

LENA GRAHAM

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THE SLIPPERY ROCKS. See p. 53.

LENA GRAHAM

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"LINFORD GREEN," "NEW HONOURS," ETC

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LENA GRAHAM.

CHAPTER I. AT AUNT MARY'S.

"It does seem so strange not to know one's own Papa and Mama and sisters; does it not, Auntie?" remarked Lena Graham, leaning her arm on the mantelpiece as she spoke, and gazing thoughtfully at a photograph that stood there.

"You are not the only little girl in the world that has had, from one cause or another, to be separated from her parents, Lena dear," said her Aunt, looking up from her work to answer her little niece. "And I think you have been very happy with me, my pet," she continued.

In a moment Lena was beside her, saying, "Happy! oh yes, there never was such a good kind Auntie as you anywhere; but I cannot help wondering if they will love me. And"—

"Love you, Lena, your parents!" interrupted her Aunt.

"Not exactly that either, Auntie, for I know they do from their letters, but you know they have Milly and Lucy."

"And Aunt Mary has only her little Lena," said Miss Somerville, stroking back her niece's hair, and looking fondly at the young face lifted to hers. "You will be so happy altogether, dear, that you will wonder how you ever got on without companions of your own age."

"I mean to be so kind to them, Auntie, and lend them all my things, and help Milly with her lessons; for you know I am much older than she is."

"Only two years; and I fancy, from all I hear, that Milly is old for her age. She has seen more than my little girl, so I don't think you will find her so much younger in her ways than yourself."

"I am two years and five months older than she is," said Lena, who liked to have what she considered the full advantage.

"We shall know all about it very soon, for, if I am not much mistaken, there will be a letter to-night saying when they will arrive here."

Lena was too excited and impatient to settle down quietly that evening to either books or work; even the doll was neglected, which was not often the case, for Lena was devoted to this especial one, who was called after her two unknown sisters, "Millicent Lucy," as a special token of affection.

She wandered aimlessly about the room, now stopping to gaze at the photograph on the mantel-piece, and ask, for the hundredth time, "if it was really like," then to the window to peep out and wonder when the "postman would come," and if, when he did come, he would bring a letter from the expected travellers.

The photograph that engrossed so much of her thoughts and attention consisted of a group of four persons. Mrs. Graham was seated, holding little Lucy on her knee; at her feet, Milly was sitting on a stool; while Colonel Graham stood, leaning one arm on his wife's chair, and looking, Lena thought, very grave and a little bit stern. Perhaps, thought Lena, "that was because he was accustomed to command his soldiers, and had been in battle." She hoped he did not always look like that, for if he did she might be a little bit afraid of him, though Auntie did say, "there was no fear of such a thing happening."

Lena Graham had only a very dim, childish remembrance of her parents, for it was fully six years since she had seen them. Just half her young life had been passed under Aunt Mary's loving care.

Six years before our story commences, Colonel Graham's regiment was ordered to India. At first both he and his wife had hoped to take their little girls out with them, but just at that time Lena was taken ill; and though better and stronger when the time came for their leaving England, she was not strong enough, the doctor said, to stand a hot climate. It was then that Miss Somerville, Mrs. Graham's sister, had offered to take charge of the little Lena.

Millicent was a strong, healthy child, and well able to stand the climate, at any rate for a year or two. About a year after their leaving England, Colonel Graham was offered an appointment for five years at one of the hill stations, which he gladly accepted, as the climate was as cool and healthy as at home, and thus was able not only to keep Millicent with them, but the baby sister that had been born after their arrival in the far East.

The five years had now come to an end. And the day before we make the acquaintance of their daughter Helena, or Lena as she was always called, Colonel and Mrs. Graham had arrived in England.

The child was naturally all eagerness to see them; not even the knowledge that in a few days she would be separated from her Aunt could cast a shadow over her, and, childlike, she was too much absorbed in her own prospects of happiness, to note the shade of sadness that sometimes crossed her Aunt's kind face, as she listened to her merry chatter, at the thought that would intrude itself, of how sorely she would miss her little niece's loving companionship, and how dull the house would be when the sound of the bright young voice would be heard there no longer.

The last few years had been very happy ones to both aunt and niece, and Lena warmly returned all the love and care that had been lavished on her.

Miss Somerville was not strong, and both from this circumstance, and also from inclination, her life had been a secluded one, and her whole time and attention had been devoted to the education and bringing up of her young charge.

It would be a different life, she knew, that her niece would lead after this, for in the future she would have to share not only her lessons but her pleasures with her sisters, and instead of being the first to be considered, as had been the case hitherto, she would be one among others, and would have to learn not only to take but give. (And as our story goes on, we shall see what fruits she will show of the loving training she had received.)

As these thoughts passed through Miss Somerville's mind, the postman's knock was heard at their door. With one bound Lena was out of the room, exclaiming, "There he is at last!" returning in a very short space of time with a letter in her hand.

"It's from Papa; I know his handwriting. Do make haste, Auntie, and read it. I wonder Mama did not write to me."

"They will be here to-morrow, darling. Poor Mama had a headache, from all the bustle and noise of London, I should think. The black nurse she brought home with her has already got an engagement to return with a lady to her own country, so they will have to come without a nurse. Hester will be able to look after Lucy until Mama finds one to suit her."

"O Auntie, I will look after Lucy; I am sure I could do all she wants."

Auntie laughed as she answered, "I don't think you quite understand the duties of a nurse, dear, but you can be of great use and comfort to Mama, I am sure."

"Yes, I mean to be," was the confident answer.

"You mean, dear, you will try to be."

But Lena did not wait to answer. She left the room, saying, "I must go and

tell Hester that they are really coming to-morrow." And off she went, only to return with some new question that she wanted Auntie to answer.

Not until the bell rang for prayers did she quiet down, and when she rose from her knees there was a very grave, subdued look on her face.

As soon as they were alone, she flung her arms round her Aunt's neck, exclaiming, "Ah, I do wish you were coming too! It won't be perfectly happy without you, Auntie, darling."

"Dear one, you must not expect perfect happiness anywhere in this world," she answered, returning her embrace.

"But I shall miss you so."

"And I shall miss you sadly; but I cannot be so selfish, as to grudge Mama the happiness of having her eldest daughter with her."

"I do so long to see her, my very own Mama, but I want you too."

"What a greedy little creature! Why, you will have Milly and Lucy, as well as Papa and Mama, and not satisfied!"

"If I had you too, I should be perfectly satisfied. I should not want anything else in the world."

"Ah, Lena dear, I fear that you would not find it so."

"Yes, I am sure I should."

Auntie shook her head. "Don't be too confident, dear; you must not expect that in the future you will have everything you want. You will have to share your pleasures with Milly."

"Oh, I shall like that."

"I am very glad to hear it, dear," was the quiet answer.

"Now, Auntie, don't look so grave; for you will see how well I shall behave, and show that your child can be really good."

"Not my child, Lena dear. To be really good you must be the child of God."

Auntie spoke so gravely that Lena, humbled and ashamed, whispered, "Yes indeed, Auntie, I will try," as she gave and received her good-night kiss.

Miss Somerville lived in a pretty sea-coast town called West Meadenham. In truth, it was but a suburb of Meadenham proper, but that town had grown so large of late years that the numerous streets, squares, and terraces that had sprung up around it, considered themselves important enough to have a name of their own; but as if to show to the world in general, that they did not wish to throw off all allegiance from the dear old town, that nestled so comfortably at the foot of the high cliff that sheltered it from the cold east winds of spring, it modestly christened itself, West Meadenham, instead of choosing a new name.

The next day arrived, fine as heart could wish, a bright sun shining overhead, and a soft breeze blowing from the sea. No wonder that Lena exclaimed, "How lovely!" as she came out of the house and gazed around her as if drinking

in the beauty of the morning.

The trees were all decked in their first fresh young green, the air scented with the sweet perfume of the spring flowers, that made the garden of Scarsdale Villa look quite gay even in April. Their house was the last of a row of villas almost in the country, and before and behind them stretched green fields.

Let me describe Lena Graham to you, as she stands, sniffing up the fresh air that brings the healthy roses into her cheeks, and gives her a hearty appetite for the bread-and-butter that she is only waiting for Aunt Mary's appearance to attack with good-will.

A sturdy little English girl, rather short for her age, with rosy cheeks and bright intelligent brown eyes, that glance here, there, and everywhere; long light-brown hair, tied back from her face with a blue ribbon, that matches in colour the blue serge dress she wears. The face has a bright, open expression, and the girl's whole appearance speaks of the happy, peaceful life she leads. Shading her eyes with her hand from the sun, she looks about attentively.

"Yes," she remarks to herself in a low voice, "I can get plenty for both rooms without spoiling the garden. I think Mama shall have the violets, and Milly the primroses; and I shall ask Auntie to let me run to the fields and get some cowslips for Lucy; and Papa shall have some of all, because he is the only man." Here her meditations were broken into by hearing Auntie's voice calling—

"Lena, Lena, where are you, dear child?"

"Here; Auntie; it's such a lovely day, do come out just for one minute."

"It must be only for one minute then," said her Aunt as she joined her. "Yes, it is a lovely day. We can welcome Papa and Mama with both sunshine and smiles."

"Sunshine in doors and out," said Lena, with a beaming look as they entered the house together.

Lena always did lessons with her Aunt, but to-day was to be a holiday, for Miss Somerville saw that the child was too excited and nervous to settle down quietly to work; and besides that, there was a good deal to be done in the way of preparation for the expected travellers, for it was not often that so large a party as four people came to visit their quiet household.

They were not expected until five o'clock, so Lena had the whole day before her to wonder and speculate in. The morning passed away quickly, as time always does when one is busy and occupied, and in the afternoon Lena was to arrange the flowers in the different rooms. Aunt Mary quite approved of the arrangement Lena had made as to the ones each was to have, though she asked why Lena had chosen those especial ones.

"Violets for Mama, because they are so sweet; and they are getting scarce now, you know, Auntie: they are nearly over in the garden."

"I didn't know that."

"Why, Auntie, we have picked them all; I wish I had not now. And then primroses for Milly, because they are my favourite flower, and I want her to like all I do."

"Or you could like what she does?"

"But she must like primroses, she couldn't help it; then cowslips for Lucy, they are nearly as nice as primroses; but I want Milly to have the nicest, because she's to be my great friend; and I thought Papa ought to have some of all." Here Lena stopped, and looked at her Aunt for approval.

"Very well, dear; come out and get them."

"And may I arrange them?"

"Yes, and put them in the different rooms."

"Thank you, Auntie dear. And then may I put on my best dress? I do want to look nice when they come."

"Yes, darling," said Miss Somerville with a smile. Then she went to the window and watched the child as she gathered the flowers, flitting from one place to another, as busy as a bee, looking up every now and then, to nod smilingly to her Aunt, or to hold up her treasures to be admired.

No fear, she thought, of her parents or any one not thinking her nice, as Lena had expressed it. She smiled to herself as she thought of the happiness of the parents at getting back the child from whom they had so long been parted; and much as she would miss the cheerful, loving little companion who had brightened her lonely life, she felt it would be better for Lena herself to take her place once more among young companions. In the nursery or the school-room, where there are two or three together, it is, as it were, a little world of its own. No one in particular can have the entire care and thought of the whole household. All must take their place and their share both in the duties and pleasures of everyday life. This was exactly what had been wanting to Lena, and hers was a character that especially required it. It is so very easy for any one of us to accustom ourselves to be the first to be considered, and Lena was no exception to this. She had a warm, loving heart, but a proud, wilful temper; humility was a grace she sadly lacked. A loving word from Auntie would bring the ready tears to Lena's eyes, but what she considered a hard or disparaging word would make them flash as quickly. How she and Millicent would get on together, was rather an anxious thought to Miss Somerville, for dearly as she loved her little niece, she was not blind to her faults; and if the sisters were alike in character, there would not, she feared, be always peace. Lena had a very decided opinion on the subject of elder sisters, and that she was the eldest of the family, she always made a point of dwelling upon.

Neither a cloud nor a doubt crossed the child's own mind as to the future.

Of course Millicent and Lucy would love her as much as she was prepared to love them, and they would all be so happy together, she knew. The only shadow was the thought that she would have to part with dear Aunt Mary; but as that parting was not to be at once, she cast the thought away with the happy ease of childhood.

CHAPTER II. THE ARRIVAL.

As it struck five by the drawing-room clock, Lena threw open the hall-door and ran to the gate; and opening it, she went out and gazed eagerly down the road.

Scarsdale Villa, as Aunt Mary's house was called, was built on the top of a long hill that ran straight down into the town. As Lena now stood, the town itself seemed to be at her feet, and beyond the houses lay the sea, stretching away into the distance, far as the eye could reach, and now sparkling in the bright spring sunshine. But its beauty was quite thrown away upon Lena; her eager gaze was fixed on one particular spot on the road—the turning to the station.

She had not long to wait, for in a very few minutes she was gladdened by the sight of a cab, well covered with luggage, coming round the corner, and commencing the ascent of the hill.

At this sight, she turned and darted back into the house, calling loudly for "Auntie."

"Do you see them, dear?" Miss Somerville asked.

"There's a cab coming this way, and it has luggage; it must be them, I am sure. Do come out and look." Taking her Aunt's hand, they went out together and watched the well-laden cab as it came slowly up the hill.

Often and often had Lena grumbled at that weary hill, when she came home, tired-out after a long afternoon's ramble on the sands, or a walk into Meadenham, but never before had she thought it so long and tedious as that day. She watched the cab come "creeping along," as she called it.

Then as it drew very near, a new fit came over her—a fit of shyness. Clasp-
ing Auntie's hand very tight, she crept very close to her, whispering, "I do hope;" but she had no time to say more, for at that moment a gentleman's head was put out of the cab window, that Lena instantly recognised as the same face whose photograph she had looked at so often. "Papa!" she almost gasped in her excite-

ment.

"Here they are, waiting to welcome us home," called out Colonel Graham in a loud, cheery voice, and then the cab stopped, and there came warm, loving greetings. Lena had no very distinct recollection of all that was done or said for the next few minutes, but among all the greetings and fuss of arrival was one remembrance, that Lena thought would never leave her.

It was Mama's soft voice, that said, "My darling child; thank God for giving you back to me," so loving and tender, that Lena knew then how dear she was to Mama.

Not till they were all seated quietly in the drawing-room had Lena time to take a good look at these dear ones.

Ah, she would have known Mama anywhere, she was sure, for there was the same sweet gentle face, that had looked at her from her picture, day after day. And Papa did not look one bit stern, or grave, but was just the sort of papa she approved of; and dear, fat, chubby Lucy, with her fair curls and blue eyes—"a perfect pet" was Lena's verdict of her little sister; but Millicent, who was to be her own particular sister and companion, she was not quite what she expected her to be.

As she sat on the sofa beside Mama, her hand clasped in hers, she heard Aunt Mary say—

"They are very like, really; the same eyes and hair, and the likeness will be more apparent when Milly gets some of Lena's roses and plumpness." What Lena saw was a tall slight girl, as tall as herself, though she had two years and five months the advantage in age, with large serious brown eyes, and a pale face.

"No." Lena thought Auntie mistaken in this matter; surely she and Milly were not alike. As she gazed, or, I might say, stared at her sister, their eyes met, and Milly smiled such a sweet loving smile that lighted up her whole face, and that so altered and improved it, that Lena was not so much disposed to disagree with her Aunt's opinion as before.

Tea was brought in, and Lena was too busy waiting upon the travellers to think more about the likeness. Milly was shy and quiet; but that Lena did not so much object to, as it would enable her to show her all the more kindness and attention, for of course she was at home here, and the truth must be told, liked doing the honours of the house. Her sudden fit of nervousness soon passed off, and she was giving Mama her tea, and chatting away quite at her ease before very long.

"Milly and I are to stay up and have dinner with you to-night, Mama," said Lena. "Auntie thought Lucy would go to bed then, for it is not till seven."

"I hope you have not altered your hours for us, Mary?" said Colonel Graham.

"Now Papa, please," began Lena.

"No, no, my little girl," he said very decidedly, "we cannot allow your Aunt to alter her hours; it is very kind of her to have such a large party of us, as it is."

"We will talk about that to-morrow," said Miss Somerville with a smile. "Now I think it is time for you all to come and see your rooms; one little pair of eyes is looking very sleepy."

Lucy, who was alluded to, was sitting by the table, her little head nodding and her eyes half-closed; but at the mere suggestion of bed she protested crossly, "that she did not want to go to bed."

"We are all going upstairs, darling; you don't want to stay down here by yourself, do you?"

No, Lucy didn't want that, so she consented to go up with the others.

"Let me carry you," proposed Lena, lovingly.

Now Lucy was tired and sleepy, and, as very often happens in these cases, very cross, so instead of responding to Lena's kindly offer, she pushed her away with, "No, don't want you; Milly must."

A shade came over Lena's face, she had meant so kindly. "O Lucy, what a cross little thing you are," said Milly. "She doesn't mean it, Lena, only she is accustomed to me; and last night I had to do it because Nana was gone, and Mama had such a bad headache," she went on to say, as she followed Lena upstairs with Lucy in her arms.

"I will send Hester to help you, Milly," said her Aunt; "you must be tired too."

"And Mama wants Lena to help her this first evening," said Mrs. Graham, drawing the girl to her side lovingly, for she had seen the shadow that had come to the child's face at Lucy's cross words. "You must not mind Lucy being cross, dear, for the child has been excited and wearied with all the changes and strangeness of her life the last few days, and I am sorry to say has been rather spoilt on board ship. It is very difficult to avoid it there."

"And has not Milly?"

"Ah, Milly is such a quiet, staid little mortal, she is not easily spoiled; she has been the greatest comfort to me during the voyage, and now I have you too, my little one," was Mrs. Graham's answer, as she took Lena's face in both hands and kissed it, then, looking at her lovingly, said, "I think I should hardly have known you for the same white, delicate little thing that I left with such a sad heart all these years ago."

"Dear Mama," was Lena's only answer.

As they entered the bedroom, Mrs. Graham exclaimed, "Ah what sweet violets, my favourite flower! I think I can guess who placed them here."

"I did not know they were your favourites, but they are so sweet I thought

you must like them.”

”Such a pretty, homelike room,” said Mama, looking round. ”I often used to try and picture to myself what my little girl was doing, and what her surroundings were like.”

”Wasn’t Aunt Mary living here when you went away?”

”No, dear; she came here in hopes that the sea air would make you strong and rosy again, as it has.”

”O Mama, you can see the sea from the windows in Papa’s dressing-room; do come and look at it.”

Taking her mother’s hand, they went into the dressing-room, the window of which looked over the garden and towards the sea. Here they were joined by Colonel Graham, and as Lena stood between them, a hand clasped in each of theirs, she thought that there was not a happier little girl in the world than herself, and I think she was right. Silence fell upon them as they looked; so long it lasted that Lena looked up at her mother, and seeing her eyes full of tears, asked anxiously—

”Mama, what is it; what are you thinking of; aren’t you happy?”

”Very happy, darling,” said Mama, smiling down on her through her tears. ”I was thinking how good and grateful we ought to be to Him, who has guarded us all these long years, and now brought us together again.

”Safely and well,” added Papa.

”And, my Lena, we all must try to show our love and thankfulness not only in words, but in very deed and truth.”

At that moment a knock was heard at the door, and Milly looked in. ”As you were not in your room, Mama, I thought you must be in here,” she said.

”Looking at your beloved sea,” said Papa, holding out his hand to her to come and join them.

”Is Milly so fond of it?” asked Lena.

”Yes, so fond that we were thinking of making a present of her to the captain of our ship,” said Papa, laughing.

”I have the sea here, and you as well, and,” she added shyly, ”Lena too.”

”True, most sensible of little women; but, Lena, you must not think she is always so alarmingly sensible, for alas!”—and here Papa shook his head with affected sadness,—”she does love fun and romping sometimes.”

