anything; but Miss Mellor was not at all in the humour for going to bed; she wanted some one to talk to; she was not exactly what people call selfish, but she did things which occurred to herself without thinking whether or not they made other people uncomfortable. After Agnes had taken off her frock, and her shoes and stockings, Mary suddenly caught up a pretty pink flannel dressing-gown of her own which was lying near, and threw it over the little girl before she was aware. The young lady seized upon her, muffled her up in the dressing-gown, lifted her up,—for Agnes was a light, slender, little girl,—and carried her laughingly to the mirror, to see how funny she looked. Then she sat down on

that same ottoman, and kept Agnes on her knee. I cannot say she was careless of her comfort; she tied the dressing-gown close at the neck, and wrapped Agnes' poor little bare feet in the skirt, which was a great deal too long for her; but she only laughed when Agnes begged to be suffered to go to bed, and held her fast. "I want to talk to you," said Miss Mellor. "Do you think I would have any other little girl in the school to be my companion? Now keep still and listen. I have a thousand things to say."

"Oh, please, I want to go to bed," said Agnes, rubbing her sleepy eyes.

"Never mind bed," said Miss Mellor. "What do you think that little creature, Annie, meant by coming to me to-day?"

"She meant *that*," cried Agnes, very earnestly; "I know it was true."

"What?" said Miss Mellor. "Something about her Mamma coming home, and being happy and sorry? You are so wise now, you little girls. I was only a little fool, and knew nothing, when I was like you."

“Is it best to be a little fool?” said Agnes.

“Perhaps,” answered Miss Mellor. “Wise people are so tiresome. I dare say you, you little brown-mouse, could preach to *me*.”

“I am too sleepy; I want to go to bed,” said Agnes.

“You shall go to bed presently. Was that letter from your Mamma? Do you know I have no end of money, and a great house of my own? You shall come and stay with me sometime, and drive about in a pony-carriage all day, and go to all sorts of places in the evenings. But I want to know about your Mamma; which of you is like her? It must be Lucy, I think.”

“Oh, and so it is Lucy! how could you tell?” cried Agnes; “you never saw Mamma.”

“Ah, you see I am clever; you never found it out before,” said Miss Mellor. “Do you know I am going to leave school this half year?”

Agnes did not answer; but she gave a shiver through the pink flannel, which *almost* said, “I wish you were gone now.”

Miss Mellor laughed, and put her arms closer round her. "You poor little Patience on a monument," she said, "are you cold? But you have never told me what that funny little Annie Oxenford meant by coming to me to-day."

"It was because she was so happy; she felt sorry," said Agnes, "and ashamed."

Miss Mellor laughed. "That is a very funny reason for being sorry,—because she was happy," said Mary. "You are such a set of little philosophers, one can't understand you. What did she mean?"

"Annie said it made her ashamed to think that God was bringing her Mamma home all the time she was behaving so wickedly. I do not know anything more," said Agnes; "but I think I know what she meant."

"What was it, then?" said Miss Mellor.

But Agnes shut her lips very tight. "I know, but I could not tell," said Agnes. Perhaps she was wrong; but she did not feel very good herself, and she was only a little girl, and felt sure she could

not teach Miss Mellor. I am not sure that she *was* wrong. Little girls in story-books very often teach other people; but I don't quite like it for my part. I think it is better for the little ones to be good and learn.

However, perhaps what Agnes said, or what she did not say, made Miss Mellor think—for she was silent a little; silent so long indeed, that Agnes began quite to struggle in her pink flannel wrapper, and felt cold and rather angry, and envied Lucy, who was snug in bed.

“Wait a little,” said Mary, laughing at her as she twisted about, vainly trying to get out of her hands, “wait a little. I have a great deal more to say. I think you behaved very well that night, Agnes; you did me a great deal of good; perhaps I should have been afraid to face Miss More if you had not been there. Do you know what I mean to do? When you go home for the holidays, I'll come and see you, and we'll have capital fun. Now don't look frightened. I'll write and ask your Mamma.”

At that moment Agnes saw Lucy's head pop up

from the pillow with such a look of dismay. Fancy Miss Mellor at Ardsley! the rich heiress, who did not understand how anybody could be poor, in Mrs. Hopetoun's little house! Agnes grew quite white and horrified to think of it; and then if Miss Mellor did write, what *would* Mamma say?

“Shan't you like it?” said Miss Mellor, holding Agnes fast upon her knee and laughing at her struggles to get away. “You twisty little thing, are you not content with my pretty new dressing-gown? But listen, Agnes: you know Miss More has been very good to me; I really do love her, though that spiteful Amelia used to abuse her so. I should like to give her a very pretty present when I go away; what should it be?”

“I once bought a present for Mamma,” cried Agnes, “a box with little silver things for working—would that do?”

“Tell me all about it,” said Miss Mellor; “was it out of your own head? and how did a little mouse like you know what to buy? and where did you get the money?—make haste, I want to know.”

“Uncle James gave me five pounds to spend, on my birthday,” said Agnes slowly, not caring to say more.

“Who is Uncle James?”

“He is—he is—rich,” said Agnes, after a little pause, rather bewildered; because, except that he was Uncle James, she did not know anything else about him. By this time Miss Mellor began to feel cold herself. She jumped up laughing, pulled the dressing-gown over Agnes’ head, and plumped her down, half-dressed as she was, upon her own little bed. Then she huddled off her own things and got to bed directly, shivering and complaining how cold it was; yet sometimes laughing and calling Agnes a little frog as she squatted on the bed. It was rather provoking to be kept out of bed and handled so roughly, and laughed at into the bargain; but Agnes, except just at the first moment, was not so much offended as you might have supposed, for she was rather fond of Mary Mellor in spite of all her faults. But what if she should come to Ardsley! When the candle was put out, Lucy, who was not asleep, leaned over

and whispered, "Oh Agnes, we don't want to see *her* when we get home; she must *never* come there—what would all the girls say to our little house?" Agnes had not quite thought of that. All the other girls lived in great houses when they went home, and belonged to rich people; and it was rather mortifying to remember how very very small the parlour was. "If Uncle James would only take the house at Ardham Hill!" whispered Agnes back again. But immediately Miss Mellor's voice sounded through the dark room, asking what they were chattering about, and ordering them to go to sleep. Lucy was rather angry. I think Lucy went on whispering for a while on purpose to show Miss Mellor she did not care; but by and by sleep was too strong for all the three of them, and there was no more talking that night.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LUCY'S POLITICS.

THE next thing that happened in the school was that Miss Mellor really did go away.

She had finished her education, as people say ; but I am afraid, as Mary had been very idle, that this meant only that she had learned a great many things, but could not do one thing well. She played a little, and drew a little, and could chatter a little French ; but although Miss More was very anxious and took great pains that all the girls should learn things thoroughly, and though she had very careful and good teachers, still Mary's idleness and carelessness defeated Miss More—and Mary herself knew only a very little more when she left school than when she came to it ; I mean as far as knowledge and lessons go—for she had learned some things, which are not to be found in books. That night in the garden had

taught her something, and she could not easily get out of her head the behaviour of little Annie Oxenford, and Agnes Hopetoun's explanation of it. "Because she was so happy, she felt sorry and ashamed." Mary laughed at that at first—then it puzzled her, and she thought it very strange; but one way or other it kept in her mind, and I rather think, though Mary did not know, that this was one of the best lessons she ever had.

After all, she was very good-natured and kind in her way. Most of the girls in the school, when it came to the last, were sorry to part with Mary Mellor. I think every one of them had a keepsake from her, for she was very fond of giving presents; and she wanted very much to give Miss More some expensive jewellery, such as she began to wear herself. Miss More, however, was very particular about that; she said she liked a *little* present very well, but she could not accept a great one. So Miss Mellor had to be content with buying a very pretty little card-basket to stand on the table in Miss More's room.

And somehow when she was gone—when there

was no longer her big person and full skirts to sweep things off the table as she passed, or her merry laugh to ring through the house, or her strong arm, which was almost as strong as a man's, to swing the girls up among the branches till they grew frightened—everybody missed Mary: Lucy and Agnes at least were very sorry when she was gone. She gave them each a nice book, a story prettily bound, and threatened again to come to Ardsley. She left just before the holidays, so they were very much frightened that she would keep her word.

“But I don't think she would mind,” said Agnes, when they travelled home by the coach as they had come, the guard having particular charge of them; “I don't think she would mind,” whispered Agnes, for some one else was in the coach, and she did not want to be overheard. “Mary would love us just as well though she knew we were poor.”

“Ah, but I do not think of her, I was thinking of ourselves,” said Lucy; “should you like Mary to come into our little parlour and see that we had no servant but Jane?”

Agnes thought over that for some time and was silent; at last she poked Lucy with her elbow, to tell her decision. "I don't think *I* should mind!" said Agnes; "for whether we are rich or poor we are just the same."

I am afraid this was too philosophical for Lucy. She said, "Oh, if Uncle James would only take Ardham Hill," with a little sharpness in her voice with this thought they reached home. They were very glad to get home, and rushed into Mamma's arms and kissed her so joyfully; and as for Mamma, the tears were in her eyes for happiness. She had so longed for them and felt so lonely; as for Arty, he shouted so that he could have been heard a quarter of a mile off; and how he had grown! altogether, though the parlour was small and Jane was the only servant, it was a great delight to come home.

Things had gone on just the same while they were away; Uncle James still lived at Mrs. Sutton's, and still came up every day to lounge in Mrs. Hopetoun's easy chair, and chat to his sister and spoil Arty; and still he kept talking about that impossible house, that

never was, but always *was to be* taken, for them all to live in. When Lucy heard of that again, she grew quite red with anger. It certainly was very provoking, but still I don't think Lucy should have been angry. As for Agnes, she stared at Uncle James, with her mouth a little open, as she always did when she was surprised, and wondered whether he really could think in his own mind that he was in earnest; and after a little while Agnes laughed; perhaps that was not right either; but it was very funny that Uncle James never found himself out.

