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THE SEABOARD PARISH

BY GEORGE MAC DONALD, LL.D.

VOL. I.

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CHAPTER I.

HOMILETIC.

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

But let me, for a moment, suppose that I am your grandfather, and that you have all come to beg for a story; and that, therefore, as usually happens

in such cases, I am sitting with a puzzled face, indicating a more puzzled mind. I know that there are a great many stories in the holes and corners of my brain; indeed, here is one, there is one, peeping out at me like a rabbit; but alas, like a rabbit, showing me almost at the same instant the tail-end of it, and vanishing with a contemptuous _thud_ of its hind feet on the ground. For I must have suitable regard to the desires of my children. It is a fine thing to be able to give people what they want, if at the same time you can give them what you want. To give people what they want, would sometimes be to give them only dirt and poison. To give them what you want, might be to set before them something of which they could not eat a mouthful. What both you and I want, I am willing to think, is a dish of good wholesome venison. Now I suppose my children around me are neither young enough nor old enough to care about a fairy tale, go that will not do. What they want is, I believe, something that I know about--that has happened to myself. Well, I confess, that is the kind of thing I like best to hear anybody talk to me about. Let anyone tell me something that has happened to himself, especially if he will give me a peep into how his heart took it, as it sat in its own little room with the closed door, and that person will, so telling, absorb my attention: he has something true and genuine and valuable to communicate. They are mostly old people that can do so. Not that young people have nothing happen to them; but that only when they grow old, are they able to see things right, to disentangle confusions, and judge righteous judgment. Things which at the time appeared insignificant or wearisome, then give out the light that was in them, show their own truth, interest, and influence: they are far enough off to be seen. It is not when we are nearest to anything that we know best what it is. How I should like to write a story for old people! The young are always having stories written for them. Why should not the old people come in for a share? A story without a young person in it at all! Nobody under fifty admitted! It could hardly be a fairy tale, could it? Or a love story either? I am not so sure about that. The worst of it would be, however, that hardly a young person would read it. Now, we old people would not like that. We can read young people's books and enjoy them: they would not try to read old men's books or old women's books; they would be so sure of their being dry. My dear old brothers and sisters, we know better, do we not? We have nice old jokes, with no end of fun in them; only they cannot see the fun. We have strange tales, that we know to be true, and which look more and more marvellous every time we turn them over again; only somehow they do not belong to the ways of this year--I was going to say _week_,--and so the young people generally do not care to hear them. I have had one pale-faced boy, to be sure, who will sit at his mother's feet, and listen for hours to what took place before he was born. To him his mother's wedding-gown was as old as Eve's coat of skins. But then he was young enough not yet to have had a chance of losing the childhood common to the young and the old. Ah! I should like to write for you, old men, old women, to help you to read the past, to help you to look for the future. Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed; for, however your souls may be at peace, however your quietness and confidence may give you strength, in the decay of your earthly tabernacle, in the shortening of its cords, in the weakening of its stakes, in the rents through which you see the stars, you have yet your share in the cry of the creation after the sonship. But the one thing I should keep saying to you, my companions in old age, would be, "Friends, let us not grow old." Old age is but a mask; let us not call

the mask the face. Is the acorn old, because its cup dries and drops it from its hold--because its skin has grown brown and cracks in the earth? Then only is a man growing old when he ceases to have sympathy with the young. That is a sign that his heart has begun to wither. And that is a dreadful kind of old age. The heart needs never be old. Indeed it should always be growing younger. Some of us feel younger, do we not, than when we were nine or ten? It is not necessary to be able to play at leapfrog to enjoy the game. There are young creatures whose turn it is, and perhaps whose duty it would be, to play at leap-frog if there was any necessity for putting the matter in that light; and for us, we have the privilege, or if we will not accept the privilege, then I say we have the duty, of enjoying their leap-frog. But if we must withdraw in a measure from sociable relations with our fellows, let it be as the wise creatures that creep aside and wrap themselves up and lay themselves by that their wings may grow and put on the lovely hues of their coming resurrection. Such a withdrawing is in the name of youth. And while it is pleasant--no one knows how pleasant except him who experiences it--to sit apart and see the drama of life going on around him, while his feelings are calm and free, his vision clear, and his judgment righteous, the old man must ever be ready, should the sweep of action catch him in its skirts, to get on his tottering old legs, and go with brave heart to do the work of a true man, none the less true that his hands tremble, and that he would gladly return to his chimney-corner. If he is never thus called out, let him examine himself, lest he should be falling into the number of those that say, "I go, sir," and go not; who are content with thinking beautiful things in an Atlantis, Oceana, Arcadia, or what it may be, but put not forth one of their fingers to work a salvation in the earth. Better than such is the man who, using just weights and a true balance, sells good flour, and never has a thought of his own.

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

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

I am again seated in the little octagonal room, which I have made my study because I like it best. It is rather a shame, for my books cover over every foot of the old oak panelling. But they make the room all the pleasanter to the eye, and after I am gone, there is the old oak, none the worse, for anyone who prefers it to books.

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

CHAPTER II.

CONSTANCE'S BIRTHDAY.

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

the individual in authority. Constance had chosen "a long ride with papa."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It is a long ride," I answered.

"Too much for the pony?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"In consequence of what?"

"In consequence of your thinking you understood it."

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

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

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

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

"You often say, papa, that half the misery in this world comes from

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

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

"Yes, but that's not work."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Nobody does."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I ought to have mentioned that Constance had been at school for two years,

and had only been home a month that very day, in order to account for my knowing so little about her tastes and habits of mind. We went on talking a little more in the same way, and if I were writing for young people only, I should be tempted to go on a little farther with the account of what we said to each other; for it might help some of them to see that the thing they like best should, circumstances and conscience permitting, be made the centre from which they start to learn; that they should go on enlarging their knowledge all round from that one point at which God intended them to begin. But at length we fell into a silence, a very happy one on my part; for I was more than delighted to find that this one too of my children was following after the truth--wanting to do what was right, namely, to obey the word of the Lord, whether openly spoken to all, or to herself in the voice of her own conscience and the light of that understanding which is the candle of the Lord. I had often said to myself in past years, when I had found myself in the company of young ladies who announced their opinions--probably of no deeper origin than the prejudices of their nurses--as if these distinguished them from all the world besides; who were profound upon passion and ignorant of grace; who had not a notion whether a dress was beautiful, but only whether it was of the newest cut--I had often said to myself: "What shall I do if my daughters come to talk and think like that--if thinking it can be called?" but being confident that instruction for which the mind is not prepared only lies in a rotting heap, producing all kinds of mental evils correspondent to the results of successive loads of food which the system cannot assimilate, my hope had been to rouse wise questions in the minds of my children, in place of overwhelming their digestions with what could be of no instruction or edification without the foregoing appetite. Now my Constance had begun to ask me questions, and it made me very happy. We had thus come a long way nearer to each other; for however near the affection of human animals may bring them, there are abysses between soul and soul--the souls even of father and daughter--over which they must pass to meet. And I do not believe that any two human beings alive know yet what it is to love as love is in the glorious will of the Father of lights.

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

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

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

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

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

When we reached home at length, we found that Ethel, or, as we commonly called her, using the other end of her name, Wynn timer--for she was named after her mother--had got a room on the ground-floor, usually given to visitors, ready for her sister; and we were glad indeed not to have to carry her up the stairs. Before my wife left, she had sent the groom off to Addicehead for both physician and surgeon. A young man who had settled at Marshmallows as general practitioner a year or two before, was waiting for us when we arrived. He helped us to lay her upon a mattress in the position in which she felt the least pain. But why should I linger over the sorrowful detail? All agreed that the poor child's spine was seriously injured, and that probably years of suffering were before her. Everything was done that could be done; but she was not moved from that room for nine months, during which, though her pain certainly grew less by degrees, her want of power to move herself remained almost the same.

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

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

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

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

"Please do, papa."

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

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

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

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

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

This is a dreary beginning of my story, is it not? But sickness of all kinds is such a common thing in the world, that it is well sometimes to

let our minds rest upon it, lest it should take us altogether at unawares, either in ourselves or our friends, when it comes. If it were not a good thing in the end, surely it would not be; and perhaps before I have done my readers will not be sorry that my tale began so gloomily. The sickness in Judaea eighteen hundred and thirty-five years ago, or thereabouts, has no small part in the story of him who came to put all things under our feet. Praise be to him for evermore!

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

out-houses.

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

CHAPTER III.

THE SICK CHAMBER.

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

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

"What is it, my pet?" I asked.

"I am so happy!"

"What makes you so happy?" I asked again.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I do, I do. But that is easy to do," she returned.

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

"Papa, papa! do forgive me. This is a judgment on me for talking to you as

I did that dreadful morning. But I was so happy that I was impertinent."

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

"Lying in bed and doing nothing!"

"Yes. Just lying in bed, and doing his will."

"If I could but feel that I was doing his will!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After I had done talking, she said--

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the papers wherein I am about to record the chief events of the following years of my life, I shall give a short account of what passed at some of these assemblies in my child's room, in the hope that it may give my friends something, if not new, yet fresh to think about. For God has so made us that everyone who thinks at all thinks in a way that must be more or less fresh to everyone else who thinks, if he only have the gift of setting forth his thoughts so that we can see what they are.

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

As far as I can remember, I will tell how this Sunday-evening class began.

I was sitting by Constance's bed. The fire was burning brightly, and the twilight had deepened so nearly into night that it was reflected back from the window, for the curtains had not yet been drawn. There was no light in the room but that of the fire.

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

"What is it like, papa?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

than if he only made our minds as he makes our bodies."

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

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

"I see that, papa."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I have tried to read him a little."

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

had been talking about. Are you tired, darling?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You did show me, papa."

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

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

"And I was going on to give her the greatest instance of it in human history. As long as our Lord was with his disciples, they could not see him right: he was too near them. Too much light, too many words, too much revelation, blinds or stupefies. The Lord had been with them long enough. They loved him dearly, and yet often forgot his words almost as soon as he said them. He could not get it into them, for instance, that he had not come to be a king. Whatever he said, they shaped it over again after their own fancy; and their minds were so full of their own worldly notions of grandeur and command, that they could not receive into their souls the gift of God present before their eyes. Therefore he was taken away, that his Spirit, which was more himself than his bodily presence, might come into them--that they might receive the gift of God into their innermost being. After he had gone out of their sight, and they might look all around and down in the grave and up in the air, and not see him anywhere--when they thought they had lost him, he began to come to them again from the other side--from the inside. They found that the image of him which his presence with them had printed in light upon their souls, began to revive in the dark of his absence; and not that only, but that in looking at it without the overwhelming of his bodily presence, lines and forms and meanings began to dawn out of it which they had never seen before. And his words came back

to them, no longer as they had received them, but as he meant them. The spirit of Christ filling their hearts and giving them new power, made them remember, by making them able to understand, all that he had said to them. They were then always saying to each other, 'You remember how;' whereas before, they had been always staring at each other with astonishment and something very near incredulity, while he spoke to them. So that after he had gone away, he was really nearer to them than he had been before. The meaning of anything is more than its visible presence. There is a soul in everything, and that soul is the meaning of it. The soul of the world and all its beauty has come nearer to you, my dear, just because you are separated from it for a time."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That is quite another thing, my Connie. That is the heart of my hopes by day and my dreams by night. To behold the face of Jesus seems to me the one thing to be desired. I do not know that it is to be prayed for; but I think it will be given us as the great bounty of God, so soon as ever we are capable of it. That sight of the face of Jesus is, I think, what is meant by his glorious appearing, but it will come as a consequence of his spirit in us, not as a cause of that spirit in us. The pure in heart shall see God. The seeing of him will be the sign that we are like him, for only by

being like him can we see him as he is. All the time that he was with them, the disciples never saw him as he was. You must understand a man before you can see and read his face aright; and as the disciples did not understand our Lord's heart, they could neither see nor read his face aright. But when we shall be fit to look that man in the face, God only knows."

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

"Certainly I do, my dear."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

smiling.

"How do you mean, my dear?"

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER IV.

A SUNDAY EVENING.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

used in the eucharist but wooden platters and wooden cups."

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

"Yes, with our very hearts and souls, with our wills, with our absolute being. But all external things should be in harmony with the spirit of his revelation. And if God chose that his Son should visit the earth in homely fashion, in homely fashion likewise should be everything that enforces and commemorates that revelation. All church-forms should be on the other side from show and expense. Let the money go to build decent houses for God's poor, not to give them his holy bread and wine out of silver and gold and precious stones--stealing from the significance of the _content_ by the meretricious grandeur of the _continent_. I would send all the church-plate to fight the devil with his own weapons in our overcrowded cities, and in our villages where the husbandmen are housed like swine, by giving them room to be clean and decent air from heaven to breathe. When the people find the clergy thus in earnest, they will follow them fast enough, and the money will come in like salt and oil upon the sacrifice. I would there were a few of our dignitaries that could think grandly about things, even as Jesus thought--even as God thought when he sent him. There are many of them willing to stand any amount of persecution about trifles: the same enthusiasm directed by high thoughts about the kingdom of heaven as within men and not around them, would redeem a vast region from that indifference which comes of judging the gospel of God by the church of Christ with its phylacteries and hems."

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

"First, I would answer, Wynnie, that if you would tell me why it is necessary for all of us to come as babies, it would be less necessary for me to tell you why he came so: whatever was human must be his. But I would say next, Are you sure that he could not do anything for so long? Does a baby do nothing? Ask mamma there. Is it for nothing that the mother lifts up such heartfuls of thanks to God for the baby on her knee? Is it nothing that the baby opens such fountains of love in almost all the hearts around? Ah! you do not think how much every baby has to do with the saving of the world--the saving of it from selfishness, and folly, and greed. And for Jesus, was he not going to establish the reign of love in the earth? How could he do better than begin from babyhood? He had to lay hold of the heart of the world. How could he do better than begin with his mother's--the best one in it. Through his mother's love first, he grew into the world. It was first by the door of all the holy relations of the family that he entered the human world, laying hold of mother, father, brothers, sisters, all his friends; then by the door of labour, for he took his share of his father's work; then, when he was thirty years of age, by the door of teaching; by kind deeds, and sufferings, and through all by obedience unto the death. You must not think little of the grand thirty years wherein he got ready for the chief work to follow. You must not think that while he was thus preparing for his public ministrations, he was not all the time saving the world even by that which he was in the midst of it, ever laying hold of it more and more. These were things not so easy to tell. And you

must remember that our records are very scanty. It is a small biography we have of a man who became--to say nothing more--the Man of the world--the Son of Man. No doubt it is enough, or God would have told us more; but surely we are not to suppose that there was nothing significant, nothing of saving power in that which we are not told.--Charlie, wouldn't you have liked to see the little baby Jesus?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I sat up too, and listened.

"There is some creature," I granted.

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

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

me, and the wind was so strong that it blew through every chink, and threatened momentarily to blow it out. My wife was by my side before I knew she was coming.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I think I do," I answered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the whole matter, and then Ethelwyn fell a-crying.

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

I knelt down, and said:

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

Then I said to Ethelwyn,

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

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

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

CHAPTER V.

MY DREAM.