Millicent laughed as Lena exclaimed eagerly—

”Oh, I am so glad, for I do, and I do want her to be my companion; we can have such fun on the rocks, Milly.”

”Yes, dear; I trust you will be firm friends as well as companions. Milly has been longing for sister Lena.”

”And I have been longing for her,” was Lena’s answer.

"You have been very quick putting Lucy to bed: was she good?" asked Mrs. Graham.

"Oh, Hester did that; she was quite good with her, and Aunt Mary said I had better not stay, for she wanted her to grow accustomed to Hester."

"And where are you to sleep?"

"In the room with Lucy. I took off my things there, and I thought you might want me to help you."

"Oh, let me do that to-night," pleaded Lena.

"I shall be glad of help from you both. We have been idling our time away here talking instead of getting ready for dinner, and nothing is unpacked."

So saying, Mrs. Graham returned to her room, followed by the two girls, and very soon they were both busily engaged, undoing parcels, and getting out things that were required for the night. At first they delayed one another by both working at the same box, and strewing its contents over the floor. Such dreadful confusion ensued from this, that Mrs. Graham proposed that one should do the unpacking, while the other put the things away tidily in the drawers.

"Who shall unpack?" asked Lena.

"Well, I think you had better, and Milly can put away, for she knows what we shall require at first."

"I shall know soon, too, shan't I?" asked Lena; "but I like unpacking best, and seeing what you have got."

"You will never get through your work if you stop to examine and admire everything," said Mrs. Graham, as she watched her taking a good look at each thing she brought out of the box.

Milly took the opportunity while she was stooping down to take some clothes out of Lena's arms, to whisper, "I like the flowers so much."

"Do you know which are meant for you?" she asked, stopping in her work for a reply.

"Yes, the primroses, Aunt Mary told me. I think them lovely."

After this they worked away busily until dinner-time. Then, when the bell sounded, Lena rushed off to tell Aunt Mary what she had been doing, and also to inform her that they were all dear darlings; and, "what did Auntie think of Milly?"

Auntie's opinion was very favourable.

Then Lena suggested, "But don't you think she is very quiet?"

"She is very sweet and gentle, and I think very shy; but as you know, Lena, I do not dislike a little bit of shyness in children; it is far, far better than being forward."

"But not too shy?"

"Milly is not that; and I feel sure that you will be great friends as well as

loving little sisters before long."

This conversation took place as they went down to the drawing-room, Lena hanging on to her Aunt's arm, as she eagerly questioned her. Finding no one in the drawing-room, Lena began again—

"Isn't she tall, Auntie, nearly as tall as I am?"—the "she" alluded to being, of course, Milly.

"Quite as tall as you are, I think, though that is not such an enormous height, for"—

"No, I know," burst in Lena; "I wish I was taller, because people will never believe that I am so much older than she is."

Miss Somerville laughed as she answered, "I do not think that that need cause you unhappiness, dear."

The entrance of Mrs. Graham and Milly put an end to their conversation; then Colonel Graham came in, and they all went into the dining-room.

After dinner the two sisters went off together to Lena's room, to see all her treasures. There had been a certain constraint and shyness between them, as is so often the case with children in the presence of their elders. When they were alone, this wore off very quickly, and soon they were chatting away together, the best of friends; and although Lena's tongue was going at a gallop, Milly managed to keep up a very good second.

When Aunt Mary came to tell them it was time to go to bed, she found them seated, side by side, on the floor, Milly clasping in her arms "Millicent Lucy," while Lena held forth on the doings and sayings of Aunt Mary and herself; and promising Milly all sorts of delights, in both their names.

"O Auntie, we are having such a nice talk."

"Which I have come to put an end to."

"Already?"

"Yes, dears; it is prayer-time now."

At this both girls jumped up, and Dolly being put away carefully, the two girls followed their Aunt downstairs, hand clasped in hand.

Later, Mama went up with her two girls to see Lucy. Such a pretty picture she made, Lena thought, as she looked down on the chubby little face, all flushed with sleep, one small arm thrown over her head, and the fair curls all tossed about in confusion. As Mrs. Graham looked down on her little one, her heart swelled with love and gratitude at once more having all her children with her. Putting an arm round each of the others, she said in a low voice, "I trust, darlings, that you both thanked Him to-night for His great mercy to us all?"

"Yes, Mama," Milly whispered, shyly. "And for letting Lena be so nice and kind, and Aunt Mary too."

"And, Mama, I have to thank Him for double as much as Milly has, for I

have four of you all at once, and you are all just as nice as I hoped and expected."

"I am glad you are not disappointed in any of us, darling," answered her mother with a smile; "but we must not talk any more beside Lucy or we shall awake her."

"I may give her one kiss, please, Mama," said Lena; "she does look such a sweet!"

"Only one, and try and not to awake her, dear," was the answer. Then they left Milly, and Mama took Lena to her room, and said good-night.

Aunt Mary had been in and given her good-night kiss, and Lena was just falling off to sleep, all sorts of pleasant happy thoughts passing through her mind, in the confused sort of way that so often happens after anything pleasant has occurred—thoughts half real, half dreams, all jumbled up together in hopeless confusion, but very sweet withal,—when the door of her room opened very gently, but still making just noise enough to call forth the sleepy question, "Auntie, is that you?"

"No, darling, it's Mama."

"Mama!" she exclaimed, raising her head and rubbing her sleepy eyes.

"I could not go to sleep without one more look at my newly restored treasure."

Throwing her arms round her mother's neck, she said fervently, "I am so glad to have you, Mama; and I will be a treasure to you and be so good, indeed I will."

"God grant it, my darling," was Mama's answer to her as she laid the sleepy little head on the pillow again. Then kneeling beside her child's little bed she thanked Him, in a few heartfelt words, for having watched over and guarded her little one, during those six long years of separation.

CHAPTER III. THE PETITION.

The next few days passed away very happily. Having her sisters with her as companions quite equalled Lena's fondest expectations. Not a jar or a discord had broken the harmony of those days as yet. Milly was so nice, and always ready to admire and enjoy everything that Lena did or proposed; and as to giving up things,—certainly little Lucy did sometimes want what her elder sisters were

playing with, but it was very easy to please and satisfy her, she was such a sweet little thing. Lena often wondered how Auntie could have feared her not liking to do it.

It was the end of April when the Grahams came to West Meadenham, and now May had arrived—bright warm sunshiny May, enabling them to spend most of their time out of doors, either in the garden or the fields. And nicest of all, many a happy hour was spent on the sands and among the rocks, while their parents and Aunt walked up and down the Parade, watching them, or would sit with books and work on the shingle, ready to listen to all their doings when they rushed up breathless and eager to recount them.

But these bright delightful days could not last for ever. The first change was Colonel Graham's leaving them for a few days on a visit to some relations; and Lena had a shrewd suspicion, from words that she had heard fall from Aunt Mary, that other changes were in store for them also; but at present she was too much occupied with her sisters to think much about it.

The day after Colonel Graham left, Mama and Auntie announced that they were going to be very busy, preparing Milly's and Lucy's summer-dresses, and that they wanted Hester's assistance, so the three children might play out in the garden together quietly.

"Not go to the beach to-day?"

"I am afraid not. You can be very happy without going there for one afternoon."

"But, Mama," argued Lena, "it is such a pity not to go to-day, because it's low tide in the afternoon, and we should be able to have such a nice long time on the rocks—do let us go."

"Run away now and play in the garden, and we will see what can be done about it after dinner."

"I do hope you will let us, Mama, Lena says."

"Never mind what Lena says, Milly. You must both do what you are told. It is not the way to gain your wishes by being disobedient."

The two girls went slowly and reluctantly from the room, and taking their hats, went into the garden.

What had come over them both I know not: perhaps it was that the last few days had been too pleasant, and they were beginning to think that things were always to be so for them; or perhaps it was that the first hot weather made them both feel a little bit cross and languid—it has that effect sometimes, I believe; but whatever the reason was, the fact was what I have stated: they both were feeling rather cross, and inclined to take a gloomy view of things. And their being told that they might not be able to go to the beach that day was a ready-made grievance for them.

They showed their feelings, however, in very different ways. While Milly went and sat down quietly on a garden-seat, and gazed wistfully at the object of her affections, the sea, Lena wandered about the garden in a restless, disconsolate sort of way. Lucy was busy playing by herself with a little cart and horse, and for a few minutes Lena played with her; but seeing Milly leaning forward and looking quite interested, she said hastily, "You must play by yourself now, Lucy; I want to go and speak to Milly."

It is a curious fact that when one is idle and unsettled, one is apt to get a feeling of being ill used at seeing any one else looking interested and occupied. This was what Lena felt when she saw her sister not looking dull and wistful as before, but with a bright and animated expression on her face. Going up to her she said, "Milly, what are you looking at?"

No answer. This was irritating, so she repeated her question in a louder tone. Instead of speaking, Milly held up her hands, as if to impose silence on her.

This was too much for Lena in her present mood. Giving her sister a push, she exclaimed angrily, "How rude you are not to answer me! What *are* you looking at?"

"There now, Lena, you have spoilt it all."

"Spoilt all what? How tiresome you are, Milly!"

"I was counting the ships that passed, or that I could see, and I wanted to count twenty, and I had only got to fourteen when you disturbed me. Now I must begin again."

"Oh, that's silly. It's all very well when you are by yourself, but not when you have any one to play with."

"What shall we do then?" asked Milly, who was now getting over her disappointment; and as she was more accustomed to give up her own wishes than Lena was, she was naturally of a far happier disposition. Little Lucy had been her constant companion; and Milly was so fond of her little sister, that she never thought it hard or disagreeable to put aside her own pleasures and wishes to please Lucy. So now she found it easy to give in to Lena also. Lena had not found out how much pleasanter and happier life is when one studies the happiness of others. Her happiness had been so studied by Aunt Mary that she took Milly's good-natured assent as a matter of course.

"There is nothing nice to do here, the garden is so small; and Milly, don't you think that Mama might let us go to the beach? Aunt Mary would, I know."

"Mama will if she can; she always is good to us," and she gave Lena a reproachful look for her last words.

Lena noticed the reproach in both words and look, but she answered, without remarking upon it, "She would not even let us stay and ask about it. I always coax and coax Aunt Mary till she says 'Yes.'"

"Does she always say yes when you coax?" was the surprised remark elicited from Milly.

"Not always," Lena had to confess, "but sometimes."

There was a pause for a minute or two, and then Lena exclaimed eagerly, "Do you remember that man coming with a paper for Auntie to sign, and she told us it was a petition, and the man said the more people that signed it, the more likely it would be to succeed."

"Yes; what of that?" answered Milly in an independent tone. She had gone back to her occupation of counting the vessels in sight and was once more absorbed in it.

"I don't believe you listened to what I was saying; I do think it unkind of you."

At this accusation Milly started, and turning round, said gently, "I didn't mean to be unkind, but what has the petition to do with us?"

"O Milly, you are stupid. Don't you see what I mean? Wouldn't it be fine to write a petition to Mama to let us go to the beach?"

"Yes, let us: it would be something to do."

"I will go in and get a sheet of paper and a pencil, and then we will all sign it. Do you remember how it began?"

"Let me try and remember," said Milly with an air of wisdom, covering her face with her hands, as if to prevent any outside object from attracting her attention, only looking up, as Lena ran off to the house, to call out, "Mind and bring a pretty piece, Lena."

"All right," was the cheerful answer.

A few minutes after she returned with a packet of paper in her hand. "Look, I have brought 'terra cotta;' it's a very fashionable colour," was her announcement, as she held it out for her sister to see.

"It is not a very pretty colour though?"

"No, but the woman in the shop said it was very fashionable." This was said in a tone that admitted of no reply.

Laying the paper on the seat they both knelt down upon the ground, and each began to write. They decided on writing a rough copy first, and then, as Lena said, "she, as the eldest, would copy it out tidily."

"I took a look into the dictionary, to see that we were spelling it all right, for we mustn't make mistakes in that, or Mama and Auntie would laugh at us."

There was silence for a little while, as both heads were bent over their work: it was more difficult than they expected. At last Milly gave a great sigh, "I can't think where humble came; it did somewhere, I know."

"Yes, so it did. Now I remember; of course it ought to be at the end. We must put 'Your humble children.' Let me have a look at your paper. Why, I've

got much more scratched out than you have. I've begun six times already."

"It's the beginning that is so difficult; but, Lena, I feel sure 'humble' was at the top somewhere."

"Who was that petition to, I wonder?" said Lena.

"I am sure I don't know." And they both burst out laughing. Their ill-humour had all vanished by this time and they were in high spirits.

"It must have been to the 'Queen.'"

"Then they would not have put 'humble Queen.'"

At this there came another explosion of laughter.

"To our humble Mother and Aunt." That certainly sounded quite wrong. They remembered that the words "Most Gracious" were what they had seen oftenest written before their Sovereign's name.

At last they decided to write one together; it was more amusing in doing, and also more likely to be successful. Their continual peals of laughter soon attracted Lucy's attention, and she hovered about them, quite ready and anxious to assist, and growing impatient at the long delay before she was allowed to sign her name.

After nearly an hour's work they wrote the following:—

"To our Most Gracious Mother and Aunt.

"Please, dear darling Mama and Auntie—please let us go to the beach this afternoon, because it will be low tide, and perhaps we shall be able to catch some little crabs. We love playing on the rocks, and do want to go so much.

"Your loving and humble children, "HELENA MARY GRAHAM.

"MILLICENT GRACE GRAHAM.

"LUCY CAROLINE GRAHAM.

"P.S.—We don't want anybody to go with us, and we will be very good.

"OUR PETITION."

These last two words were written in very large letters at the bottom of the page. They had an idea that it ought to be written somewhere, so that there would be no mistake as to the nature of the document.

When this was all done, they surveyed their work with great pride. Then

Milly ran in for an envelope, and the petition was folded up and put in, and the address written—

”Mrs. GRAHAM,
”Miss SOMERVILLE.”

Going into the house, they gave it to Emma the servant. Taking her into their confidence, they easily obtained her promise to ring the hall-door bell, and bring it into the dining-room on a salver.

”What time would you like it brought in?” she asked with a smile, quite entering into the spirit of the fun.

”Soon,” said Milly, ”or Lucy will let it all out.”

”She had better not,” began Lena.

”When I have handed round the plates I will get master to ring the bell, and then I will go out and bring it in.”

That was a delightful arrangement, and now all they had to do was to impress upon Lucy the necessity of silence.

As they were still pointing out to her the dreadful consequences that would follow, if she mentioned a word about what they had been doing, Hester was heard calling them in to get ready for their dinner.

That something was exciting the children, was very quickly seen by both Mama and Auntie, from the frequent and meaning looks they exchanged, and from the state of suppressed excitement they were all in.

The hall-door bell was heard to ring.

”There it is!” exclaimed Lucy, eagerly.

”Hush!” came immediately from the other two.

Then Emma went out and returned with a letter, which she handed to Mrs. Graham, who on reading the address had great difficulty in suppressing a smile.

Opening the letter, she read it through carefully; then handing it to Miss Somerville, said, ”It will require serious consideration before we give an answer.”

”Oh, please, don’t say that, Mama; we want an answer at once.”

”Your Aunt has not even read it yet. After dinner my humble little children can come to me in the drawing-room, and then I hope to give them a gracious answer.”

With this they had to be content, for not a word more would Mrs. Graham say on the subject until after dinner. Lucy was carried off for an hour’s sleep; and Mama, seating herself on the sofa, drew Lena to her side, while Milly installed herself on the other side; then Mrs. Graham said—

”You are longing for an answer to your petition, I know, dears. First I must

tell you that Auntie and I graciously assent to it.”

”That means we are to go, Mama?” asked Milly.

”Thank you, thank you,” exclaimed Lena; ”I told you, Milly, if we coaxed them.”

”No, Lena dear,” interrupted her mother, ”that was the very thing that nearly lost it to you. I could not promise when you asked me before, because I never like to break a promise, and I was not sure whether it would be safe for you three children to go alone.”

”I could have told you it would,” said Lena, reproachfully.

”But I preferred Aunt Mary’s opinion,” was her mother’s answer, given with a smile.

”She thinks it safe, doesn’t she, Mama?”

”Yes, but what I want to say to you now, is particularly to you, Lena. I saw my little girl thought I was very unkind in not consenting to her wishes at once, and now you think I have given leave because you begged and coaxed.”

Lena blushed furiously at this, but nodded her head, as much as to say, ”Yes, that is true.”

”What I want you both, my children, to do, is to trust me. I think it gives me more pain to refuse you a pleasure, than you to be refused; and when I say No, try, darlings, and believe that Mama has some good reason for it.”

”Yes, we will,” they both exclaimed at once. Then Lena went on to say, ”But, Mama, why didn’t you tell us that you were not sure, and the reason, and then I could have told you it was quite safe to go alone?”

”In fact, dear, why did I not ask your advice, you mean?”

”No, I didn’t mean that; only if you had said”——

”And what about obedience, Lena?”

Not receiving any answer, Mrs. Graham continued. ”Perfect obedience, dear, is what Papa and I both expect from all our children; and by and by, when you know us better, you will find out that it is not only your duty but your happiness to give it. I think Milly knows that already.”

”Yes, Mama, and I know how good you are, and always try to do what we like.”

”And I hope Lena will soon think so too.”

”You talk as if Milly loved you better than I do,” said Lena jealously, ”and I am sure she does not.”

”No, darling, I did not mean that, for I am sure you both love me dearly. What I meant was that Milly knows me best, and understands my ways.”

”And Lena will soon,” said Milly, stooping across her mother to smile at her sister, ”for we are going to be the greatest friends, aren’t we, Lena? We have settled that a long time.”

Then, after a loving kiss from Mama, the two girls went off together to get ready for their walk; and by the time buckets and spades had been hunted out, and they were both ready, Lucy had had her sleep, and was waiting for them in the hall.

"Be sure and come in by half-past five or six at latest. Auntie won't mind putting off Lucy's tea till then, I am sure."

No. Auntie was quite ready to do anything she was asked; and after many promises of being very good and careful, they started, Lena calling back, as they shut the gate, "You can trust them to me; I will look after them."

CHAPTER IV. ON THE ROCKS.

The three girls started off hand in hand; Lucy between the two elder ones, holding a hand of each. As it was all down-hill, they went at such a quick pace that it was almost a run, and brought them very quickly to the esplanade. Here they stopped and took a look round.

As they had told their mother, it was very nearly low tide, and a long stretch of beach and rocks lay temptingly before them. Not a cloud was to be seen in the sky; and the waves broke so softly and gently on the shore, that it was hard to associate the thoughts of storms and raging winds with that sparkling, lake-like sea.

On either side of them stretched, as far as the children could see, the broad, handsome esplanade, now quite a gay sight with the many people who had been tempted out by the warm sun, either to sit or walk up and down, while enjoying the beauty and freshness of the day. In the distance a band was playing, the soft strains of which were heard by the children as they stood gazing about them.

"A band!" cried Lucy. "O Milly, do let us go and hear it closer—do come;" and she pulled her sisters in the direction from which the sound came.

"Mama might not like us to go; and besides, Lucy, there are such lots of people there," said Milly.

Lena did not at all approve of this speech of Lucy's. It was not Milly's permission she ought to have asked, but hers. *She* was the eldest, and had already said that she would take care of them, or, as she would have expressed it, "had promised Mama to take care of them." And besides, she knew the place, and was

at home here, which Millicent certainly was not.

So, as soon as Milly had spoken, she said—

”Why shouldn’t we go? The people won’t hurt us. Come along, Milly,” she added impatiently, as the latter drew back.

”But, Lena, Mama didn’t give us leave. She said we might go to the beach, and”—

”And so we are going. We can go down to it near the band, and Lucy can hear it, as she wants to so much.”