“What are you laughing at, puss?” said Uncle James.

“Nothing, Uncle,” said Agnes; then she laughed again. “I mean only—it is so funny that nobody can ever hear of that house.”

At this Lucy grew more and more red, and looked at Uncle James to see what he would say.

Uncle James looked serious for a moment, then he rubbed his hands and laughed too. “It *is* odd,” he said, with a laugh as light and free as a schoolboy's;

“very odd indeed, when I think of it. So you’re laughing at *us*, you satirical monkey. Sister, we must really bestir ourselves; these children must not make fun of us any longer. We must fix upon this famous house before they go away.”

“Oh, Uncle James, I do so wish you would,” said Lucy; “the other girls would not know what to think if they saw how small a house we lived in, and only one servant. Oh do, Uncle James!”

When Lucy had said this, she got frightened and looked at her mother. Mamma was looking at her with a very grave look in her face, almost as grave as that day that Lucy told a lie.

“My dear,” said Mrs. Hopetoun, “you make me very sorry that you ever went to that school.”

“Oh, Mamma, but Lucy means Miss Mellor,” said Agnes; and she began to tell about Mary, how she had offered to come to Ardsley, and how they did not wish her to come because she was rich and an heiress.

Agnes spoke very fast and ran into the whole

story, for she wished to make Mamma forget being angry with Lucy. And Mamma, I think, saw what Agnes meant, and smiled and said no more of it for her little girl's sake.

“I should think a great heiress would enjoy coming here,” said Mamma, very quietly. “Sometimes rich people find it very pleasant to taste what poverty means for a little—of course they would not like to be poor, but it is so different from what they are accustomed to, that they enjoy it for a day or two. If she is a good girl I have no objection to Miss Mellor coming here.”

You should have seen Lucy, how dismayed she looked! She quite trembled at the idea; for Lucy, you see, had quite got it into her head about Uncle James being rich, and could not be content or satisfied now. However, she was a sensible girl, and knew it would only make Mamma angry to say any more, so she kept quiet. But while she was silent her heart burned, thinking how she could persuade and urge Uncle James, thinking how she would find out a house herself and *make* him go to see it; and

feeling quite terrified lest Mary Mellor *should* come. Certainly Lucy was not any the happier for having a rich uncle ; all her discontented thoughts seemed to come back when she got home.

As for Agnes, I think she understood Mamma better that day than Lucy did. After she had thought of it a minute, she began to get quite bright and to feel that Mamma must be right. Mary Mellor had a great many rich friends whom she could visit, where there were just such rooms and just such servants as she had at home, and it would be *quite* a change to come to Ardsley to Mrs. Hopetoun's little parlour, where they had to wait upon themselves. I think there is a good deal in that if people only thought of it. It is only because we are ashamed of being poor that we try to appear rich.

Next morning Lucy made Agnes get up early and they both went out for a long walk. I am afraid what Lucy wanted was to look if there were any houses to let ; and it was not very kind the first morning to leave Mamma by herself. She found one not so nice as Ardham Hill, but still a large house ;

and made up her mind that Uncle James *must* go to see it. So that morning after breakfast Lucy persuaded Mamma that she had a message to send to Uncle James. I think Mrs. Hopetoun saw what Lucy wanted, and thought it best to let her try what she could do. So they did get a message to Uncle James. They found him at his late breakfast in his dressing-gown, with his breakfast table drawn to the window, enjoying the sunshine. He looked so pleased and so well-off in his easy chair, and there were some new comfortable contrivances in the room. Lucy's heart failed her a little when she saw all these things. They looked as if he had quite established himself here, but then she remembered that he still talked of the house. Surely he did mean it after all.

"Uncle James," said Lucy, "we saw a very nice house this morning. You know the windmill over there, on the other side of the river? Well, it is just below that, down such a pretty green lane. I think you would like it, Uncle James."

"So *you* have found out a house in one morning? more than I have done in three months," said Uncle

James, rubbing his hands. "Three months, isn't it, since you two went to school?"

"It is six months, Uncle," said Lucy, with a little indignation.

"Is it really? see how time runs away, even with an old fellow like me," said Uncle James. "So it's a nice house, is it, Lucy?"

"I think it is very pretty, with an orchard, and a flower-garden, and a coach-house, and a great many rooms," said Lucy, almost out of breath; "and such a pretty name—Rosebank—don't you think Rosebank is a pretty name, Uncle?"

"A *pretty* name? do you expect me to live in a house called Rosebank?" cried Uncle James, as if something dreadful had happened. "Impossible!"

"Oh, but Uncle," cried Lucy, in dismay, "I am *sure* it is a nice house; and we could change the name."

When Uncle James saw how much in earnest she was, he laughed. "Agnes says nothing about this house," said he; "come here and tell me what you think of it, Agnes."

"Oh, Uncle, I *never* think of it now," cried Agnes.

"Indeed! and why, then?"

"Because Mamma said we were not to think of it," said Agnes, who was sometimes more honest than she needed to be; "Mamma did not think you *ever* would take it, Uncle."

Uncle James listened, grew quite red, and raised himself up in his chair. "You and I, Lucy," he said, in a hurried, offended way, "must go directly and see Rosebank; Agnes, who does not think of it, can go home. Rosebank! what an atrocious name I'd rather call it the Lucy-house, as we call plantations in Barbadoes; but we shall see presently what like it is."

"Oh, Uncle, I am sure you will like it!" cried Lucy.

And Uncle James actually went with her to see Rosebank. He had very nearly slid out of it again before he had finished breakfast, but Lucy, who was full of hope, kept repeating his promise, and he could not break it for shame. However, it did very little good after all, for it turned out that Uncle James

did not like Rosebank. Lucy thought it the most delightful house that ever was; but it was not nearly big enough, nor fine enough, for Uncle James; and nothing came of it. Poor Lucy! it took the pleasure out of her holidays; she was so disappointed, she did not know what to do.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ONE THING NEEDFUL.

I MEAN to skip very quickly over the time after this, because we never should be done if we were to go over every day. They went on at Hyde House, Agnes and Lucy, for some years, always coming home for the holidays, though they never hoped now to live in a great house; Uncle James still lived in Mrs. Sutton's; Fred had gone to live with a doctor in London, to learn his profession, and attended lectures at the University, and studied at the hospitals; and even Arty was big enough now to go to school. Agnes Hopetoun all this time had been getting rather a strange education. When the two girls first went to school, Mrs. Hopetoun wrote a letter to Miss More about them. Mamma told her that the family were not rich, and their Uncle was giving them their edu-

cation, and though she did not wish to make the girls governesses, she wished them to have such an education as would be of service to them when they grew up, especially Agnes. Miss More thought a great deal over this letter when she got it; for it was so sensible and candid that it pleased her; and when he came to know the two little girls, she understood what Mrs. Hopetoun meant. Lucy had a great deal of sense, and was sure to know how to take care of herself, Miss More thought; but Agnes was a fanciful thinking little girl, who wanted more to occupy her mind than Lucy did. You remember the talk Miss More had with them at first, when she wanted to know what Agnes could do best. I can scarcely tell you why Miss More decided upon teaching Agnes languages as the thing she could do best—but it turned out very wise. I do not mean you to understand that she learned nothing but languages—she did her other lessons with the other girls—but she learnt more French and German and Italian than they, and was made to do Latin, which was rather a trial—and Miss More got her pleasant books to read, and

encouraged her, and made her translate poems and stories, and did everything she could to bring her on. At first Agnes hated the grammars, and nouns and verbs, and conjugations and declensions, very much, as you may suppose, and had very hard work to remember them ; but when she got on a little, and found that she could have such a great many more books to read than if she only knew her own language, Agnes got very much pleased and anxious to get on. But this, you know, was rather an odd education—it was exactly what Agnes had been used to dream about—it was being good for *something*—good for some *one* thing, and not for a quantity of things—that is what she used to long for ; but I am not sure that Agnes was satisfied about that still.

Because, after all, when she got home, it did not seem to matter much how many languages she knew ; they did not make her help Mamma any better, or be a nicer girl. I think Agnes, by that time, found out that learning something, however well, was not *being good for something*. She still thought over this to herself a good deal, but she did not talk much of it

now. Lucy went through all the common lessons. She was not idle, but a very good scholar; though not so clever as Agnes. She could do a great many things very nicely, but did not know any one thing so perfectly and completely as Agnes did her languages; yet, somehow, Agnes felt Lucy had got more of the secret of being good for something than she had. She loved Lucy very much, and thought her very good and very wise—as indeed she was, except sometimes—and many a serious thought Agnes had over that old puzzle of hers,—How to be good for something?—and how it was possible that Mary, who sat at Jesus' feet and only listened, did not do anything at all—had yet chosen the good part. Agnes still, though she grew a big girl, wondered very much over that in the silence of her own heart.

It so happened that Agnes' fourteenth birthday was spent at school: that is a long leap to take, is it not, from ten years old to fourteen?—but in order to let you hear this story all in one book, we are obliged to do it. Because it was Agnes' birth-day, she and Lucy took tea with Miss More in her own little room,

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all by themselves, which was a great honour. After tea, Miss More gave them a beautiful book of prints to look over. She sat working herself and listening to what they said about the pictures, and sometimes explaining one, what it meant. That particular tidy little room looked very bright and cosy. There was a little fire on—for Agnes' birthday, you remember, was in October—which made everything look cheerful though it was not cold. Suddenly Agnes stopped talking, and lingered a long time over one of the prints; and when Miss More looked up to see why, she saw Agnes looked very serious and almost troubled. The old lady bent over the table to see what it was: it was a picture of Mary at Jesus' feet. There she sat listening, looking up at Him, as if she could see nothing in the world but only her Lord's face; and there stood Martha remonstrating about it, and complaining that her sister did not help her. It is so usual a subject, that Miss More was rather surprised to see how Agnes looked at it: she said, "My dear, I think you seem very much pleased with that?"