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

In my dream I found myself in a pleasant field full of daisies and white clover. The sun was setting. The wind was going one way, and the shadows another. I felt rather tired, I neither knew nor thought why. With an old man's prudence, I would not sit down upon the grass, but looked about for a more suitable seat. Then I saw, for often in our dreams there is an immediate response to our wishes, a long, rather narrow stone lying a few yards from me. I wondered how it could have come there, for there were no

mountains or rocks near: the field was part of a level country. Carelessly, I sat down upon it astride, and watched the setting of the sun. Somehow I fancied that his light was more sorrowful than the light of the setting sun should be, and I began to feel very heavy at the heart. No sooner had the last brilliant spark of his light vanished, than I felt the stone under me begin to move. With the inactivity of a dreamer, however, I did not care to rise, but wondered only what would come next. My seat, after several strange tumbling motions, seemed to rise into the air a little way, and then I found that I was astride of a gaunt, bony horse--a skeleton horse almost, only he had a gray skin on him. He began, apparently with pain, as if his joints were all but too stiff to move, to go forward in the direction in which he found himself. I kept my seat. Indeed, I never thought of dismounting. I was going on to meet what might come. Slowly, feebly, trembling at every step, the strange steed went, and as he went his joints seemed to become less stiff, and he went a little faster. All at once I found that the pleasant field had vanished, and that we were on the borders of a moor. Straight forward the horse carried me, and the moor grew very rough, and he went stumbling dreadfully, but always recovering himself. Every moment it seemed as if he would fall to rise no more, but as often he found fresh footing. At length the surface became a little smoother, and he began a horrible canter which lasted till he reached a low, broken wall, over which he half walked, half fell into what was plainly an ancient neglected churchyard. The mounds were low and covered with rank grass. In some parts, hollows had taken the place of mounds. Gravestones lay in every position except the level or the upright, and broken masses of monuments were scattered about. My horse bore me into the midst of it, and there, slow and stiff as he had risen, he lay down again. Once more I was astride of a long narrow stone. And now I found that it was an ancient gravestone which I knew well in a certain Sussex churchyard, the top of it carved into the rough resemblance of a human skeleton--that of a man, tradition said, who had been killed by a serpent that came out of a bottomless pool in the next field. How long I sat there I do not know; but at last I saw the faint gray light of morning begin to appear in front of me. The horse of death had carried me eastward. The dawn grew over the top of a hill that here rose against the horizon. But it was a wild dreary dawn--a blot of gray first, which then stretched into long lines of dreary yellow and gray, looking more like a blasted and withered sunset than a fresh sunrise. And well it suited that waste, wide, deserted churchyard, if churchyard I ought to call it where no church was to be seen--only a vast hideous square of graves. Before me I noticed especially one old grave, the flat stone of which had broken in two and sunk in the middle. While I sat with my eyes fixed on this stone, it began to move; the crack in the middle closed, then widened again as the two halves of the stone were lifted up, and flung outward, like the two halves of a folding door. From the grave rose a little child, smiling such perfect contentment as if he had just come from kissing his mother. His little arms had flung the stones apart, and as he stood on the edge of the grave next to me, they remained outspread from the action for a moment, as if blessing the sleeping people. Then he came towards me with the same smile, and took my hand. I rose, and he led me away over another broken wall towards the hill that lay before us. And as we went the sun came nearer, the pale yellow bars flushed into orange and rosy red, till at length the edges of the clouds were swept with an agony of golden light, which even my dreamy eyes could not endure, and I

awoke weeping for joy.

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

"What is the matter, husband?"

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

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

CHAPTER VI.

THE NEW BABY.

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

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

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

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

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

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

to ask, and the more fearless in asking.

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

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

"Why?" I asked.

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

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

"But you don't want the child."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My wife said the baby was a beauty. I could see that she was a plump, well-to-do baby; and being by nature no particular lover of babies as babies--that is, feeling none of the inclination of mothers and nurses and elder sisters to eat them, or rather, perhaps, loving more for what I believed than what I saw--that was all I could pretend to discover. But even the aforementioned elderly parishioner was compelled to allow before three months were over that little Theodora--for we turned the name of my youngest daughter upside down for her--"was a proper child." To none, however, did she seem to bring so much delight as to our dear Constance. Oftener than not, when I went into her room, I found the sleepy, useless

little thing lying beside her on the bed, and her staring at it with such loving eyes! How it began, I do not know, but it came at last to be called Connie's Dora, or Miss Connie's baby, all over the house, and nothing pleased Connie better. Not till she saw this did her old nurse take quite kindly to the infant; for she regarded her as an interloper, who had no right to the tenderness which was lavished upon her. But she had no sooner given in than the baby began to grow dear to her as well as to the rest. In fact, the house was ere long full of nurses. The staff included everyone but myself, who only occasionally, at the entreaty of some one or other of the younger ones, took her in my arms.

But before she was three months old, anxious thoughts began to intrude, all centering round the question in what manner the child was to be brought up. Certainly there was time enough to think of this, as Ethelwyn constantly reminded me; but what made me anxious was that I could not discover the principle that ought to guide me. Now no one can tell how soon a principle in such a case will begin, even unconsciously, to operate; and the danger was that the moment when it ought to begin to operate would be long past before the principle was discovered, except I did what I could now to find it out. I had again and again to remind myself that there was no cause for anxiety; for that I might certainly claim the enlightenment which all who want to do right are sure to receive; but still I continued uneasy just from feeling a vacancy where a principle ought to have been.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER SUNDAY EVENING.

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

We had spoken a good deal together about the infancy and childhood of Jesus, about the shepherds, and the wise men, and the star in the east, and the children of Bethlehem. I encouraged the thoughts of all the children to rest and brood upon the fragments that are given us, and, believing that the imagination is one of the most powerful of all the faculties for aiding

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

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

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

"What is, my dear?" I said; for although I thought I knew well enough what she meant, I wished her to set it forth in her own words, both for her own

sake, and the sake of the others, who would probably understand the difficulty much better if she presented it herself.

"I mean that he spoke to his mother--"

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

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

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

"Well, Jesus was one of that class of people. He was the son of a carpenter. He called his mamma, _mother_. But, Charlie, _mother_ is the more beautiful word of the two, by a great deal, I think. _Lady_ is a very pretty word; but _woman_ is a very beautiful word. Just so with _mamma_ and _mother_. _Mamma_ is pretty, but _mother_ is beautiful."

"Why don't we always say _mother_ then?"

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

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

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

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

"I am sitting wondering at myself, Harry," I said. "Long after I was your age, Wynn timer, I remember quite well that those words troubled me as they now trouble you. But when I read them over now, they seemed to me so lovely that I could hardly read them aloud. I can recall the fact that they troubled me, but the mode of the fact I scarcely can recall. I can hardly see now wherein lay the hurt or offence the words gave me. And why is that? Simply because I understand them now, and I did not understand them then. I took them as uttered with a tone of reproof; now I hear them as uttered with a tone of loving surprise. But really I cannot feel sure what it was that I did not like. And I am confident it is so with a great many things that we reject. We reject them simply because we do not understand them. Therefore, indeed, we cannot with truth be said to reject them at all. It is some false appearance that we reject. Some of the grandest things in the whole realm of truth look repellent to us, and we turn away from them, simply because we are not--to use a familiar phrase--we are not up to them. They appear to us, therefore, to be what they are not. Instruction sounds

to the proud man like reproof; illumination comes on the vain man like scorn; the manifestation of a higher condition of motive and action than his own, falls on the self-esteeming like condemnation; but it is consciousness and conscience working together that produce this impression; the result is from the man himself, not from the higher source. From the truth comes the power, but the shape it assumes to the man is from the man himself."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But look here, Wynn timer; listen to this," I said, "'And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.' Was that not doing his Father's business too? Was it not doing the business of his Father in heaven to honour his father and his mother, though he knew that his days would not be long in that land? Did not his whole teaching, his whole doing, rest on the relation of the Son to the Father and surely it was doing his Father's business then to obey his parents--to serve them, to be subject to them. It is true that the business God gives a man to do may be said to be the peculiar walk in life into which he is led, but that is only as distinguishing it from another man's peculiar business. God gives us all our business, and the business which is common to humanity is more peculiarly God's business than that which is one man's and not another's--because it lies nearer the root, and is essential. It does not matter whether a man is a farmer or a physician, but it greatly matters whether he is a good son, a good husband, and so on. O my children!" I said, "if the world could but be brought to believe--the world did I say?--if the best men in the world could only see, as God sees it, that service is in itself the noblest exercise of human powers, if they could see that God is the hardest worker of all, and that his nobility are those who do the most service, surely it would alter the whole aspect of the church. Menial offices, for instance, would soon cease to be talked of with that contempt which shows that there is no true recognition of the fact that the same principle runs through the highest duty and the lowest--that the lowest work which God gives a man to do must be in its nature noble, as certainly noble as the highest. This would destroy condescension, which is the rudeness, yes, impertinence, of the higher, as it would destroy insolence, which is the rudeness of the lower. He who recognised the dignity of his own lower office, would thereby recognise the superiority of the higher office, and would be the last either to envy or degrade it. He

would see in it his own--only higher, only better, and revere it. But I am afraid I have wearied you, my children."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VIII.

THEODORA'S DOOM.

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

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

well as over the trunk.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Susan was the old nurse.

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

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

"O, I don't think there's much harm in her," I returned, which was easy generosity, seeing my wife was taking my part. "Indeed, I am not sure that

we are not both considerably indebted to her; for it was after I met her that a thought came into my head as to how we ought to do with Theodora."

"Still troubling yourself about that, husband?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

said Ethel.

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

"Yes, thank you, I do."

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

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

"And, indeed, are not aware of it themselves, though it is so. And yet, the same remarks hold good about the kindness as about the gift. But to return to Theodora. If we put her in a way of life that would be recognisant of whence she came, and how she had been brought thence, might it not be better for her? Would it not be building on the truth? Would she not be happier for it?"

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

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

"Wisdom, Harry, not cunning."

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

My wife laughed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Would you have called one of those girls educated? Or even if they had been educated, as any of them might well have been, better than nine-tenths of the girls that go to boarding-schools, you must remember that they had never been taught service--the highest accomplishment of all. To that

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER IX.

A SPRING CHAPTER.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I promised, and repeated the poem.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Had she seen better days, then?" asked Wynn timer.

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

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

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

"We have done, papa."

"After talking awhile, during which she went bustling a little about the cottage, in order to hide her feelings, as I thought, for she has a good

deal of her mother's sense of dignity about her,--but I want your mother to hear the story. Run and fetch her, Wynnie."

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

When Ethelwyn came, I went on.

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

Various guesses were hazarded.

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

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

"That she proceeded at once to do. 'Do you remember, sir,' she said, 'how that horseshoe used to hang on a nail over the chimneypiece?' 'I do remember having observed it there,' I answered; 'for once when I took notice of it, I said to your mother, laughing, "I hope you are not afraid of witches, Mrs. Aylmer?" And she looked a little offended, and assured me to the contrary.' 'Well,' her daughter went on, 'about three months ago, I missed it. My mother would not tell me anything about it. And here it is! I can hardly think she can have carried it about all that time without me finding it out, but I don't know. Here it is, anyhow. Perhaps when she felt death drawing nearer, she took it from somewhere where she had hidden it, and put it in her pocket. If I had found it in time, I would have put it in her coffin.' 'But why?' I asked. 'Do tell me the story about it, if you know it.' 'I know it quite well, for she told me all about it once. It is the shoe of a favourite mare of my father's--one he used to ride when he went courting my mother. My grandfather did not like to have a young man coming about the house, and so he came after the old folks were gone to bed. But he had a long way to come, and he rode that mare. She had to go over some stones to get to the stable, and my mother used to spread straw there, for it was under the window of my grandfather's room, that her shoes mightn't make a noise and wake him. And that's one of the shoes,' she said, holding it up to me. 'When the mare died, my mother begged my father for the one off her near forefoot, where she had so often stood and patted her neck when my father was mounted to ride home again.'"

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

"I don't say it was right, my dear. But in looking at what is wrong, we ought to look for the beginning of the wrong; and possibly we might find that in this case farther back. If, for instance, a father isn't a father, we must not be too hard in blaming the child for not being a child. The

father's part has to come first, and teach the child's part. Now, if I might guess from what I know of the old lady, in whom probably it was much softened, her father was very possibly a hard, unreasoning, and unreasonable man--such that it scarcely ever came into the daughter's head that she had anything else to do with regard to him than beware of the consequences of letting him know that she had a lover. The whole thing, I allow, was wrong; but I suspect the father was first to blame, and far more to blame than the daughter. And that is the more likely from the high character of the old dame, and the romantic way in which she clung to the memory of the courtship. A true heart only does not grow old. And I have, therefore, no doubt that the marriage was a happy one. Besides, I daresay it was very much the custom of the country where they were, and that makes some difference."

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

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

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

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

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

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

since she was the merest child had there been any contest between us. Now, of course, there was no demand of obedience: she was simply the best earthly friend that her father and mother had. It often caused me some passing anxiety to think that her temperament, as well as her devotion to her home, might cause her great suffering some day; but when those thoughts came, I just gave her to God to take care of. Her mother sometimes said to her that she would make an excellent wife for a poor man. She would brighten up greatly at this, taking it for a compliment of the best sort. And she did not forget it, as the sequel will show. She would choose to sit with one candle lit when there were two on the table, wasting her eyes to save the candles. "Which will you have for dinner to-day, papa, roast beef or boiled?" she asked me once, when her mother was too unwell to attend to the housekeeping. And when I replied that I would have whichever she liked best--"The boiled beef lasts longest, I think," she said. Yet she was not only as liberal and kind as any to the poor, but she was, which is rarer, and perhaps more important for the final formation of a character, carefully just to everyone with whom she had any dealings. Her sense of law was very strong. Law with her was something absolute, and not to be questioned. In her childhood there was one lady to whom for years she showed a decided aversion, and we could not understand it, for it was the most inoffensive Miss Boulderstone. When she was nearly grown up, one of us happening to allude to the fact, she volunteered an explanation. Miss Boulderstone had happened to call one day when Wynn timer, then between three and four was in disgrace--_in the corner_, in fact. Miss Boulderstone interceded for her; and this was the whole front of her offending.

"I _was_ so angry!" she said. "As if my papa did not know best when I ought to come out of the corner!" I said to myself. And I couldn't bear her for ever so long after that."

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

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

Mr. Boulderstone did not long outlive his sister. Though the old couple, for they were rather old before they died, if, indeed, they were not born old, which I strongly suspect, being the last of a decaying family that had not left the land on which they were born for a great many generations--though the old people had not, of what the French call sentiments, one between them, they were yet capable of a stronger and, I had almost said, more romantic attachment, than many couples who have married from love; for the lady's sole trouble in dying was what her brother _would_ do without

her; and from the day of her death, he grew more and more dull and seemingly stupid. Nothing gave him any pleasure but having Wynnie to dinner with him. I knew that it must be very dull for her, but she went often, and I never heard her complain of it, though she certainly did look fagged--not _bored_, observe, but fagged--showing that she had been exerting herself to meet the difficulties of the situation. When the good man died, we found that he had left all his money in my hands, in trust for the poor of the parish, to be applied in any way I thought best. This involved me in much perplexity, for nothing is more difficult than to make money useful to the poor. But I was very glad of it, notwithstanding.

My own means were not so large as my readers may think. The property my wife brought me was much encumbered. With the help of her private fortune, and the income of several years (not my income from the church, it may be as well to say), I succeeded in clearing off the encumbrances. But even then there remained much to be done, if I would be the good steward that was not to be ashamed at his Lord's coming. First of all there were many cottages to be built for the labourers on the estate. If the farmers would not, or could not, help, I must do it; for to provide decent dwellings for them, was clearly one of the divine conditions in the righteous tenure of property, whatever the human might be; for it was not for myself alone, or for myself chiefly, that this property was given to me; it was for those who lived upon it. Therefore I laid out what money I could, not only in getting all the land clearly in its right relation to its owner, but in doing the best I could for those attached to it who could not help themselves. And when I hint to my reader that I had some conscience in paying my curate, though, as they had no children, they did not require so much as I should otherwise have felt compelled to give them, he will easily see that as my family grew up I could not have so much to give away of my own as I should have liked. Therefore this trust of the good Mr. Boulderstone was the more acceptable to me.

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

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

CHAPTER X.

AN IMPORTANT LETTER.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"About the beginning of June."

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

"The better, I do think."

"Has she had any increase of pain since?"

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

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

"It is a long journey."

"She could make it by easy stages."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Of what?" she asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"My darling! You have hurt yourself!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XI.

CONNIE'S DREAM.