”Yes, I do want to,” said Lucy, dropping Milly’s hand and going forward with Lena.

”We shall hear it just as well down here, and it will be much nicer on the rocks than among all those people.”

”It’s because you are shy and afraid. You want Lucy not to hear it.”

Now like many shy, sensitive people, Milly couldn’t bear to be called so. She felt as if it was wrong and a disgrace to be shy. So she said, ”I don’t think Mama would like it. I should like it otherwise.”

”I’m the eldest, and know that it’s all right; so come along, it’s no good wasting all our time doing nothing.” And she started off with Lucy, who was delighted at the prospect of going to see, as well as hear, the band.

It was a much longer walk than any of them had expected, and by the time they got there, Lucy was rather tired; so they found a seat and sat and listened to the music for some time. Milly’s shyness at finding herself among a number of people soon wore off, when she found that no one took any notice of them; and Lena’s assurance that she had often come, with only a companion of her own age, reassured her as to the propriety of the proceeding, so they all enjoyed themselves listening to the music and watching the varied throng around them, until Lucy became tired of sitting still and proposed that they should go to the rocks. It was no use going back to those nearer home, so they ran down the first steps they came to, and were soon close to the water’s edge, hard at work with spade and bucket.

Leaving Milly and Lucy to play on the sand, Lena wandered off to the rocks. This was much more exciting work, and she went back in a very short time to invite the others to come there also.

”Bring your bucket, Lucy, and we will try and catch you a dear little crab,” promised Lena, as they all went off together. But very soon the rocks proved too difficult for poor little Lucy; they were rough and slippery, and she slipped about in the most helpless manner. With the aid of her sister’s hand she managed for a little, then, emboldened by her success, she tried to go alone, but alas! it was for a very little way. Down she came on the sharp wet stones, cutting both hand and leg in the fall, raising a loud cry of pain and terror as she did so. Her sisters

were beside her in a moment, consoling and lifting her on to smoother ground. But some time elapsed before she was comforted sufficiently to be left.

"You are all right now, Lucy, aren't you?" said Lena coaxingly.

"It hurts still," said Lucy mournfully.

"But, Lucy, if we don't go we shall not be able to catch you a crab," continued Lena.

This was too tempting an offer to be refused; even the injured hand was forgotten before such an alluring prospect, and Lucy promised to stay and amuse herself with her spade, until the others returned with the promised crab.

"You will be sure and not leave this part until we come back," said Milly.

"You are a good little girl, Lucy," said Lena, giving her a kiss.

"Now, Milly, we will have a grand scramble. Let us try and go out to those quite far out, the big ones I mean, and let the water come all round us."

And she started off, jumping from rock to rock with the confidence and surefootedness gained by many a former scramble. Not so Milly, who was new to the work, and only too glad to avail herself of Lena's hand and help.

Soon they were both at the furthest point, proudly waving their handkerchiefs back to Lucy, who, poor little body, sat quietly playing for some time by herself, quite happy with her spade. For how long she did not know, but it must have been for some time. She could see her sisters at some distance off, evidently very busy about something, "catching the crab" they had promised to bring her, she supposed. It must be very interesting work, she thought, thus to engross their attention, and keep them away so long. Why should not she try her hand at it also? was the conclusion she arrived at ere long. Rising from where she was seated, she wandered off, and very soon was searching in the pools of water that lay, left by the receding tide, at the edge of the rocks, quite happy, and delighted with all the beauties she descried in their clear depths.

Is it any wonder that we, as well as the children, are enchanted, and forget the passing hours as we search out "the treasures of the deep" that are left by the receding waves, to give us a glimpse, as it were, of the "wondrous things" that lie hidden in their depths? And above all, what mysteries and beauties of God's love does the sea show forth to the thoughtful mind; and who can help being thoughtful and awed as they gaze on that mighty work of the Creator, and think how He who rules the raging waters, and who said of old, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed," is the same loving Father who watches over and guards the weakest and smallest of His children, and without whose knowledge not "even a sparrow falleth to the ground"? No wonder then that Lena and Milly became so absorbed and interested as they searched among the pools, some of which were quite large and deep, for the crab they had promised to catch and take back to Lucy; though I fear this

their original intention was soon forgotten among all the new delights that they discovered, and the time slipped away as if it were a thing of not the slightest consequence.

At first they often took a look to see if their little sister was safe, and every time they did so, they saw her sitting in the same place, busy with her spade. At last Milly exclaimed, "O Lena, I don't see Lucy; we must go back and look for her."

Lena looked round, rather startled also. Then she answered, "How stupid of us to be frightened! Of course she's hidden behind the rocks. We have moved ever so far since the last time we looked."

"I will go back and see. I wish we had brought her on with us."

"She couldn't have managed to scramble along these rocks. She is all right, I am sure."

"I won't be long going back to look. Mama trusted me to look after her."

Lena flushed. This was her weak point, and as Milly spoke, an angry feeling started up in Lena's mind at the thought, perhaps "Mama had spoken to Milly privately, and told her to look after Lucy." "She trusts her more than she trusts me," were the words she used to herself. Out loud she said, "Mama said I was to take charge of you both. What did she say to you, Milly?"

"To be careful of Lucy," said Milly, without looking at her sister. She was gazing earnestly about to see if she could see Lucy, and so didn't observe the changed expression on Lena's face. When she did turn round, Lena was stooping down peering into the water.

"You can go back then if you like. I must get that bit of seaweed for Auntie, and then I will follow you," she said without raising her head.

"Don't be long, will you, Lena?"

"No, and I will soon overtake you, if you go slipping and stumbling about as you did coming." The words were not either kindly said or meant.

Milly looked vexed. "I did not mean to put you out by asking you to hurry, Lena."

Lena vouchsafed no answer to this; so Milly went on, "I know I can't manage half so well as you do—come and help me."

Still silence. So after lingering for a minute or two, Milly started off.

She had not gone very far when Lena heard a cry of pain, and looking up, saw Milly raising herself and looking ruefully at her hand. She had evidently hurt herself, and conscience gave Lena a sharp prick, that recalled her to her better self. Alas! poor Lena little knew to what a strong enemy she was opening her heart. She would have indignantly denied that she was jealous of Milly,—no one ever does like to confess that they are that of anybody,—but it was the truth, and twice that day had she allowed it entrance "only just for a moment;" but it is

quite wonderful how a very little giving in to strengthens our faults. "Ill weeds grow apace" is only too true. The sweet flowers want a great deal of care and cultivation; but then when they do come to perfection, how they repay us for all the toil and care, and what happiness they give, not only to the owner, but to all around!

Lena sprang forward, and was soon beside her sister, whom she found tying up her hand with her handkerchief and trying hard to keep back the tears.

"Have you cut it much, Milly? let me look."

Milly undid the handkerchief, and showed a deep cut on the palm of her hand. "The salt water makes it smart so," she explained, blinking her eyes fast to get rid of the tell-tale tears.

"It is a deep one. Cover it up again; I will help you," and she tied the handkerchief again.

"Thank you, Lena. I have cut my leg too; was not it stupid! I was trying to hurry, and forgot how slippery it was."

Together they went on, jumping and scrambling from rock to rock.

"We ought to see her now. I am sure that is the place where we left her."

Yes, there was the place, and plenty signs in the scattered sand, that some small person had been at work; but no Lucy was to be seen.

They looked at one another in alarm. What could have become of her?

"Oh, I wish we had never left her!" burst out Milly.

"It's very naughty of her to have moved, when we told her not to," said Lena.

There was no good standing there, wondering any longer, so they started off to look for her.

"Let us ask those children near if they have seen her," proposed Lena; and running down to where they were at play, they inquired of them if they had seen their little sister. "She was sitting playing there close to the rocks."

"Yes, they had seen her, but she had gone away some time ago in that direction," pointing fortunately to the direction that led towards home.

"And I don't wonder either; it must have been jolly dull for her all by herself," remarked a boy loud enough for the two girls to hear, as they were hurrying off to look for Lucy.

They both blushed scarlet, as they heard these words, and knew that they were meant to hear them. "What a horrid rude boy! But, Milly, I wish we had not left her now."

"So do I," was the answer given with a sigh.

As they skirted the rocks, they came upon a long stretch of sand, now well covered with children. Close to the water's edge were several of them paddling, their bare legs gleaming in the water as they danced and jumped about. And

there among them, gazing with delight at their antics, was the missing Lucy. So close was she to the water, that the little waves not only crept up close to her feet, but rippled gently over them, much to the child's delight, who clapped her hands and screamed with pleasure at every wetting.

"You naughty child!" said Lena, as she rushed up to her, followed more slowly by Milly, who was limping from the cut on her leg.

Lucy turned round, her rosy little face beaming with delight, not one whit abashed by Lena's angry words.

"You naughty child! what made you leave and give us such a fright?" Lena was like many other people who have been frightened; when once their fears are removed, they give vent to their feelings by being angry, and, strange to say, consider they have a right to be aggrieved. "You are so wet, too; what will Mama say?"

"That you ought not to have left me," said Lucy, with a saucy laugh.

Lena was too much taken aback to answer this, and Lucy, seeing her advantage, continued, "You and Milly are just as wet as I am;" and she pointed to their feet and dresses, which certainly were both wet and dirty.

Several of the paddlers had gathered round to listen to the conversation, and as Lucy pointed triumphantly to her sister's wet feet, they all raised a laugh. For a moment Lena looked very angry; but catching Milly's eyes, which were dancing with suppressed laughter, the absurdity of it all struck her also, and she joined in the laugh.

"I expect you will all catch it, when you go home," remarked one of the small bystanders in a delighted tone.

"Come, Lucy, it is time to go home."

"Not yet; it's such fun here, I mean to stay," said Lucy, who was so elated at having silenced Lena's scolding, that she thought she might do what she chose.

A laugh from the listeners egged Lucy on in her naughtiness.

Milly's "O Lucy, how can you be so naughty!" was taken no notice of.

Lena, with heightened colour but in silence, walked off to where a lady was sitting, reading, and asked politely, if she would "tell her the time."

"Five-and-twenty minutes to seven," was the answer as she looked at her watch.

As late as that, and they were told to be home by six! "Thank you," she said to the lady, then hurried back to Milly and told her the hour.

"We must go home at once," she exclaimed.

"Will Mama be very angry?"

"Not when we tell her we did not mean to be naughty, and did not know the time. She will be frightened though; I wish Lucy would be good and come."

"She must," said Lena shortly. Going up to the child she took hold of her by

the arm and said, "We are going home now, Lucy; it's very late, and Mama will be vexed."

Lucy looked up saucily—"That's to make me come, but I am not going yet."

"Yes, you are; it's long after six." She pulled Lucy away from the water, Milly took hold of her by the other hand, and together they dragged her away, screaming lustily.

All eyes were fixed upon them, making both the elder girls very uncomfortable. They knew they were right in going home, but still thus having to drag their little sister away by main force made them, they thought, appear very unkind in the eyes of the bystanders.

"O Lucy, do be good and come quietly," entreated Milly.

"You must come, Lucy, so there is no good making all this fuss," added Lena.

"I am not going to obey Lena. I'll go with Milly, but I don't love Lena; she's horrid." And pulling her arm away from Lena's restraining grasp, she struck wildly at her, to push her away.

Lucy's words were but added fuel to Lena's wrath. Seizing the child firmly by her shoulders she gave her a good shaking, saying as she did so, "I don't care if you like me or not, but you must do what I tell you."

"O Lena, don't be angry; she does not mean what she says, I know she doesn't," said Milly.

The shaking so took Lucy by surprise, for she was unaccustomed to such strong measures, that she stopped screaming, and gazed at Lena's angry face in open-mouthed astonishment.

In the midst of this scene Hester's voice was heard exclaiming, "Miss Lena, whatever is the matter? That's not the way to treat your little sister. I wonder at you, that I do!"

At the sound of Hester's voice, Lena quickly removed her hands from Lucy's shoulders, and turning to her said, "She has been so naughty, Hester; she would not come home, though we told her it was late, and she went on screaming."

"But you hurt me," sobbed the child. "I would have gone with Milly, because she's kind and nice."

"That's a wicked story, Lucy. You know quite well Milly had to drag you along as well as I; hadn't you, Milly?"

"Yes," she asserted; "but, Lucy, you will be good now?"

"You should not have been so rough with her, Miss Lena; you don't understand how to manage children."

"No, she does not," agreed Lucy. "I will go home with you, Hester," clinging affectionately to her new ally, as she considered Hester.

"Your mother was so nervous at your being so late, that Miss Somerville

sent me to look for you.”

”Come on, Lena,” said Milly, and linking her arm into her elder sister’s, they hurried on first, followed by Hester and Lucy.

At first neither of the two girls spoke as they walked quickly along, but soon the steep hill, they had to ascend, made them slacken their pace.

”Lena,” said Milly, ”you are not still angry with Lucy; she is so dreadfully passionate sometimes, but she does not mean all she says.”

”Then she ought to be punished,” was the short answer.

”So she always is. And she does not get into rages nearly as often as she did, because she knows how wicked it is, and how it grieves the Lord Jesus,” said Milly reverently, adding, as a sort of apology for her little sister, ”And she is very young, you know.”

The life of a child in India is very different to what it is in this country; and Millicent, thoughtful and gentle by nature, had become more so, from having been the constant companion of her parents; for in the hill station, where their home was situated, she had no companion of her own age. The few children that were near them were all quite little, and looked upon Milly as ”quite old” in comparison. Mrs. Graham had been very far from well, the last two years of their stay, and when Colonel Graham had to be away, as he often was obliged to be, on duty, it was Milly’s delight and privilege to be her mother’s loving little nurse and attendant. And Mama loved to have her gentle little daughter beside her, during the long days of weakness that followed the attacks of fever from which she suffered; and Milly would sit so quietly with her work, or read out to her, but oftenest they spoke of the dear child and sister in the English home. In this way, Mama soon began to depend upon her little nurse, and even to consult her, when Papa was away, upon many subjects; and she dearly liked to be consulted and trusted by Mama, and would put on an air of wisdom, and answer quite gravely and sedately on such occasions, and was beginning to think herself almost grown-up compared to little Lucy, who was full of baby fun and frolic, and apt to become so wild and noisy that she would disturb Mama, if Milly did not amuse her and keep her good. ”She was a pet and a darling, and didn’t know better,” Milly would say at such times. It was only natural then, that Milly considered it her duty to apologise for her little sister’s outburst of naughtiness. As Lena made no answer, she went on, ”You won’t mind, Lena dear, will you?”

”It’s very hard,” burst out Lena. ”Mama trusted her to me, so she ought to have obeyed me; and Hester blames me, I know she does, from what she said, and she takes her part, and she has been my nurse, and ought to like me best; but nobody does love me but Auntie.”

”O Lena, I do, and Papa and Mama, and Lucy.”

”But they all love you best. Mama always asks you about things, and”——

Here Milly interrupted, with a look of distress—it had never dawned upon her before that Lena doubted her mother’s love, or had what she called such dreadful thoughts—”How can you say such things, Lena? It is not kind and it is not true,” she added with spirit.

They had nearly reached the gate of Scarsdale Villa by this time, and there stood Mrs. Graham, looking out anxiously for them, and now hurried to meet them, thus preventing any more conversation between the sisters.

”Here you are, my darlings; I was beginning to fear something had happened. And there is Lucy lagging behind, I see.” One look at her children’s faces, showed Mama that something had gone wrong. Milly looked distressed, and Lena’s usually bright open countenance was now very clouded. Putting her arm round Lena, she drew her to her side, and kissing her, said, ”What has made you so late, dear?”

What power there is for good in the gentle word or the loving gesture! The mere fact of her mother having put her arm round her, and having spoken to her first, brushed away, for the moment, the hard jealous thoughts, that had been finding room in Lena’s heart.

”I am so sorry, Mama, we are late,” she said, looking up with an altered expression. ”We were so interested and happy on the rocks, we did not know how fast the time was going.”

”How did you find out at last?”

”We asked a lady, and it was five-and-twenty minutes to seven; we were so astonished.”

”Now run and take off your wet things, and come down to tea. Milly looks tired; are you, darling?”

”A little, Mama, not very.”

”She has cut her hand, Mama, and her leg too, that is what makes her walk like that. Fancy my forgetting it!”

”I will tell Hester to take Lucy to the nursery then. I will come and see to you, dear,” said Mrs. Graham to Milly, as she watched them go up to their rooms; then went out again to meet Hester and Lucy, who by this time had also reached the house.

CHAPTER V. AUNTIE’S LETTER.

Wrong thoughts, when only sent away by a kind deed or loving word, are not really rooted out; they are, as it were, but expelled for a short time. When we only thus send them away, we are like the man in the parable spoken of by our Divine Master. The evil spirit certainly goes, but this is not enough; we cannot sit down with folded hands and say, "It is done—we can rest." No, we have our work still to do. Now that the place is empty, we must fill it anew, but this time with the good and true, or else the evil thought will return, and alas! not alone, but in the words of Holy Writ, "He taketh with him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself"—that is, the wrong thought returns with sevenfold strength, and "the last state of that man is worse than the first."

Thus it was with Lena Graham. The jealous thoughts, that had been showing themselves, were put aside, as it were, for the time being, and unfortunately she did not trouble herself any more about them; and Milly, who was the only person whom she had spoken or even hinted to, that she had such thoughts, was only too glad to dismiss it from her mind, blaming herself for having even allowed the suspicion entrance.

"Lena," said her mother, later in the evening, when she and Aunt Mary were sitting together with the two girls in the drawing-room.

"Yes, Mama," she answered, looking up from the book she was reading.

"What was the meaning of the scene that Hester saw, when she found you on the beach this evening?"

Milly looked up hastily at these words, while Lena said, "I will tell you about the whole afternoon Mama. It was this." And she gave a long account of their doings, appealing often to Milly to confirm what she said; and if she did gloss over the leaving little Lucy alone, it was done almost unconsciously, so easy is it to see, when we wish it, a good reason for our conduct.

When she had finished there was a pause for a moment or two, during which the two girls looked anxiously at their mother.

"Well, Mama?" asked Lena, who was growing impatient.

"I was wondering if either of my girls saw how very selfishly they had acted this afternoon."

"In leaving Lucy alone?" they both said slowly.

"Yes, dears; don't you think it was very hard for the child to be left all by herself? and from your own account, you were away for some time."

"We didn't mean to be long."

"But that was not the first fault: disobedience was that. I gave you leave to go down to the beach, but I did not give you leave to go and hear the band play. I thought I could have trusted you both."

Milly's eyes filled with tears at these words, and her heart swelled at the thought that she, "Mother's right-hand," as she had often been called, could not

be trusted; but she said nothing, while Lena, who was both truthful and generous, hastened to explain, "It was not Milly's fault, Mama; she didn't want to go, but I insisted on it."

"Ah, Lena, you see how one fault leads to another."

"But we were quite as safe there as at the beach."

"That has nothing to do with it. You did wrong, my child, and I am afraid, continued doing so all the afternoon, for Hester tells me you were very harsh and rough with your little sister."

"But Lucy was so naughty and cross, we could not help getting angry."

"I know we ought not to have left her, Mama," said Milly; "but she was so provoking, screaming so loud, it made everybody look at us. Though we told her it was late, she would not come home."

"And she hit me, and said all sorts of things."

"She was in one of her fits of passion," added Milly.

"I am very sorry to hear it," was Mrs. Graham's answer with a sigh, for Lucy's fits of passion were a great sorrow to her.

"If you had been gentler and kinder, would you not have done more good?"

"I don't think so, for Milly didn't get into a passion. I did, Mama, and I am very sorry. Oh dear, it is so hard to be good! And I wanted to be so really, and now I have grieved you and Auntie too. I promised I would show how good her child could be."

"O Lena dear, that is it: you forget what I said, and what you promised; to try and be, not mine, but"—and she paused, while Lena finished the sentence in a low voice—"The child of God. And I have not been good, but I am so sorry, I really am."