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Agnes looked up quickly as if she meant to tell her difficulty, and then blushed and looked down again; so Lucy interposed for her. Lucy wanted Miss More to explain to Agnes how it was.

“When Agnes was a very little girl,” said Lucy, “she wanted very much to be good for something. Mamma once said she would be good for nothing if she was careless; and she always remembered it. Agnes thinks that to be good for something means to be clever at one thing in particular; and so she does not understand how Mary, who was only listening, should have got the one thing needful—and I cannot explain it; will *you* tell her, Miss More?”

“My dear, you might be *clever* at a great many things without being *good* for anything,” said Miss More.

“Oh yes, I know; it is *one* thing we must be good for,” cried Agnes, “and *you* wanted me to be good for one thing, Miss More; but somehow they are different. I learn the French grammar well enough; but I am good for nothing still.”

“Yet the French grammar is good for something

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in its way," said Miss More, smiling; "however, it is different, as you say, Agnes. I make you learn one thing in particular; but that is not the one thing needful. I must try to tell you as well as I can what it is, though you have heard it often, and know it, perhaps, as well as I do. Why do you suppose Mary did sit there, Agnes, at Jesus' feet?"

"I suppose because she wanted to hear what He said," said Agnes in a low voice.

"And thought the one thing in the world above all others, was to hear what He said," said Miss More, "and to know what was in His heart, so far as a sinful woman could, and to understand why He came to the world, and what a changed world that was in which Jesus had been. That was why Mary left the household work to listen at the feet of Jesus. I think when they were all by themselves again in that little house, that she did all her work better, Agnes, for Jesus' sake. I think when she had anything to do for anybody, her heart warmed to think that Jesus loved them. I think she never was really afraid of anything after that, because Jesus was her own

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Friend; and did everything with a heart and goodwill as if it were done to Jesus and not to men. One thing was needful—it was not to be able to do this thing or the other thing—it was to look up into Jesus' face, and see Him and know Him, and be quite sure of Him: that is the only thing that puts a heart into life and all its works. I think this was what Mary did, my dear; do you understand?"

The one thing needful!—was that then what it meant? The tears came to Agnes' eyes; she did not say much, but I think at the bottom of her heart she began to understand. Before one can be good for something one must get a heart into one's life and one's work. After all, it *is* one thing and not a great many things; and that one thing is to see Jesus, and know Him, and be *quite* sure of Him. Being half sure or half interested would not do. Agnes was right so far; the one thing must be done perfectly, as Mary did it—looking up with all her heart into Jesus' face.

Now Agnes had known all this before, and had been taught it a great many times in other words,

but when it came thus, as one might say, in her own words, her heart was touched. Things became a great deal clearer to her afterwards. She had found out the one thing which was like, and yet was not like, her own fancy. It made her happier and more satisfied in her own mind, and she never forgot it again.

CHAPTER XXV.

SORROW.

IT was not very long after that, one gloomy November day when there was a great fog in London, and when it was not very clear even at Hyde House, that in the afternoon, when the lamps down the hill which you could see from the front windows, began to be lighted and shine through the heavy mist, Fred Hopetoun drove furiously up to the door of Hyde House in a cab, and came rushing in almost faster than the servant would let him, to see his sisters. He was taken into Miss More's room to wait for them, and it looked very strange to see the impatient young man—for he was quite a young man now—fuming about in that quiet, tidy, lady-like little place, where nothing ever happened, and scarcely able to keep quiet. At last Lucy came

running into the room, and then Agnes after her—they had just been having a good game at romps with some little ones, and they both came in flushed with laughing and running about. They were big girls now: Agnes the tallest of the two and very slender, with long dark brown hair which she had just begun to put up behind, and which was always tumbling down. Instead of pulling that end of Agnes' hair, which had dropped from the knot behind, and meeting his sisters in his usual noisy happy way, Fred looked quite pale and trembling. The girls both cried out in the same moment, "Oh, Fred! what is the matter?" They thought something had happened to Mamma or Arty. They stood trembling, afraid for the next words he would say. What could it be?

"Have you had no letter?—perhaps then it is not so bad," said Fred.

"What? is Mamma ill?" cried Lucy.

"Or Arty?" said Agnes, with something choking in her throat.

"It is Uncle James," said Fred. "I got a letter

this afternoon, saying I was to go home directly to see him before he died—by to-night's coach. He is very ill; given over by the doctor. I don't know what disease it is; perhaps, as you have had no letter it is not so bad after all."

"Uncle James?" said Lucy, while Agnes stole behind, feeling so ashamed of herself, because she was glad at the first moment to hear it was not Mamma nor Arty; "but Uncle James has often little illnesses, Fred, and we heard a week ago, and then he was *quite* well. Oh, I am sure Mamma has just got frightened and anxious, as we all did last Christmas when he had *that* cold; he cannot be so bad in such a little time."

"I begin to hope so myself," said Fred, for the first time since he had heard the news venturing to sit down and keep still for a moment.

"Did Mamma say you were to go to-night? show us Mamma's letter, Fred—did she send for us? what did she say?" cried Agnes.

Then Fred gave them Mrs. Hopetoun's letter. It was very short and so much in earnest, that the girls

grew very anxious and troubled. Mamma did not do things rashly. She never would have sent for Fred in such a hurry unless there had been some cause; but the puzzle was that *they* were not mentioned at all. Mrs. Hopetoun did not say, "Tell Lucy and Agnes, or bring the girls down with you;" but only, "be sure you come by the night coach."

"I am sure Mamma means it," said Agnes. "Oh, Lucy, don't you think *we* should go too?"

"Mamma would have said so if she had wished us to come," said Lucy, looking wistfully at the letter with the tears coming to her eyes.

"But suppose Uncle James were to die!" cried Agnes, beginning to cry bitterly at the thought; "and Mamma almost says so—the doctor thinks he is dying;—and he has been so good to us all. Oh, Lucy, let us go with Fred!"

"I think so too," said Fred; "that is why I came; only I thought my mother must have written to you. I dare say she had not time. He cares more for you girls than he does for me, poor old fellow. I'll tell you what—I've got money to take us all three home.

He gave me a twenty pound note last time I was down," said Fred, suddenly stopping to clear his throat, "to buy some things I wanted. Get on the warmest wraps you have and come along with me; I've got a cab at the door; make haste and get ready. We'll all get there early to-morrow morning; and" continued Fred, very slowly, gulping down something between every word, "he'll be pleased to see us all, if it must be—before"—

But here they all broke down; the girls cried aloud, and Fred tried very hard to hide his own tears, but could not. Dear, kind, good Uncle James! sometimes he had provoked them; but how kind he had always been.

"But we must ask Miss More first," said Lucy.

It never had occurred to them before that this was necessary. Lucy went out of the room instantly to find her, leaving Fred and Agnes together. "But whatever Miss More says, you must come with me," said Fred. "Recollect, Agnes, it would be a pleasure to him, dear old fellow; and perhaps we may never be able to do him a pleasure again."

Miss More came into the room with Lucy almost immediately. She did not see the necessity of the case half so strongly as the young people did, but in face of the earnest pleadings of Lucy and Agnes, she would not quite forbid them to go. She said, "My dear children, if your Mamma had wished you to come, don't you think she would have written for you?"—which was indeed very reasonable; but then they were rather past reason at that moment, thinking only of Uncle James who was dying, whom perhaps they never might see again, and of Mamma who was nursing him, and had nobody with her. They scarcely remembered their Papa's death, it happened so long ago; and except that once, death had never been near their house. So they were all the more excited and anxious now.

I cannot quite tell how it was that Miss More permitted them to go so easily; I think she imagined that Uncle James's death might, perhaps, make a great difference to them; that perhaps Mrs. Hopetoun might not wish them to stay any longer at school. However, what between the anxiety of the girls and

the determination of Fred, who had quite made up his mind that they must go, Miss More consented at last. She made them put on their warmest dresses, and looked over all their shawls and wraps to see if they had enough to keep them warm on a night journey, and kissed them very affectionately, and said they were to write and let her know at once how their good Uncle was. Then with her own hands she put a little basket with sandwiches and a bottle of wine and water into Fred's cab; and so, suddenly and hurriedly, without having time to think of it, and without bidding anybody good-bye, except Miss More, they went away. They thought perhaps it was only for a few days, but neither Lucy nor Agnes ever returned to Hyde House again.

They drove down into the fog and the noise, through the red street lamps, and among the throngs of carriages where they could scarcely make their way, down into the very centre of the city to get the coach. They were all so startled and excited, and full of anxiety, that everything looked like a dream. They got out of the cab and into the coach, almost

without knowing how, Lucy holding fast in her hand, without being at all aware of it, Miss More's basket of sandwiches. Then came all the noise and bustle of the starting, and once more they rattled out through the busy city streets to the cold dark silent country, where there was not a sound except the noise of the horses' feet and the wheels of the coach upon the frosty road. I don't think they had even a lamp in the coach to let them see each others' faces, and scarcely spoke to each other the whole night. The other person in the coach was a big man, very stout and heavy, who slept and snored most part of the way; and the girls shrank into their corners, with their hands wrapped up in their shawls and their veils over their faces, and never moved except when they got tired; once Fred dropped off to sleep for an hour or more, and two or three times Agnes and Lucy fell into little dozes, from which they always awoke with a little start and cry, feeling still more sad and miserable; for if they had dozed only for two minutes they were sure to have dreamt something of Uncle James. All the time Lucy held in

her hand the basket of sandwiches. I don't think she even knew what it was; and the wine and water would have done them good if they could have thought of it; but the basket reached Ardsley without even being opened—just as it had come out of Miss More's hands.