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

As the season advanced, she continued to improve. I shall never forget the first time she was carried out upon the lawn. If you can imagine an infant coming into the world capable of the observation and delight of a child of eight or ten, you will have some idea of how Connie received the new impressions of everything around her. They were almost too much for her at first, however. She who had been used to scamper about like a wild thing on a pony, found the delight of a breath of wind almost more than she could bear. After she was laid down she closed her eyes, and the smile that flickered about her mouth was of a sort that harmonised entirely with the two great tears that crept softly out from under her eyelids, and sank, rather than ran, down her cheeks. She lay so that she faced a rich tract of gently receding upland, plentifully wooded to the horizon's edge, and through the wood peeped the white and red houses of a little hamlet, with the square tower of its church just rising above the trees. A kind of frame was made to the whole picture by the nearer trees of our own woods, through an opening in which, evidently made or left for its sake, the distant

prospect was visible. It was a morning in early summer, when the leaves were not quite full-grown but almost, and their green was shining and pure as the blue of the sky, when the air had no touch of bitterness or of lassitude, but was thoroughly warm, and yet filled the lungs with the reviving as of a draught of cold water. We had fastened the carriage umbrella to the sofa, so that it should shade her perfectly without obscuring her prospect; and behind this we all crept, leaving her to come to herself without being looked at, for emotion is a shy and sacred thing and should be tenderly hidden by those who are near. The bees kept very _beesy_ all about us. To see one huge fellow, as big as three ordinary ones with pieces of red and yellow about him, as if he were the beadle of all bee-dom, and overgrown in consequence--to see him, I say, down in a little tuft of white clover, rolling about in it, hardly able to move for fatness, yet bumming away as if his business was to express the delight of the whole creation--was a sight! Then there were the butterflies, so light that they seemed to tumble up into the air, and get down again with difficulty. They bewildered me with their inscrutable variations of purpose. "If I could but see once, for an hour, into the mind of a butterfly," I thought, "it would be to me worth all the natural history I ever read. If I could but see why he changes his mind so often and so suddenly--what he saw about that flower to make him seek it--then why, on a nearer approach, he should decline further acquaintance with it, and go rocking away through the air, to do the same fifty times over again--it would give me an insight into all animal and vegetable life that ages of study could not bring me up to." I was thinking all this behind my daughter's umbrella, while a lark, whose body had melted quite away in the heavenly spaces, was scattering bright beads of ringing melody straight down upon our heads; while a cock was crowing like a clarion from the home-farm, as if in defiance of the golden glitter of his silent brother on the roof of the stable; while a little stream that scampered down the same slope as the lawn lay upon, from a well in the stable-yard, mingled its sweet undertone of contentment with the jubilation of the lark and the business-like hum of the bees; and while white clouds floated in the majesty of silence across the blue deeps of the heavens. The air was so full of life and reviving, that it seemed like the crude substance that God might take to make babies' souls of--only the very simile smells of materialism, and therefore I do not like it.

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

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

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

"Doesn't _he_ enjoy this?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What do you think we girls are like, then, papa?" she asked at length.

"Don't say you don't know, now."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Her merriment returned.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well, I'll go on with my dream. I lay a long time till I got very tired, and wanted to get up, O, so much! But still I lay, and although I tried, I could not move hand or foot. At last I burst out crying. I was ashamed of crying in my coffin, but I couldn't bear it any longer. I thought I was quite disgraced, for everybody was expected to be perfectly quiet and patient down there. But the moment I began to cry, I heard a sound. And when I listened it was the sound of spades and pickaxes. It went on and on, and came nearer and nearer. And then--it was so strange--I was dreadfully frightened at the idea of the light and the wind, and of the people seeing me in my coffin and my night-dress, and tried to persuade myself that it was somebody else they were digging for, or that they were only going to lay another coffin over mine. And I thought that if it was you, papa, I shouldn't mind how long I lay there, for I shouldn't feel a bit lonely, even though we could not speak a word to each other all the time. But the sounds came on, nearer and nearer, and at last a pickaxe struck, with a blow that jarred me all through, upon the lid of the coffin, right over my head.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"There must be the best of it."

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

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

"I was afraid to do that, papa."

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

thoughts."

"Where do you mean, papa?"

"Dreamland, my dear. If it is right to thank God for a beautiful thought--I mean a thought of strength and grace giving you fresh life and hope--why should you be less bold to thank him when such thoughts arise in plainer shape--take such vivid forms to your mind that they seem to come through the doors of the eyes into the vestibule of the brain, and thence into the inner chambers of the soul?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE JOURNEY.

For more than two months Charlie and Harry had been preparing for the journey. The moment they heard of the prospect of it, they began to prepare, accumulate, and pack stores both for the transit and the sojourn. First of all there was an extensive preparation of ginger-beer, consisting, as I was informed in confidence, of brown sugar, ground ginger, and cold water. This store was, however, as near as I can judge, exhausted and renewed about twelve times before the day of departure arrived; and when at last the auspicious morning dawned, they remembered with dismay that they had drunk the last drop two days before, and there was none in stock. Then there was a wonderful and more successful hoarding of marbles, of a variety so great that my memory refuses to bear the names of the different kinds, which, I think, must have greatly increased since the time when I too was a boy, when some marbles--one of real, white marble with red veins especially--produced in my mind something of the delight that a work of art produces now. These were carefully deposited in one of the many divisions of a huge old hair-trunk, which they had got their uncle Weir, who could use his father's tools with pleasure if not to profit, to fit up for them with a multiplicity of boxes, and cupboards, and drawers, and trays, and slides, that was quite bewildering. In this same box was stowed also a quantity of hair, the gleanings of all the horse-tails upon the premises. This was for making fishing-tackle, with a vague notion on the part of Harry that it was to be employed in catching whales and crocodiles. Then all their favourite books were stowed away in the same chest, in especial a packet of a dozen penny books, of which I think I could give a complete list now. For one afternoon as I searched about in the lumber-room after a set of old library steps, which I wanted to get repaired, I came upon the chest, and opening it, discovered my boys' hoard, and in it this packet of books. I sat down on the top of the chest and read them all through, from Jack the Giant-killer down to Hop o' my Thumb without rising, and this in

the broad daylight, with the yellow sunshine nestling beside me on the rose-coloured silken seat, richly worked, of a large stately-looking chair with three golden legs. Yes I could tell you all those stories, not to say the names of them, over yet. Only I knew every one of them before; finding now that they had fared like good vintages, for if they had lost something in potency, they had gained much in flavour. Harry could not read these, and Charlie not very well, but they put confidence in them notwithstanding, in virtue of the red, blue, and yellow prints. Then there was a box of sawdust, the design of which I have not yet discovered; a huge ball of string; a rabbit's skin; a Noah's ark; an American clock, that refused to go for all the variety of treatment they gave it; a box of lead-soldiers, and twenty other things, amongst which was a huge gilt ball having an eagle of brass with outspread wings on the top of it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After we had again started, our ears were invaded with shouts from the post-chaise behind us, in which Charlie and Harry, their grief at the abandoned chest forgotten as if it had never been, were yelling in the exuberance of their gladness. Dora, more staid as became her years, was trying to act the matron with them in vain, and old nurse had enough to do with Miss Connie's baby to heed what the young gentlemen were about, so long as explosions of noise was all the mischief. Walter, the man-servant, who had been with us ten years, and was the main prop of the establishment,

looking after everything and putting his hand to everything, with an indefinite charge ranging from the nursery to the wine-cellar, and from the corn-bin to the pig-trough, and who, as we could not possibly get on without him, sat on the box of the post-chaise beside the driver from the Griffin, rather connived, I fear, than otherwise at the noise of the youngsters.

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

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

There is a strange delight in motion, which I am not sure that I altogether understand. The hope of the end as bringing fresh enjoyment has something to do with it, no doubt; the accompaniments of the motion, the change of scene, the mystery that lies beyond the next hill or the next turn in the road, the breath of the summer wind, the scent of the pine-trees especially, and of all the earth, the tinkling jangle of the harness as you pass the trees on the roadside, the life of the horses, the glitter and the shadow, the cottages and the roses and the rosy faces, the scent of burning wood or peat from the chimneys, these and a thousand other things combine to make such a journey delightful. But I believe it needs something more than this--something even closer to the human life--to account for the pleasure that motion gives us. I suspect it is its living symbolism; the hidden relations which it bears to the eternal soul in its aspirations and

longings--ever following after, ever attaining, never satisfied. Do not misunderstand me, my reader. A man, you will allow, perhaps, may be content although he is not and cannot be happy: I feel inclined to turn all this the other way, saying that a man ought always to be happy, never to be content. You will see I do not say _contented_; I say _content_. Here comes in his faith: his life is hid with Christ in God, measureless, unbounded. All things are his, to become his by blessed lovely gradations of gift, as his being enlarges to receive; and if ever the shadow of his own necessary incompleteness falls upon the man, he has only to remember that in God's idea he is complete, only his life is hid from himself with Christ in God the Infinite. If anyone accuses me here of mysticism, I plead guilty with gladness: I only hope it may be of that true mysticism which, inasmuch as he makes constant use of it, St. Paul would understand at once. I leave it, however.

I think I must have been the very happiest of the party myself. No doubt I was younger much than I am now, but then I was quite middle-aged, with full confession thereof in gray hairs and wrinkles. Why should not a man be happy when he is growing old, so long as his faith strengthens the feeble knees which chiefly suffer in the process of going down the hill? True, the fever heat is over, and the oil burns more slowly in the lamp of life; but if there is less fervour, there is more pervading warmth; if less of fire, more of sunshine; there is less smoke and more light. Verily, youth is good, but old age is better--to the man who forsakes not his youth when his youth forsakes him. The sweet visitings of nature do not depend upon youth or romance, but upon that quiet spirit whose meekness inherits the earth. The smell of that field of beans gives me more delight now than ever it could have given me when I was a youth. And if I ask myself why I find it is simply because I have more faith now than I had then. It came to me then as an accident of nature--a passing pleasure flung to me only as the dogs' share of the crumbs. Now I believe that God _means_ that odour of the bean-field; that when Jesus smelled such a scent about Jerusalem or in Galilee, he thought of his Father. And if God means it, it is mine, even if I should never smell it again. The music of the spheres is mine if old age should make me deaf as the adder. Am I mystical again, reader? Then I hope you are too, or will be before you have done with this same beautiful mystical life of ours. More and more nature becomes to me one of God's books of poetry--not his grandest--that is history--but his loveliest, perhaps.

And ought I not to have been happy when all who were with me were happy? I will not run the risk of wearying even my contemplative reader by describing to him the various reflexes of happiness that shone from the countenances behind me in the carriage, but I will try to hit each off in a word, or a single simile. My Ethelwyn's face was bright with the brightness of a pale silvery moon that has done her harvest work, and, a little weary, lifts herself again into the deeper heavens from stooping towards the earth. Wynnie's face was bright with the brightness of the morning star, ever growing pale and faint over the amber ocean that brightens at the sun's approach; for life looked to Wynnie severe in its light, and somewhat sad because severe. Connie's face was bright with the brightness of a lake in the rosy evening, the sound of the river flowing in and the sound of the river flowing forth just audible, but itself still, and content to be still

and mirror the sunset. Dora's was bright with the brightness of a marigold that follows the sun without knowing it; and Eliza's was bright with the brightness of a half-blown cabbage rose, radiating good-humour. This last is not a good simile, but I cannot find a better. I confess failure, and go on.

After stopping once to bait, during which operation Connie begged to be carried into the parlour of the little inn that she might see the china figures that were certain to be on the chimney-piece, as indeed they were, where she drank a whole tumbler of new milk before we lifted her to carry her back, we came upon a wide high moorland country the roads through which were lined with gorse in full golden bloom, while patches of heather all about were showing their bells, though not yet in their autumnal outburst of purple fire. Here I began to be reminded of Scotland, in which I had travelled a good deal between the ages of twenty and five-and-twenty. The further I went the stronger I felt the resemblance. The look of the fields, the stone fences that divided them, the shape and colour and materials of the houses, the aspect of the people, the feeling of the air, and of the earth and sky generally, made me imagine myself in a milder and more favoured Scotland. The west wind was fresh, but had none of that sharp edge which one can so often detect in otherwise warm winds blowing under a hot sun. Though she had already travelled so many miles, Connie brightened up within a few minutes after we got on this moor; and we had not gone much farther before a shout from the rumble informed us that keen-eyed little Dora had discovered the Atlantic: a dip in the high coast revealed it blue and bright. We soon lost sight of it again, but in Connie's eyes it seemed to linger still. As often as I looked round, the blue of them seemed the reflection of the sea in their little convex mirrors. Ethelwyn's eyes, too, were full of it, and a flush on her generally pale cheek showed that she too expected the ocean. After a few miles along this breezy expanse, we began to descend towards the sea-level. Down the winding of a gradual slope, interrupted by steep descents, we approached this new chapter in our history. We came again upon a few trees here and there, all with their tops cut off in a plane inclined upwards away from the sea. For the sea-winds, like a sweeping scythe, bend the trees all away towards the land, and keep their tops mown with their sharp rushing, keen with salt spray off the crests of the broken waves. Then we passed through some ancient villages, with streets narrow, and steep and sharp-angled, that needed careful driving and the frequent pressure of the break upon the wheel. And now the sea shone upon us with nearer greeting, and we began to fancy we could hear its talk with the shore. At length we descended a sharp hill, reached the last level, drove over a bridge and down the line of the stream, saw the land vanish in the sea--a wide bay; then drove over another wooden drawbridge, and along the side of a canal in which lay half-a-dozen sloops and schooners. Then came a row of pretty cottages; then a gate, and an ascent, and ere we reached the rectory, we were aware of its proximity by loud shouts, and the sight of Charlie and Harry scampering along the top of a stone wall to meet us. This made their mother nervous, but she kept quiet, knowing that unrestrained anxiety is always in danger of bringing about the evil it fears. A moment after, we drew up at a long porch, leading through the segment of a circle to the door of the house. The journey was over. We got down in the little village of Kilkhaven, in the county of Cornwall.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT WE DID WHEN WE ARRIVED.

We carried Connie in first of all, of course, and into the room which nurse had fixed upon for her--the best in the house, of course, again. She did seem tired now, and no wonder. She had a cup of tea at once, and in half an hour dinner was ready, of which we were all very glad. After dinner I went up to Connie's room. There I found her fast asleep on the sofa, and Wynn timer as fast asleep on the floor beside her. The drive and the sea air had had the same effect on both of them. But pleased as I was to see Connie sleeping so sweetly, I was even more pleased to see Wynn timer asleep on the floor. What a wonderful satisfaction it may give to a father and mother to see this or that child asleep! It is when her kittens are asleep that the cat creeps away to look after her own comforts. Our cat chose to have her kittens in my study once, and as I would not have her further disturbed than to give them another cushion to lie on in place of that which belonged to my sofa, I had many opportunities of watching them as I wrote, or prepared my sermons. But I must not talk about the cat and her kittens now. When parents see their children asleep, especially if they have been suffering in any way, they breathe more freely; a load is lifted off their minds; their responsibility seems over; the children have gone back to their Father, and he alone is looking after them for a while. Now, I had not been comfortable about Wynn timer for some time, and especially during our journey, and still more especially during the last part of our journey. There was something amiss with her. She seemed constantly more or less dejected, as if she had something to think about that was too much for her, although, to tell the truth, I really believe now that she had not quite enough to think about. Some people can thrive tolerably without much thought: at least, they both live comfortably without it, and do not seem to be capable of effecting it if it were required of them; while for others a large amount of mental and spiritual operation is necessary for the health of both body and mind, and when the matter or occasion for so much is not afforded them, the consequence is analogous to what follows when a healthy physical system is not supplied with sufficient food: the oxygen, the source of life, begins to consume the life itself; it tears up the timbers of the house to burn against the cold. Or, to use a different simile, when the Moses-rod of circumstance does not strike the rock and make the waters flow, such a mind--one that must think to live--will go digging into itself, and is in danger of injuring the very fountain of thought, by drawing away its living water into ditches and stagnant pools. This was, I say, the case in part with my Wynn timer, although I did not understand it at that moment. She did not look quite happy, did not always

meet a smile with a smile, looked almost reprovingly upon the frolics of the little brother-imps, and though kindness itself when any real hurt or grief befell them, had reverted to her old, somewhat dictatorial manner, of which I have already spoken as interrupted by Connie's accident. To her mother and me she was service itself, only service without the smile which is as the flame of the sacrifice and makes it holy. So we were both a little uneasy about her, for we did not understand her. On the journey she had seemed almost annoyed at Connie's ecstasies, and said to Dora many times: "Do be quiet, Dora;" although there was not a single creature but ourselves within hearing, and poor Connie seemed only delighted with the child's explosions. So I was--but although I say _so_, I hardly know why I was pleased to see her thus, except it was from a vague belief in the anodyne of slumber. But this pleasure did not last long; for as I stood regarding my two treasures, even as if my eyes had made her uncomfortable, she suddenly opened hers, and started to her feet, with the words, "I beg your pardon, papa," looking almost guiltily round her, and putting up her hair hurriedly, as if she had committed an impropriety in being caught untidy. This was fresh sign of a condition of mind that was not healthy.