"So am I," whispered Milly, nestling close to her mother. "Are you very grieved? Will you forgive us?"

"Fully and freely, dear; but there is One, whose children you both are, whom you have grieved more. I want you both to ask Him to forgive you before you go to sleep to-night, never doubting that if you ask aright He will do so."

As the two girls went upstairs together, later on that evening, Lena gave a great sigh as she said, "Oh dear, I wish we had not taken Lucy with us this afternoon; it quite spoiled all the pleasure."

"I wish we had not left her," said Milly, in her gravest tones.

"I believe you think we are most to blame."

"We are the eldest, and she is such a little thing; if we had stayed with her she would have been good."

"Then I am most naughty, for I would go to the band. I wish one could always be good; it is so horrible after being naughty."

When Lena was alone in her room, she went to the window, and pulling

up the blind, looked out, but her thoughts were not on what she saw, fair as the scene was, on which her eyes rested. Beneath her window lay the garden, now bathed in moonlight, and in the far distance was the sea, shining like a band of silver in the moon's rays. How often had she stood, as now, at this very window, thinking! Then, her thoughts had been of the parents so dimly remembered. What would they be really like? Ah, how good she would be to them, and show how much she loved them. Now they had really come; and to-day, instead of all this goodness, she had grieved her mother by her disobedience and selfishness, and the little sister of whom she had said, "She would like to give up her pleasures to,"—she had quarrelled with her, not only in word, but in very deed. The tears filled her eyes as she thus thought. She did love her mother just as much as she ever did, and—no, there was no disappointment in her, but somehow things were not quite what she had expected. She had pictured to herself a life with Mama, as something of the same kind, she had led with her Aunt, being her constant companion, and her one chief thought and care. Instead of that, she was more with her sisters than her parents. Kind and loving as Mama was to her, she was equally so to Milly and Lucy. Poor foolish child, surrounded as she was with every earthly blessing, she was not content. Instead of a happy, grateful love for all she had, she was groping after the impossible, and raising up for herself all sorts of imaginary troubles, that had no real existence but in her own wayward fancy. The opening of the door roused her, and turning round, she saw that it was her mother who had entered.

"Not in bed yet, dear?"

"No, Mama, I have been thinking," said Lena, in a very grave tone, as she pulled down the blind.

"What were the thoughts that made you look so grave, and forget to go to bed?"

"I was wondering why things are never so nice as we expect them to be."

"Shall I tell you why that is the case, dear?"

Lena only nodded in reply, and Mrs. Graham, looking down fondly on the girl's upturned face, said, "Because we want things to be exactly as we wish, instead of taking thankfully and contentedly what God sends. I fear we are all too apt to think we know best what is good for us."

"Oh no, Mama," cried Lena in a shocked tone.

"We don't think or allow, even to ourselves, that we do so, dear; but how is it that we so often say—'If it had only been different, it would have been so much nicer and better?' I fancy that some such thoughts were in my little girl's mind to-night."

"I did not know that it was so wrong. Auntie told me it would not be good for me to have my own way too much; and I remember she once said, 'She was

so glad she had not the ordering of her own life.' Are you glad too?"

"Yes, darling, very, very glad. Ah, Lena dear, it is such peace and happiness to know that all is done for us by that loving Father, who gives us more than we can ask or desire."

When Lena said her prayers that night, she paused, in the Lord's Prayer, at the words, "Thy will be done." How often she had repeated them slowly and reverently as she had been taught to do, but to-night they seemed to assume a new and deeper meaning; and when Mama had given her, her good-night kiss, she repeated them over and over to herself ere she fell asleep. No wonder that the next morning she rose bright and happy; and when Lucy's voice was heard at the door saying, "I want to speak to you, Lena," she opened the door and greeted her little sister with a loving kiss.

"I am very sorry I was a naughty girl last night," she said gravely, as if repeating a lesson.

"Oh, never mind, dear."

"Mama said I was to beg your pardon; and, Lena, I told a story, because I do love you."

"I was naughty too and unkind," said Lena, who, when she was pleased and happy, was always ready to be generous and kind.

In general, all Lena's troubles were self-made; she wanted to be first, not so much in amusements, though she certainly liked to take the lead there also, but in every one's opinions and affections. She wanted to be Milly's and Lucy's favourite, as well as eldest sister. And she would have also liked to be the first in her parent's confidence and affections, as well as the first of their children.

Aunt Mary called the two elder girls to her after breakfast, and told them that she meant them to do some lessons with her every morning. Too much idle time was neither good nor pleasant for them; and she did not want the governess, under whose care they were very soon to be placed, to find her new pupils backward in their education.

The idea of a governess was quite new to them. They would have liked to discuss the subject well over with Auntie; but this she at once forbade—"Your Mama will tell you all about it herself."

"Do just tell us when she is to come?"

"Not till your parents are settled into their own house," said their Auntie unguardedly.

"Going to leave here? O Auntie, you must tell us—please, please do," Lena added coaxingly.

"I thought we were always to live here; I do like this place. Where are we to live?" said Milly, adding her entreaties to Lena's.

"Not a word more will you get out of me," said their Aunt laughing. "What

a foolish old woman I was to let so much out."

"You are not old, and you are not foolish, but a dear kind Auntie who is going to tell us all about it."

"I am not quite so foolish as to be taken in by all these blandishments; but, joking apart, dears, I ought not to tell you more; your parents will do so when they think right."

At this, both the girls returned to their seats, and lessons went on quietly. Milly was found not to be so very much behind Lena, for she had been well and carefully taught by her mother, who had used the very same books of instruction that Miss Somerville had taught Lena from. So that the two sisters would be able to go on together with the same governess; and both girls were quite pleased at the thought of doing the same lessons. All was as it should be. Lena was a little advanced, but not too much so to make it difficult for Milly to keep up with her, but enough to spur Lena on to keep in advance.

"Is it true we are to have a governess? and are we going to another house?" were the questions that were eagerly put to Mama on the very first opportunity.

"I have been letting out secrets, I am afraid," said Miss Somerville.

"I meant to tell them what their Papa had decided upon. He has taken a house in the country—a furnished one, near the friends with whom he is now staying. The people to whom it belongs are anxious to leave as soon as they can, so Papa says, he hopes we will be able to go there in a fortnight."

"In a fortnight!" This sudden move quite took away Lena's breath; to leave Aunt Mary and her own home! for Scarsdale Villa was the only home Lena could remember. Then she gave a little laugh at this foolish thought of hers. "Leave Aunt Mary! of course she would go with them."

Milly was busy asking questions about the new house—"Was it quite in the country? had it a garden?"

All these questions were answered satisfactorily. "It was quite in the country, with a nice garden, and some fields attached to it," Mama said.

"What is to be done with this house?" Lena asked.

"I am going to let this," said her Aunt quietly.

So it was all right. Aunt Mary was coming with them; and Lena eagerly joined Milly in talking over their new home. How delightful it would be to live quite in the country! And very soon they were both quite eager to be there, and were planning about the gardens they were to have for their very own.

"You will find nice neighbours in the Freelings," said Miss Somerville to Mrs. Graham.

"Have they children?" was the eager question.

"Yes, six. Two are grown up. There are four at home, two girls and two boys—at least not the boys; they are at school."

"I wonder what they will be like—the girls I mean."

"The eldest girl is fifteen. The youngest will be a nice companion for you; she is only thirteen."

The prospect of the change gave the children plenty to think and talk about for the next day or two. Lena went so far in preparation that she went about collecting what she considered her own property from the different rooms, and was rather aggrieved that she was not allowed to pack them all up in readiness. Mama compromised the matter by allowing her, with Milly's help, to fill one box with the many books and toys that she had outgrown, and were too numerous to carry away; and this box, when ready, was to be sent to the poor little suffering children in the hospital. How often that box was packed and unpacked I should be sorry to say: it was a great amusement and occupation to them for the next few days, as the weather had changed, and instead of bright sunshine and warm breezes, the rain came down steadily; and Milly and Lucy would look mournfully out of the window, thinking that here, as in India, there was to be no more hot bright suns for some time now that the rains had set in, though Lena assured them fifty times a day it would be sure to be fine to-morrow. This was all very well the first day; but when to-morrow came with clouded sky, Lucy grew very very angry when she heard Lena begin the same story "of to-morrow being fine," and accused her of being wicked and telling stories. A stormy scene was fast brewing indoors as well as out, when Mama heard the cause of anger, and Lucy had the matter explained to her, and hope once more "of seeing fair weather to-morrow" sprang up in her small mind.

In the midst of this wet weather they were all cheered and enlivened by Papa's return. Now they would be able to have all their questions answered about Astbury, as their new home was called. They had to curb their curiosity till after Papa had had dinner. Lena had still a little lingering awe of her father; and when he told them that they must keep all their questions until after he had finished his dinner, she did not dare to disobey him, as I fear her eagerness and curiosity would have tempted her to do if it had been her aunt or mother who had given the order.

As they were all seated round the fire listening to his account of Astbury and its neighbourhood, Aunt Mary, seeing her nieces' attention devoted to their father, quietly drew a letter from her pocket. Taking it out of the envelope, she began to read it. Soon after the conversation turned upon some matter that Lena did not think interesting, so she turned to her Aunt to ask some question. Instead of receiving the answer she had expected, Aunt Mary went on with her reading, evidently not having heard what she had said. "The letter seemed to interest her very much," Lena thought. She wondered who it could be from, and why had not Auntie told her of it, for during the time that aunt and niece had lived

alone together Miss Somerville had got into the way of reading her letters aloud before her niece. It was a habit that she had got into during the years when she was quite alone and before she had taken charge of Lena: gradually she had not only read out the letters before the child, but as she grew older and more companionable, had spoken and discussed things that were in them before and with her. It was not a good thing for any child, especially for one like Lena Graham. Still it had been done in all love and with good intention. Rising from her seat, Lena went and perched herself on the arm of her Aunt's chair, so that she could read the letter over her shoulder. We must do Lena the justice to say, that though it was a wrong thing to do, it was not done with a wrong intention. She had always heard Auntie's letters, she would have told you, so there could not be the slightest harm in reading them. It was a very interesting one she saw at once; the handwriting was perfectly familiar to her as being that of a great friend of her Aunt's, who had often stayed with them—Miss Howard was her name. The contents puzzled Lena, for Miss Howard wrote as if she and Aunt Mary were going together somewhere, to a place called "Lucerne." Lena knew the name well, but for the moment she was confused as to its locality. As she tried to make out what it meant, she leant forward to see more easily. At that moment Colonel Graham looked up and saw Lena doing what he considered, and what certainly is, a most dishonourable action, reading what is not meant for one to see.

"Lena!" was all he said, but the tone in which it was said startled them all.

Lena looked up. Never before had she heard her name so spoken. Startled and confused at the suddenness with which she had been called, she answered hastily and nervously, "Yes, Papa."

"What is it, dear?" asked Mrs. Graham.

"Lena knows," was the short reply.

Poor Lena was frightened, not only at the sternness of the voice, but by her father's face. It seemed to her that it had the same look that she had remarked in the photograph and had hoped never to see shown towards her. Her fear and nervousness brought the colour to her looks and gave her the conscious look of guilt.

"I don't know, Papa. What is it?" she faltered out.

"You must know what a dishonourable thing you were doing, reading your Aunt's letter over her shoulder."

"Oh!" she said with a great sigh of relief, "is that all, Papa? Why, I always do it."

Here Aunt Mary interposed hastily, and said, before Colonel Graham could speak the astonishment he certainly felt at Lena's answer, "It is my fault, Henry. Lena always sees my letters. I may have been wrong; but remember she has been

niece and child and companion to me all in one. I may have spoilt her in many ways, but I am sure she would not do a dishonourable thing;" and as she spoke, she pulled Lena on to her knee and kissed the troubled little face. "I ought to have told her I did not wish her to read this quite yet, and I am sure she would not have done it."

At her Aunt's kind words Lena burst out crying. The child had been frightened, and the burst of tears relieved her feelings.—"No, Auntie dear, indeed, indeed I would not," she sobbed out.

"I think you have made a mistake about it, Mary. And I hope Lena will remember that though you have allowed her to see yours, letters are sacred, and she must never look at any without leave that are not addressed to her."

"No, Papa, indeed I never will," she said earnestly.

"Come and give Papa a kiss," said her mother, leading the still sobbing child to her father.

"You are not afraid of me, Lena?" he asked kindly, as she shrunk from him, without lifting her eyes from the ground. "Come, look up, and give me a kiss."

Lena looked up as bidden, and seeing nothing in his face but love and kindness, summoned back her courage as she said, "You looked so angry before, and so stern."

"I am only angry when you do wrong and act dishonourably; and you need not be afraid to look even a stern man in the face if you have done nothing to be ashamed of, my child."

As Lena returned to her chair she thought, "Oh dear, I hope he will never speak to me again like that. Even if I was ever so naughty, I don't think I could tell him, and ask him to forgive me."

Aunt Mary said quietly to Lena, "I will read you all that Miss Howard says to-morrow, dear; it will interest you, I am sure, and I meant you to hear it soon."

"Where is Lucerne?" she asked in a low voice.

"In Switzerland," answered her Aunt. And not another word would she say that night on the subject of the letter and its contents.

CHAPTER VI. LEAVING MEADENHAM.

"Switzerland! O Auntie, that is such a long way off! You don't mean really that

you are going all that way from me," and Lena as she spoke these words burst into tears, and clung tightly to her Aunt, as if to prevent her leaving her.

"I am not going away to-day, dear," said Miss Somerville, trying to speak cheerfully and brightly as she fondly stroked the little head that was buried on her shoulder. "And, my child," she went on more gravely, "this is no new thought to you; we both knew this parting must come."

"But not so soon, and such a long way."

"You have Papa and Mama and your sisters, and will be so happy with them, and will often write to me. And I shall hope for such good accounts of my pet."

"You won't get them," said Lena in a most doleful tone; "I shan't be able to be good without you, I know I shan't."

"Lena, dear, that is not a right way to speak. I shall think that I have taught you what is wrong if you say such things."

"No, no, I did not mean that; but why can't you always live with us? What do you want to go to that horrid place for?"

"It is not at all a horrid place, but a very nice one. Why I am going is this"—

Lena lifted her head to listen with such an injured expression that her Aunt laughed. "I believe you are glad to go!" (indignantly).

"Yes, dear, I am glad, though very very sorry to leave you. I am glad because Miss Howard has to go, and wants a companion; and you know, dear, it is always pleasant to be able to do anything for your friends."

"But I want you too."

"Not now. You have wanted me, but now you have Mama and Papa; and, Lena, you love them both very dearly, I know."

"Yes, but I want you too."

"We none of us can have all we want in this world. Ask God, my little one, to make you grateful and thankful for all the blessings He has so liberally bestowed on you, instead of murmuring for what you cannot have."

Before Lena had time to reply, Mrs. Graham opened the door, asking, as she did so, if she might come in.

"O Mama, why does Auntie want to go away from us? Mayn't she stay with us?"

"Of course she may, dear; but Aunt Mary thinks Miss Howard requires her. We want her, and she requires her. Now don't you see why Auntie has decided on going abroad?"

"Yes, because she thinks it right;" adding, "but couldn't Miss Howard come and live with her here?"

"Why do you wish that, Lena?"

"Because it's so much nearer, and we could come and see her sometimes."

"Oh, so you don't want it for Aunt Mary's pleasure, but your own," was the quiet rebuke.

Lena's face flushed scarlet as she murmured some words in too low a tone for her mother to hear.

"Listen, my child; do you not think that a change would do Auntie good? Think how much more she would miss the little niece she has been so good to, and has learned to love so dearly, if she remained on here, than if she goes abroad, and sees new sights and beautiful scenery."

"Yes, I see; but, Mama, I can't help being sorry, and wishing changes would not come—at least not nasty changes."

"I should be very much astonished and very grieved too, if you were not sorry at parting with Auntie, who has been so good and kind to you and to me too. Changes must come in this world, my child; but we know that if we love our Saviour, every one that comes is sent in love and for some good purpose."

"I can't see why Auntie's going away can do us good."

"That is what the disciples said when their Divine Master told them of His ascension: they, like you, thought they knew best." Mama spoke the words so significantly that they at once recalled to her the conversation they had held together some evenings before, and when Lena had expressed herself as so shocked at the idea of any one thinking they knew better than God. Humbled and abashed, Lena promised to try and bear whatever was sent for her, though she was quite sure it would be dreadfully hard to bear parting with Auntie, forgetting that it was harder for Auntie than herself. It was a great comfort to both Colonel and Mrs. Graham, since Aunt Mary had decided not to go and live with them, that she was going abroad with her friend Miss Howard for a few months. It was very easy to let her house for the summer, as West Meadenham was a favourite resort for summer visitors, and Lena was comforted by hearing that before Miss Somerville settled down for the winter, she had promised to pay a visit to her brother and sister at Astbury.

"We shall spend our first Christmas at home altogether," said Colonel Graham cheerfully, as Aunt Mary's plans were being discussed one day openly, now that all was arranged.

Lena expected, and Milly also, that the former would be quite heart-broken at the prospect of parting from her Aunt. Milly was of rather a sentimental character, and had secret visions of herself comforting and consoling poor Lena; and felt rather disappointed, to say the least of it, when she saw her sister interested and busy in the preparations for their departure, and talking brightly and hopefully of what was to be done at Astbury. Not that Lena was unkind or unloving. She did love her Aunt very very dearly, and felt really sorry and unhappy at the prospect of losing her; but with the buoyancy and cheerfulness of youth, she soon

learned to look on the bright and hopeful side of things. She had never written to Auntie in all her life, and she talked much of the long letters she would write to her, and then how nice it would be to show her the new home when she came to see them at Christmas. So very soon she was the same bright, lively little Lena of old. Occasionally, however, some little thought or action would cause her to sigh, and wish that changes would not come—at least she would add, "I wish people had not to go away from one another. I like going to new places."

There were other changes in store also, for an invitation came for Milly from her godmother, who lived in London. Mrs. Clifford wanted to see and know her little namesake and godchild. Would Colonel Graham, who was going to Astbury a few days earlier than the rest of the family, bring Milly and leave her with Mrs. Clifford on his way through London? So ran the invitation.

"I wish she had asked me!" exclaimed Lena, when she heard of the letter.

"O Lena, and leave Aunt Mary the last few days!" said Milly reproachfully.

"No, of course not—I did not think of that—but I should like to see London and all the sights."

Milly was not at all of this opinion. She shrank from the very thought of going away to a strange house without Mama. She had never left her before; and although she was called after Mrs. Clifford, she had only seen her once when they were in town, on first arriving from India. She begged very hard not to go, but her parents thought it was right for her to do so. Lena alternately teased and laughed at her for being shy and stupid for not wanting to go, and envied her for being invited, and wished she was going, for she was quite sure that Mrs. Clifford would take her to see all sorts of things and be ever so kind to her. If this invitation had come to Milly at any other time, I am afraid Lena would have been terribly disappointed at not being invited also; but these last few days at Aunt Mary's were too full of interest and occupation to allow much time for regrets of any sort. There were so many people and places to take farewell of, and so much to be seen to in the house, that Lena was what she called "deliciously busy." Hester was to go with them as nurse to Lucy, so she also was very busy, and also went away for a day or two to say good-bye to her parents, who lived in the neighbourhood of Meadenham. During those days Lucy was Lena's constant companion, and on the whole they got on capitally together. They were very much alike in disposition; and although Lucy was very fond of Lena, she found she was quite a different sort of sister in authority than Millicent.