At last, when there began to be a very little grey chilly light in the sky, and morning was about to break, Lucy touched Agnes on the arm, and pointed out of the window. Agnes did not know how near home they were; she started very much when she saw at a distance the windmill which was opposite their own house, and began to pray the same words again that she had said over and over and over in her heart all through the night—"Oh, if God would spare Uncle James; for Jesus' sake." Agnes could scarcely find any other words but these in her great earnestness and anxiety; and her heart fluttered and grew sick as they drew so near,—what if even now Uncle James were gone? what if he were past seeing them, who had come so far to see him before he died?

They all got out trembling and anxious at their own door, where, however, Jane met them with a frightened face to say Mrs. Hopetoun was at Mrs. Sutton's, and Mr. Butler was very, very ill. The young people did not go in, but turned down the street together, not saying a word, to Uncle James's lodgings. The blind was down in his bed-room, but not at the pretty bow-window of the sitting-room,—at least he was living still.

After a little while Mamma came out to meet them, looking pale and with her eyes unnaturally open as if she had been watching long. She was surprised to see the girls, but I think after the first moment she was pleased that they had come. She said they were to rest a little and warm themselves, and by and by they should go into the sick-room. She told them Uncle James was quite sensible and happy, but that he was dying—the doctor said so, and there was no hope now.

It is a dreadful thing to hear these words, and when one is young one cannot endure to be obliged to submit to them. Fred thought wildly that some-

thing could surely be done, and wanted to see Uncle James himself, for he, too, was a doctor, he said; and the girls hoped against hope and in spite of themselves. Surely, since he was living, he might get better yet. Mamma did not say anything; she took off their shawls and bonnets, and made them sit by the fire, and ordered some tea to be made for them, and then she went into the sick-room where she had been watching all night.

After a little while they were allowed to go in: Uncle James lay in his bed looking so pale that the hope went out of their hearts; but he was just like himself still. He could only speak a few words at a time, he was so feeble, but he signed that they were all to come up and kiss him; then after a while he spoke,—

“Yes, I am going away,” said Uncle James, very slowly. “But don’t cry, children; *I* am not sorry; to-morrow I shall not be the same useless old fellow I have been for so many years, and I dare say the time won’t seem long to me in heaven till you are all there,—only take care that you all come

there; aye, you too, Fred, you've more temptations than the girls; I'll tell you what, keep always on the same road with Christ, and never let the Lord get out of sight,—you're safe as long as you see Him. That's all I've got to say, for I can't pretend to give you many advices,—I have never been very wise myself, Heaven knows."

"You have been our stay and comfort, James," said Mrs. Hopetoun. "You have been very, very kind to these children and me."

"Ah, there was something about that; I ought to have seen to it," said Uncle James with a troubled look upon his face. "Never mind, it will all come right, I dare say. Ah, I'll see Hopetoun presently, sister,—I'll see your father by and by, children; I'll tell him about you all; as for carrying any message to the Lord," said Uncle James, raising his heavy eyes as if his mind were wandering a little, "that is no use, for to be sure He is here."

And his eyes wandered all round the room as if looking for some one; every one was crying but

himself; and Agnes stood by the head of the bed with her eyes full, and something choking in her throat; she could scarcely speak, and yet she could not keep silent, for her heart was full.

“Oh, Uncle James, but *we* cannot see Him,” cried Agnes; “presently you will.”

I think the light was failing in his eyes; he turned them towards her as if he could not see where she was standing, like a blind man. “Presently I will,” he said, “and I almost think, little one, I begin to see Him now.”

These were the last words that Uncle James said to them. They had to leave the room almost directly after, for it was not right he should be excited, and Mrs. Hopetoun would not let the girls watch in her place. All the day Uncle James lingered on, just living and no more—and then he died; and though he was a very imperfect man and had a great many sins about him, went like a little child to Jesus,—and I think, as he said himself, that he was no longer a useless old fellow after that day.

It was a great blow to them all, both Mrs. Hope-toun and her children. When they met that night they scarcely dared to look in each others' faces, but they had to bear it—as everybody has to bear the troubles which are sent by God.

CHAPTER XXVI.

UNCLE JAMES'S HEIRS.

It was a very sad time at Mrs. Hopetoun's till the funeral was over; for, with all the windows closed, and staying in the house the whole time, and having no lessons, made it seem very long for the girls; and they could think of nothing else but this first grief. At last, however, the blinds were drawn up again, the sun shone into the little parlour, and life began again just as before, only there was no Uncle James now to come in, and lounge in Mamma's chair, and talk of plans and intentions. It felt as if they had been in a dream all these years. Now Uncle James was gone again out of their house and out of Ardsley, and everything was just as it used to be before he came.

But Mrs. Hopetoun had a great many troublesome thoughts in her own mind. She did not say anything to the young people till after the funeral, but

she was very anxious and troubled before, and did not know at all what they were to do; for Mamma did not know anything about Uncle James's money, where it was, or how much it was; and she felt sure he had not left a will. Perhaps you will think it strange that she should begin to think of the money so soon, but then it was so important to the children. If they were to have nothing after this but Mrs. Hopetoun's own little income, she did not know how Fred was to get on at all with his studies—for it cost a good deal to keep him in London—and as for the girls, of course they must give up school at once. So, besides her grief for her brother, this trouble was strong in Mamma's heart. After the funeral she had a talk with Cæsar, and found out the name of the gentleman in Oldcastle who had done Uncle James's business for him. Mrs. Hopetoun knew his name before, because Uncle James used to get his money there; but she did not know any more about him. She thought the best way was to send for him to Ardsley—which she did, and he came the next day. He had not a very cheerful account to give of these affairs.

But that did not make Mrs. Hopetoun at all less anxious to hear what he said.

For it turned out that Uncle James had very little money at the Bank—indeed, not any more than would be needed to pay his debts, and had been living very carelessly, and never looking into his accounts, nor paying any attention to them. Mr. Farquhar said he had often advised him to make his will, and to look after his property in Barbadoes, which he was sure was in bad hands, for they heard nothing but accounts of bad harvests and accidents from it, while other places were getting on very well; and Mr. Butler always promised to attend to his advice, this gentleman said, but never did it. The estate in Barbadoes was a good deal encumbered, and yielded very little profit, and would not sell for anything near its value; and there was nothing left but that, of all Uncle James had. This was very heavy news for the Hopetouns. They all met together to talk about it the evening after Mr. Farquhar had been there. There was no will, but they were his only relatives, and so, as it is called, his heirs-at-law.

“I am afraid this will be rather serious for you all, children,” said Mrs. Hopetoun, as they sat round the fire, all in their mourning dresses. “You will have to give up some of your hopes, and perhaps something more than hopes. It is what I always feared.”

“But there must surely be some mistake, mother,” said Fred. “My uncle might not be prudent, but he was kind, as kind as ever man was. He never would have led us on so far, if he had known that one day or other it might stop and leave us just as we were.”

“Oh, Fred! my poor dear James, do you think I can blame him now?” said Mrs. Hopetoun; “but I can understand it very well. He never looked into it—he never took any trouble about it; and if he had lived, poverty would have come upon him unawares while he thought he was rich. I can see how it all happened as well as possible. He has suffered his property to fall into the hands of some overseer or manager who knew his ways, and so he has been cheated and deceived. Mr. Farquhar thinks the same. My dear children, I wish you would quite

dismiss from your minds all thoughts of having anything to receive, and just understand that we are exactly as we were when Fred was going to Mr. Settledon's office, and the girls were at Miss Thomson's school."

"What, mother! do you think I can go to Mr. Settledon's office, now?" cried Fred, with a sharp tone of pain and suffering in his voice.

"No, my dear boy; and that is the heaviest thought of all," said Mamma, very gravely. "I do not yet see what we are to do about that. We must not sacrifice you—"

"Nor any one else," cried Fred, rather impatiently. "Why give up this property in Barbadoes? I think it would be wrong, if it were only for my uncle's memory. We shall recover that."

"My dear, West Indian property never is recovered," said Mamma; and she began to tell them about some people she knew who had fortunes left them there, but never could get the money,—a great deal of which you could not understand, and would not care for.

However, Fred, who was a man, would not give it up. He could not bear the idea of having to stop his studies, and give up his profession after all.

“ We might send some one there, or you might go yourself, to see about it,” said Mamma. “ There is only one thing against that. We have no money. Our position is changed, Fred. We can only write about it, and wait, and do what we can to get justice. But in the meantime, if we are wise, we will think of it no more.”

The girls had not said anything all this time. It was not a thing which they could talk about. They felt very grieved in their hearts not only for losing Uncle James, but to find out how thoughtless he had been, and how, perhaps, if he had lived longer, he would have been *quite* poor. What he would have done had he been poor they could not tell, so helpless and indolent a man.

“ *We* would have taken care of him,” said Agnes with tears in her eyes ; “ but I think if he *had* lived to see that day, it would have broken Uncle James’s heart.”

However, Fred very unwillingly gave in at last that it was nonsense to think of sending *him* to Barbadoes,—he who knew nothing of business, and had no influence, and no money; and that, indeed, nothing could be done but only to speak to Mr. Farquhar to write to some agent in Barbadoes about the property, and wait what *he* would say. Mr. Farquhar himself gave them very little hopes, and even Fred could not feel comfortable about it. But there was something else more important just then, and that was, how Fred was to be kept in London at his studies; for I have just told you Uncle James had left no money, but what was just enough to pay his debts, and Mrs. Hopetoun had only her own little income, and did not know what to do.