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

"O papa," she said, laying her head on my shoulder, "I am afraid I must be very naughty. I so often feel now as if I were doing something wrong, or rather as if you would think I was doing something wrong. I am sure there must be something wicked in me somewhere, though I do not clearly know what it is. When I woke up now, I felt as if I had neglected something, and you had come to find fault with me. _Is_ there anything, papa?"

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

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

Here Connie woke up.

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

"What nonsense is Wynn timeralking about being wicked?" asked Connie.

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

"I know nothing of the sort, Wynn timer. If it were me now! And yet I don't _feel_ wicked."

"My dear children," I said, "we must all pray to God for his Spirit, and then we shall feel just as we ought to feel. It is not for anyone to say to himself how he ought to feel at any given moment; still less for one man to say to another how he ought to feel; that is in the former case to do as St. Paul says he had learned to give up doing--to judge our own selves,

which ought to be left to God; in the latter case it is to do what our Lord has told us expressly we are not to do--to judge other people. You get your bonnet, Wynn timer, and come out with me. I am going to explore a little of this desert island upon which we have been cast away. And you, Connie, just to please Wynn timer, must try and go to sleep again."

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

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

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

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

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

"What do you mean, my child?"

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

even as the wind of God first breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, and the sun was the pledge of the fulfilment of every aspiration. I turned and looked at Wynnie. She stood pleased but listless amidst that which lifted me into the heaven of the Presence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She stood silent for a moment, looked up at the sky, looked round on the earth, looked far across the sea to the setting sun, and then turned her eyes upon me. They were filled with tears, but whether from feeling, or sorrow that she could not feel, I would not inquire. I made haste to speak again.

"As this world of delight surrounds and enters your bodily frame, so does God surround your soul and live in it. To be at home with the awful source of your being, through the child-like faith which he not only permits, but requires, and is ever teaching you, or rather seeking to rouse up in you, is the only cure for such feelings as those that trouble you. Do not say it is too high for you. God made you in his own image, therefore capable of understanding him. For this final end he sent his Son, that the Father might with him come into you, and dwell with you. Till he does so, the temple of your soul is vacant; there is no light behind the veil, no cloudy pillar over it; and the priests, your thoughts, feelings, loves, and desires, moan, and are troubled--for where is the work of the priest when the God is not there? When He comes to you, no mystery, no unknown feeling, will any longer distress you. You will say, 'He knows, though I do not.' And you will be at the secret of the things he has made. You will feel what they are, and that which his will created in gladness you will receive in joy. One glimmer of the present God in this glory would send you home singing. But do not think I blame you, Wynnie, for feeling sad. I take it rather as the sign of a large life in you, that will not be satisfied with little things. I do not know when or how it may please God to give you the

quiet of mind that you need; but I tell you that I believe it is to be had; and in the mean time, you must go on doing your work, trusting in God even for this. Tell him to look at your sorrow, ask him to come and set it right, making the joy go up in your heart by his presence. I do not know when this may be, I say, but you must have patience, and till he lays his hand on your head, you must be content to wash his feet with your tears. Only he will be better pleased if your faith keep you from weeping and from going about your duties mournful. Try to be brave and cheerful for the sake of Christ, and for the sake of your confidence in the beautiful teaching of God, whose course and scope you cannot yet understand. Trust, my daughter, and let that give you courage and strength."

Now the sky and the sea and the earth must have made me able to say these things to her; but I knew that, whatever the immediate occasion of her sadness, such was its only real cure. Other things might, in virtue of the will of God that was in them, give her occupation and interest enough for a time, but nothing would do finally, but God himself. Here I was sure I was safe; here I knew lay the hunger of humanity. Humanity may, like other vital forms, diseased systems, fix on this or that as the object not merely of its desire but of its need: it can never be stilled by less than the bread of life--the very presence in the innermost nature of the Father and the Son.

We walked on together. Wynn timer made me no reply, but, weeping silently, clung to my arm. We walked a long way by the edge of the cliffs, beheld the sun go down, and then turned and went home. When we reached the house, Wynn timer left me, saying only, "Thank you, papa. I think it is all true. I will try to be a better girl."

I went straight to Connie's room: she was lying as I saw her last, looking out of her window.

"Connie," I said, "Wynn timer and I have had such a treat--such a sunset!"

"I've seen a little of the light of it on the waves in the bay there, but the high ground kept me from seeing the sunset itself. Did it set in the sea?"

"You do want the General Gazetteer, after all, Connie. Is that water the Atlantic, or is it not? And if it be, where on earth could the sun set but in it?"

"Of course, papa. What a goose I am! But don't make game of me--_please_. I am too deliciously happy to be made game of to-night."

"I won't make game of you, my darling. I will tell you about the sunset--the colours of it, at least. This must be one of the best places in the whole world to see sunsets."

"But you have had no tea, papa. I thought you would come and have your tea with me. But you were so long, that mamma would not let me wait any longer."

"O, never mind the tea, my dear. But Wynn timer has had none. You've got a tea-caddy of your own, haven't you?"

"Yes, and a teapot; and there's the kettle on the hob--for I can't do without a little fire in the evenings."

"Then I'll make some tea for Wynn timer and myself, and tell you at the same time about the sunset. I never saw such colours. I cannot tell you what it was like while the sun was yet going down, for the glory of it has burned the memory of it out of me. But after the sun was down, the sky remained thinking about him; and the thought of the sky was in delicate translucent green on the horizon, just the colour of the earth etherealised and glorified--a broad band; then came another broad band of pale rose-colour; and above that came the sky's own eternal blue, pale likewise, but so sure and changeless. I never saw the green and the blue divided and harmonised by the rose-colour before. It was a wonderful sight. If it is warm enough to-morrow, we will carry you out on the height, that you may see what the evening will bring."

"There is one thing about sunsets," returned Connie--"two things, that make me rather sad--about themselves, not about anything else. Shall I tell you them?"

"Do, my love. There are few things more precious to learn than the effects of Nature upon individual minds. And there is not a feeling of yours, my child, that is not of value to me."

"You are so kind, papa! I am so glad of my accident. I think I should never have known how good you are but for that. But my thoughts seem so little worth after you say so much about them."

"Let me be judge of that, my dear."

"Well, one thing is, that we shall never, never, never, see the same sunset again."

"That is true. But why should we? God does not care to do the same thing over again. When it is once done, it is done, and he goes on doing something new. For, to all eternity, he never will have done showing himself by new, fresh things. It would be a loss to do the same thing again."

"But that just brings me to my second trouble. The thing is lost. I forget it. Do what I can, I cannot remember sunsets. I try to fix them fast in my memory, that I may recall them when I want them; but just as they fade out of the sky, all into blue or gray, so they fade out of my mind and leave it as if they had never been there--except perhaps two or three. Now, though I did not see this one, yet, after you have talked about it, I shall never forget it."

"It is not, and never will be, as if they had never been. They have their influence, and leave that far deeper than your memory--in your very being, Connie. But I have more to say about it, although it is only an idea,

hardly an assurance. Our brain is necessarily an imperfect instrument. For its right work, perhaps it is needful that it should forget in part. But there are grounds for believing that nothing is ever really forgotten. I think that, when we have a higher existence than we have now, when we are clothed with that spiritual body of which St. Paul speaks, you will be able to recall any sunset you have ever seen with an intensity proportioned to the degree of regard and attention you gave it when it was present to you. But here comes Wynnie to see how you are.--I've been making some tea for you, Wynnie, my love."

"O, thank you, papa--I shall be so glad of some tea!" said Wynnie, the paleness of whose face showed the red rims of her eyes the more plainly. She had had what girls call a good cry, and was clearly the better for it.

The same moment my wife came in. "Why didn't you send for me, Harry, to get your tea?" she said.

"I did not deserve any, seeing I had disregarded proper times and seasons. But I knew you must be busy."

"I have been superintending the arrangement of bedrooms, and the unpacking, and twenty different things," said Ethelwyn. "We shall be so comfortable! It is such a curious house! Have you had a nice walk?"

"Mamma, I never had such a walk in my life," returned Wynnie. "You would think the shore had been built for the sake of the show--just for a platform to see sunsets from. And the sea! Only the cliffs will be rather dangerous for the children."

"I have just been telling Connie about the sunset. She could see something of the colours on the water, but not much more."

"O, Connie, it will be so delightful to get you out here! Everything is so big! There is such room everywhere! But it must be awfully windy in winter," said Wynnie, whose nature was always a little prospective, if not apprehensive.

But I must not keep my reader longer upon mere family chat.

CHAPTER XIV.

MORE ABOUT KILKHAVEN.

Our dining-room was one story below the level at which we had entered the

parsonage; for, as I have said, the house was built into the face of the cliff, just where it sunk nearly to the level of the shores of the bay. While at dinner, on the evening of our arrival, I kept looking from the window, of course, and I saw before me, first a little bit of garden, mostly in turf, then a low stone wall; beyond, over the top of the wall, the blue water of the bay; then beyond the water, all alive with light and motion, the rocks and sand-hills of the opposite side of the little bay, not a quarter of a mile across. I could likewise see where the shore went sweeping out and away to the north, with rock after rock standing far into the water, as if gazing over the awful wild, where there was nothing to break the deathly waste between Cornwall and Newfoundland. But for the moment I did not regard the huge power lying outside so much as the merry blue bay between me and those rocks and sand-hills. If I moved my head a little to the right, I saw, over the top of the low wall already mentioned, and apparently quite close to it the slender yellow masts of a schooner, her mainsail hanging loose from the gaff, whose peak was lowered. We must, I thought, be on the very harbour-quay. When I went out for my walk with Wynnie, I had turned from the bay, and gone to the brow of the cliffs overhanging the open sea on our own side of it.

When I came down to breakfast in the same room next morning, I stared. The blue had changed to yellow. The life of the water was gone. Nothing met my eyes but a wide expanse of dead sand. You could walk straight across the bay to the hills opposite. From the look of the rocks, from the perpendicular cliffs on the coast, I had almost, without thinking, concluded that we were on the shore of a deep-water bay. It was high-water, or nearly so, then; and now, when I looked westward, it was over a long reach of sands, on the far border of which the white fringe of the waves was visible, as if there was their hitherto, and further towards us they could not come. Beyond the fringe lay the low hill of the Atlantic. To add to my confusion, when I looked to the right, that is, up the bay towards the land, there was no schooner there. I went out at the window, which opened from the room upon the little lawn, to look, and then saw in a moment how it was.

"Do you know, my dear," I said to my wife, "we are just at the mouth of that canal we saw as we came along? There are gates and a lock just outside there. The schooner that was under this window last night must have gone in with the tide. She is lying in the basin above now."

"O, yes, papa," Charlie and Harry broke in together. "We saw it go up this morning. We've been out ever so long. It was so funny," Charlie went on--everything was funny with Charlie--"to see it rise up like a Jack-in-the-box, and then slip into the quiet water through the other gates!"

And when I thought about the waves tumbling and breaking away out there, and the wide yellow sands between, it was wonderful--which was what Charlie meant by funny--to see the little vessel lying so many feet above it all, in a still plenty of repose, gathering strength, one might fancy to rush out again, when its time was come, into the turmoil beyond, and dash its way through the breasts of the billows.

After breakfast we had prayers, as usual, and after a visit to Connie, whom I found tired, but wonderfully well, I went out for a walk by myself, to explore the neighbourhood, find the church, and, in a word, do something to shake myself into my new garments. The day was glorious. I wandered along a green path, in the opposite direction from our walk the evening before, with a fir-wood on my right hand, and a belt of feathery tamarisks on my left, behind which lay gardens sloping steeply to a lower road, where stood a few pretty cottages. Turning a corner, I came suddenly in sight of the church, on the green down above me--a sheltered yet commanding situation; for, while the hill rose above it, protecting it from the east, it looked down the bay, and the Atlantic lay open before it. All the earth seemed to lie behind it, and all its gaze to be fixed on the symbol of the infinite. It stood as the church ought to stand, leading men up the mount of vision, to the verge of the eternal, to send them back with their hearts full of the strength that springs from hope, by which alone the true work of the world can be done. And when I saw it I rejoiced to think that once more I was favoured with a church that had a history. Of course it is a happy thing to see new churches built wherever there is need of such; but to the full idea of the building it is necessary that it should be one in which the hopes and fears, the cares and consolations, the loves and desires of our forefathers should have been roofed; where the hearts of those through whom our country has become that which it is--from whom not merely the life-blood of our bodies, but the life-blood of our spirits, has come down to us, whose existence and whose efforts have made it possible for us to be that which we are--have before us worshipped that Spirit from whose fountain the whole torrent of being flows, who ever pours fresh streams into the wearying waters of humanity, so ready to settle down into a stagnant repose. Therefore I would far rather, when I may, worship in an old church, whose very stones are a history of how men strove to realise the infinite, compelling even the powers of nature into the task--as I soon found on the very doorway of this church, where the ripples of the outspread ocean, and grotesque imaginations of the monsters of its deeps, fixed, as it might seem, for ever in stone, gave a distorted reflex, from the little mirror of the artist's mind, of that mighty water, so awful, so significant to the human eye, which yet lies in the hollow of the Father's palm, like the handful that the weary traveller lifts from the brook by the way. It is in virtue of the truth that went forth in such and such like attempts that we are able to hold our portion of the infinite reality which God only knows. They have founded our Church for us, and such a church as this will stand for the symbol of it; for here we too can worship the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob--the God of Sidney, of Hooker, of Herbert. This church of Kilkhaven, old and worn, rose before me a history in stone--so beaten and swept about by the "wild west wind,"

"For whose path the Atlantic's level powers
Cleave themselves into chasms,"

and so streamed upon, and washed, and dissolved, by the waters lifted from the sea and borne against it on the upper tide of the wind, that you could almost fancy it one of those churches that have been buried for ages beneath the encroaching waters, lifted again, by some mighty revulsion of nature's heart, into the air of the sweet heavens, there to stand marked for ever with the tide-flows of the nether world--scooped, and hollowed,

and worn like aeonian rocks that have slowly, but for ever, responded to the swirl and eddy of the wearing waters. So, from the most troublous of times, will the Church of our land arise, in virtue of what truth she holds, and in spite, if she rises at all, of the worldliness of those who, instead of seeking her service, have sought and gained the dignities which, if it be good that she have it in her power to bestow them, need the corrective of a sharply wholesome persecution which of late times she has not known. But God knows, and the fire will come in its course--first in the form of just indignation, it may be, against her professed servants, and then in the form of the furnace seven times heated, in which the true builders shall yet walk unhurt save as to their mortal part.

I looked about for some cottage where the sexton might be supposed to live, and spied a slated roof, nearly on a level with the road, at a little distance in front of me. I could at least inquire there. Before I reached it, however, an elderly woman came out and approached me. She was dressed in a white cap and a dark-coloured gown. On her face lay a certain repose which attracted me. She looked as if she had suffered but had consented to it, and therefore could smile. Her smile lay near the surface. A kind word was enough to draw it up from the well where it lay shimmering: you could always see the smile there, whether it was born or not. But even when she smiled, in the very glimmering of that moonbeam, you could see the deep, still, perhaps dark, waters under. O! if one could but understand what goes on in the souls that have no words, perhaps no inclination, to set it forth! What had she endured? How had she learned to have that smile always near? What had consoled her, and yet left her her grief--turned it, perhaps, into hope? Should I ever know?

She drew near me, as if she would have passed me, as she would have done, had I not spoken. I think she came towards me to give me the opportunity of speaking if I wished, but she would not address me.

"Good morning," I said. "Can you tell me where to find the sexton?"

"Well, sir," she answered, with a gleam of the smile brightening underneath her old skin, as it were, "I be all the sexton you be likely to find this mornin', sir. My husband, he be gone out to see one o' Squire Tregarva's hounds as was took ill last night. So if you want to see the old church, sir, you'll have to be content with an old woman to show you, sir."