Time slipped away very fast, as it always does when there is much to be done. It is only with the idle and lazy that time lags and creeps slowly along. How the minutes crawl while one is waiting without anything to do—they seem to lengthen themselves out in the most extraordinary manner. Let one of my little readers remark the length of five minutes when she or he, as the case may be,

is busy and interested, and five minutes when they are standing idle, wondering what they shall do next, or perhaps grumbling because they are prevented doing something on which they had set their heart. Once a very small child, who was told to wait ten minutes for some reason, was seen to give the clock a great push and call it "a stupid, tiresome thing"—she was quite sure it had stopped just to tease her. She was too small to be able to tell the time herself, but nurse had shown her where the big hand would point when the ten minutes were up, and, oh dear! they were so long to that impatient little mortal who stood gazing up at it with such interest and anxiety. The last day came, and they all—that is, Mama, Auntie, Lena, Lucy, and Hester—all started for London, at which place they were to meet Milly. Mrs. Clifford was to meet them with her at the station, and there also Aunt Mary was to part from them.

On reaching London, they drove from the station at which they arrived from Meadenham to one on the other side of the town, from which they were to go to the town near which their future home was situated. Aunt Mary was to drive with them and see them off. At first Lena and Lucy were in the wildest of spirits, everything was new and pleasant; but before they reached London they both became tired of the monotony of being shut up in one place; and as the train was a fast one, it whirled along too rapidly for them to get more than a passing glimpse of the different places on the road.

Most children delight in going away, but I never yet met with one that liked being in the train. The Grahams were no exception to this rule. Lucy first became restless and inclined to be cross, then Mama seated her on her knee, to look out, and very soon the rapid motion wearied the little frame, the blue eyes began to blink, then close, the head fell back on Mama's shoulder, and Lucy was sound asleep, to the relief and comfort of her fellow-passengers. Lena nestled up against Aunt Mary, and as she thus sat with the kind arm round her, the remembrance came to her with startling distinctness, that this would be the last time for many months that she would feel the pressure of that kind hand; and then thought after thought came thronging into her mind of all the love and goodness that Aunt Mary had showered upon her during the last six years. Her whole life, as it seemed to the child, had been passed with Auntie, and now that they were to be separated, she wished, oh so much, that she had been a better and more obedient girl. When she came to them at Christmas she would show her how much she loved her by being so good, and all that she could wish. And she crept closer to her Aunt as she thus thought of the past and of the future. She would have liked to throw her arms round her neck, and tell her how much she loved her, and how sorry she was to part with her; but there were strangers in the compartment with them, and Lena did not like any one but her own people to see her in tears, so she only crept close, and squeezed the hand that clasped hers very

tight. Lena's thoughts were good and loving, but mingled with all the goodness was the one thing that was so seldom wanting from her good resolutions, and was the invariable cause of their failure, self-confidence—she would be good she was determined. How often and often had Auntie shown this to Lena, and now Mama was trying to teach her the same lesson of humility and trust in God. If Lena had said to her own heart, "I will try, by God's help, to be good and do what I know will please Auntie," she would certainly have succeeded. But fortunately for Lena, both Mama and Auntie were asking for her what she forgot to ask for herself—the grace of humility.

When the train reached its destination, it was a very sobered, quiet Lena that got out of it; she was so gentle, and waited so quietly, holding Lucy's hand, while the luggage was being collected and placed on a cab, that Mama said, "Why, Lena, what a capital little traveller you are! I shall tell Papa that he need not be afraid of my travelling without him when I have you."

Lena blushed with pleasure at her mother's words, and when they were settling how to divide their party—for they were obliged to have two cabs—and Lucy said she wanted Lena to come with her and Hester, she complied at once, determining that from that very moment she would carry out her good intentions of doing everything that Aunt Mary would approve of; and that both aunt and mother were pleased with her present conduct, she saw at once.

It was a long drive from one station to the other. The streets were so crowded that it took them a much longer time than they expected, not that either Lena or her little sister thought it too long, for they were delighted with all the bustle and noise around them, and especially with the passing glimpse they had at the shops that they drove past. So long had been their drive across London, that there was but little time to spare on arrival at the station, where Millicent and Mrs. Clifford were waiting for them—Milly all smiles and beaming with pleasure at sight of the dear home faces. Though so glad to see them, she had evidently been very happy with Mrs. Clifford, to judge from her friendly attitude towards that lady, and the warm kiss and grateful words of farewell when the time came for saying good-bye.

There was no opportunity for any private last words between Aunt Mary and Lena in all the fuss of starting: a fond kiss and a whispered "God bless you, my darling," was all Auntie said as she parted from her little niece.

"Good-bye, Auntie, darling; you will come back soon, won't you? and I will be so good I promise you."

"Promise me to try, dear," laying a stress on the word try, as she returned the kisses that the now weeping Lena was pressing on her cheek.

Auntie's eyes were full of tears also as she stood watching them all take their places in the train.

"You will let Milly come to me again, I hope," said Mrs. Clifford. "She has been such a good girl, I have quite enjoyed having her. And Lena must come too," she added, kindly laying her hand on the girl's shoulder as she spoke, seeing her struggling bravely to check her sobs, "Won't you, dear?"

A nod was all Lena could manage; speaking was out of the question at that moment; but the nod and grateful look showed Mrs. Clifford that her kindness was appreciated.

"I won't forget your parcel, Milly," called out Mrs. Clifford as the train began to move, slowly at first, then quicker and quicker.

Lena stooped forward to take a last loving look at Auntie, who stood waving her hand in farewell. Then the train glided out of the station, and they were fairly on their way to their new home. Mama drew Lena down beside her, and with loving words cheered and consoled the poor girl, who, now that the excitement was all over, broke down utterly, and laying her head on Mama's shoulder, wept bitterly. The tears came from many mingled sources: first was sorrow from parting with Auntie, and that sorrow was real and deep, but she had the hope of seeing her again very soon, and she was with the dear mother she loved so dearly, and had so often and often longed to be with; fatigue and over-excitement helped to cause the sobs, which were in great part hysterical. Lena had lived such a quiet regular life with her Aunt, that she was now feeling all the excitement and bustle of the last week or two. There had been all the packing and good-byes, and the journey, and now, to crown it all, was the parting from Auntie.

Mrs. Graham let her cry on quietly for some time as she sat encircled by her arm, until the first violence of her tears was over. Then she spoke to her a few caressing words, which helped to soothe the weary child; gradually, as the sobs ceased, the poor tear-swollen eyes closed, from sheer "weariness of grief," and Lena fell asleep on Mama's arm, while Milly, with frequent looks of sympathy towards her sister, helped Hester to amuse Lucy at the opposite window.

Thus they journeyed quietly on, until the train stopping roused Lena. "Have we arrived?" she asked in a sleepy voice.

"No, dear, we are not half-way yet. Edgerley is a very small place, which this is certainly not."

By the time Mama had done speaking Lena was wide awake, and the three girls crowded to the window to look out, and also, as they said, in hopes of preventing any one coming in. Several people peeped into the carriage, but whether it was the sight of the small fellow-travellers, who, however charming they may be, are certainly not appreciated by the travelling public, or from some other reason, they left our party to themselves, so that, when they once more started off, it was in quite a lively tone Lena exclaimed, "Oh, I am glad no one came in, I was in such a fright they would!" Her sleep had done Lena good, although the ready

tears sprang to her eyes whenever the thought of Aunt Mary was recalled. She was calmer and happier, and as the time wore on she soon recovered her spirits, and was busy helping her sisters with the buns and sandwiches that were in Mama's basket, and eagerly talking about what they were to see at their country home, and also listening to Milly's account of her visit to Mrs. Clifford.

"I am to go next time with you, am I not, Mama?" she asked.

"Perhaps Milly won't want you to," said Lucy in a very grave tone.

"O Lucy, of course I shall. It will be ever so much nicer. And there are such lots of things to see and do." And here she launched into an animated account of all her doings.

"What is the parcel she is going to send?" Mrs. Graham with a smile asked.

"I don't know, Mama, what it will be—it's a present. She said she would take me to the Bazaar and buy me something; but we had not time yesterday, so she said she would send it to me."

"I wonder what it will be!" said Lena, and they all fell to conjecturing what Milly's present would be, guessing all the probable and improbable things they could think off. Not satisfied with this, they—that is the two who were not included—actually talked themselves into the belief that Mrs. Clifford, now she had seen them, would very likely send them something also: in fact, it was not only a probable thing, but "almost sure to be the case."

Thus they whiled away the time of their journey, until Mama announced that the next station would be Edgerley.

When the train drew up there, three little heads were out of the window, and three shrill young voices were shouting out words of welcome to Papa, whom they at once caught sight of standing waiting for them.

It was a very small station, as Mrs. Graham had told them. She had been to it before when she had paid a visit, many years ago, to Colonel and Mrs. Freeling, who were now to be their near neighbours. They were the only passengers who alighted, and until their luggage was taken out there was no time to speak with Papa; for, as it appeared to the children, "the train seemed to be in a hurry to rush off again;" and it certainly looked as if they were right, for directly their luggage was taken out of the van and safely deposited on the platform, the guard waved his arm, the engine gave what sounded like a very impatient shriek, and the train rushed off again with its living freight, and left our young people standing gazing after it, in a sort of bewilderment, from which their father's cheery voice roused them as he exclaimed, "Now, children, come along; while you are being packed into the carriage, I will give orders for the luggage to be sent up in a cart."

"A carriage!" exclaimed Lena, as she caught sight of a handsome carriage and pair of horses standing outside the station. "Is that ours? how nice! I am glad." She asked the question of no one in particular, and no one answered it, all

being busy and their attention occupied at the moment. Milly did not feel the same feeling of pleasure as her sister at the sight of the carriage, for during their stay in India her parents had kept their carriage, not as a luxury as in this country, and one only to be indulged in by rich people, but as a matter of necessity. So she took her seat next Lena without a word or sign of wonder. "This is nice," began Lena directly they started, though this was not done for a little while, during which she had been picturing to herself all sorts of wonderful visions of a large house and future drives in this comfortable equipage. It was very strange why Aunt Mary had always been so particular in making her so careful of her things, and teaching her to do so much for herself if her Papa was so rich.

"So you are pleased, little woman," said her father. "It was very kind of Colonel Freeling to send his carriage and bring you home in state like this," he added with a laugh.

"Colonel Freeling!" said Lena in a tone of surprise. "Is it not our carriage, Papa?"

"No, dear, of course not. What put such an idea into your head?" At sight of Lena's crestfallen looks at his answer, Colonel Graham burst out laughing, in which the others joined, much to Lena's secret annoyance. Then he added gravely, "I thought you knew, dear, that I was not a rich man, only"—this with a laugh—"a poor soldier."

"But Colonel Freeling was a soldier too; you said so," she persisted.

"Yes, with a private fortune, which makes all the difference."

"Riches do not make happiness, darling," said Mama kindly. "We shall be very happy in our quiet little country home without a grand carriage like this, and we ought all to be very much obliged to Colonel Freeling for having been so kind in lending it to us to-day."

"Here we are," said Colonel Graham, as turning the corner they came in sight of a small but very pretty house standing within iron gates which opened into the road.

CHAPTER VII. THE NEW HOUSE.

As Mama had said, Astbury was a very small house, but for all that it was a very pretty one, and looked so homelike and inviting this fine spring evening. The

windows shone out, lit up by the rays of the setting sun, from amid the green leaves with which the house was covered, like friendly eyes of welcome to the new-corners. Roses and wisteria seemed to vie with one another in beauty and luxuriance on the walls.

They all exclaimed with pleasure and delight at this first sight of their new home. All Lena's visions faded away of a stately mansion, and she agreed with the others that nothing could be prettier or nicer than their new home appeared to be, and although it was small, how could they help being happy in such a pretty place? There was not much garden in the front, but behind, as they soon discovered, was quite a large one, and to the side was a kitchen-garden, and beyond, stretching far away on every side of them, was field after field. The children were so impatient to explore the garden and shrubberies, and to wander forth into this delicious green world around them, that it was with extreme unwillingness that they received the summons to tea, which ought to have been a welcome one to such young travellers. Lena and Milly were to share a room together in their new home, while Lucy still occupied one with Hester, who had come as nurse. There was no fear of their getting into trouble or difficulties here, Mama thought, so they were allowed to ramble off at their own sweet will the next morning; and what wonderful discoveries they made, to be sure; everything was new and delightful to them. Although Lena had never lived quite in the country before like this, she had been so many country rambles with Auntie, that most of the wild flowers that grew in such profusion round Astbury were known to her by sight and name. Milly and Lucy considered her as quite an authority on the subject, and consulted her about every new floral treasure they acquired. Returning home with hands full of bluebells and anemones, they met the first living human creature they had come across in their rambles. Cows and sheep they had seen in plenty—almost too many of the former for their perfect comfort—but none of their own species till this young girl, who returned their looks of curiosity with one equally as curious. She was taller and bigger than either of the elder Graham girls, with short curly hair and sun-browned face, dressed very plainly in blue serge with a plain sailor-hat perched on the top of her curls, rather, Milly thought, because it was necessary to wear a hat than to shelter her face from the sun, for it was pushed well back, which quite accounted for the young face being so sun-burnt and rosy. She hesitated as she met our young people as if about to speak, then drew back with a sort of cold shyness and hurried on. Not so a little dog she had with her. At sight of the Graham girls, he stood still and set up a series of shrill barks. Lena and Milly hesitated whether to attempt to pass him or not. Lucy settled the matter by retreating backwards into the hedge, dragging Milly with her and screaming with terror. At the noise the girl turned. Seizing the dog in her arms, she exclaimed, "Don't be frightened, he won't hurt you."

Then giving the dog a good hard slap, added, "Be quiet, you stupid little thing." And without another word she hurried on again.

Lucy soon recovered from her terror, and the incident of the dog and the unknown girl was an engrossing subject of conversation for the remainder of the walk, and was eagerly related to their parents at dinner.

"It must have been Bessie Freeling, I fancy," said Colonel Graham; "she answers to your description."

"Would not she be afraid to go about by herself?" asked Milly.

"No, I fancy from what I have seen of her that she is only too fond of roaming about in the fields; likes it better, I suspect, than staying in the schoolroom and learning her lessons," said their father with a smile.

"I don't wonder, Papa," was Lena's emphatic remark; "I could be out in the fields all day long."

"You must be careful what fields you go into, children, for some of them are set aside for hay, and you would be doing sad mischief if you went wandering about there."

"Had not you better go with them and show them where they may go and where not?" said their mother.

"Yes," said Colonel Graham, "we will all go together this afternoon, Mama and all, later in the day, I mean when it is cooler."

"May not we go out now?" asked Milly.

"No, dear, it is too hot; besides, you have not put your books and things away tidily in your room. I thought you both had decided on making your room pretty and keeping it so."

"So we did. Let us go and do it now, Lena, while Lucy has her sleep." For little Lucy always required a sleep in the middle of the day, for however much she wished to be running about, her eyes would grow heavy, and her little feet weary after spending the morning trotting about.

Lena and Milly were very busy in their room when they received a summons to the drawing-room to see Mrs. Freeling, who, with her two girls, had come to call. It was Hester who had come to tell them, and on seeing Lena jump down from the chair she was standing on, so as to enable her to reach the book-case, where hers and Milly's books were to be kept, she exclaimed—

"Why, Miss Lena, you are not going to leave your work unfinished, now it is so nearly done, are you?"

"We can do that afterwards; I do so want to see Bessie Freeling."

"There are so few books left, you had better put them all tidy; I know you will forget afterwards."

"Well, give them to me, Milly. We will stick them up anyhow now, and put them right by and by."

"It is as easy to put them in tidily as untidily," said Hester; "and I don't mean to let you go down till you have done it, and seen that you are tidy also."

So, very unwillingly, Lena had to wait till Hester considered they were fit to go down, for both children's hands showed they had been at work. When they were ready Lena said, "Come, Milly; how slow you are! I don't believe you want to go," and she turned to Milly, who was still lingering at the table.

"I do hate going down to see new people. I never know what to say to them first."

"I like it when there are children, and I do want to know if Bessie is the same girl we saw this morning. Come on, Milly."

"Curiosity" gained the day, and overcame Milly's shyness, for she too wanted to see if Bessie and their unknown friend were the same.

Yes, Papa had been quite right in his surmise, for when they entered the room, they at once recognised the young girl sitting so quietly and demurely beside Mrs. Freeling to be the same one they had met in the morning. Gertrude, the elder sister, was there also. Much taller than Bessie, with long fair hair, and a quiet self-possessed manner, that made both our little friends decide that she was almost grown up, though Milly thought she must be very nice, she had such a sweet gentle look. Lena did not trouble very much about her, as she saw she was so "grown-up looking;" all her looks and interest were centered upon Bessie, who looked very rosy and uncomfortable, for she was as shy nearly as Milly, and only answered Lena's friendly advances with short low monosyllables, until the door opened and Lucy entered. At first she did not recognise Bessie as the owner of the little dog that had so frightened her, but the moment she did so she ran to her with outstretched hand, asking, "Where is your little dog? haven't you brought him, 'cause he was naughty?"

Bessie's eyes brightened as she greeted the child, and very soon Lucy was on her knee chattering away quite at her ease, and Bessie soon forgot her shyness also in the delight of the little one's company.

"How nice for you to have a little sister!" she said, looking at Lena.

"Yes, she is a dear little thing. Are you so fond of little children?"

"Yes, I love them. I hate dolls; they can't speak or anything, just pieces of wood. I would rather have Dash than any doll; but Lucy is better than Dash," she added with a low laugh.

Lena looked rather disgusted at her words, and said in an aggrieved tone, "We all love dolls; don't we, Milly?"

"Love dolls," said Gertrude, joining them, "so used I; and I am not sure that I don't still, at any rate I like dressing them."

"Gerty has got a whole drawerful at home. I think it is so silly to like them," said Bessie scornfully.

Mrs. Freeling rising at that moment to leave, there was nothing more said about the dolls.

"Bessie, we must ask Miss Gifford to give you a half-holiday to-morrow."

"It is Wednesday, Mama, so I have one," interrupted Bessie hastily.

"Ah yes, so it is, I had forgotten. Mrs. Graham has promised to bring her children to-morrow to spend the day with you and Gertrude."

"How nice! And, Mama, mayn't Lucy come too?"

"Of course, dear, she was included;" then she added, turning to Mrs. Graham, "We will expect you by one o'clock. You are sure you prefer to walk up?"

"Yes, we shall all enjoy the walk across the fields." And she looked at her children, whose beaming faces showed they were delighted at all Mama's arrangements for them.

As the carriage drove away, the three children all began a chorus of remarks upon their late visitors. Lucy was unqualified in her praises, but not so Lena and Milly; they were neither of them sure whether they liked Bessie quite so much as they expected.

"Gertrude was very nice," said Milly.

"What fault have you to find with poor Bessie?" said Mrs. Graham.

"Why, Mama, she turned up her nose at our liking dolls, called them pieces of wood, and spoke as if she thought we were silly," said Lena indignantly.

"Well, dear, you cannot expect to find everybody with exactly the same tastes as yourselves. I daresay you will find she is really very nice; she looks a bright frank girl, and she must be kind, judging from the way she treated Lucy."

"She loves little girls," said Lucy with a toss of her small head. "She likes me better than Dash; she said so."

Mrs. Graham was right. The girls found out the next day that they had very many tastes in common with Bessie. Although she did not like dolls, there were a great many things she did like, especially playing in the garden and the fields, and before they separated that evening they were all the closest of friends. But Lucy was prime favourite with Bessie; everything that the child wanted was done at once, nothing was too much to give the little one pleasure. Bessie had spoken the truth when she had said that Gertrude had a drawer full of dolls, and as they were looking at them—for Bessie condescended to be one of the party, as Lucy expressed a wish to see the "dear dollies"—she exclaimed, "Don't you think it silly of Gerty keeping those dolls when she is so old? And then she is so fond of books, she is always at them. Miss Gifford says she knows three times as much as I do."

"That is your own fault, Bessie, you know; for you won't try to learn, so how can you get on?"