However, Fred could not stay after the first week. There was time to consider of it before the end of the term, he said, and Fred thought something would turn up, as lads do. But Mamma knew very well that nothing was likely to turn up, and went about thinking all day long what she must do for her boy. About two years more would finish him with his

studies. Mrs. Hopetoun thought of it, and thought of it till her head ached, but she did not say anything; while the girls sat indoors very sad in that November weather thinking of Uncle James, and wishing they had said good-bye to all the girls when they left school.

“For we must not think of going back,” said Lucy to Agnes, when they sat sewing in the little parlour. “I wonder if we could do anything? I wonder *what* we could do?”

Agnes had been thinking just the same thing, so she only shook her head and did not answer. “But, Lucy,” she said at last, “perhaps after all Mamma will get the Barbadoes estate.”

“Perhaps,” said Lucy; and so they sat another long while quiet, stitching as fast as ever they could.

“I wonder, should we have to go and live there?” said Agnes, after a long time.

“*Live* there; oh no! Uncle James did not live there,” said Lucy. “I wonder if we shall live *here* much longer? Mamma does not say anything, but

she looks as if she were thinking of some change, I feel sure she does."

All at once while this conversation was going on, something went rapidly past the window, overshadowing it, and immediately there came a thundering knock at the door, and the sound of carriage-steps letting down. The girls listened quite breathless, wondering who it could be. Then they heard a voice in the passage, "Are the Miss Hopetouns at home? where are they? or don't take me to the drawing-room; take me directly where they are. Never mind saying who it is—make haste—let me in. They know *me*."

And while Lucy and Agnes still listened, the door of the little parlour burst open, and Miss Mellor came rushing into the room. The little parlour! the place where there was scarcely room to turn round; but they did not think of that, they were so much surprised that they could scarcely say a word to her. Miss Mellor was twenty now, dressed very gaily, and like a very rich person as she was. She came running in with open arms to kiss them. *She* was not changed at least.

“Something is wrong,” she said, as she looked at their black frocks and pale faces. What has happened? is there somebody dead?”

“Uncle James,” said Lucy, very quietly.

“Were you very fond of him?” said Miss Mellor.

The girls did not answer, but the tears came to their eyes.

“Have you left school?” said Mary again. “I was there on Friday; I heard you had gone away suddenly because somebody was ill; but you are surely going back again.”

“No, I do not think we are going again,” said Lucy.

“Uncle James sent us—and now he is dead,” said Agnes, with a little sob.

The next thing after that was that Miss Mellor kissed Agnes suddenly, then turned very red, then asked if she might send the carriage away and stay all day with them, and if she could see Mamma.

After they had got over the first shock of seeing her in this little house, they were very glad that she should stay all day. So she sent off the carriage,

which belonged to the lady she was staying with, a lady who lived at Ardham Hill, in the very house Lucy and Agnes had longed so much to take. And then Miss Mellor made herself very much at home in the little room. Mamma was out, and had been out for a long time. Mary made them give her something to do, and, I think, put in about four stitches in as many hours; but she had so much to talk of, that how do you think it was possible she could work as well? It was quite tea-time before Mamma came in, and she was very tired, and rather annoyed when she saw a stranger; but Mary behaved so kindly that Mrs. Hopetoun soon liked her very much. They had tea in the best room, and both the girls took the opportunity of running upstairs to see that everything was comfortable, and of having a little talk together by the way about Mary. The moment they were gone, Mary started up, sprang to the door of the little parlour, locked it, and rushing back again, knelt down on the little footstool by the side of Mrs. Hopetoun's chair. Mamma got quite alarmed for the moment, and thought she had gone

crazy. She must have been half out of her wits, I think indeed, when she, a stranger, locked the parlour door.

“They can’t come in till we let them,” said Mary; “and now, oh please Mrs. Hopetoun, listen to what I have got to say.”

But I am not going to tell you all that Miss Mellor said. First of all she told Mamma exactly what had happened *that* night in the garden at Hyde House, and how Agnes had saved her, as she said. And then she said she was rich and had a great deal more money than she should ever want; and then she begged and entreated and prayed Mrs. Hopetoun, now that their uncle was dead, to let *her* keep Lucy and Agnes at school.

I don’t know exactly how Mrs. Hopetoun felt; I think she was very pleased and yet a little mortified in her heart. She kissed Mary and thanked her and was very affectionate to her, but she said Agnes and Lucy were not going to school again, and would not be persuaded to anything different. Then she stopped Mary’s entreaties by taking her arm and lead-

ing her upstairs, after she had unlocked the door. The girls did not know anything about it; they thought Mary looked a little confused and agitated, but they were quite happy to see what good friends she was with Mamma. Such very good friends! After tea Mamma actually told Miss Mellor about the estate in Barbadoes, and how they were afraid they never would get it; and Miss Mellor jumped up and clapped her hands, and said she knew her uncle had an agent in Barbadoes, and she should write to him that very night to send out word about it. The girls were filled with new hopes by this, and Agnes determined to write and tell Fred directly. Indeed, they were all very much the better for Mary's visit. It was a little novelty in their life; and then to see Mary—Mary Mellor of all persons in the world—such very good friends with Mamma!

CHAPTER XXVII.

A CONSULTATION.

BUT when Miss Mellor was gone, Mamma called them both downstairs to talk to them. Arty was not the beautiful little darling now that he was four years ago. He was a big sturdy boy, with nails in his boots, and could go to bed by himself. Mamma called the girls to the little parlour that evening, just after Arty had gone to bed. She sat down in her own easy chair, and made them take seats near her. She still looked tired and was very thoughtful and serious, besides. She did not speak just at once, and both Lucy and Agnes thought there were some new wrinkles in Mamma's dear face.

“My dears,” she said, “you will think it strange what I am going to propose, just after seeing your rich friend. It is God who makes one rich and another poor—after all riches and poverty matter very

little to happiness. Try to be patient while I tell you what I was thinking of doing on account of Fred."

"Oh Mamma! if you could think of anything that we could do!" said Agnes. Lucy kept silent, listening for what Mamma would say.

"Ah, Agnes, I am afraid I shall have to ask you to do more than you care for doing," said Mrs. Hopetoun. "You were very much frightened the first year you were at school for any of your friends coming here. Do you think you could bear to be still poorer, *far* poorer than this?"

Agnes looked at her Mamma with her lips apart and her mouth a little open, after her old childish fashion. She did not understand what she meant.

"Fred must not lose all his past studies—all his time—if we can help it," said Mrs. Hopetoun with a little agitation. "Are you prepared to make a sacrifice for Fred's sake? tell me that first, and then I shall tell you what my meaning is."

"Yes, Mamma," said Lucy; and Agnes said nothing, but looked a great deal, so that Mamma began to say what it was.

“ In the first place you are too young—you cannot *do* anything except help me,” said Mrs. Hopetoun. “ I was in the country to-day, a long way in the country, in the little village of Colton. I saw a cottage there of four rooms, with a nice garden and some fruit-trees; just a cottage, nothing more: do you think you could make up your mind to go and live with me there without any servant—to do *everything* ourselves, and to keep Arty on with his lessons? Do you think you could do that, my dear children, for Fred’s sake? Now, think; do not answer me all at once; for unless you can bring yourselves to consent heartily, I will never think of it again.”

“ We *will* consent heartily!” cried Agnes, in great haste; but Mamma would not hear her then, and Lucy did not say anything. Then there was a long silence. To live in a little country cottage, like a labourer’s house—to keep no servant—to do *everything*—to live like poor people, and be taken for poor people, and nobody to know that they did this of their own will. Lucy was a little proud, and did not like to be

thought poor; she thought it over with a pain at her heart; she will consent, and she will do it, you may be sure; but it will be a real sacrifice to Lucy. She would rather go out to be a governess—she would rather do anything else.

Agnes was quite different—she leaped it at once, and did not think whether she would like it or not. She thought she would have been content to shut herself up in a cave for two years, so that Fred might get on with his studies, and thought directly of the cottage in the country, and the garden, and the change, and never at all of the brushing and cooking, and all that would have to be done by their own hands. When she found that Lucy remained so long silent, Agnes did not wait for her, but put her hand into Mrs. Hopetoun's, and said, "Mamma, I shall be very glad."

"And you, Lucy?" said Mrs. Hopetoun.

"Do you think we could not teach, Mamma? do you really think I am too young to teach?" said Lucy, looking up very wistfully.

"I think you are," said Mamma; "and besides, all

the girls in Ardsley go to Miss Thomson's—you would not like to injure her."

Lucy made another pause. "Do not you think we could take in work, Mamma, or do embroidery—or something?" said Lucy again, rather discontentedly and slowly. Mrs. Hopetoun did not make any answer; she sat quite quiet, waiting till Lucy should satisfy herself.

Now Agnes began to get very impatient, a little angry with Lucy, and a little afraid lest Mamma should be angry with her. "Oh, Mamma, why don't you say just what we are to do—you know best," cried Agnes. "It is very difficult to choose for one's self; tell us what we must do, and we shall like it then."

"No," said Mamma, "I am not going to punish my other children for the sake of Fred; I am glad that Lucy takes time to think of it. It will be rather hard at first, and often disagreeable; but, I think, with a little arrangement it will not turn out so very bad; and if we never make a hardship nor a secret of it ourselves, nor seem ashamed, other people will remember that there is nothing to be ashamed of;

and in two years Fred will have his studies over, and we can come back to our comfortable house, and you will be pleased to think that you have served your brother; but you must make up your own minds, children; I will not say you are to do it—for you will have to suffer in your own persons, as well as me.”

“Mamma,” said Lucy, rising up and coming to her mother’s side, “I am quite ready—I shall like it now.”