"I shall be quite content, I assure you," I answered. "Will you go and get the key?"

"I have the key in my pocket, sir; for I thought that would be what you'd be after, sir. And by the time you come to my age, sir, you'll learn to think of your old bones, sir. I beg your pardon for making so free. For mayhap, says I to myself, he be the gentleman as be come to take Mr. Shepherd's duty for him. Be ye now, sir?"

All this was said in a slow sweet subdued tone, nearly of one pitch. You would have felt that she claimed the privilege of age with a kind of mournful gaiety, but was careful, and anxious even, not to presume upon it, and, therefore, gentle as a young girl.

"Yes," I answered. "My name is Walton I have come to take the place of my friend Mr. Shepherd; and, of course, I want to see the church."

"Well, she be a bee-utiful old church. Some things, I think, sir, grows more beautiful the older they grows. But it ain't us, sir."

"I'm not so sure of that," I said. "What do you mean?"

"Well, sir, there's my little grandson in the cottage there: he'll never be so beautiful again. Them children du be the loves. But we all grows uglier as we grows older. Churches don't seem to, sir."

"I'm not so sure about all that," I said again.

"They did say, sir, that I was a pretty girl once. I'm not much to look at now."

And she smiled with such a gracious amusement, that I felt at once that if there was any vanity left in this memory of her past loveliness, it was sweet as the memory of their old fragrance left in the withered leaves of the roses.

"But it du not matter, du it, sir? Beauty is only skin-deep."

"I don't believe that," I answered. "Beauty is as deep as the heart at least."

"Well to be sure, my old husband du say I be as handsome in his eyes as ever I be. But I beg your pardon, sir, for talkin' about myself. I believe it was the old church--she set us on to it."

"The old church didn't lead you into any harm then," I answered. "The beauty that is in the heart will shine out of the face again some day--be sure of that. And after all, there is just the same kind of beauty in a good old face that there is in an old church. You can't say the church is so trim and neat as it was the day that the first blast of the organ filled it as with, a living soul. The carving is not quite so sharp, the timbers are not quite so clean. There is a good deal of mould and worm-eating and cobwebs about the old place. Yet both you and I think it more beautiful now than it was then. Well, I believe it is, as nearly as possible, the same with an old face. It has got stained, and weather-beaten, and worn; but if the organ of truth has been playing on inside the temple of the Lord, which St. Paul says our bodies are, there is in the old face, though both form and complexion are gone, just the beauty of the music inside. The wrinkles and the brownness can't spoil it. A light shines through it all--that of the indwelling spirit. I wish we all grew old like the old churches."

She did not reply, but I thought I saw in her face that she understood my mysticism. We had been walking very slowly, had passed through the quaint lych-gate, and now the old woman had got the key in the lock of the door, whose archway was figured and fashioned as I have described above, with a dozen mouldings or more, most of them "carved so curiously."

CHAPTER XV.

THE OLD CHURCH.

The awe that dwells in churches fell upon me as I crossed the threshold--an awe I never fail to feel--heightened in many cases, no doubt, by the sense of antiquity and of art, but an awe which I have felt all the same in crossing the threshold of an old Puritan conventicle, as the place where men worship and have worshipped the God of their fathers, although for art there was only the science of common bricklaying, and for beauty staring ugliness. To the involuntary fancy, the air of petition and of holy need seems to linger in the place, and the uncovered head acknowledges the sacred symbols of human inspiration and divine revealing. But this was no ordinary church into which I followed the gentlewoman who was my guide. As entering I turned my eyes eastward, a flush of subdued glory invaded them from the chancel, all the windows of which were of richly stained glass, and the roof of carved oak lavishly gilded. I had my thoughts about this chancel, and thence about chancels generally which may appear in another part of my story. Now I have to do only with the church, not with the cogitations to which it gave rise. But I will not trouble my reader with even what I could tell him of the blending and contradicting of styles and modes of architectural thought in the edifice. Age is to the work of contesting human hands a wonderful harmoniser of differences. As nature brings into harmony all fractures of her frame, and even positive intrusions upon her realm, clothes and discolours them, in the old sense of the word, so that at length there is no immediate shock at sight of that which in itself was crude, and is yet coarse, so the various architecture of this building had been gone over after the builders by the musical hand of Eld, with wonder of delicate transition and change of key, that one could almost fancy the music of its exquisite organ had been at work _informing_ the building, half melting the sutures, wearing the sharpness, and blending the angles, until in some parts there was but the gentle flickering of the original conception left, all its self-assertion vanished under the file of the air and the gnawing of the worm. True, the hand of the restorer had been busy, but it had wrought lovingly and gently, and wherein it had erred, the same influences of nature, though as yet their effects were invisible, were already at work--of the many making one. I will not trouble my reader, I say, with any architectural description, which, possibly even more than a detailed description of natural beauty dissociated from human feeling, would only weary him, even if it were not unintelligible. When we are reading a poem, we do not first of all examine the construction and dwell on the rhymes and rhythms; all that comes after, if we find that the poem itself is so good that its parts are therefore

worth examining, as being probably good in themselves, and elucidatory of the main work. There were carvings on the ends of the benches all along the aisle on both sides, well worth examination, and some of them even of description; but I shall not linger on these. A word only about the columns: they supported arches of different fashion on the opposite sides, but they were themselves similar in matter and construction, both remarkable. They were of coarse granite of the country, chiselled, but very far from smooth, not to say polished. Each pillar was a single stone with chamfered sides.

Walking softly through the ancient house, forgetting in the many thoughts that arose within me that I had a companion, I came at length into the tower, the basement of which was open, forming part of the body of the church. There hung many ropes through holes in a ceiling above, for bell-ringing was encouraged and indeed practised by my friend Shepherd. And as I regarded them, I thought within myself how delightful it would be if in these days as in those of Samuel, the word of God was precious; so that when it came to the minister of his people--a fresh vision of his glory, a discovery of his meaning--he might make haste to the church, and into the tower, lay hold of the rope that hung from the deepest-toned bell of all, and constrain it by the force of strong arms to utter its voice of call, "Come hither, come hear, my people, for God hath spoken;" and from the streets or the lanes would troop the eager folk; the plough be left in the furrow, the cream in the churn; and the crowding people bring faces into the church, all with one question upon them--"What hath the Lord spoken?" But now it would be answer sufficient to such a call to say, "But what will become of the butter?" or, "An hour's ploughing will be lost." And the clergy--how would they bring about such a time? They do not even believe that God has a word to his people through them. They think that his word is petrified for use in the Bible and Prayer-book; that the wise men of old heard so much of the word of God, and have so set it down, that there is no need for any more words of the Lord coming to the prophets of a land; therefore they look down upon the prophesying--that is, the preaching of the word--make light of it, the best of them, say these prayers are everything, or all but everything: their hearts are not set upon hearing what God the Lord will speak that they may speak it abroad to his people again. Therefore it is no wonder if the church bells are obedient only to the clock, are no longer subject to the spirit of the minister, and have nothing to do in telegraphing between heaven and earth. They make little of this part of their duty; and no wonder, if what is to be spoken must remain such as they speak. They put the Church for God, and the prayers which are the word of man to God, for the word of God to man. But when the prophets see no vision, how should they have any word to speak?

These thoughts were passing through my mind when my eye fell upon my guide. She was seated against the south wall of the tower, on a stool, I thought, or small table. While I was wandering about the church she had taken her stocking and wires out of her pocket, and was now knitting busily. How her needles did go! Her eyes never regarded them, however, but, fixed on the slabs that paved the tower at a yard or two from her feet, seemed to be gazing far out to sea, for they had an infinite objectless outlook. To try her, I took for the moment the position of an accuser.

"So you don't mind working in church?" I said.

When I spoke she instantly rose, her eyes turned as from the far sea-waves to my face, and light came out of them. With a smile she answered--

"The church knows me, sir."

"But what has that to do with it?"

"I don't think she minds it. We are told to be diligent in business, you know, sir."

"Yes, but it does not say in church and out of church. You could be diligent somewhere else, couldn't you?"

As soon as I said this, I began to fear she would think I meant it. But she only smiled and said, "It won't hurt she, sir; and my good man, who does all he can to keep her tidy, is out at toes and heels, and if I don't keep he warm he'll be laid up, and then the church won't be kep' nice, sir, till he's up again."

I was tempted to go on.

"But you could have sat down outside--there are some nice gravestones near--and waited till I came out."

"But what's the church for, sir? The sun's werry hot to-day, sir; and Mr. Shepherd, he say, sir, that the church is like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. So, you see, if I was to sit out in the sun, instead of comin' in here to the cool o' the shadow, I wouldn't be takin' the church at her word. It does my heart good to sit in the old church, sir. There's a something do seem to come out o' the old walls and settle down like the cool o' the day upon my old heart that's nearly tired o' crying, and would fain keep its eyes dry for the rest o' the journey. My old man's stockin' won't hurt the church, sir, and, bein' a good deed as I suppose it is, it's none the worse for the place. I think, if He was to come by wi' the whip o' small cords, I wouldn't be afeared of his layin' it upo' my old back. Do you think he would, sir?"

Thus driven to speak as I thought, I made haste to reply, more delighted with the result of my experiment than I cared to let her know.

"Indeed I do not. I was only talking. It is but selfish, cheating, or ill-done work that the church's Master drives away. All our work ought to be done in the shadow of the church."

"I thought you be only having a talk about it, sir," she said, smiling her sweet old smile. "Nobody knows what this old church is to me."

Now the old woman had a good husband, apparently: the sorrows which had left their mark even upon her smile, must have come from her family, I thought.

"You have had a family?" I said, interrogatively.

"I've had thirteen," she answered. "Six boys and seven maidens."

"Why, you are rich!" I returned. "And where are they all?"

"Four maidens be lying in the churchyard, sir; two be married, and one be down in the mill, there."

"And your boys?"

"One of them be lyin' beside his sisters--drownded afore my eyes, sir. Three o' them be at sea, and two o' them in it, sir."

At sea! I thought. What a wide where! As vague to the imagination, almost, as in the other world. How a mother's thoughts must go roaming about the waste, like birds that have lost their nest, to find them!

As this thought kept me silent for a few moments, she resumed.

"It be no wonder, be it, sir? that I like to creep into the church with my knitting. Many's the stormy night, when my husband couldn't keep still, but would be out on the cliffs or on the breakwater, for no good in life, but just to hear the roar of the waves that he could only see by the white of them, with the balls o' foam flying in his face in the dark--many's the such a night that I have left the house after he was gone, with this blessed key in my hand, and crept into the old church here, and sat down where I'm sittin' now--leastways where I was sittin' when your reverence spoke to me--and hearkened to the wind howling about the place. The church windows never rattle, sir--like the cottage windows, as I suppose you know, sir. Somehow, I feel safe in the church."

"But if you had sons at sea," said I, again wishing to draw her out, "it would not be of much good to you to feel safe yourself, so long as they were in danger."

"O! yes, it be, sir. What's the good of feeling safe yourself but it let you know other people be safe too? It's when you don't feel safe yourself that you feel other people ben't safe."

"But," I said--and such confidence I had from what she had already uttered, that I was sure the experiment was not a cruel one--"some of your sons were drownded for all that you say about their safety."

"Well, sir," she answered, with a sigh, "I trust they're none the less safe for that. It would be a strange thing for an old woman like me, well-nigh threescore and ten, to suppose that safety lay in not being drownded. Why, they might ha' been cast on a desert island, and wasted to skin an' bone, and got home again wi' the loss of half the wits they set out with. Wouldn't that ha' been worse than being drownded right off? And that wouldn't ha' been the worst, either. The church she seem to tell me all the time, that for all the roaring outside, there be really no danger after all. What matter if they go to the bottom? What is the bottom of the sea,

sir? You bein' a clergyman can tell that, sir. I shouldn't ha' known it if I hadn't had bys o' my own at sea, sir. But you can tell, sir, though you ain't got none there."

And though she was putting her parson to his catechism, the smile that returned on her face was as modest as if she had only been listening to his instruction. I had not long to look for my answer.

"The hollow of his hand," I said, and said no more.

"I thought you would know it, sir," she returned, with a little glow of triumph in her tone. "Well, then, that's just what the church tells me when I come in here in the stormy nights. I bring my knitting then too, sir, for I can knit in the dark as well as in the light almost; and when they come home, if they do come home, they're none the worse that I went to the old church to pray for them. There it goes roaring about them poor dears, all out there; and their old mother sitting still as a stone almost in the quiet old church, a caring for them. And then it do come across me, sir, that God be a sitting in his own house at home, hearing all the noise and all the roaring in which his children are tossed about in the world, watching it all, letting it drown some o' them and take them back to him, and keeping it from going too far with others of them that are not quite ready for that same. I have my thoughts, you see, sir, though I be an old woman; and not nice to look at."

I had come upon a genius. How nature laughs at our schools sometimes! Education, so-called, is a fine thing, and might be a better thing; but there is an education, that of life, which, when seconded by a pure will to learn, leaves the schools behind, even as the horse of the desert would leave behind the slow pomposity of the common-fed goose. For life is God's school, and they that will listen to the Master there will learn at God's speed. For one moment, I am ashamed to say, I was envious of Shepherd, and repined that, now old Rogers was gone, I had no such glorious old stained-glass window in my church to let in the eternal upon my light-thirsty soul. I must say for myself that the feeling lasted but for a moment, and that no sooner had the shadow of it passed and the true light shined after it, than I was heartily ashamed of it. Why should not Shepherd have the old woman as well as I? True, Shepherd was more of what would now be called a ritualist than I; true, I thought my doctrine simpler and therefore better than his; but was this any reason why I should have all the grand people to minister to in my parish! Recovering myself, I found her last words still in my ears.

"You are very nice to look at," I said. "You must not find fault with the work of God, because you would like better to be young and pretty than to be as you now are. Time and time's rents and furrows are all his making and his doing. God makes nothing ugly."

"Are you quite sure of that, sir?"

I paused. Such a question from such a woman "must give us pause." And, as I paused, the thought of certain animals flashed into my mind and I could not insist that God had never made anything ugly.

"No. I am not sure of it," I answered. For of all things my soul recoiled from, any professional pretence of knowing more than I did know seemed to me the most repugnant to the spirit and mind of the Master, whose servants we are, or but the servants of mere priestly delusion and self-seeking.

"But if he does," I went on to say, "it must be that we may see what it is like, and therefore not like it."

Then, unwilling all at once to plunge with her into such an abyss as the question opened, I turned the conversation to an object on which my eyes had been for some time resting half-unconsciously. It was the sort of stool or bench on which my guide had been sitting. I now thought it was some kind of box or chest. It was curiously carved in old oak, very much like the ends of the benches and book-boards.

"What is that you were sitting on?" I asked. "A chest or what?"

"It be there when we come to this place, and that be nigh fifty years ago, sir. But what it be, you'll be better able to tell than I be, sir."

"Perhaps a chest for holding the communion-plate in old time," I said. "But how should it then come to be banished to the tower?"

"No, sir; it can't be that. It be some sort of ancient musical piano, I be thinking."

I stooped and saw that its lid was shaped like the cover of an organ. With some difficulty I opened it; and there, to be sure, was a row of huge keys, fit for the fingers of a Cyclops. I pressed upon them, one after another, but no sound followed. They were stiff to the touch; and once down, so they mostly remained until lifted again. I looked if there was any sign of a bellows, thinking it must have been some primitive kind of reed-instrument, like what we call a seraphine or harmonium now-a-days. But there was no hole through which there could have been any communication with or from a bellows, although there might have been a small one inside. There were, however, a dozen little round holes in the fixed part of the top, which might afford some clue to the mystery of its former life. I could not find any way of reaching the inside of it, so strongly was it put together; therefore I was left, I thought, to the efforts of my imagination alone for any hope of discovery with regard to the instrument, seeing further observation was impossible. But here I found that I was mistaken in two important conclusions, the latter of which depended on the former. The first of these was that it was an instrument: it was only one end of an instrument; therefore, secondly, there might be room for observation still. But I found this out by accident, which has had a share in most discoveries, and which, meaning a something that falls into our hands unlocked for, is so far an unobjectionable word even to the man who does not believe in chance. I had for the time given up the question as insoluble, and was gazing about the place, when, glancing up at the holes in the ceiling through which the bell-ropes went, I spied two or three thick wires hanging through the same ceiling close to the wall, and right over the box with the keys. The vague suspicion of a discovery dawned upon me.