"How can one think of lessons when one wants to be out of doors? I don't

mind them on wet days, but on fine ones I cannot bear the sight of a book. I envy you," looking at her friends as she spoke, "for you have holidays and no governess."

"But only for a week longer. Our new governess is coming then, and we are not to have any more holidays this summer, except a fortnight in August."

"What a shame!"

"Mama says we have had so many lately; but we shall have the same half-holidays as you."

"Then we can be out together, and the summer evenings are lovely for the fields."

"Don't you like your lessons at all, Bessie?" asked Milly.

"No. How can I, when I feel I am such a long way behind Gerty? It's no good my trying to get on—I can't," and a shade passed over the bright face as she sighed. Bessie was in fact disheartened and disappointed. She had been, when younger, considered quicker at her work than Gertrude, and when she found she could learn so much sooner the lessons set them, she had become idle and careless, thinking she could easily catch up Gerty, though she did work so hard and was so fond of her books. But Bessie soon found she had made a mistake, for the careless roving habits she had given way to grew fast upon her, and soon her sister outdistanced her on the path of learning. So Bessie grew disgusted and disheartened. Instead of trying to make up for lost time, she said "It was of no use," and grew fonder, or said she did, of shirking her work. The Graham girls often wondered that Mrs. Freeling allowed her so much liberty, for not only on the summer evenings, but every spare hour she could get, Bessie made her way to the Grahams, and would coax Mrs. Graham to let her carry off little Lucy to the garden, much to the child's delight. The reason of this was that Mrs. Freeling had come to the decision that Bessie must go to a boarding-school. She had watched with sorrow how the girl's idle habits were increasing, and she also saw that a good deal of it was caused by her being so thoroughly put out of heart about her own doings and work. It would be better for her, Mrs. Freeling knew, to have a change, and she hoped that being with other girls, with whom she had not lost ground, would give her courage to make a fresh start. Little did Bessie guess, as she played with Lucy or her sisters, that very soon all this wild free life was to be exchanged for the routine and discipline of a school. Gertrude knew of it, and over and over again would she try and persuade Bessie to settle down more steadily to her lessons; but argument and persuasion were alike in vain. She was always unprepared and in trouble. "You will be sorry for it," Gertrude would many a time say; but Bessie's answer was always the same, "It is no good trying; I can't get on." Thus the next week or two slipped away. Miss Marshall had arrived, and lessons were begun regularly, when one morning Lucy rushed

in, throwing the door wide open, and forgetting in her excitement that she was breaking through all rules by thus disturbing her sisters during working hours.

"O Miss Marshall, Lena, Milly, what do you think?" she exclaimed eagerly, her eyes sparkling with delight. Then without waiting for an answer she went on, "We are all to have tea in the hayfield. Mrs. Freeling has asked us, and Mama says we may go, and this afternoon Bessie is going to buy me a little rake, and I shall make hay." Here the child stopped for sheer want of breath, while Lena and Milly both exclaimed in tones of delight at the proposed treat.

Fortunately lessons were nearly over for the morning, for Miss Marshall found it very difficult to restrain her pupils' eagerness to get them finished, and go and hear all about the treat in store. Bessie, who had brought the news to Lucy, was quite ready and able to give them all particulars. And the two elder girls looked wistfully after the carriage that conveyed Mrs. Graham and Lucy with Mrs. Freeling to the neighbouring town when they began afternoon lessons.

"Lucy gets all the treats," murmured Lena crossly, while Milly added with a little sigh, "I wish I was her."

This was to be a day of surprises for them, for when Mama returned she told them she had heard from Mrs. Clifford, who wrote she had that day sent off a box. "It is addressed to you, Milly dear," she continued.

"When do you think it will come?" asked Milly.

"It has arrived at the station, dear. Mrs. Freeling kindly called, meaning to bring it back with her; but we heard then that it had been sent by the carrier, so I expect it will soon be here."

After tea and lessons were over, the three girls went down the road to look if they could see the carrier's cart coming. Lena and Lucy were both as excited about the expected parcel as Milly herself, for they had quite talked themselves into the belief that Mrs. Clifford would be sure to send them something. Mrs. Graham had repeatedly told them that it was not at all probable; but they thought otherwise, and as they wished to think so, Mama's warnings were all thrown away upon them. Bessie, too, had helped to increase Lucy's confidence, for she had said, "Of course she would not forget to send such a little darling as you something nice." So all three were in a state of great delight when they saw the cart coming towards the house. They all scampered back to call to Mama that the precious parcel would very soon arrive, and to entreat her to come and see it opened.

"You can bring it into the dining-room and open it there," said Mrs. Graham to the eager party.

"Such a nice big one, Mama," said Milly, appearing with a box in her arms, done up in brown paper, and addressed to "Miss Millicent Graham."

"It must have more than one thing in it," said Lena anxiously. Then the

string was undone and the paper taken off, and a square card-board box was displayed to view.

"I see two parcels," said Milly excitedly as she opened it.

"Mine will be in the corner or underneath!" cried Lucy, as she danced about in her excitement.

Milly took out the first thing, and taking off the paper coverings that were round it, held up a very pretty white hat, trimmed with lace and a large white ostrich feather.

"Oh, how lovely! I hope mine is the same," said Lena, putting down the hat on the table.

Milly took out the other thing. It was not a hat she felt at once. Uncovering it, she saw a white straw work-basket, and opening it they further saw that it was lined with blue satin, and filled with all the necessary things for working with. Laying that on the table beside the hat, she dived again into the box. A look of disappointment crept over her face as she felt, for nothing more was there but the paper which had been placed in it to keep the hat from being hurt by the basket.

"That's all," she said at length.

Lucy stood the picture of disappointment, and screwed up her little face ready for a good cry, when Mama said, "Look, dear, here is a note in the work-basket."

Lucy waited for her cry to hear if there was any good news in the note.

"Read it, please, Mama," said Milly, putting the paper into her mother's hands. She had caught a glimpse of what was written, and she could not bear to read out the words which she knew were coming.

"For dear Milly, hoping she will like her god-mama's choice." Not a word about either Lena or Lucy.

The latter set up a howl of disappointment, but Lena said never a word. Her disappointment was very great—she had so made up her mind that she would be remembered, and had spoken so decidedly on the subject before them all. Her heart swelled with feelings of wounded pride, disappointment, and anger, for at the moment she was angry, not only with herself for having so hoped for it, but with Mrs. Clifford, who she considered had behaved very unkindly to her. Though why Mrs. Clifford should have sent her a present she could not have told you herself.

"May Lena have the hat, and me the basket, Mania?" asked Milly pleadingly. "You like the hat best, don't you, Lena?"

Mrs. Graham was trying to comfort the weeping Lucy, who refused to be comforted, and wept and raved at the cruelty of every one in general and Mrs. Clifford in particular.

"No, Milly, I don't want the hat: they were both sent to you; of course she likes you best—every one does." And with these words, and without a kind look or word of thanks to her sister, Lena left the room.

Poor Milly! Her eyes filled with tears as she looked at the presents that but a few minutes before she had thought of with such pleasure.

Mrs. Graham came to her side, and lifting up her face, kissed her, and whispered, "My poor little Milly, this is a sad way to receive your present."

"O Mama, I wish it had never come. I can never wear the hat."

"No," screamed Lucy, "it's a nasty hat—I'll spoil it," and she seized the unoffending hat roughly; but Mrs. Graham at once took it from her, and handing it to Milly, said, "Put it in the box again, and take it to my room."

"Nasty horrid thing! I'll spoil you," screamed Lucy again, and thus, screaming and struggling, the passionate child was taken by her mother to the nursery, while Milly put the hat and work-basket away in the box, and carried it up as told to her mother's room. Opening the wardrobe she put the box into it, and then shut and locked the door.

"There, you are out of sight now," she said as she did so. Then sitting down on the sofa she gave way to a burst of tears. She had looked forward with such pleasure to receiving her promised present; in her secret heart she had hoped that it might be the very work-basket that had come, for she had admired it so much in the shop one day, and Mrs. Clifford had alluded to it before she left. Now it had really been given to her, and had brought her nothing but sorrow. Why would not Lena take the hat? for she had said she hoped there would be one for her the same, and Milly couldn't wear it after what Lena had said. She was sorry there was nothing for Lucy, but she knew she would soon be comforted by some small present, and that she should have something Milly quite settled in her own mind; but she felt that with Lena it was very different, nothing she had to give her would make up for the disappointment and the wound to her self-love. It was not thus that Milly called it; she so dearly loved her sister that she made excuses for her in her own mind and also to her mother, who very soon came to seek for and comfort her.

"Mama, Lena says she won't have the hat—do make her take it."

"No, dear; I don't wish her to have it. It was sent to you, and I want my children to learn to see each other given pleasure without coveting it for themselves or being jealous about it."

"O Mama, but it was such a disappointment to her!"

"Yes, I know it is; but Lena has brought it on herself, for I have told her over and over again that she was raising false hopes both for herself and Lucy, and so it has ended in sorrow to you all."

"Can't I leave it in your wardrobe and say nothing more about it?"

"The hat you may leave in my wardrobe, and you needn't wear it just yet,—indeed there won't be an opportunity for doing so,—but the work-basket must be taken down to the drawing-room. Both Lucy and Lena must learn to see it, dear, without wanting it."

Milly felt somehow that Lena wouldn't mind the work-basket so much, especially as she had a nice one of her own, while Milly's was an old and rather shabby one, so she took it down more contentedly; now that the hat was well out of sight, she hoped that it would soon be forgotten.

Lena walked out of the dining-room with a swelling heart and clouded brow. She had been very unkindly and ungently treated, she considered. It was very hard that Milly should have everything. What right had she to have a god-mama who gave presents when she herself had not, forgetting that the Aunt who had done so much for her was her godmother as well as Aunt, and had done for her far more than Milly's had ever done. Running up to her bedroom for her garden-hat, she opened the drawer where her best hat was kept. She had thought it very pretty and nice when it was given her, but now, as she looked at it, and compared it with Milly's new one, she thought how shabby and plain it was. "Not even a feather!" And she shut to the drawer with a slam, and seizing her garden-hat ran downstairs again and out of the house. As she wandered on by herself, all the jealous fancies that had raised their heads before, now began slowly to return and show themselves once more. Ah me! Lena was not only allowing them to do so unopposed, but encouraging them both to come back and remain with her. Looking back at the house, she saw, through the open window of her mother's room, Milly standing up, and beside her stood Mrs. Graham. If Lena had only heard the words her sister was saying, her heart would have softened. "It was such a disappointment to her," the gentle voice pleaded; but unfortunately, the words were unheard, and Lena, turning her back to the sight, walked on hurriedly. "I knew she was Mama's favourite, she has got everything; it is me Mama might be sorry for. Oh, I wish Aunt Mary was here!" At this thought the tears filled her eyes, but she pressed them back; if any one saw her crying, they would think it was because she was sorry for the hat, and she would not let them think that Very soon she caught sight of Bessie coming across the fields. As soon as the latter saw her, she hurried on, calling out the moment she was within hearing, "Has the parcel arrived?"

"Yes," said Lena, trying to speak indifferently. "But it was only for Milly—a hat and a work-basket."

"Nothing for you?"

"No," said Lena with a shaky voice, which Bessie seeing, she slipped her arm in hers, saying, "What a shame! And nothing for little Lucy; she will be disappointed!"

Lena began to walk off in the direction away from the house; and Bessie, who was always good-natured, especially when any one was in trouble, walked beside her, and began telling her what they hoped to do the next day, when they were to spend the afternoon in the hay-field. "Mama wants Mrs. Graham to let Hester and the other servants come too—every one ought to help in the hay-field."

Lena did not return home until as late an hour as she dared to, but nothing was said by either Mama or Miss Marshall at her being a little late, both hoping that she had had time to reflect on what had passed, and that by this time she knew she alone had been to blame for the false hopes she had raised for herself and her little sister. Not one word did Lena say about the parcel or her disappointment. She would show them she did not care. And when Milly, who was longing for an opportunity to say something kind about it, saw that Lena did not wish the subject mentioned, she kept silence, only trying, by being extra kind and loving to her, to show she felt with and for her. When they were alone in their room Lena said she was tired and sleepy, hurrying over her undressing, and, alas! her prayers also. She did not wish to forgive, and the girl's mind was so clouded by her wrong and jealous thoughts, that she would not allow that she herself had any need of forgiveness. With a cold kiss she returned Milly's clinging, loving embrace; and prayerless—for no mere formal words, repeated from habit only, can be called prayer—and unhappy,—for how could she be otherwise with such thoughts as hers?—she closed her eyes and pretended to be asleep. So still did she lie, that when Mrs. Graham came in to see her little girls, as was her custom every night, Milly said softly, "Lena was tired, Mama, and she is asleep already."

"Poor child," said her Mother, "I won't stay and talk to you, dear, for fear of waking her. I am glad she has taken the disappointment so quietly." After kissing Milly, she stooped over Lena, and with a tender "God bless you, my child," she kissed her forehead softly, and left the room.

The tears forced themselves under the closed lids, but Lena gulped them back, and with them, all the softened thoughts that began to rise at her mother's words; and as she drove back the good, the wrong thoughts returned and filled the child's mind with seeds that were to reap a bitter harvest ere long.

CHAPTER VIII.

MILLY'S NEW HAT.

"I shall be sorry to have to keep you in this afternoon, Lena," said Miss Marshall; "but if you do not pay more attention to your lessons I shall be obliged to."

"They are so difficult," grumbled Lena.

"That is nonsense. Milly has said hers correctly, and surely you can do so also; you are not paying the slightest attention this morning."

"Of course Milly does it best when you help her," muttered Lena, but in tones loud enough to be heard by her governess.

Things went on from bad to worse. Lena was in a cross, stubborn mood. She was hugging to herself, as it were, the disappointment of the afternoon before, dwelling upon it, and looking at it over and over again in the light of her own wounded pride and vanity. This was the morning of the day they had all looked forward to with such pleasure, the day when they were all to have tea in the hay-field; and now, instead of getting through her lessons well and quickly, she was allowing her thoughts and attention to wander anywhere they would, except to the one place they ought to have rested on.

"Have you got a headache, Lena?" asked Miss Marshall at length, when her patience was nearly exhausted.

"No," was the short answer.

"Then what is the matter with you, dear?" she asked kindly.

"Nothing, only my lessons are so difficult."

"Let me try and explain them to you again," said Miss Marshall; and taking the book she went over the prescribed task. But all her kindness was thrown away; it was not that Lena could not, it was that she would not learn. When the usual hour for ending morning lessons arrived, Lena was all behind, and there was nothing to be done except to excuse her them altogether, or to keep her in for part of the afternoon. The latter course was what Miss Marshall resolved on.

"Lena must stay in alone," said Mrs. Graham, when she heard of this resolution. "I am very sorry for it, my child, but I cannot help myself. It would not be fair to deny any of the others their pleasure because you choose to be so naughty and wilful."

All but the cook were going to the hay-field. She was remaining to look after the house during the absence of all the others, and so Lena would not be quite alone in the house.

"Directly you think you know your lessons you may come and join us. I know I can trust you, my little one," said her mother kindly to the child as she left her sitting alone in the schoolroom. For a little while Lena sat leaning her elbows on the table and gazing into vacancy, as she heard the voices of her mother and sisters gradually dying away in the distance. It was very hard, she thought, sitting here all by herself, when they were all enjoying themselves out of doors, forgetting that it was all her own doing. Suddenly a new impulse seized her,

and bending down over her book, she began to read over her lesson. The door opened, and Hester came in.

"Have you not gone yet, Hester?" asked Lena in surprise.

"No, Miss, I had to finish my work first. I am ready now, only waiting for Emma. She has gone to put the salt into Miss Milly's bath. Oh, Miss Lena, do make haste and do your lessons: only think what your Auntie would say if she saw you now."

"She would not have been so cross and kept me in."

"Well, dear, show that you can do them as well as Miss Milly."

Hester had touched her pride with this speech, and tossing back her head she answered, "Of course I can if I choose."

"Well then, dear, I would choose; it's a pity to lose all the fun of the hay-making, and such a lovely afternoon as it is, too."

"I won't be long now, Hester; I will learn them."

"Shall I wait for you?"

"No, thank you, Hester, I will soon follow you."

Then with a few kindly words of encouragement Hester left the room, and Lena applied herself to her task with such goodwill that very soon she had learnt it correctly.

Putting away her books, she went up for her walking things. As she passed her mother's room, the door of which was left wide open, she went in, and going to the window looked out to see if she could see them in the field. Not a person was to be seen—all lay so still and peaceful in the bright sunshine, the silence only broken by the song of a bird or the distant lowing of cattle. Turning from the window, Lena's eye fell on the box that had come from Mrs. Clifford. It had been taken out for some reason from the wardrobe, placed on the bed, and evidently forgotten to be put back. Lena lingered a moment beside it. She had not seen it except for the few moments that Milly had held it before her on first taking it out of the box. She would like to have a good look at it, and here was an opportunity for doing so privately and without having to ask Milly to allow her to do so. Opening the box, she lifted the paper and looked in. Then taking it carefully out, she turned it round and examined it more attentively. "What a nice feather!" she murmured. "I wonder if it looks nice on." That was very easy to decide. Placing it on her head, she walked to the looking-glass. It was a very becoming one, she considered, as she turned her head from side to side to see it to every advantage. A sudden noise made her start guiltily and turn quickly round, "for a fearful conscience makes cowards of us all." So quickly had she turned and with such a jerk, that off went the hat. Lena made a dash at it, but it was too late, she could not save it. With a splash it went into the salt bath prepared for Milly's weak ancles, and which was always taken into her mother's room. With a cry of

horror Lena snatched it out, but alas! the mischief was done, the beautiful curly feather was soaking. Such a miserable-looking object it was, as Lena gazed at it in dismay. Hastily taking a towel from the rack, she rubbed away at the unfortunate hat; then when the straw was dry, or looked nearly so, she shook it vigorously, hoping in this way to restore the feather to its former beauty. All the shaking and rubbing was of no use, for the feather still remained all wet and uncurled. Holding it before the fire sometimes did a wet feather good, Lena knew; should she take it down and ask cook to let her hold it before the kitchen fire? As she stood meditating she saw through the open window her father and Milly coming towards the house. If Milly had been alone she would have run and told her all, for all anger and pride had died away in her fright and sorrow, for she was sorry for the mischief she had caused, but the sight of her father made her hesitate. "He would be so angry," she thought, and the remembrance of the stern way he had spoken to her the night she had looked over Aunt Mary's shoulder and read her letter, came back to her. "She could not tell him." She would wait and tell Milly afterwards, or Mama. She would understand it was not done intentionally. Thrusting the hat hastily into the box again, she hurried to her room, trembling and almost in tears.

"Lena, Lena, where are you?" shouted Milly, as she bounded upstairs to look for her, after having failed to find her in the schoolroom. "Getting ready? Oh, I am so glad you have done. I have come back to bring you—we all want you so much. Crying, Lena?" she continued, and receiving no answer—"Oh, don't cry; it is all right now."

Here was Lena's opportunity to confess all, and this she determined to do. Bursting out afresh into tears, she sobbed, "Oh, Milly dear, do forgive me; the hat"—she went on incoherently.

Here Milly interrupted her with a kiss—"Never mind the tiresome old hat; I never want to see it again. I love you better than all the hats in the world."

"But, Milly, I must tell you"—

Here Colonel Graham's voice was heard calling in rather impatient tones for them to make haste.

"There, Lena, you must come; I won't listen to one word more about the hat;" and dragging her after her, she hurried down to join her father.

No one took any notice of Lena's tear-stained face, all attributing it to the fact of her having been kept in; and when Mama, greeting her with a loving kiss, the tears welled up afresh, they were thought to be only signs of sorrow for her conduct during the morning, and only drew forth another kiss and kind words of forgiveness, "Now, darling, run and join the others, and all enjoy yourselves."