Then Mamma kissed them both, and they saw that tears were in her eyes. “I think you will never be sorry for this,” she said, “and I believe we shall be very happy and comfortable, children. In the summer it will be very pleasant, and the country is very nice even in winter; you can go with me to see the place to-morrow. Miss Pounceby knows somebody in Oldecastle who wants to try the fresh air in Ardsley, and who would take this house. We will leave the furniture in the best room, and they will take good care of it, and the cottage will look very nice with the rest. Do you know, once when I was a little girl, I lived in just such a cottage, one

time, when I was delicate—and my heart quite warmed to this one whenever I saw it. If we get the estate in Barbadoes, and grow rich, Fred shall buy that little house for his mother, and when you are all grown up and gone away, I will go and live there.”

“ Oh, Mamma,” cried Agnes, suddenly, “ why did you tell Mary of the Barbadoes estate ? ”

“ Because I liked her,” said Mrs. Hopetoun, quietly.

“ I like her too,” said Agnes, “ very much, but I did not think *you* would, Mamma; and she enjoyed being here, Lucy, better perhaps than if she had been in a grand house.”

“ But I am afraid I don't like that,” said Lucy, “ I would rather that people were not so *kind* to us. I should like to be just equals with our friends, and that they should not need to enjoy themselves unless they liked. I don't like to be pitied. I don't like—”

“ To be poor, Lucy,” said Mrs. Hopetoun; “ a great many people quite agree with you; but, my dear, that is just what God says *we* are to be; and

don't you think it would be best to try to like it since we must *bear* it?—it is the wisest way.”

“ I will try, Mamma—indeed I will—I did not mean to be ill-tempered,” said Lucy; “ but Agnes is provoking. Agnes likes everything that is new; Agnes never cares—”

Agnes opened her brown eyes and wondered, but for once in her life was prudent, and would not quarrel. This was partly true about Agnes, but not quite. She did care very much about some things; but I confess that this night she did not think of all the unpleasantness of working and having red hands, and being only a cottage girl; but, instead of that, made pictures in her mind of quite a fancy cottage, with flowers all round it, and honeysuckles on the walls, and everything so nice and so neat within, like a house in a picture, and of setting a little table in the garden for tea in the summer evenings, and taking long walks, and working in the garden, and a great many other pleasant things. I think it was very good for Agnes that she could take pleasure out of it in this way; but Lucy, though she was much

more sensible than her sister, kept thinking about the hardships in spite of herself, and kept always saying to herself, "It is for Fred's sake," and was quite provoked when Agnes said anything about the cottage, or how pleasant it would be in summer. Lucy did not want to think it would be pleasant; she did not wish to make the best of it; she preferred to be quite a martyr, making a sacrifice of herself for Fred's sake.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE COTTAGE.

WHEN Fred came to hear of what his mother proposed, he exclaimed, first of all, that he never would consent to have such a sacrifice made for him; then he hid his face in his hands, and something very like a sob sounded through the little parlour, and then he looked up with his eyes all glistening, and kissed Mamma's hand, and prayed God that he might never forget it, but try to be worthy of this love—for Mrs. Hopetoun had settled everything before she even told him: she had taken the cottage directly whenever the girls saw it—and Miss Pounceby had already let the house; so you see, if Fred had made ever so much resistance, it would have been of no use. All he could do was to resolve in his own mind to save everything he could, and to pay double

attention to his studies. Fred was a little like Agnes; you remember he always wanted to do great things when he was a man; now he set his heart upon being a great doctor, and an honour and credit to Mamma.

Arty for his part was quite delighted with the change. He was not to go to school for some time; that was splendid news for Arty, and he did not think just at that moment about Agnes keeping him up with his lessons. He walked the whole way to Colton twice over on the day of the removal, with his gloves in his pocket, and his fingers red and blue with cold, one time carrying the birdcage, and the next a basket containing some china. It was a very cold day, frosty and clear, with the sun shining red, and the river frozen over; a bright day to look at, but not so very comfortable for a removal. However, Mamma was resolved everything should be cheerful. There was only one room in the cottage which could be made a sitting-room; that is to say, it was the kitchen, which Mamma had got papered, and which looked very cosy, with its big fireplace,

and its broad lattice window. They had such a famous fire on that first night, and cakes of Mamma's own making on the table, when they had their dinner-tea, and Agnes and Arty were so merry that even Lucy could not help feeling pleased too. It was a pretty little cottage with a red-tiled roof, and the walls grown over with brown and yellow lichens—such a homelike cosy little place, that you could almost have supposed it had grown there, and never was built at all. The sitting-room, which was to serve them, both for parlour and kitchen, was on one side of the door, and Mamma's bedroom on the other; and above were two rooms lighted from the roof, one of which was Arty's, and one belonged to the girls. When Fred came to see them all, Lucy and Agnes slept in Mamma's room. Those two little attic windows in the roof made the cottage look all the prettier. There were two windows in the sitting-room, one in front and one in the gable wall of the house, which was covered with monthly roses; and there were flower-beds and grass in front, and the kitchen-garden behind, and at one side two apple-trees. The garden

gate opened upon the quiet road—almost a lane, with high green hedges on each side, and a broad edge of beautiful grass—which led to the village. It was three or four minutes' walk to Colton, so you see they were *quite* in the country; and I think I should like very much if somebody would give me for a Christmas-box, just such another cosy little house.

They soon got settled down here, and after a while enjoyed it very much. I am not sure whether Mamma missed Miss Pounceby and her other friends in Ardsley; or if she sometimes found it rather hard to look after their dinner every day, and help to do everything herself. If you ask me my real opinion, I don't think she did. I don't think Agnes felt a bit the worse for having to wash the cups and saucers, though she had not done it for a long time: and even Lucy did not suffer at all for what she had to do. They had no servants to trouble them, and nobody to spy upon what they did. Sometimes an old woman came from the village to do the rougher part of the work; for the rest, they got on famously. I think, instead of sitting in a foggy room in London, writing stories,

I should like to be living in that cottage serving my own people with my own hands. What do you think, all you girls? Because, you know, whatever anybody likes to say, that is the true woman's work after all.

Miss Mellor came to see them very soon after they were settled—insisted upon coming, though I know Lucy did not want her. Mary danced about like a wild creature when she got there; she thought there never was such a delightful life—nobody to see them, nobody to bother them; able to run out into the garden without their bonnets whenever they pleased, and to do just what they liked. I think she would not have been so fond of the cottage if she had lived there always—because, you know, Mary had been brought up very differently from the Hopetouns; but for a day she thought it delightful. There was once a queen, you remember, who had a little rustic dairy-cottage, and used to go there and play at being a peasant. Mary Mellor was like poor Queen Marie Antoinette.

I will tell you of an adventure they had once—I think the only adventure that did happen to them at

the cottage. They were walking out one evening in summer—Mamma and Lucy and Agnes—for they only needed to lock the door and everything was safe. When they came near the parsonage, Agnes picked up a book—a little unbound German book, with thick, rough edges—I dare say you have seen some like it. When Agnes saw it was German, and a tale, she began to read it aloud. She had got quite a habit of reading aloud to Mamma; reading the foreign books in English, translating as she went along. I don't quite know why it was, but Mamma liked this sort of reading better than if it had been an English book. I think she was proud of her daughter, and it pleased her to think that Agnes could not have done this so well, unless she had been clever and a good scholar. This time Agnes opened at the middle of the story, and plunged into it; she did not make it into very nice smooth English as your language teachers make you do, but often put the German words into English just as they came, which Mamma thought very odd and liked to hear; and they sometimes had very good laughs over the queer

expressions of the literal translation. This book was a tale, and rather a funny one. Agnes walked between Lucy and Mamma—there was not another person to be seen on the whole road—and read first one little bit, and then another. While she was doing this, and they were all laughing at something she had read, they passed the gate of Colton parsonage. There was a gentleman standing there, trying to open it, as if he had just come in from a walk. He started a little when he heard the voice reading, and stood with his back to them, pretending to be busy with the gate, to listen. Agnes went on reading and never noticed him; but by and by, after they had gone a little further on, he came after them. He was an odd-looking man, big and tall, with a great cloak on, and a travelling-cap tied down at the ears. His cloak had a hood to it, which the girls had never seen on a gentleman's cloak before, and he wore a moustache, and had a huge pair of spectacles on. He made them quite a splendid bow when he came up to them. He could not take off his cap, you know, as he could have done had he worn a hat, but it was a very grand

salutation for all that. He looked so good-tempered and fat that Mamma saw very well he would not be rude to them ; so she waited to hear what he had to say. He made another bow, and then he spoke to Agnes. "I beg your pardon, Meess," he said, speaking very good English, only speaking slow, "I perceive you do know my language ver well."

Agnes said "Yes," holding down her head a little, for though she was fourteen she was still very shy.

"Perhaps it is your book which my daughter has just picked up," said Mrs. Hopetoun. "Give it back to the gentleman, Agnes ; I am glad you have found its owner so soon."

Agnes looked at the book rather wistfully ; she wished she could have finished the story—but held it out at once to the stranger.

"Should you like to keep it?" said the German gentleman. "Permit, Madam, that I make a little inscription, and give it back to the young lady. The book is mine—I mean it is not mine only, but I am the author of it—I shall give it to the young lady with pleasure. Does the young Meess live near?"

“We live close by,” said Mrs. Hopetoun. “Thank you; Agnes will be proud to have a book from the author, I am sure.”

Mrs. Hopetoun said this because she knew there had been a German gentleman staying at the parsonage, which made him not quite a stranger; and Agnes stood by, very proud and blushing, thinking in her heart it would be very grand to have a book with the author's name.

“I shall fetch it, Madam,” said the gentleman; “my pen is indoors.” And he took the book out of Agnes' hand, and pointed over his shoulder to the house, and went in as fast as possible. But he did not come out again as long as they were in sight—he did not meet them coming back—they thought he must have changed his mind.