"Have you got the key of the tower?" I asked.

"No, sir. But I'll run home for it at once," she answered. And rising, she went out in haste.

"Run!" thought I, looking after her. "It is a word of the will and the feeling, not of the body." But I was mistaken. The dear old creature had no sooner got outside of the church-yard, within which, I presume, she felt that she must be decorous, than she did run, and ran well too. I was on the point of starting after her at full speed, to prevent her from hurting herself, but reflecting that her own judgment ought to be as good as mine in such a case, I returned, and sitting down on her seat, awaited her reappearance, gazing at the ceiling. There I either saw or imagined I saw signs of openings corresponding in number and position with those in the lid under me. In about three minutes the old woman returned, panting but not distressed, with a great crooked old key in her hand. Why are all the keys of a church so crooked? I did not ask her that question, though. What I said to her, was--

"You shouldn't run like that. I am in no hurry."

"Be you not, sir? I thought, by the way you spoke, you be taken with a longing to get a-top o' the tower, and see all about you like. For you see, sir, fond as I be of the old church, I du feel sometimes as if she'd smother me; and then nothing will do but I must get at the top of the old tower. And then, what with the sun, if there be any sun, and what with the fresh air which there always be up there, sir,--it du always be fresh up there, sir," she repeated, "I come back down again blessing the old church for its tower."

As she spoke she was toiling up the winding staircase after me, where there was just room enough for my shoulders to get through by turning themselves a little across the lie of the steps. They were very high, but she kept up with me bravely, bearing out her statement that she was no stranger to them. As I ascended, however, I was not thinking of her, but of what she had said. Strange to tell, the significance of the towers or spires of our churches had never been clear to me before. True, I was quite awake to their significance, at least to that of the spires, as fingers pointing ever upwards to

"regions mild of calm and serene air,
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot,
Which men call Earth;"

but I had not thought of their symbolism as lifting one up above the church itself into a region where no church is wanted because the Lord God almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

Happy church indeed, if it destroys the need of itself by lifting men up into the eternal kingdom! Would that I and all her servants lived pervaded with the sense of this her high end, her one high calling! We need the church towers to remind us that the mephitic airs in the church below

are from the churchyard at its feet, which so many take for the church, worshipping over the graves and believing in death--or at least in the material substance over which alone death hath power. Thus the church, even in her corruption, lifts us out of her corruption, sending us up her towers and her spires to admonish us that she too lives in the air of truth: that her form too must pass away, while the truth that is embodied in her lives beyond forms and customs and prejudices, shining as the stars for ever and ever. He whom the church does not lift up above the church is not worthy to be a doorkeeper therein.

Such thoughts passed through me, satisfied me, and left me peaceful, so that before I had reached the top, I was thanking the Lord--not for his church-tower, but for his sexton's wife. The old woman was a jewel. If her husband was like her, which was too much to expect--if he believed in her, it would be enough, quite--then indeed the little child, who answered on being questioned thereanent, as the Scotch would say, that the three orders of ministers in the church were the parson, clerk, and sexton, might not be so far wrong in respect of this individual case. So in the ascent, and the thinking associated therewith, I forgot all about the special object for which I had requested the key of the tower, and led the way myself up to the summit, where stepping out of a little door, which being turned only heavenwards had no pretence for, or claim upon a curiously crooked key, but opened to the hand laid upon the latch, I thought of the words of the judicious Hooker, that "the assembling of the church to learn" was "the receiving of angels descended from above;" and in such a whimsical turn as our thoughts will often take when we are not heeding them, I wondered for a moment whether that was why the upper door was left on the latch, forgetting that that could not be of much use, if the door in the basement was kept locked with the crooked key. But the whole suggested something true about my own heart and that of my fellows, if not about the church: Revelation is not enough, the open trap-door is not enough, if the door of the heart is not open likewise.

As soon, however, as I stepped out upon the roof of the tower, I forgot again all that had thus passed through my mind, swift as a dream. For, filling the west, lay the ocean beneath, with a dark curtain of storm hanging in perpendicular lines over part of its horizon, and on the other side was the peaceful solid land, with its numberless shades of green, its heights and hollows, its farms and wooded vales--there was not much wood--its scattered villages and country dwellings, lighted and shadowed by the sun and the clouds. Beyond lay the blue heights of Dartmoor. And over all, bathing us as it passed, moved the wind, the life-bearing spirit of the whole, the servant of the sun. The old woman stood beside me, silently enjoying my enjoyment, with a still smile that seemed to say in kindly triumph, "Was I not right about the tower and the wind that dwells among its pinnacles?" I drank deep of the universal flood, the outspread peace, the glory of the sun, and the haunting shadow of the sea that lay beyond like the visual image of the eternal silence--as it looks to us--that rounds our little earthly life.

There were a good many trees in the church-yard, and as I looked down, the tops of them in their richest foliage hid all the graves directly below me, except a single flat stone looking up through an opening in the leaves,

which seemed to have been just made for it to let it see the top of the tower. Upon the stone a child was seated playing with a few flowers she had gathered, not once looking up to the gilded vanes that rose from the four pinnacles at the corners of the tower. I turned to the eastern side, and looked over upon the church roof. It lay far below--looking very narrow and small, but long, with the four ridges of four steep roofs stretching away to the eastern end. It was in excellent repair, for the parish was almost all in one lord's possession, and he was proud of his church: between them he and Mr. Shepherd had made it beautiful to behold and strong to endure.

When I turned to look again, the little child was gone. Some butterfly fancy had seized her, and she was away. A little lamb was in her place, nibbling at the grass that grew on the side of the next mound. And when I looked seaward there was a sloop, like a white-winged sea-bird, rounding the end of a high projecting rock from the south, to bear up the little channel that led to the gates of the harbour canal. Out of the circling waters it had flown home, not from a long voyage, but hardly the less welcome therefore to those that waited and looked for her signal from the barrier rock.

Reentering by the angels' door to descend the narrow cork-screw stair, so dark and cool, I caught a glimpse, one turn down, by the feeble light that came through its chinks after it was shut behind us, of a tiny maiden-hair fern growing out of the wall. I stopped, and said to the old woman--

"I have a sick daughter at home, or I wouldn't rob your tower of this lovely little thing."

"Well, sir, what eyes you have! I never saw the thing before. Do take it home to miss. It'll do her good to see it. I be main sorry to hear you've got a sick maiden. She ben't a bedlar, be she, sir?"

I was busy with my knife getting out all the roots I could without hurting them, and before I had succeeded I had remembered Turner's using the word.

"Not quite that," I answered, "but she can't even sit up, and must be carried everywhere."

"Poor dear! Everyone has their troubles, sir. The sea's been mine."

She continued talking and asking kind questions about Connie as we went down the stair. Not till she opened a little door I had passed without observing it as we came up, was I reminded of my first object in ascending the tower. For this door revealed a number of bells hanging in silent power in the brown twilight of the place. I entered carefully, for there were only some planks laid upon the joists to keep one's feet from going through the ceiling. In a few moments I had satisfied myself that my conjecture about the keys below was correct. The small iron rods I had seen from beneath hung down from this place. There were more of them hanging shorter above, and there was yet enough of a further mechanism remaining to prove that those keys, by means of the looped and cranked rods, had been in connection with hammers, one of them indeed remaining also, which struck the bells, so that a tune could be played upon them as upon any other keyed

instrument. This was the first contrivance of the kind I had ever seen, though I have heard of it in other churches since.

"If I could find a clever blacksmith in the neighbourhood, now," I said to myself, "I would get this all repaired, so that it should not interfere with the bell-ringing when the ringers were to be had, and yet Shepherd could play a psalm tune to his parish at large when he pleased." For Shepherd was a very fair musician, and gave a good deal of time to the organ. "It's a grand notion, to think of him sitting here in the gloom, with that great musical instrument towering above him, whence he sends forth the voice of gladness, almost of song to his people, while they are mowing the grass, binding the sheaves, or gazing abroad over the stormy ocean in doubt, anxiety, and fear. 'There's the parson at his bells,' they would say, and stop and listen; and some phrase might sink into their hearts, waking some memory, or giving birth to some hope or faint aspiration. I will see what can be done." Having come to this conclusion, I left the abode of the bells, descended to the church, bade my conductress good morning, saying I would visit her soon in her own house, and bore home to my child the spoil which, without kirk-rapine, I had torn from the wall of the sanctuary. By this time the stormy veil had lifted from the horizon, and the sun was shining in full power without one darkening cloud.

Ere I left the churchyard I would have a glance at the stone which ever seemed to lie gazing up at the tower. I soon found it, because it was the only one in that quarter from which I could see the top of the tower. It recorded the life and death of an aged pair who had been married fifty years, concluding with the couplet--

"A long time this may seem to be, But it did not seem long to we."

The whole story of a human life lay in that last verse. True, it was not good grammar; but they had got through fifty years of wedded life probably without any knowledge of grammar to harmonise or to shorten them, and I daresay, had they been acquainted with the lesson he had put into their dumb mouths, they would have been aware of no ground of quarrel with the poetic stone-cutter, who most likely had thrown the verses in when he made his claim for the stone and the cutting. Having learnt this one by heart, I went about looking for anything more in the shape of sepulchral flora that might interest or amuse my crippled darling; nor had I searched long before I found one, the sole but triumphant recommendation of which was the thorough "puzzle-headedness" of its construction. I quite reckoned on seeing Connie trying to make it out, looking as bewildered over its excellent grammar, as the poet of the other ought to have looked over his rhymes, ere he gave in to the use of the nominative after a preposition.

"If you could view the heavenly shore,
Where heart's content you hope to find,
You would not murmur were you gone before,
But grieve that you are left behind."

CHAPTER XVI.

CONNIE'S WATCH-TOWER.

As I walked home, the rush of the rising tide was in my ears. To my fancy, the ocean, awaking from a swoon in which its life had ebbed to its heart, was sending that life abroad to its extremities, and waves breaking in white were the beats of its reviving pulse, the flashes of returning light. But so gentle was its motion, and so lovely its hue, that I could not help contrasting it with its reflex in the mind of her who took refuge from the tumult of its noises in the hollow of the old church. To her, let it look as blue as the sky, as peaceful and as moveless, it was a wild, reckless, false, devouring creature, a prey to its own moods, and to that of the blind winds which, careless of consequences, urged it to raving fury. Only, while the sea took this form to her imagination, she believed in that which held the sea, and knew that, when it pleased God to part his confining fingers, there would be no more sea.

When I reached home, I went straight to Connie's room. Now the house was one of a class to every individual of which, whatever be its style or shape, I instantly become attached almost as if it possessed a measure of the life which it has sheltered. This class of human dwellings consists of the houses that have grown. They have not been, built after a straight-up-and-down model of uninteresting convenience or money-loving pinchedness. They must have had some plan, good, bad, or indifferent, as the case may be, at first, I suppose; but that plan they have left far behind, having grown with the necessities or ambitions of succeeding possessors, until the fact that they have a history is as plainly written on their aspect as on that of any you or daughter of Adam. These are the houses which the fairies used to haunt, and if there is any truth in ghost-stories, the houses which ghosts will yet haunt; and hence perhaps the sense of soothing comfort which pervades us when we cross their thresholds. You do not know, the moment you have cast a glance about the hall, where the dining-room, drawing-room, and best bedroom are. You have got it all to find out, just as the character of a man; and thus had I to find out this house of my friend Shepherd. It had formerly been a kind of manor-house, though altogether unlike any other manor-house I ever saw; for after exercising all my constructive ingenuity reversed in pulling it to pieces in my mind, I came to the conclusion that the germ-cell of it was a cottage of the simplest sort which had grown by the addition of other cells, till it had reached the development in which we found it.

I have said that the dining-room was almost on the level of the shore. Certainly some of the flat stones that coped the low wall in front of it were thrown into the garden before the next winter by the waves. But Connie's room looked out on a little flower-garden almost on the downs, only sheltered a little by the rise of a short grassy slope above it. This,

however, left the prospect, from her window down the bay and out to sea, almost open. To reach this room I had now to go up but one simple cottage stair; for the door of the house entered on the first floor, that is, as regards the building, midway between heaven and earth. It had a large bay-window; and in this window Connie was lying on her couch, with the lower sash wide open, through which the breeze entered, smelling of sea-weed tempered with sweet grasses and the wall-flowers and stocks that were in the little plot under it. I thought I could see an improvement in her already. Certainly she looked very happy.

"O, papa!" she said, "isn't it delightful?"

"What is, my dear?"

"O, everything. The wind, and the sky, and the sea, and the smell of the flowers. Do look at that sea-bird. His wings are like the barb of a terrible arrow. How he goes undulating, neck and body, up and down as he flies. I never felt before that a bird moves his wings. It always looked as if the wings flew with the bird. But I see the effort in him."

"An easy effort, though, I should certainly think."

"No doubt. But I see that he chooses and means to fly, and so does it. It makes one almost reconciled to the idea of wings. Do angels really have wings, papa?"

"It is generally so represented, I think, in the Bible. But whether it is meant as a natural fact about them, is more than I take upon me to decide. For one thing, I should have to examine whether in simple narrative they are ever represented with them, as, I think, in records of visions they are never represented without them. But wings are very beautiful things, and I do not exactly see why you should need reconciling to them."

Connie gave a little shrug of her shoulders.

"I don't like the notion of them growing out at my shoulder-blades. And however would you get on your clothes? If you put them over your wings, they would be of no use, and would, besides, make you hump-backed; and if you did not, everything would have to be buttoned round the roots of them. You could not do it yourself, and even on Wynnies I don't think I could bear to touch the things--I don't mean the feathers, but the skinny, folding-up bits of them."

I laughed at her fastidious fancy.

"You want to fly, I suppose?" I said.

"O, yes; I should like that."

"And you don't want to have wings?"

"Well, I shouldn't mind the wings exactly; but however would one be able to keep them nice?"

"There you go; starting from one thing to another, like a real bird already. When you can't answer one thing, off to another, and, from your new perch on the hawthorn, talk as if you were still on the topmost branch of the lilac!"

"O, yes, papa! That's what I've heard you say to mamma twenty times."

"And did I ever say to your mamma anything but the truth? or to you either, you puss?"

I had not yet discovered that when I used this epithet to my Connie, she always thought she had gone too far. She looked troubled. I hastened to relieve her.

"When women have wings," I said, "their logic will be good."

"How do you make that out, papa?" she asked, a little re-assured.

"Because then every shadow of feeling that turns your speech aside from the straight course will be recognised in that speech; the whole utterance will be instinct not only with the meaning of what you are thinking, but with the reflex of the forces in you that make the utterance take this or that shape; just as to a perfect palate, the source and course of a stream would be revealed in every draught of its water.

"I have just a glimmering of your meaning, papa. Would you like to have wings?"

"I should like to fly like a bird, to swim like a fish, to gallop like a horse, to creep like a serpent, but I suspect the good of all these is to be got without doing any of them."

"I know what you mean now, but I can't put it in words."

"I mean by a perfect sympathy with the creatures that do these things: what it may please God to give to ourselves, we can quite comfortably leave to him. A higher stratum of the same kind is the need we feel of knowing our fellow-creatures through and through, of walking into and out of their worlds as if we were, because we are, perfectly at home in them.--But I am talking what the people who do not understand such things lump all together as mysticism, which is their name for a kind of spiritual ash-pit, whither they consign dust and stones, never asking whether they may not be gold-dust and rubies, all in a heap.--You had better begin to think about getting out, Connie."

"Think about it, papa! I have been thinking about it ever since daylight."

"I will go and see what your mother is doing then, and if she is ready to go out with us."

In a few moments all was arranged. Without killing more than a snail or two, which we could not take time to beware of, Walter and I--finding that

the window did not open down to the ground in French fashion, for which there were two good reasons, one the fierceness of the winds in winter, the other, the fact that the means of egress were elsewhere provided--lifted the sofa, Connie and all, out over the window-sill, and then there was only a little door in the garden-wall to get her through before we found ourselves upon the down. I think the ascent of this hill was the first experience I had--a little to my humiliation, nothing to my sorrow--that I was descending another hill. I had to set down the precious burden rather oftener before we reached the brow of the cliffs than would have been necessary ten years before. But this was all right, and the newly-discovered weakness then was strength to the power which carries me about on my two legs now. It is all right still. I shall be stronger by and by.