Though Lena joined in all the games and pleasures of the others, it was not with the full enjoyment with which she usually did so. No one alluded either to

her having been kept at home, or to the disappointment of the day before, except once, and that was done by Lucy, who said, "Milly, Bessie says she expects that my present was small, and must have got hidden among the paper."

"No, Lucy dear, I am sure there was not anything more in the box."

"Yes, so am I," said Lena, flushing scarlet, "it is very stupid of Bessie saying such things to you."

"I believe Bessie, and she is not stupid; she is very nice—nicer than you," and the child walked off, indignantly murmuring to herself, "I mean to look and see, for I believe Bessie."

"I wish she would not tell Lucy such things; she never thinks how bad it is for her." The one she alluded to being Bessie, who petted and spoiled the child, giving her everything she asked for, and never allowing either of her sisters to contradict her; or when they did so, she made up for it by an extra petting.

Lena was ill at ease, and looked so tired when evening came that Mama sent her off to bed, attributing the weary looks and subdued manner to over fatigue from running about in the heat.

As Lena lay waiting for Milly to come to bed—for Lena had been sent off first by Mama—she decided that she would tell Milly when she came in, and then together they would tell their mother; but all her plans were frustrated by the weary eyes closing in sleep before her sister came in, and so quiet was Milly that she did not awake her.

The following morning doubts and conjectures began to trouble Lena. Milly made such a fuss when she began to speak of the hat, and say she would not hear a word more about it; she had said she did not care one bit about it. Still conscience kept telling her over and over again, that there was but one path before her, and that was a very plain and straight one, called Truth. The longer she put off telling, the more difficult it became. She would tell her while dressing. "Milly," she began, just before they left the room, "I want to speak to you about the hat."

"O Lena, please don't say anything now about it, or I shall hate it. Mama and I decided last night that it is to be left in its box, and I shall forget all about it: I could not wear it now."

"Could not wear it now," Lena repeated, but no one heard her, for Milly had left the room. "Could Mama and Milly have opened the box last night and seen what had happened? Yes, that must be it; how good and kind Milly was to forgive her so easily. She would show her how grateful she was, and how much she loved her and Mama too for forgiving her." She felt she did not deserve this kind treatment, but she would try to in the future. All that day Lena expected her mother to say something about the feather, but not one word was said, not even when they were alone. Lena tried very hard all that day to be good, and

was gentle and affectionate to both her sisters, especially Milly, who was so glad to have Lena once more on amiable terms with her that she was in the best and highest spirits.

When Mama gave her little girls their good-night kiss, Lena said, "How good you are to me, Mama!"

"When one tries to be good oneself, darling, one always finds that others are trying to be the same; as when one is cross, one thinks everybody is cross too."

Lucy had not forgotten Bessie's remark, that perhaps Milly had overlooked her present, and that very probably it had got among the paper that formed the wrappings of the hat and work-basket. To find this out Lucy was quite determined, but how to do so was the difficulty. She had asked Mama if she would look, but her answer had not been satisfactory to the child—"Milly had looked, and the paper from Mrs. Clifford proved that only Milly was to receive anything." Lucy wanted to see for herself. The box was in Mama's wardrobe she knew, and could be very easily got at and searched, if only she could do so without being seen. Some days passed away, and no opportunity occurred. One was sure to come, for it is wonderful how opportunities do occur, for either good or evil, when eagerly watched for. It was the case with Lucy. Colonel and Mrs. Graham had gone to return a visit some distance off; the two elder girls had gone with Miss Marshall, Gertrude Freeling and her governess for a long walk to some woods in the neighbourhood. This walk had long been talked of, but it was too far to go in their usual walking hours, so had been arranged for a half-holiday. When Gertrude and Miss Gifford called for the Grahams, Astbury being on the way, they brought word that Bessie was not going with them; she would come down later and take Lucy for a play in the fields. This was a splendid opportunity for Lucy to search the box. Hester was busy in the nursery, so Lucy asked leave to go and meet Bessie. This was at once accorded, for the time fixed on for her coming was close at hand. Instead of going out at once, Lucy went to her mother's room. Shutting the door quietly, so that she should not be seen, she opened the wardrobe. The box was too high for her to reach, so putting a chair close she mounted on it, and was thus enabled easily to reach the desired object. Placing it on the floor, she opened it, and lifting the hat out, put it on the floor beside her, without uncovering it from the paper in which it was wrapped. Then she made a careful but unavailing search. The child's face grew longer and longer as the conviction was at last forced upon her, that there was really nothing more there. It was quite true then that she had been told the truth by Milly, and Bessie was wrong. Anger succeeded to disappointment. Without waiting to remove the chair or to replace the box, she turned to go; the paper containing the hat lay before her: giving it a kick with her foot, for Lucy had worked herself

into a rage by this time, she sent hat, paper, and all flying across the room. Then, without waiting to see the effects of the kick, she rushed out of the room, down the stairs, and into the garden. Bessie had not arrived, so she started off to meet her, and pour into her ever-friendly ear her tale of woe.

CHAPTER IX. THE SPOILT FEATHER.

Lucy had not gone very far when she saw Bessie coming towards her, not walking along briskly and brightly as usual, but with a lagging step and drooping head, so unlike her usual self that even Lucy, full as she was of her own grievance, was struck by it.

"O Bessie, what is the matter? what have you been doing?"

"Nothing, except I am miserable," was the gloomy answer.

Awed and subdued, the child walked beside her in silence, until they came to a favourite resting-place of theirs—an old tree that had been blown down in some winter storm and still lay beside the hedge. The branches had been chopped off, and grass and wild flowers had grown up around it, making it both a comfortable and picturesque seat. On this Bessie seated herself with Lucy beside her.

"Do tell me what is the matter; why are you so unhappy?" Placing her little hand on her knee, she looked up affectionately into her companion's face.

"They are going to send me away from here, all among strangers in a horrid town, and I shall be wretched."

"Send you away, your Papa and Mama! Why, what have you done?" the child asked in surprise.

"Nothing." And as she spoke the word she began to laugh in an hysterical, nervous sort of way. Then seeing the child's bewildered look she said, "Yes, Lucy, that's really why, because Mama says I am not getting on with Miss Gifford, that I do nothing, so they are going to send me to school."

"How unkind of them!"

"No, Mama could not be unkind, nor Papa either; they say it's for my good."

"Like what they say when they give you nasty medicine." This was not said saucily, but very gravely, for Lucy was not in a merry mood; the news she had just heard was too serious for a joke.

"Only think," said Bessie, looking round her with loving, admiring eyes, "to

live among streets and houses, and to leave all these beautiful fields and trees—oh, it is cruel! I can never be happy away from here.” Sure of a sympathising listener in her little companion, she poured forth all her sorrows for the present and fears for the future.

The prospect of dear kind Bessie going away saddened little Lucy, and so filled her thoughts that it drove away the remembrance of her own disappointment, and she quite forgot to tell her of all that had happened, and that she had come out to meet her with the full intention of telling. When they parted at the garden gate, Bessie looked happier, though I fear not one whit more resigned to the prospect in store for her.

Lucy watched her away, and then turned and ran back to the house. Though she was very very sorry about it, still it did not prevent her from being eager to tell her sisters the news, sad though it was. It gave her a feeling of importance to know something the elder ones did not, so she felt quite disappointed at finding that none of the others had come in. She must tell her tale to some one, so running up to the nursery she found Hester, who listened to her news and was as interested and sympathising as her small charge desired.

Lucy was already dressed and waiting for tea, when Lena came in, saying, “O Lucy, there you are! Mama wants you; she is in the drawing-room; come along quickly.”

Together they entered the drawing-room, where they found Colonel and Mrs. Graham and Milly. The latter looked very distressed, and both parents very grave.

“What is it, Mama?” they both exclaimed.

“Have you been in your mother’s bedroom to-day, Lena?” asked Colonel Graham.

“No, Papa,” was the immediate answer, and she looked frankly into her father’s face as she spoke. Not a suspicion of what was coming dawned upon her, she had so completely made up her mind that both her mother and sister knew of her wrong-doing and had forgiven her. At first she had often wondered that her mother had said no word to her on the subject. Then as the days wore on, she was only too glad to forget all about it, and she had tried to be very good and obedient, to show her gratitude. It was the old story with Lena, trusting to her own efforts to repair the wrong, forgetting that there is nothing that we can do that will cleanse us from sin; there is only One who can do that, and He was now going to give her the opportunity to confess her fault, and to show true repentance.

As Colonel Graham asked Lena this question, Lucy coloured and cast down her eyes. She suddenly remembered what she had done, and how she had left her mother’s room.

"Lucy, have you been in?" There was little doubt what would be the answer. Conscious guilt was stamped on every feature of the child's face.

"Yes, Papa," she said timidly. Then bursting into tears, she rushed to her mother's arms for refuge and comfort.

"Tell us all about it, my child; what did you go for?"

"To see if there was not a present for me," she sobbed.

"But Milly told you she had searched the box."

"Bessie said perhaps it had got among the paper, and you had not seen it."

"Well, when you found it was not there, what did you do to the hat?"

"Kicked it," she murmured very low.

"Nothing else?"

"No, I did not even look at it."

"You must have done something more, Lucy," said her father. "How else could it be in this state?" And he held out Milly's unfortunate hat.

Lucy lifted her head from her mother's shoulder and looked. "O Papa, what a pity! how did it get like that?"

The child spoke with such an accent of truth, that the parents looked at one another in surprise. That Lucy had not done it intentionally there could be no doubt.

"We thought you had done it, Lucy. We found it in this state under the washing-stand."

"I am so sorry. I never meant to spoil the hat; I only kicked it because I was so angry;" for Lucy immediately jumped to the conclusion that she had done the mischief, though unintentionally. Springing forward she flung her arms round Milly, saying, "Please, please forgive me, Milly; I did not mean to spoil your hat really."

"No, I know you did not, Lucy. I don't mind one bit now; I did at first, because it was such a pretty one. I don't mind now; and Lena and I will have the same like always—won't we, Mama?" said Milly sweetly as she kissed her little sister.

What were Lena's feelings during this time? Very conflicting ones. So Mama and Milly had not known of it all along, and now she must confess that she had not only done the mischief, but had concealed it all this time. Would they believe her when she told them the whole story? She had not really meant to deceive them, she repeated over and over again to herself. The others were too much taken up with Lucy to notice her, or else her varying looks must have betrayed the struggle that was going on within. As Milly ceased speaking, Lena started forward. "O Milly," she began, when her father's voice arrested her.

"I am glad, my child, you told me the truth at once, for if you had tried to deceive me and denied your fault, I should have been very angry. You see what

sins jealousy and passion lead you into.”

”I could not tell before Papa,” thought Lena as she drew back; ”if he would be angry with little Lucy, how much more so would he be with me who am older?” Then as Lucy sobbed out, ”I really did not mean to spoil the feather,” and her mother answered, ”No, dear, that must have been an accident,” the temptation that rose to Lena’s mind was too strong to be resisted by her feeble strength, and on that strength alone had she been and still was relying. So she held her peace and let Lucy bear the blame.

”You need not stay, dears,” said Mrs. Graham to the two elder girls. ”Go to your tea; I want to have Lucy with me alone for a little while.”

How the feather had been spoiled still remained a mystery. Lucy fully and firmly believed that she had been the cause, by throwing it under the washing-stand, though unless the floor had been wet it would not have been so utterly ruined. It was an unsatisfactory solution of the difficulty, but as no other could be found, they had to be satisfied with it. How thankful Lena was when tea was over, and Miss Marshall gave them leave to go out into the garden for half an hour.

”May I go up and see Lucy?” asked Milly.

Gaining permission, she ran after Lena to tell her where she was going, and to ask if she would come with her.

”There is no good both going, and I want to finish my book.” But not much of the book was read that evening, when, out of sight of every one, Lena sat down and tried to arrange her thoughts. What had she done? Though no one was by to see her, her cheeks flushed with shame at her conduct. What cowardice and meanness had she not been guilty of! Oh, if she had only spoken out at the beginning, all this misery and wickedness would have been saved. ”It was not too late yet,” conscience whispered. Then the thought of what her father would say when he heard that she had deceived them. If it was only Mama, I should not mind, so ran her thoughts; but I dare not tell Papa, he would be so angry. Oh, if only Aunt Mary were here I could tell her everything, forgetting, or rather pushing away the remembrance, of One nearer and dearer than any earthly friend, who never turns a cold or deaf ear to any of His children, and who ever has the gentlest and most loving answer for His repentant little ones. How, over and over again, we dread the anger of some earthly friend, forgetting that some day we must face the just anger of an offended God if we continue in our hardness and sin. As Lena sat thus thinking, we may be very sure that excuses, and what she called good reasons for keeping silence, were not long in making their appearance. Lucy had been forgiven, and nothing more would be said on the subject. Why should she open out such a painful thing again? She had not told a falsehood; if Papa had asked her, she would have acknowledged doing it. He

had only asked her if she had been in her mother's room that afternoon, and she had spoken the truth when she said "No." Then what would Aunt Mary feel if she heard that she, her pet and darling, had got into trouble and disgrace? No, this must never be, and so on and on went the struggle between right and wrong, ending, alas! in Lena's leaving it to be settled some other time. "I could not do it to-night, I will the first opportunity;" and somehow, when an opportunity offered itself, it was not a right one—Lena would wait for a better. So day followed day, and still the secret was locked up in Lena's bosom, and it seemed probable that it never would be told. Nothing was ever said about the feather, and to all appearance no one remembered anything about it. Still Lena was not happy. How could she be, with such a weight at her heart? Aunt Mary had striven to train her niece not for this life alone; and the good seed that had been sown in love and faith was not dead, and the better thoughts would make themselves heard. Lena was not callous or hardened; no, she was very miserable, poor child, as all of us must be who carry about with us an unconfessed and unforgiven sin. As day after day she kneeled, as she had ever done in prayer, and listened to, or read God's Word, her heart grew heavier, and sometimes the longing to tell all was so strong that she would start up to go, then her courage would fail, and she was afraid of what they would say; and the remembrance of her father's words, both to herself and Lucy, would come back, and she would shrink from the task, thinking, "I will be very good and obedient, and make up for not telling by good conduct." At times she would forget all about it, and be the bright, lively Lena we first knew; but some word or deed would be sure to recall her secret, and she would have the same struggle over again.

Her mother was sure that something was amiss, and would watch her troubled, anxious face with loving eyes, fearing that her child was either ill or unhappy. Could it be, she would wonder, that she was fretting at the loss of Aunt Mary? and at this thought she would be, if that were possible, when she was always kind and loving to her children, more so than usual to Lena. Strange to say, that when this was the case, it made Lena only stronger in her determination not to tell, for she would think, "She would not be so kind to me if she knew how naughty I had been." So day after day passed and her secret was still untold.

"Where is Lena?" asked Mrs. Graham, coming into the garden, where Milly and Lucy were busy working at their own especial little garden.

"On the lawn, Mama. She wanted to finish a book Gertrude lent her. Shall I call her?"

"No, dear, I will go to her," and she moved away.

Throwing down the rake with which she had been working, Milly followed. "Mama," she began, when she was out of ear-shot of Lucy; "I don't think Lena is very happy here."

"I am afraid, dear, that she is not well," answered her mother.

"She is so much quieter, and she is not half so fond of running about and romping as she used to be."

"I am beginning to think this place does not suit her. It's a change from the sea-air she has been accustomed to. I have a letter for her from Aunt Mary; that is what I want her for."

"Oh, that will please her. There she is. Lena!" she called out as they came in sight of her lying flat on the grass, intent on a book she was reading.

Lena looked up as they joined her, saying, "It is such a nice book! Milly, you ought to read it."

"I have brought you something else to read, dear," said her mother, holding out a letter which Lena sprang up to receive; for what child is not delighted at receiving a letter, especially if directed to itself!

As Lena was opening the envelope, Mrs. Graham said, "I heard from Mrs. Clifford to-day. That will interest you, Milly. I wrote and asked her to come and stay here."

At these words Lena turned round hastily, and listened anxiously to hear the answer from Mrs. Clifford. As her mother had paused and was looking for the letter in her pocket, Lena asked impatiently, "Is she coming?"

"Yes, dear, in a fortnight."

Lena's cheek flushed crimson, for the thought flashed through her mind, "She will inquire about the hat."

At sight of her crimsoned cheeks Mrs. Graham and Milly at once came to the same conclusion—"Lena has not forgotten her disappointment at not receiving a present;" but neither took any notice of her confusion in words.

"Shall I read you your letter, dear?" asked Mrs. Graham.

"Please, Mama," she answered, placing the letter in her hand. Then walking slowly up and down the lawn, Mrs. Graham read the letter aloud to the two girls, who were walking one on each side of her.

After telling her niece about the many new and interesting places she had been visiting, she went on to say what pleasure it had given her to hear from Mrs. Graham, how good and obedient Lena had been, ending with, "Nothing can give me so much happiness as hearing this, dear Lena, and I trust that I may continue to have equally good accounts until we meet again in the winter." Lena listened to these words in silence as her mother ended the letter.

Bessie Freeling rushed out of the house to join them, exclaiming as she did so, "O Mrs. Graham, I came with Mama; she is in the drawing-room; she wants to see you."

This was a happy interruption for Lena. She dreaded hearing some words of praise from her mother, for she knew how little she deserved them. Handing

her the letter with a smile, Mrs. Graham answered Bessie, and hurried back to the house to see Mrs. Freeling, leaving the three girls together.

Bessie was in a state of excitement, and the moment Mrs. Graham disappeared into the house she burst out with, "What do you think she has come for? To ask if your mother will let one of you go to the seaside with Gertrude and Miss Gifford, instead of me. I want to stay here all summer. I don't want to lose a day when I have such a miserable winter before me."

"I thought your Papa and Mama were going away too," said Milly.

"Yes, to take the boys to see Uncle Henry; but I want to come and stay here while you go with Gerty."

Milly's face fell: she did not want to leave home. "But we can't—we have no holidays," she said, brightening up at this thought.

Here was an escape for Lena from meeting Mrs. Clifford. Was ever anything more fortunate? she thought, for she dreaded any remarks or inquiries from that lady.

"I should like to go to the sea," said Lena; "I hope Mama will let me."

"Want to go away, Lena?" said Milly reproachfully. "And when Mrs. Clifford is coming; I do so want her to know you, as well as me."

"I do hope Mrs. Graham will say 'yes.' Now, Milly, don't you go trying to persuade Lena not to—I shan't let you speak to her until it is all settled;" and she laughingly dragged her away, calling loudly to Lucy to come and help her, which the moment Lucy heard her voice, she hastened to do. And a merry struggle went on between them, in which Lena, rejoiced at the prospect of escaping Mrs. Clifford's promised visit, joined in, and it was in the midst of all the fun and noise that Mrs. Graham and Mrs. Freeling joined them.

"You will consent, won't you, Mrs. Graham?" said Bessie, leaving Milly and looking up coaxingly at her.

"Consent to have you here? Yes, with pleasure; and I think, as your mother has kindly asked one of my children to go with Gertrude, that it would do Lena good. She has not been very well lately, and the sea-air may strengthen her."

"But our lessons, Mama?" said Milly.

"She will do them all the better when she is strong and well; won't you, Lena dear?"

"I am not ill, Mama, but I should like to go to the sea."

"And I do so want to stay here," said Bessie. "O Lucy, won't we be happy? I shall have no lessons, and we will live out of doors." Seizing the child as she spoke, she danced her round.

"When are we to go?" asked Lena.

"In a few days," said Mrs. Freeling. "I have written about the rooms, and we shall hear to-morrow."

"And how long shall we be away?" asked Lena nervously.

"About three weeks or a month, I hope. Will that be too long?" asked Mrs. Freeling of her mother.

"I am afraid you will miss Mrs. Clifford's visit, dear; perhaps she will stay longer than she says when once she is here."