However, that very night, the same gentleman came to the cottage, and the clergyman came along with him. The German gave the book to Agnes, and sat down by her, and began to ask her questions. He took his cap off when he came into the house; he had a round forehead, very bald and high, and his

hair at the sides was grey, and so was his moustache. He asked Agnes if she could write very nicely. Now, to tell the truth, Agnes could *not* write very nicely. I am afraid she thought it rather an impertinent question.

“ Because I know you know my language well—ver well,” said the gentleman; “ and I want one lady, if she will be so good, to translate some littel stories for me.”

“ To translate! Oh, Sir, do you mean to put them in a book?” cried Agnes, feeling very much frightened.

“ To put them in a book—yes; that is not dreadful, is it?” said the German. “ Yes, and you can do it, mine little girl.”

“ Oh, but I cannot write well,” said Agnes, trembling; “ and I don’t know very good English—I never tried to translate—I only can read to Mamma; and then I always make the words into English just as they come.”

“ That is the very way to do it best,” said the German, very kindly.

“ This gentleman means to publish a translation of some of his own works, and he thinks your daughter seems able to undertake it,” said the clergyman to Mrs. Hopetoun. “ Of course we should revise it very carefully, and go over every word. He seems to have taken it into his head, and nothing will make him give it up.”

When Agnes heard that, she saw by his tone and by a glance of his eye that the clergyman thought she could not do it. This roused her spirit a little. She said, “ If you think I can have the time, I know I can do it, Mamma.”

Mamma was a little fluttered and agitated with the thought. She did not know what to say; but the German gentleman took up Agnes' words, and began to talk to her about his tales, so that no one else could say a word. He was very good-humoured, and had a great opinion of himself. He thought there had never been such stories as his own. He told Agnes all about them, and what made him think of this part and that part, and chuckled over them. Then he took up the book and read what he

thought was the best scene—in the German, with such a true accent, and so much emphasis, that poor little Agnes scarcely understood, and none of the rest understood at all. You would have thought it very funny to see that scene in the cottage; the German sitting holding his book close to his eyes, rolling the big-sounding German words out of his moustache—the clergyman looking annoyed—Mamma quite surprised and wondering—Lucy trying very hard not to laugh—and poor Agnes, growing white one moment and red the next, trying with all her ears, with her brown eyes wide open, and her lips apart, to follow what he read. It was a funny scene, but as nobody understood it, nobody could see the fun. The clergyman did not know much German, neither did Lucy, and Mrs. Hopetoun could not tell a word; even Agnes found it such hard work to follow him, being unfamiliar with the accent, that she was nearer crying than laughing. When he had finished, the author put down the book, took off his spectacles, put his hand upon his side, and laughed—such a long, comical, satisfied ha, ha, ha! I think you would all

have laughed too if you had heard it; and I am sorry to tell you that Lucy went off into a regular burst of laughter, and could not help herself, and laughed the more, the more she tried to stop it, till Mamma was quite ashamed. However, the German was very much pleased with Lucy; he thought it was all because of his funny scene.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GOOD FOR SOMETHING.

THE end of the conversation was, however, that Agnes did get the stories to translate. I don't think she put them into very fine English; she was too young for that, and did not know how to do it; but she did put them into English, such as it was, and wrote them all out; and inked her poor little fingers so dreadfully that Mamma thought they never would come white again. Such trouble she took over it! she had her German dictionary beside her, and an English dictionary too; and when she had settled upon the meaning of the words in a sentence, she used to look up her English dictionary to see if she could find finer words—meaning the same thing—than those that came into her own head. I don't think the translation was any the better for that myself.

Then the German gentleman was always dropping in to see how she got on, and I don't think he mended the matter either. It was not published just as Agnes wrote it; but still the real work of the translation was hers, and she did it very faithfully too, though she could not write a very nice "style."

Lucy was a little disposed to be discontented while Agnes worked at this. Lucy could not help thinking that she was the eldest, and surely could do something too. "My dear child, it is greater self-denial to do Agnes' work for her while she is busy," said Mamma; "it does not matter what kind of work one does so long as one does it out of a good heart." That is very true; but Lucy found it rather hard to be content just at that time, though I think she did gain a victory over herself, and did as her Mamma said. This work of Agnes' did not bring very much money; but it was enough to buy winter dresses for the two sisters, and some little things they wanted besides. I think that money made them all sad, and brought the tears to Agnes' eyes. She

could not help thinking of Uncle James's five pounds which she had gone into Oldcastle to spend. Everything was very much changed now. Uncle James was dead, and even they who loved him were beginning to forget him; and they had almost grown out of acquaintance with Ardsley; but they all thought of Uncle James and his five pounds, when Agnes put the money she had got for her translations into Mamma's hand.

That same autumn, Mary Mellor came to fetch them to her own wedding. She wanted them to go about a week before, and persuaded Mrs. Hopetoun, who indeed was very glad to let them, that the change would do them good. I think it was rather an odd change. A great country house full of people, and all the bustle of a marriage party, and all the bride's fine dresses and pretty presents, and the splendid wedding breakfast, and the crowd of visitors—and then to go back all at once, and to drop into the little cottage where they never saw a stranger week after week, and scarcely spoke to any one but Arty and Mamma. However, by this time, the two years

were getting done: six months more, and Fred, who had been distinguishing himself greatly among his companions, would have finished his studies, and then they were all to go home.

Perhaps you think it was no very great home they had to go to; but still Mrs. Hopetoun had been quite a person of consideration in Ardsley, where everybody knew her, and where people knew how good she was; and they all looked forward with great satisfaction, and a sort of hope, which they could scarcely account for, to this return. Very little had been heard all this time about the Barbadoes estate; indeed, except in very fanciful moods, they never even thought of it now. They were very much changed in all their thoughts and expectations. Even Lucy was no longer ashamed of the house in Ardsley, but thought very well of it indeed, and felt that it was very comfortable to have such a home to go back to. Then Fred would soon be ready for a man's work, his own chosen profession, and it was very comfortable to the girls to think that their self-denial had helped their brother to this. They

thought all sorts of pleasant things of Fred; they imagined him a great physician, whom everybody knew, and whom a great many people blessed and thanked; they thought of him marrying some very nice wife, and being so happy, and how he would always come to Ardsley at Christmas, and in summer. I can't tell you how many stories Agnes made up in her mind about Fred.

And then Arty (Arty was not always a very obedient pupil to his sister): he began—that curly-headed stammering little rogue, whom we remember quite a baby—to play tricks and make jokes upon the girls, as Fred used to do; and Lucy and Agnes were pleased to think that he should go to the grammar school as soon as they went home. How they did talk of going home! how excited they grew as the days and the weeks dropped by, one by one; and it was again Agnes' birthday, this time her sixteenth birthday! and they might now expect Fred directly to take them back in triumph.

“And so Agnes is sixteen,” said Mamma, kissing her at breakfast that morning. “I wish Fred could

have been here to wish his sister joy—Agnes is almost a woman now.”

“Such a lot of birthdays,” said Agnes,—“*almost* a woman—I wonder at you, Mamma! ah, but I shall never have a birthday without thinking of dear Uncle James, and that five pounds.”

“How kind he was!” said Mamma; “it is just two years now, children, since Uncle James died.”

“And do you remember that night before we heard, Agnes,—the night of your birthday, when you were fourteen,—when we took tea with Miss More,” said Lucy, “and what she said about Mary? Agnes found out her puzzle that night, Mamma.”

“What puzzle?” said Mamma.

“About being good for something.”

“And what did my dear child find out that she was good for?” said Mrs. Hopetoun, with a smile.

Agnes rose up and threw her arms round her mother's neck. “Oh, not the languages,” she said,—“not the one thing *I* had been thinking of, Mamma, but another one thing; not anything one can do with one's head or one's hands—something in the heart.”

“I think that must have been the one thing needful,” said Mamma.

“Yes,” said Agnes. “Oh, Mamma, I never told you—how did you know? It was about Mary looking up at Jesus, as if the one thing in the world was to listen to Him, and to make quite sure who He was: and oh, Lucy, do you remember,” cried Agnes, her eyes filling with tears, “dear Uncle James, when he was dying, said just the same thing?”

“And so shall I say the same thing,” said Mrs. Hopetoun; “because, my dear children, the one thing needful is to get a heart into your life. People get dead in their lives often enough; a great many people go about every day as if they had no heart in them; but one gets a heart in everything one does, when one keeps thinking that the Lord went before us upon this very same way.”

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LAST.

ANOTHER winter day, so brisk, and red, and sunny, that it was scarcely possible to walk quietly along the echoing frosty roads which tempted one to skip, and jump, and dance the whole way. It was cold, but the air was so brisk and delightful that one could scarcely help laughing aloud for pleasure. Mrs. Hopetoun stood at the door of the cottage, with a shawl over her cap, looking along the road as if she expected some one; and all the young people had gone to meet Fred. The coach passed through another village about three miles off, and Lucy and Agnes and Arty had gone there to meet their brother. It was just getting dusk when Mrs. Hopetoun first went out to the door, and the lights in the village houses at a little distance shone bright and pleasant,

and a throng of stars were beginning to shine out in the frosty sky. But it was too early yet for the arrival of the traveller. Mamma went in again to see that everything was prepared. There was a bright fire in the large cottage grate, the kettle was boiling, and a savoury dish of stewed chicken was keeping itself warm before the fire; and the red light flickered over the best china, and the cakes and butter and home-made bread upon the table; and the stars looked in through the lattice window, and the warmth was so sweet and complete within, that it went to one's heart. One could not help feeling that love and family happiness had quite as much to do with it as the glow of that cheerful hearty fire.

And yet it was only a cottage-room, and, perhaps—I dare not venture to say positively, for Mrs. Hopetoun had her secrets about these little matters—perhaps the chicken was cooked over that same fire. And yet you could not have supposed an apartment less coarse or vulgar than that room in which Mamma waited for Fred.