We carried her high enough for her to see the brilliant waters lying many feet below her, with the sea-birds of which we had talked winging their undulating way between heaven and ocean. It is when first you have a chance of looking a bird in the face on the wing that you know what the marvel of flight is. There it hangs or rests, which you please, borne up, as far as eye or any of the senses can witness, by its own will alone. This Connie, quicker than I in her observation of nature, had already observed. Seated on the warm grass by her side, while neither talked, but both regarded the blue spaces, I saw one of those same barb-winged birds rest over my head, regarding me from above, as if doubtful whether I did not afford some claim to his theory of treasure-trove. I knew at once that what Connie had been saying to me just before was true.

She lay silent a long time. I too was silent. At length I spoke.

"Are you longing to be running about amongst the rocks, my Connie?"

"No, papa; not a bit. I don't know how it is, but I don't think I ever wished much for anything I knew I could not have. I am enjoying everything more than I can tell you. I wish Wynnie were as happy as I am."

"Why? Do you think she's not happy, my dear?"

"That doesn't want any thinking, papa. You can see that."

"I am afraid you're right, Connie. What do you think is the cause of it?"

"I think it is because she can't wait. She's always going out to meet things; and then when they're not there waiting for her, she thinks they're nowhere. But I always think her way is finer than mine. If everybody were like me, there wouldn't be much done in the world, would there, papa?"

"At all events, my dear, your way is wise for you, and I am glad you do not judge your sister."

"Judge Wynnie, papa! That would be cool impudence. She's worth ten of me. Don't you think, papa," she added, after a pause, "that if Mary had said the smallest word against Martha, as Martha did against Mary, Jesus would have had a word to say on Martha's side next?"

"Indeed I do, my dear. And I think that did not sit very long without asking Jesus if she mightn't go and help her sister. There is but one thing needful--that is, the will of God; and when people love that above everything, they soon come to see that to everything else there are two sides, and that only the will of God gives fair play, as we call it, to both of them."

Another silence followed. Then Connie spoke.

"Is it not strange, papa, that the only thine here that makes me want to get up to look, is nothing of all the grand things round about me? I am just lying like the convex mirror in the school-room at home, letting them all paint themselves in me."

"What is it then that makes you wish to get up and go and see?" I asked with real curiosity.

"Do you see down there--away across the bay--amongst the rocks at the other side, a man sitting sketching?"

I looked for some time before I could discover him.

"Your sight is good, Connie: I see the man, but I could not tell what he was doing."

"Don't you see him lifting his head every now and then for a moment, and then keeping it down for a longer while?"

"I cannot distinguish that. But then I am shortsighted rather, you know."

"I wonder how you see so many little things that nobody else seems to notice, then, papa."

"That is because I have trained myself to observe. The degree of power in the sight is of less consequence than the habit of seeing. But you have not yet told me what it is that makes you desirous of getting up."

"I want to look over his shoulder, and see what he is doing. Is it not strange that in the midst of all this plenty of beautifulness, I should want to rise to look at a few lines and scratches, or smears of colour, upon a bit of paper?"

"No, my dear; I don't think it is strange. There a new element of interest is introduced--the human. No doubt there is deep humanity in all this around us. No doubt all the world, in all its moods, is human, as those for whose abode and instruction it was made. No doubt, it would be void of both beauty and significance to our eyes, were it not that it is one crowd of pictures of the human mind, blended in one living fluctuating whole. But these meanings are there in solution as it were. The individual is a centre of crystallisation to this solution. Around him meanings gather, are separated from other meanings; and if he be an artist, by which I mean true painter, true poet, or true musician, as the case may be he so isolates and

represents them, that we see them--not what nature shows to us, but what nature has shown, to him, determined by his nature and choice. With it is mingled therefore so much of his own individuality, manifested both in this choice and certain modifications determined by his way of working, that you have not only a representation of an aspect of nature, as far as that may be with limited powers and materials, but a revelation of the man's own mind and nature. Consequently there is a human interest in every true attempt to reproduce nature, an interest of individuality which does not belong to nature herself, who is for all and every man. You have just been saying that you were lying there like a convex mirror reflecting all nature around you. Every man is such a convex mirror; and his drawing, if he can make one, is an attempt to show what is in this little mirror of his, kindled there by the grand world outside. And the human mirrors being all differently formed, vary infinitely in what they would thus represent of the same scene. I have been greatly interested in looking alternately over the shoulders of two artists, both sketching in colour the same, absolutely the same scene, both trying to represent it with all the truth in their power. How different, notwithstanding, the two representations came out!"

"I think I understand you, papa. But look a little farther off. Don't you see over the top of another rock a lady's bonnet. I do believe that's Wynnie. I know she took her box of water-colours out with her this morning, just before you came home. Dora went with her."

"Can't you tell by her ribbons, Connie? You seem sharp-sighted enough to see her face if she would show it. I don't even see the bonnet. If I were like some people I know, I should feel justified in denying its presence, attributing the whole to your fancy, and refusing anything to superiority of vision."

"That wouldn't be like you, papa."

"I hope not; for I have no fancy for being shut up in my own blindness, when other people offer me their eyes to eke out the defects of my own with. But here comes mamma at last."

Connie's face brightened as if she had not seen her mother for a fortnight. My Ethelwyn always brought the home gladness that her name signified with her. She was a centre of radiating peace.

"Mamma, don't you think that's Wynnie's bonnet over that black rock there, just beyond where you see that man drawing?"

"You absurd child! How should I know Wynnie's bonnet at this distance?"

"Can't you see the little white feather you gave her out of your wardrobe just before we left? She put it in this morning before she went out."

"I think I do see something white. But I want you to look out there, towards what they call the Chapel Rock, at the other end of that long mound they call the breakwater. You will soon see a boat appear full of the coast-guard. I saw them going on board just as I left the house to come up to you. Their officer came down with his sword, and each of the men had a

cutlass. I wonder what it can mean."

We looked. But before the boat made its appearance, Connie cried out--

"Look there! What a big boat that is rowing for the land, away northwards there!"

I turned my eyes in the direction she indicated, and saw a long boat with some half-dozen oars, full of men, rowing hard, apparently for some spot on the shore at a considerable distance to the north of our bay.

"Ah!" I said, "that boat has something to do with the coast-guard and their cutlasses. You'll see that, as soon as they get out of the bay, they will row in the same direction."

So it was. Our boat appeared presently from under the concealment of the heights on which we were, and made at full speed after the other boat.

"Surely they can't be smugglers," I said. "I thought all that was over and done with."

In the course of another twenty minutes, during which we watched their progress, both boats had disappeared behind the headland to the northward. Then, thinking Connie had had nearly enough of the sea air for her first experience of its influences, I went and fetched Walter, and we carried her back as we had brought her. She had not been in the shadow of her own room for five minutes before she was fast asleep.

It was now nearly time for our early dinner. We always dined early when we could, that we might eat along with our children. We were both convinced that the only way to make them behave like ladies and gentlemen was to have them always with us at meals. We had seen very unpleasant results in the children of those who allowed them to dine with no other supervision than the nursery afforded: they were a constant anxiety and occasional horror to those whom they visited--snatching like monkeys, and devouring like jackals, as selfishly as if they were mere animals.

"O! we've seen such a nice gentleman!" said Dora, becoming lively under the influence of her soup.

"Have you, Dora? Where?"

"Sitting on the rocks, taking a portrait of the sea."

"What makes you say he was a nice gentleman?"

"He had such beautiful boots!" answered Dora, at which there was a great laugh about the table.

"O! we must run and tell Connie that," said Harry. "It will make her laugh."

"What will you tell Connie, then, Harry?"

"O! what was it, Charlie? I've forgotten."

Another laugh followed at Harry's expense now, and we were all very merry, when Dora, who sat opposite to the window, called out, clapping her hands--

"There's Niceboots again! There's Niceboots again!"

The same moment the head of a young man appeared over the wall that separated the garden from the little beach that lay by the entrance of the canal. I saw at once that he must be more than ordinarily tall to show his face, for he was not close to the wall. It was a dark countenance, with a long beard, which few at that time wore, though now it is getting not uncommon, even in my own profession--a noble, handsome face, a little sad, with downbent eyes, which, released from their more immediate duty towards nature, had now bent themselves upon the earth.

"Counting the dewy pebbles, fixed in thought."

"I suppose he's contemplating his boots," said Wynn timer, with apparent maliciousness.

"That's too bad of you, Wynn timer," I said, and the child blushed.

"I didn't mean anything, papa. It was only following up Dora's wise discrimination," said Wynn timer.

"He is a fine-looking fellow," said I, "and ought, with that face and head, to be able to paint good pictures."

"I should like to see what he has done," said Wynn timer; "for, by the way we were sitting, I should think we were attempting the same thing."

"And what was that then, Wynn timer?" I asked.

"A rock," she answered, "that you could not see from where you were sitting. I saw you on the top of the cliff."

"Connie said it was you, by your bonnet. She, too, was wishing she could look over the shoulder of the artist at work beside you."

"Not beside me. There were yards and yards of solid rock between us."

"Space, you see, in removing things from the beholder, seems always to bring them nearer to each other, and the most differing things are classed under one name by the man who knows nothing about them. But what sort of a rock was it you were trying to draw?"

"A strange-looking, conical rock, that stands alone in front of one of the ridges that project from the shore into the water. Three sea-birds, with long white wings, were flying about it, and the little waves of the rising tide were beating themselves against it and breaking in white splashes. So the rock stood between the blue and white below and the blue and white

above; for, though there were no clouds, the birds gave the touches of white to the upper sea."

"Now, Dora," I said, "I don't know if you are old enough to understand me; but sometimes little people are long in understanding, just because the older people think they can't, and don't try them.--Do you see, Dora, why I want you to learn to draw? Look how Wynnie sees things. That is, in a great measure, because she draws things, and has, by that, learned to watch in order to find out. It is a great thing to have your eyes open."

Dora's eyes were large, and she opened them to their full width, as if she would take in the universe at their little doors. Whether that indicated that she did not in the least understand what I had been saying, or that she was in sympathy with it, I cannot tell.

"Now let us go up to Connie, and tell her about the rock and everything else you have seen since you went out. We are all her messengers sent out to discover things, and bring back news of them."

After a little talk with Connie, I retired to the study, which was on the same floor as her room completing, indeed, the whole of that part of the house, which, seen from without, looked like a separate building; for it had a roof of its own, and stood higher up the rock than the rest of the dwelling. Here I began to glance over the books. To have the run of another man's library, especially if it has all been gathered by himself, is like having a pass-key into the chambers of his thought. Only, one must be wary, when he opens them, what marks on the books he takes for those of the present owner. A mistake here would breed considerable confusion and falsehood in any judgment formed from the library. I found, however, one thing plain enough, that Shepherd had kept up that love for an older English literature, which had been one of the cords to draw us towards each other when we were students together. There had been one point on which we especially agreed--that a true knowledge of the present, in literature, as in everything else, could only be founded upon a knowledge of what had gone before; therefore, that any judgment, in regard to the literature of the present day, was of no value which was not guided and influenced by a real acquaintance with the best of what had gone before, being liable to be dazzled and misled by novelty of form and other qualities which, whatever might be the real worth of the substance, were, in themselves, purely ephemeral. I had taken down a last-century edition of the poems of the brothers Fletcher, and, having begun to read a lovely passage in "Christ's Victory and Triumph," had gone into what I can only call an intellectual rage, at the impudence of the editor, who had altered innumerable words and phrases to suit the degenerate taste of his own time,--when a knock came to the door, and Charlie entered, breathless with eagerness.

"There's the boat with the men with the swords in it, and another boat behind them, twice as big."

I hurried out upon the road, and there, close under our windows, were the two boats we had seen in the morning, landing their crews on the little beach. The second boat was full of weather-beaten men, in all kinds of attire, some in blue jerseys, some in red shirts, some in ragged coats. One

man, who looked their superior, was dressed in blue from head to foot.

"What's the matter?" I asked the officer of the coast-guard, a sedate, thoughtful-looking man.

"Vessel foundered, sir," he answered. "Sprung a leak on Sunday morning. She was laden with iron, and in a heavy ground swell it shifted and knocked a hole in her. The poor fellows are worn out with the pump and rowing, upon little or nothing to eat."

They were trooping past us by this time, looking rather dismal, though not by any means abject.

"What are you going to do with them now?"

"They'll be taken in by the people. We'll get up a little subscription for them, but they all belong to the society the sailors have for sending the shipwrecked to their homes, or where they want to go."

"Well, here's something to help," I said.

"Thank you, sir. They'll be very glad of it."

"And if there's anything wanted that I can do for them, you must let me know."

"I will, sir. But I don't think there will be any occasion to trouble you. You are our new clergyman, I believe."

"Not exactly that. Only for a little while, till my friend Mr. Shepherd is able to come back to you."

"We don't want to lose Mr. Shepherd, sir. He's what they call high in these parts, but he's a great favourite with all the poor people, because you see he understands them as if he was of the same flesh and blood with themselves--as, for that matter, I suppose we all are."

"If we weren't there would be nothing to say at all. Will any of these men be at church to-morrow, do you suppose? I am afraid sailors are not much in the way of going to church?"

"I am afraid not. You see they are all anxious to get home. Most likely they'll be all travelling to-morrow. It's a pity. It would be a good chance for saying something to them that they might think of again. But I often think that, perhaps--it's only my own fancy, and I don't set it up for anything--that sailors won't be judged exactly like other people. They're so knocked about, you see, sir."

"Of course not. Nobody will be judged like any other body. To his own Master, who knows all about him, every man stands or falls. Depend upon it, God likes fair play, to use a homely phrase, far better than any sailor of them all. But that's not exactly the question. It seems to me the question is this: shall we, who know what a blessed thing life is because we know

what God is like, who can trust in him with all our hearts because he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the friend of sinners, shall we not try all we can to let them, too, know the blessedness of trusting in their Father in heaven? If we could only get them to say the Lord's prayer, _meaning_ it, think what that would be! Look here! This can't be called bribery, for they are in want of it, and it will show them I am friendly. Here's another sovereign. Give them my compliments, and say that if any of them happen to be in Kilkhaven tomorrow, I shall be quite pleased to welcome them to church. Tell them I will give them of my best there if they will come. Make the invitation merrily, you know. No long faces and solemn speech. I will give them the solemn speech when they come to church. But even there I hope God will keep the long face far from me. That is fittest for fear and suffering. And the house of God is the casket that holds the antidote against all fear and most suffering. But I am preaching my sermon on Saturday instead of Sunday, and keeping you from your ministration to the poor fellows. Good-bye."

"I will give them your message as near as I can," he said, and we shook hands and parted.

This was the first experience we had of the might and battle of the ocean. To our eyes it lay quiet as a baby asleep. On that Sunday morning there had been no commotion here. Yet now at last, on the Saturday morning, home come the conquered and spoiled of the sea. As if with a mock she takes all they have, and flings them on shore again, with her weeds, and her shells, and her sand. Before the winter was over we had learned--how much more of that awful power that surrounds the habitable earth! By slow degrees the sense of its might grew upon us, first by the vision of its many aspects and moods, and then by more awful things that followed; for there are few coasts upon which the sea rages so wildly as upon this, the whole force of the Atlantic breaking upon it. Even when there is no storm within perhaps hundreds of miles, when all is still as a church on the land, the storm that raves somewhere out upon the vast waste, will drive the waves in upon the shore with such fury that not even a lifeboat could make its way through their yawning hollows, and their fierce, shattered, and tumbling crests.

CHAPTER XVII.

MY FIRST SERMON IN THE SEABOARD PARISH.

In the hope that some of the shipwrecked mariners might be present in the church the next day, I proceeded to consider my morning's sermon for the occasion. There was no difficulty in taking care at the same time that it

should be suitable to the congregation, whether those sailors were there or not. I turned over in my mind several subjects. I thought, for instance, of showing them how this ocean that lay watchful and ready all about our island, all about the earth, was but a visible type or symbol of two other oceans, one very still, the other very awful and fierce; in fact, that three oceans surrounded us: one of the known world; one of the unseen world, that is, of death; one of the spirit--the devouring ocean of evil--and might I not have added yet another, encompassing and silencing all the rest--that of truth! The visible ocean seemed to make war upon the land, and the dwellers thereon. Restrained by the will of God and by him made subject more and more to the advancing knowledge of those who were created to rule over it, it was yet like a half-tamed beast ever ready to break loose and devour its masters. Of course this would have been but one aspect or appearance of it--for it was in truth all service; but this was the aspect I knew it must bear to those, seafaring themselves or not, to whom I had to speak. Then I thought I might show, that its power, like that of all things that man is ready to fear, had one barrier over which no commotion, no might of driving wind, could carry it, beyond which its loudest waves were dumb--the barrier of death. Hitherto and no further could its power reach. It could kill the body. It could dash in pieces the last little cock-boat to which the man clung, but thus it swept the man beyond its own region into the second sea of stillness, which we call death, out upon which the thoughts of those that are left behind can follow him only in great longings, vague conjectures, and mighty faith. Then I thought I could show them how, raving in fear, or lying still in calm deceit, there lay about the life of man a far more fearful ocean than that which threatened his body; for this would cast, could it but get a hold of him, both body and soul into hell--the sea of evil, of vice, of sin, of wrong-doing--they might call it by what name they pleased. This made war against the very essence of life, against God who is the truth, against love, against fairness, against fatherhood, motherhood, sisterhood, brotherhood, manhood, womanhood, against tenderness and grace and beauty, gathering into one pulp of festering death all that is noble, lovely, worshipful in the human nature made so divine that the one fearless man, the Lord Jesus Christ, shared it with us. This, I thought I might make them understand, was the only terrible sea, the only hopeless ocean from whose awful shore we must shrink and flee, the end of every voyage upon whose bosom was the bottom of its filthy waters, beyond the reach of all that is thought or spoken in the light, beyond life itself, but for the hand that reaches down from the upper ocean of truth, the hand of the Redeemer of men. I thought, I say, for a while, that I could make this, not definite, but very real to them. But I did not feel quite confident about it. Might they not in the symbolism forget the thing symbolised? And would not the symbol itself be ready to fade quite from their memory, or to return only in the vaguest shadow? And with the thought I perceived a far more excellent way. For the power of the truth lies of course in its revelation to the mind, and while for this there are a thousand means, none are so mighty as its embodiment in human beings and human life. There it is itself alive and active. And amongst these, what embodiment comes near to that in him who was perfect man in virtue of being at the root of the secret of humanity, in virtue of being the eternal Son of God? We are his sons in time: he is his Son in eternity, of whose sea time is but the broken sparkle. Therefore, I would talk to them about--but I will treat my reader

now as if he were not my reader, but one of my congregation on that bright Sunday, my first in the Seaboard Parish, with the sea outside the church, flashing in the sunlight.

While I stood at the lectern, which was in front of the altar-screen, I could see little of my congregation, partly from my being on a level with them, partly from the necessity for keeping my eyes and thoughts upon that which I read. When, however, I rose from prayer in the pulpit; then I felt, as usual with me, that I was personally present for personal influence with my people, and then I saw, to my great pleasure, that one long bench nearly in the middle of the church was full of such sunburnt men as could not be mistaken for any but mariners, even if their torn and worn garments had not revealed that they must be the very men about whom we had been so much interested. Not only were they behaving with perfect decorum, but their rough faces wore an aspect of solemnity which I do not suppose was by any means their usual aspect.

I gave them no text. I had one myself, which was the necessary thing. They should have it by and by.

"Once upon a time," I said, "a man went up a mountain, and stayed there till it was dark, and stayed on. Now, a man who finds himself on a mountain as the sun is going down, especially if he is alone, makes haste to get down before it is dark. But this man went up when the sun was going down, and, as I say, continued there for a good long while after it was dark. You will want to know why. I will tell you. He wished to be alone. He hadn't a house of his own. He never had all the time he lived. He hadn't even a room of his own into which he could go, and bolt the door of it. True, he had kind friends, who gave him a bed: but they were all poor people, and their houses were small, and very likely they had large families, and he could not always find a quiet place to go into. And I dare say, if he had had a room, he would have been a little troubled with the children constantly coming to find him; for however much he loved them--and no man was ever so fond of children as he was--he needed to be left quiet sometimes. So, upon this occasion, he went up the mountain just to be quiet. He had been all day with a crowd of people, and he felt that it was time to be alone. For he had been talking with men all day, which tires and sometimes confuses a man's thoughts, and now he wanted to talk with God--for that makes a man strong, and puts all the confusion in order again, and lets a man know what he is about. So he went to the top of the hill. That was his secret chamber. It had no door; but that did not matter--no one could see him but God. There he stayed for hours--sometimes, I suppose, kneeling in his prayer to God; sometimes sitting, tired with his own thinking, on a stone; sometimes walking about, looking forward to what would come next--not anxious about it, but contemplating it. For just before he came up here, some of the people who had been with him wanted to make him a king; and this would not do--this was not what God wanted of him, and therefore he got rid of them, and came up here to talk to God. It was so quiet up here! The earth had almost vanished. He could see just the bare hilltop beneath him, a glimmer below, and the sky and the stars over his head. The people had all gone away to their own homes, and perhaps next day would hardly think about him at all, busy catching fish, or digging their gardens, or making things for their houses. But he knew that God would not forget him

the next day any more than this day, and that God had sent him not to be the king that these people wanted him to be, but their servant. So, to make his heart strong, I say, he went up into the mountain alone to have a talk with his Father. How quiet it all was up here, I say, and how noisy it had been down there a little while ago! But God had been in the noise then as much as he was in the quiet now--the only difference being that he could not then be alone with him. I need not tell you who this man was--it was the king of men, the servant of men, the Lord Jesus Christ, the everlasting son of our Father in heaven.

"Now this mountain on which he was praying had a small lake at the foot of it--that is, about thirteen miles long, and five miles broad. Not wanting even his usual companions to be with him this evening--partly, I presume, because they were of the same mind as those who desired to take him by force and make him a king--he had sent them away in their boat, to go across this water to the other side, where were their homes and their families. Now, it was not pitch dark either on the mountain-top or on the water down below; yet I doubt if any other man than he would have been keen-eyed enough to discover that little boat down in the middle of the lake, much distressed by the west wind that blew right in their teeth. But he loved every man in it so much, that I think even as he was talking to his Father, his eyes would now and then go looking for and finding it--watching it on its way across to the other side. You must remember that it was a little boat; and there are often tremendous storms upon these small lakes with great mountains about them. For the wind will come all at once, rushing down through the clefts in as sudden a squall as ever overtook a sailor at sea. And then, you know, there is no sea-room. If the wind get the better of them, they are on the shore in a few minutes, whichever way the wind may blow. He saw them worn out at the oar, toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary unto them. So the time for loneliness and prayer was over, and the time to go down out of his secret chamber and help his brethren was come. He did not need to turn and say good-bye to his Father, as if he dwelt on that mountain-top alone: his Father was down there on the lake as well. He went straight down. Could not his Father, if he too was down on the lake, help them without him? Yes. But he wanted him to do it, that they might see that he did it. Otherwise they would only have thought that the wind fell and the waves lay down, without supposing for a moment that their Master or his Father had had anything to do with it. They would have done just as people do now-a-days: they think that the help comes of itself, instead of by the will of him who determined from the first that men should be helped. So the Master went down the hill. When he reached the border of the lake, the wind being from the other side, he must have found the waves breaking furiously upon the rocks. But that made no difference to him. He looked out as he stood alone on the edge amidst the rushing wind and the noise of the water, out over the waves under the clear, starry sky, saw where the tiny boat was tossed about like a nutshell, and set out."

The mariners had been staring at me up to this point, leaning forward on their benches, for sailors are nearly as fond of a good yarn as they are of tobacco; and I heard afterwards that they had voted parson's yarn a good one. Now, however, I saw one of them, probably more ignorant than the others, cast a questioning glance at his neighbour. It was not returned,

and he fell again into a listening attitude. He had no idea of what was coming. He probably thought parson had forgotten to say how Jesus had come by a boat.

"The companions of our Lord had not been willing to go away and leave him behind. Now, I dare say, they wished more than ever that he had been with them--not that they thought he could do anything with a storm, only that somehow they would have been less afraid with his face to look at. They had seen him cure men of dreadful diseases; they had seen him turn water into wine--some of them; they had seen him feed five thousand people the day before with five loaves and two small fishes; but had one of their number suggested that if he had been with them, they would have been safe from the storm, they would not have talked any nonsense about the laws of nature, not having learned that kind of nonsense, but they would have said that was quite a different thing--altogether too much to expect or believe: nobody could make the wind mind what it was about, or keep the water from drowning you if you fell into it and couldn't swim; or such-like.

"At length, when they were nearly worn out, taking feebler and feebler strokes, sometimes missing the water altogether, at other times burying their oars in it up to the handles--as they rose on the crest of a huge wave, one of them gave a cry, and they all stopped rowing and stared, leaning forward to peer through the darkness. And through the spray which the wind tore from the tops of the waves and scattered before it like dust, they saw, perhaps a hundred yards or so from the boat, something standing up from the surface of the water. It seemed to move towards them. It was a shape like a man. They all cried out with fear, as was natural, for they thought it must be a ghost."

How the faces of the sailors strained towards me at this part of the story! I was afraid one of them especially was on the point of getting up to speak, as we have heard of sailors doing in church. I went on.

"But then, over the noise of the wind and the waters came the voice they knew so well. It said, 'Be of good cheer: it is I. Be not afraid.' I should think, between wonder and gladness, they hardly knew for some moments where they were or what they were about. Peter was the first to recover himself apparently. In the first flush of his delight he felt strong and full of courage. 'Lord, if it be thou,' he said, 'bid me come unto thee on the water.' Jesus just said, 'Come;,' and Peter unshipped his oar, and scrambled over the gunwale on to the sea. But when he let go his hold of the boat, and began to look about him, and saw how the wind was tearing the water, and how it tossed and raved between him and Jesus, he began to be afraid. And as soon as he began to be afraid he began to sink; but he had, notwithstanding his fear, just sense enough to do the one sensible thing; he cried out, 'Lord, save me.' And Jesus put out his hand, and took hold of him, and lifted him up out of the water, and said to him, 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And then they got into the boat, and the wind fell all at once, and altogether.

"Now, you will not think that Peter was a coward, will you? It wasn't that he hadn't courage, but that he hadn't enough of it. And why was it that he hadn't enough of it? Because he hadn't faith enough. Peter was always very

easily impressed with the look of things. It wasn't at all likely that a man should be able to walk on the water; and yet Peter found himself standing on the water: you would have thought that when once he found himself standing on the water, he need not be afraid of the wind and the waves that lay between him and Jesus. But they looked so ugly that the fearfulness of them took hold of his heart, and his courage went. You would have thought that the greatest trial of his courage was over when he got out of the boat, and that there was comparatively little more ahead of him. Yet the sight of the waves and the blast of the boisterous wind were too much for him. I will tell you how I fancy it was; and I think there are several instances of the same kind of thing in Peter's life. When he got out of the boat, and found himself standing on the water, he began to think much of himself for being able to do so, and fancy himself better and greater than his companions, and an especial favourite of God above them. Now, there is nothing that kills faith sooner than pride. The two are directly against each other. The moment that Peter grew proud, and began to think about himself instead of about his Master, he began to lose his faith, and then he grew afraid, and then he began to sink--and that brought him to his senses. Then he forgot himself and remembered his Master, and then the hand of the Lord caught him, and the voice of the Lord gently rebuked him for the smallness of his faith, asking, 'Wherefore didst thou doubt?' I wonder if Peter was able to read his own heart sufficiently well to answer that _wherefore_. I do not think it likely at this period of his history. But God has immeasurable patience, and before he had done teaching Peter, even in this life, he had made him know quite well that pride and conceit were at the root of all his failures. Jesus did not point it out to him now. Faith was the only thing that would reveal that to him, as well as cure him of it; and was, therefore, the only thing he required of him in his rebuke. I suspect Peter was helped back into the boat by the eager hands of his companions already in a humbler state of mind than when he left it; but before his pride would be quite overcome, it would need that same voice of loving-kindness to call him Satan, and the voice of the cock to bring to his mind his loud boast, and his sneaking denial; nay, even the voice of one who had never seen the Lord till after his death, but was yet a readier disciple than he--the voice of St. Paul, to rebuke him because he dissembled, and was not downright honest. But at the last even he gained the crown of martyrdom, enduring all extremes, nailed to the cross like his Master, rather than deny his name. This should teach us to distrust ourselves, and yet have great hope for ourselves, and endless patience with other people. But to return to the story and what the story itself teaches us.

"If the disciples had known that Jesus saw them from the top of the mountain, and was watching them all the time, would they have been frightened at the storm, as I have little doubt they were, for they were only fresh-water fishermen, you know? Well, to answer my own question"--I went on in haste, for I saw one or two of the sailors with an audible answer hovering on their lips--"I don't know that, as they then were, it would have made so much difference to them; for none of them had risen much above the look of the things nearest them yet. But supposing you, who know something about him, were alone on the sea, and expecting your boat to be swamped every moment--if you found out all at once, that he was looking down at you from some lofty hilltop, and seeing all round about you in time

and space too, would you be afraid? He might mean you to go to the bottom, you know. Would you mind going to the bottom with him looking at you? I do not think I should mind it myself. But I must take care lest I be boastful like Peter.

"Why should we be afraid of anything with him looking at us who is the Saviour of men? But we are afraid of him instead, because we do not believe that he is what he says he is--the Saviour of men. We do not believe what he offers us is salvation. We think it is slavery, and therefore continue slaves. Friends, I will speak to you who think you do believe in him. I am not going to say that you do not believe in him; but I hope I am going to make you say to yourselves that you too deserve to have those words of the Saviour spoken to you that were spoken to Peter, 'O ye of little faith!' Floating on the sea of your troubles, all kinds of fears and anxieties assailing you, is He not on the mountain-top? Sees he not the little boat of your fortunes tossed with the waves and the contrary wind? Assuredly he will come to you walking on the waters. It may not be in the way you wish, but if not, you will say at last, 'This is better.' It may be that he will come in a form that will make you cry out for fear in the weakness of your faith, as the disciples cried out--not believing any more than they did, that it can be he. But will not each of you arouse his courage that to you also he may say, as to the woman with the sick daughter whose confidence he so sorely tried, 'Great is thy faith'? Will you not rouse yourself, I say, that you may do him justice, and cast off the slavery of your own dread? O ye of little faith, wherefore will ye doubt? Do not think that the Lord sees and will not come. Down the mountain assuredly he will come, and you are now as safe in your troubles as the disciples were in theirs with Jesus looking on. They did not know it, but it was so: the Lord was watching them. And when you look back upon your past lives, cannot you see some instances of the same kind--when you felt and acted as if the Lord had forgotten you, and found afterwards that he had been watching you all the time?

"But the reason why you do not trust him more is that you obey him so little. If you would only, ask what God would have you to do, you would soon find your confidence growing. It is because you are proud, and envious, and greedy after gain, that you do not trust him more. Ah! trust him if it were only to get rid of these evil things, and be clean and beautiful in heart.

"O sailors with me on the ocean of life, will you, knowing that he is watching you from his mountain-top, do and say the things that hurt, and wrong, and disappoint him? Sailors on the waters that surround this globe, though there be no great mountain that overlooks the little lake on which you float, not the less does he behold you, and care for you, and watch over you. Will you do that which is displeasing, distressful to him? Will you be irreverent, cruel, coarse? Will you say evil things, lie, and delight in vile stories and reports, with his eye on you, watching your ship on its watery ways, ever ready to come over the waves to help you? It is a fine thing, sailors, to fear nothing; but it would be far finer to fear nothing _because_ he is above all, and over all, and in you all. For his sake and for his love, give up everything bad, and take him for your captain. He will be both captain and pilot to you, and steer you safe into

the port of glory. Now to God the Father," &c.

This is very nearly the sermon I preached that first Sunday morning. I followed it up with a short enforcement in the afternoon.

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