At last she heard the footsteps which rang upon the frosty road, and could be heard a long way off—especially as Arty had very strong boots, and made as much noise with them as he possibly could. Then Mamma went out again, and stood at the gate watching for them. Whenever they caught sight of her, Fred rushed forward, and Arty cried, “Hurrah!” and tossed his cap in the air. Mamma thought the boy was crazy. But Fred, almost as crazy as he, came rushing forward, holding up a letter in his hand, and seized his mother in his arms in his joy, and almost carried her into the cottage. Mrs. Hopetoun could not make it out. They all rushed round her in a crowd, and Fred put her into the easy-chair which she had set all ready for him, and stood before her, with the others all round, opening this letter. What could it be? Something else had happened besides Fred coming home.

It was a letter from Mr. Farquhar, all about the Barbadoes estate; telling how it had been recovered, and got out of the bad overseer's hands, partly by Mr. Farquhar's own agent, and partly by the trouble

which had been taken by another gentleman, a correspondent of Mr. Mellor; and how even some of the arrears had been recovered, and already a considerable remittance had come to Mr. Farquhar's hands; and congratulating Fred upon his good fortune, which was so uncommon. Mrs. Hopetoun could not believe the news when it was told to her. She quite burst into tears, when Arty set up another "Hurrah!" She got the letter itself, and went over it all slowly, scarcely able to read it with her dim eyes. Could it be true? And so the children were provided for after all!

When Mamma really came to herself after that great shock, she immediately thought upon the stewed chicken—what if it should be spoiled?—and made Fred sit in the easy-chair, and got everything ready for him with her own trembling hands. Then she went to her own room for a few minutes—I cannot tell exactly what she was doing; I think very likely kneeling down in the dark to thank God.

But the young people made such a noise over that

tea-table ! I think there never was such a happy meal. Fred was one-and-twenty, had a great pair of whiskers, and was a doctor, a real M.D., though he was so young, and qualified to give everybody physic; and they had all come to their fortunes; and to-morrow they were going out of this dear little cottage home to Ardsley, perhaps to take the great house at last which Lucy had wished for so long. But even Lucy now was glad in her heart that they had been poor, and worked with their own hands these two years. Fred's success was not merely procured by money; and now for a blessing the riches had come at last.

So next day they went to Ardsley; and not very long after went to live in the same pretty house which Lucy had taken Uncle James to see, and which he did not like because it was called Rosebank. They did not call it Rosebank when they had it—I forget what name it got; but I know it was a very pretty house with a beautiful garden, and quite large enough to satisfy Lucy: and everybody was glad to make friends with the Hopetouns. Mamma had

never been ashamed of being poor—she had not been afraid, for a good reason, to make herself even poorer—and when she came back to Ardsley, the whole little town was glad. As for the two girls, they had learned a great many things in that dear little cottage. They bought it, and sometimes went to live there for a week or two, for the sake of old times, and many of their young friends thought it excellent fun to go to the cottage with Agnes and Lucy, and do everything they wanted for themselves.

It happened, too, strangely enough, that Annie Oxenford's Papa had taken the house at Ardham Hill, in order to be near his brother, the Rector of Ardsley; and when Lucy and Agnes went to Rosebank, they soon renewed their friendship with their old companion. Annie was a very good girl now; she never had forgotten that time when she puzzled Mary Mellor, and "was so sorry and ashamed because she was so glad." I think when they all grew older there was some talk of Fred and Annie Oxenford being married, but I am not quite sure of that.

And as for Agnes, there is no fear now that she

will think her languages are the one thing that she can be good for. Often she does translate into Italian and German for some good ladies in London, who try to improve and educate the poor little Italian image boys and German organ grinders—and still reads foreign books to Mamma in English, translating as she reads—a thing which pleases Mamma very much. But Agnes is not in any doubt now about the one thing needful, and understands (as I hope you girls who read her story will all understand) how this one thing is not to do anything, but to make sure of Jesus and know him as Mary did; and so, as Mamma told her, to get a heart into her life.

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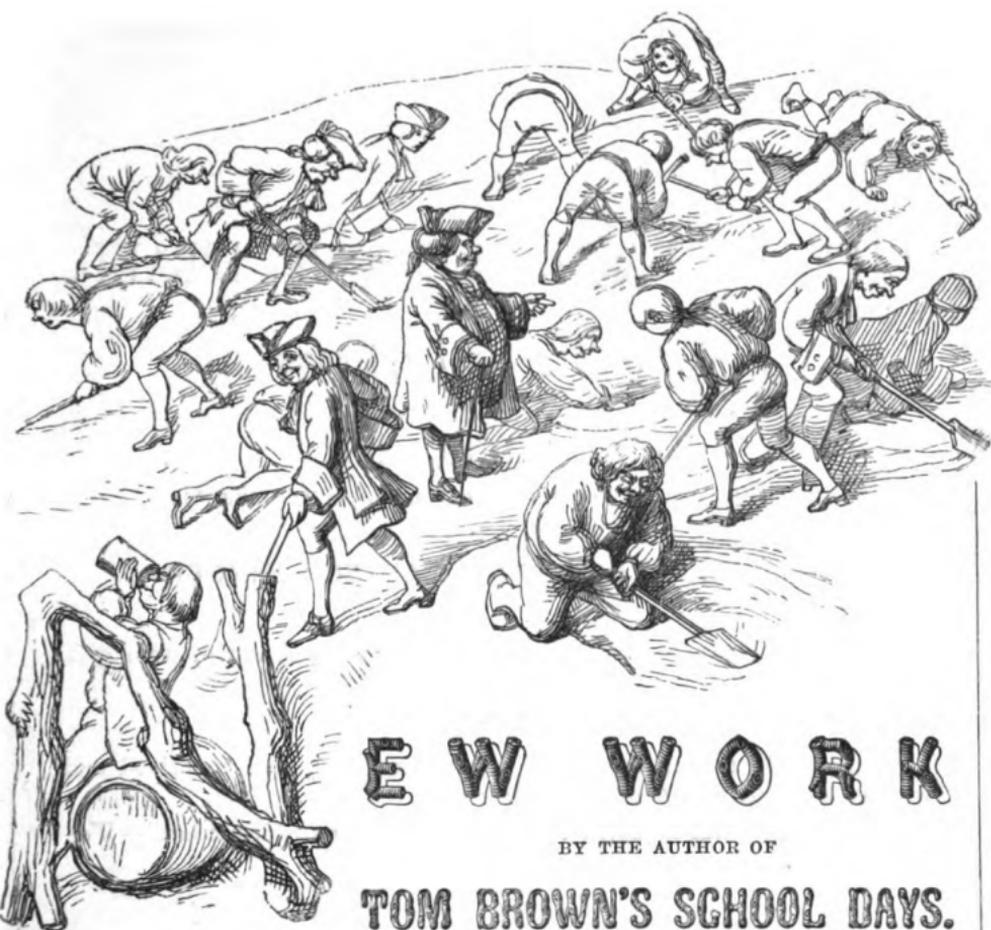
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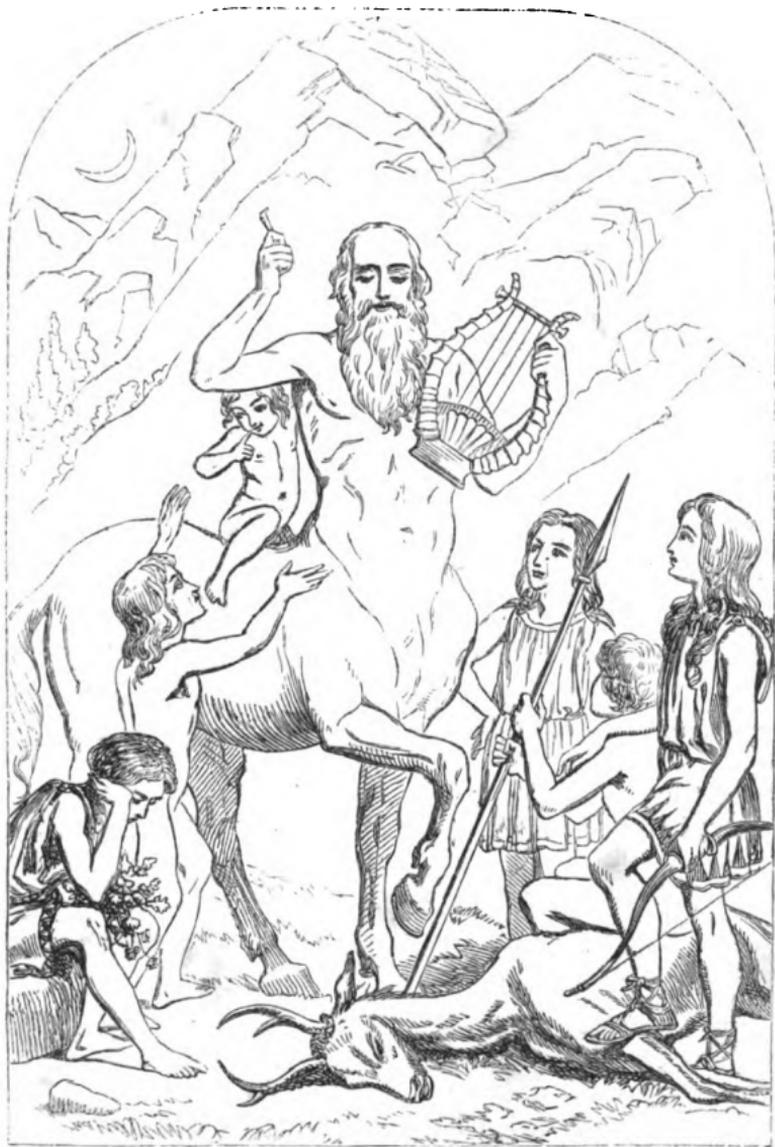
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