Lena made no answer; and Mrs. Freeling then spoke on some other subject, and the girls wandered off together to another part of the garden.

The few days before they were to start passed away quietly. Lena was very glad to escape Mrs. Clifford, for she quite made up her mind that the subject of the spoilt hat would be brought forward again during her stay, and perhaps, in some way, her part in the proceeding might be brought to light. This she dreaded happening more than anything. It would be worse, far worse, than telling it herself, for in this case who would believe that it was an accident and not done intentionally? Oh, if she had only told it at first! Now each day made it more difficult. How true it is that "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." Lena was running away from an imaginary enemy. If she had remained she would have heard no word mentioned on the subject, for Mrs. Graham had written the whole story to Mrs. Clifford, saying, as she believed was the case, that little Lucy had done it in a sudden fit of passion, but without any real intention of destroying it, simply kicking it out of the way as it was the nearest thing on which to spend her anger. And an answer had come from Mrs. Clifford, regretting all that had happened, except the amiable and forgiving behaviour of her little friend Milly.

CHAPTER X. AT SIDCOMBE.

Miss Gifford and the two girls, Gertrude and Lena, had been now for some days in their comfortable lodgings at Sidcombe, and Lena was fast becoming very fond of her new companion. Although they had seen a great deal of Gertrude during their stay at Astbury, both she and Milly had looked upon her as being nearly grown up, and though liking her very much, for she was always kind and good to them, they looked upon her in quite a different light to that in which they looked on Bessie, not considering her, as they did the latter, as a companion and playfellow. There seemed to Lena more difference between her twelve and Gertrude's fifteen years, than there was between Milly and Bessie, though the actual difference

in age was much the same. Gertrude was very different from her sister, Bessie being much gentler and quieter in disposition. But now, in the quiet and daily companionship of their life, the two girls were fast becoming firm friends.

The life at Sidcombe was very pleasant, and Lena was enjoying it much. There was nothing here to recall the secret trouble that had been haunting her at home, and no word was ever said to call forth the struggle between right and wrong, between deceit and truth, that had been of daily occurrence when with her mother-and sisters. She was only too glad to think that her secret was to remain one for ever, and that the whole thing was an affair of the past, never to trouble her any more.

Both Miss Gifford and Gertrude were very kind to Lena, and the days passed in a simple but happy manner. Their mornings were spent on the sands, and there was nothing Lena enjoyed more, when the morning bath in the sea was over, than to lie under shelter of some rock, and listen to Gertrude as she read aloud, for Miss Gifford said something in the way of lessons must be done, so had fixed upon this plan, of reading out for a certain number of hours each morning from an interesting and improving book, certainly the pleasantest of all ways of gaining knowledge.

The afternoons and evenings were devoted to long rambles, either along the sands, or through the pretty lanes and fields of the country round. At first both girls were eager to wander about and explore the neighbourhood, but very soon they grew either too lazy, or the weather became too hot, or for some reason Lena began to tire of long walks, and she would ask Miss Gifford and Gertrude to spend their evenings on the water, being rowed about in the cool evening air, chatting to one another, or listening to the many tales that their boatman, who was an old sailor, delighted to tell them of the many places he had visited.

One afternoon Miss Gifford said she had letters to write, so the two girls started off together for a walk.

"Where shall we go?" asked Lena.

"Suppose we go to the wood. We have only been once since we came."

"Right past that little white cottage where we saw that pretty little girl who sold us flowers?"

"Yes, and perhaps we shall see her again. Now don't be lazy, Lena; it will be a lovely walk."

"Can we buy some more flowers? David says that she and her mother are very poor."

"I will run and ask Miss Gifford," said Gertrude, turning back and re-entering the house she soon came out again, saying, "Yes, we may; and Miss Gifford says she will come and meet us when she has finished her letters."

They started off again, this time without returning, talking of the little girl,

whose sweet looks and gentle manner had interested them all, and of whom their boatman David had often spoken to them, her father, who had been a sailor like himself, having been drowned a few years before, leaving his widow and children very poor, and in a certain degree to David's care.

Their way lay along a shady lane, bordered with ferns and wild flowers, tempting both girls to stop to pick and admire them more than once. Before they reached the end of the lane, Lena said, "O Gertrude, let us wait here for Miss Gifford; it's so hot, and I am so tired;" and she seated herself on the bank as she spoke.

"You lazy girl!" laughed Gertrude; then seeing that she looked really tired, added, "You take a rest, dear, while I pick some flowers and ferns, and then I will bring them to you and we will arrange them together."

Gertrude had joined Lena, with both hands full of floral treasures, and they were busy arranging them into a pretty nosegay, when the sound of footsteps caused them to look up. They so seldom met any one in these quiet lanes, that both the girls stopped their work to see who was coming. In a few moments their curiosity was gratified by seeing their old friend the boatman coming towards them from the direction of the White Cottage.

"Halloa, David!" called out Lena, "have you been for a walk?"

"Yes, Missie," answered the old man as he touched his hat.

"We are going to the wood, and to call and buy some flowers from that little girl, Mary Roberts," said Gertrude.

"I would not go that way to-day, Miss," he answered gravely.

"Oh yes, but we want to—we mean to," said Lena.

"What is the matter, David?" asked Gertrude, seeing he looked troubled.

"I've just came from the cottage, Miss, from seeing little Mary. She's down with the fever."

Both girls exclaimed in tones of pity, "Poor Mary!" and Gertrude added, "Is there nothing we can do for her, David? Is she very ill?"

"Yes, Miss, she's terrible bad, and her mother is in a sad way about her."

"Oh, do take her this," pressing into his hand the money Miss Gifford had given them to pay for the flowers. "And we will go back and ask Miss Gifford to help her. Come, Lena."

Both the girls were eager to hurry back to ask for assistance, but David would not let them go until they promised they would not go near the cottage, as he feared the fever might be infectious.

When they gave the desired promise, he thanked them, and said he would return with the money they had given him, for small though the coin was, it would be a help to the poor hard-working mother.

"Is she very ill, David?" asked Lena in an awed tone; "will she die?"

"She is in God's hands, Missie; the best and safest of all," he answered reverently, adding, "She's very young, and it's wonderful what a deal of illness young things can bear."

"How old is she?" asked Gertrude kindly.

"Twelve years, that's all."

"Just your age, Lena." Then with a friendly good-bye to the old man, the two girls hurried off to meet Miss Gifford, and tell her of the sad trouble that had overtaken Mrs. Roberts and her child.

They had gone but a very little way when they met Miss Gifford hurrying towards them. When she went to post her letters, she had heard a rumour of there being fever at Mrs. Roberts' cottage, and she had hurried after the two girls, hoping to overtake them before they reached the cottage, for she dreaded their running into any danger of infection. Her first question was as to whether they had been, and it was with deep thankfulness she heard how they had loitered on the way, and that they had met David, who had stopped their going on.

"We may send them something, may we not?" they both asked eagerly as they walked home.

Very soon a basket was despatched under David's care, filled with things that Miss Gifford thought would be good for the sick child. There was no boating that evening, both the girls declaring it would not be fair upon their "own man," as they called David, to employ any one else, when he had gone on an errand of kindness and mercy to his old friend's widow and child.

Miss Gifford was naturally very anxious about the health of her two pupils, and she remembered, with a feeling of uneasiness, how much Lena had complained the last few days of being tired; and as she looked white that evening after the great heat of the day, she hurried her off early to bed, much against Lena's inclination. But Miss Gifford was firm, and she had to obey.

The next day came news that little Mary was still very very ill, and there was but small hope of her recovery. And the two girls spoke and thought much of the poor little sufferer, who but a few days ago had brought them flowers, apparently as well and with as fair a prospect of living as either of themselves, now lying tossing restlessly about in the clutches of that cruel fever, in the small close cottage that was her home.

"She is not going to die, is she, Gertrude?" asked Lena. "She is so young—only twelve."

It was not Gertrude, but Miss Gifford, that answered this remark with, "Age has nothing to do with it, Lena dear. It is not only the aged that God calls away. We ought all, even children, try to live good lives, so that when our summons comes we may be ready and glad to go."

"But we can't; at least children can't always be good," said Lena.

"No, dear; but we can all try, and if we do fall, we can repent, and ask God's forgiveness, which He never withholds, and then we need not fear."

"But David says little Mary is such a good girl, so truthful and honest, and always been so kind to her mother and everybody; he says she is a real little Christian," said Gertrude.

"Yes, so I was very glad to hear," answered Miss Gifford.

"It would be a dreadful thing," said Gertrude, thoughtfully, "to die when you were doing a wrong thing."

"Little Mary is not going to die," said Lena almost passionately, bursting into a flood of tears as she spoke.

Miss Gifford looked surprised but said nothing except, "We hope not, dear Lena." Then drawing the weeping child to her side, she soothed her with gentle words, until she had recovered, and regained her composure once more.

Nothing more was said on the subject of little Mary that morning. Gertrude opened her book and read out until it was time to return to the house, while Lena leant with her head against Miss Gifford's shoulder, apparently listening intently, but in reality thinking and wondering over many things.

After dinner Miss Gifford announced that it was too hot for a walk; and as Lena complained of having a headache, she was to lie down until it was cool enough for them to go out, adding, as she left the room, "Poor child, I had no idea she would have felt for others so very strongly."

As Lena lay on the bed in the darkened room, sleep was very far from her. Although her eyes were shut, her thoughts were very busy. Gertrude's words came back to her over and over again, "To die doing wrong." Her head ached dreadfully, which was not to be wondered at after her passionate fit of crying; and as Lena was not often troubled with a headache, she began to grow nervous and frightened. Could it be that she was going to get the fever also, like Mary Roberts? If she had it at twelve years of age, why should not she? Yes, she was sure she was going to be ill too; and her mother would soon be in as sad a state about her, as David said Mrs. Roberts was about her little girl. Poor Lena! she began to cry softly out of sheer fright. Suddenly jumping up, she went to the table, and taking up a small hand-glass that lay there, she took it with her to the window, and lifting the blind, looked at herself. Such a miserable, flushed, tear-stained face she saw. Yes, it must be the fever that made her cheeks so red. Laying down the glass, she flung herself on the bed. Oh, if she had only told Papa and Mama that it was she who had destroyed Milly's hat, and not little Lucy, as she had allowed them all to believe, how much happier she would be now! How weak and wicked she had been and still was! Oh, if Mama was only here, she would go and tell her all; but it was too late now, Mama was far away, and couldn't hear or see her child's sorrow, and alas! it was her own doing, and by her own wish, they

were not together. Then there crept into her heart the sweet loving words that had been so familiar to her all her life, but now seemed to come back to her with a stronger power and deeper meaning than they had ever had to her before. "I will arise and go to my Father," were the words that were ever before her as she lay sobbing bitterly. Yes, she too would do that. Springing up, she knelt down and prayed earnestly and truly for strength to do what was right—to tell the truth, and remove the blame from poor innocent little Lucy. Lena prayed as she had never prayed before in her young life, and being calmed and comforted, she was standing meditating how she was to carry out her good resolutions, when the door opened softly, and Gertrude looked in.

"I came to see if you were asleep; how is your headache, dear?" she asked.

Here was a way opened to her—an answer, as it seemed, to her prayer. She would tell Gertrude all, and be guided by her as to the best way of acting. Without answering her question, she sprang forward, and throwing her arms round her friend's neck, sobbed out, "O Gertrude, I must tell you—I spoil the hat; I am so wicked and so miserable. Do you think Papa will ever forgive me?"

"Spoil what, Lena? Whatever is the matter, dear?" asked Gertrude in amazement, and a little bit frightened at the excited state Lena was in. She had heard about the hat being destroyed, and thought, as they all did, that Lucy had done it; but as it was now some time since it had happened, she had forgotten all about it. So when Lena sobbed out again, "I spoil the hat," she began to think it was some hat she had destroyed belonging to herself.

"What hat, dear, do you mean?"

"Milly's; I did it, not Lucy."

"O Lena!" she exclaimed in a shocked voice.

"Don't speak like that, Gerty, please. I can't bear you to be angry with me; I didn't mean to do it really."

"I am not angry, Lena dear; but I don't understand about it. Come and sit down and tell me what you mean." Going to the window, she drew up the blind and drew a chair up for Lena as well as herself; but Lena would sit nowhere but on the floor. Crouching down at Gertrude's feet, and hiding her face on her lap, she told her tale in broken words. Gertrude listened, without saying one word until she had ended; then stooping down and putting her arms round her she said, "Poor Lena, how unhappy you must have been all this time!"

"Not since I have been here; but before it was dreadful. Do you think they will ever forgive me?"

"Of course they will, Lena; how can you doubt it?"

"But Papa said he couldn't bear us to do a dishonourable, wicked thing; and Gerty, he spoke so sternly, that I was afraid to tell him. And then I thought Mama and Milly knew, and had forgiven me without telling him," repeated Lena again.

"Poor Lena!" was all Gertrude said again, as she stroked back the child's hair from her flushed face, for by this time Lena had found her way from the floor to Gertrude's lap. A long silence fell upon them. Lena lay very still, resting her head against her kind companion's shoulder, feeling, oh, so thankful! that the wretched secret was no longer locked up in her own heart. At last she said, "How can I tell them?"

"You must write to them, dear, to-night; don't put off, for it only makes it more difficult."

"I am sure I don't know what I shall say. I shall never be able to write it."

"Yes, you will, dear. I will help you. What made you tell me to-day, Lena?"

"O Gerty!" she exclaimed, sitting up and looking very grave, "I have got such a headache, and I am so hot and my cheeks so red, I am sure I am going to have the fever like little Mary Roberts."

"O Lena, what nonsense!"

"It is not, Gertrude. I never had such a bad headache before, and I am so hot, and I thought about what you said about dying when you were doing wrong, so I felt I must tell; and, Gerty"—here she lowered her voice—"I asked God to help me, and then you came in."

"Darling," was the only answer. Then a knock came to the door and the servant's voice was heard saying, "Tea is ready."

Gertrude helped Lena to get ready, and together they went downstairs.

Miss Gifford called out in surprise as they entered the room, "My poor little Lena, I am afraid your sleep has not done you any good. Are you feeling ill?"

"Yes, Miss Gifford, my head aches, and I am so hot I could not sleep."

"You shall sit in the arm-chair by the window; it is so pleasant now with the cool sea-breeze coming in, and Gerty shall give you a cup of tea."

Lena sat very quietly, accepting all Miss Gifford's kindness in silence; but when Gerty took her a cup of tea she whispered, "Must I tell Miss Gifford?"

"I will tell her, dear, and how sorry you are."

"Perhaps she won't be so kind to me then; she will think me so wicked."

"She was never unkind when Bessie and I were naughty: I am sure she won't be to you." Then raising her voice she said, "Lena wants to write a letter home to-night, please, Miss Gifford."

"No, dear, that must wait till to-morrow; little girls with headaches must keep quiet," was the answer.

With this Lena had to be content. In truth she was not sorry to have nothing more to do that evening but rest quietly, feeling thankful that she had taken that

difficult first step in the right direction.

CHAPTER XI. CONCLUSION.

Lena's fears that she too was going to have the fever proved only too true, for by the next day she was really ill.

All she had gone through for the last few weeks—the fear of discovery, and misery of concealment, joined with the knowledge of how wrongly she was behaving—had tried the child. Though, alas! she had been, as all children are, naughty over and over again, she had never before concealed a fault and continued to do so, as she had now done week after week; and the continual struggle that had gone on in her mind between truth and right, and the pride and jealousy for love, that were such strong features of her character, had told upon body as well as mind, and made her fall an easy prey to the low fever that had broken out in the village and neighbourhood of Sidcombe; and for the next few days she had but a very dim and hazy idea of what was going on around her.

Fortunately the attack was in a mild form, and the weather was much cooler than it had been before the fever broke out, heavy rain having fallen, which cooled the air and revived the sick and drooping, and the doctor was soon able to pronounce his little patient on the high road to recovery.

When Lena first began to take notice of who was beside her, she expressed no astonishment at seeing her mother's face bending over her and hearing her whisper a few loving words in answer to her. "What is the matter, Mama?"

"You have been ill, dear, but, please God, you will soon be well again."

Lena was quite satisfied, and asked no more questions—it only seemed natural to have Papa and Mama beside her; but gradually the recollections of the day before she was taken ill came back to her, and she remembered that it was Gertrude and Miss Gifford who had been with her then. The latter was still constantly beside her, but it was Gertrude she wanted to see and speak to, as she remembered everything clearly. Had she told Miss Gifford? She wondered if she had; she certainly was not angry, for she could not have been kinder to any one than she was to Lena.

"Mama, where is Gertrude?" she asked.

"Gone home, dear, for we were afraid of her being taken ill also if she re-

mained.”

After a few minutes’ silence Lena murmured, ”My letter; I never wrote it.”

”My darling,” whispered Mrs. Graham, leaning over her child and placing her hand lovingly on her forehead, ”There is no need to write—Gertrude has told me all.”

”O Mama, and are you angry? Do you still love me, when I am so wicked?”

”Still love you, my little one! You cannot doubt that we all forgive you fully and freely. O my child, never fear to tell us everything and anything you do or think.”

Lena’s arms were round her mother’s neck in a moment, and she said, as she clung fondly to her, ”No, Mama, I never, never will. It was not you I was afraid of, but Papa. I thought he would be so angry.”

Lena did not think Papa stern, or one likely to cause any one fear, when later that day he spoke a few loving words to his child; and as she kissed him, she felt that never again would she think him stern. Her only wonder was how she could ever have feared him, or doubted the love of either of them ceasing because she had done wrong.

As Lena lay still that evening, her hand clasped in Mama’s, and her eyes fixed upon Papa, who was reading out her letters from Milly and Gertrude, Lena felt so happy and contented. There was no longer any fear in her heart, for there was nothing to be hidden, and the child’s heart swelled with gratitude as she thought how good every one had been and now were to her.

When the letters were finished, Lena asked suddenly, ”How is little Mary; is she better?”

A moment’s silence followed, and then Mama said, ”Little Mary has gone to that home where she will never have pain or suffering more, my Lena; she is with her Saviour now, dear.”

”Dead, Mama—dead! and she was only twelve years old, just my age. Her poor mother”—

And her eyes filled with tears as she added, ”And David, how sorry he must be, he was so fond of her!”

”Yes, dear, we must pity them, but not little Mary herself; she is happy, perfectly happy now.”

”O Mama, I am so glad I did not die too, for I was not good like her, and I hadn’t told you and Papa. I meant to that very night, but Miss Gifford would not let me write.”

”God has been very good to us all, as He always is, Lena, and has spared my little girl to us, and given her another opportunity of living and working for Him.”

”Indeed, indeed I will try.”

"Now, dear, you must not talk any more or get excited. We feared to tell you about little Mary, in case it should upset you while you were so weak, but Papa and I decided that if you asked we would tell you the truth; for we have all decided, have we not, that we are to have no concealments or deceptions any more,—have we not?" she repeated.

"No, I never will; I mean," she added humbly, "I will try not to."

After that day Lena grew rapidly better, and was soon able to be taken down to the sitting-room, where she could lie on the sofa before the open window, inhaling the cool sea-breezes that brought back health to the weakened frame, and colour to the pale cheeks.

Soon the day arrived when the doctor pronounced the invalid strong enough to undertake the journey home; but before they started she begged for and was allowed to see Mrs. Roberts, the poor widowed mother, who gladly spoke of her little Mary, and she told Lena much of the simple holy life her child had tried to lead; and it comforted the poor mother to hear how her child had been, although unconsciously, instrumental in leading and strengthening another in the right way; and it interested Lena much to hear of the girl who, though she had seen her but once or twice, had still been able to exercise such an influence for good on her life.

It was the contrast between her own feeling of wrong-doing, and the account David gave them of how Mary had tried to act, that made such a deep impression on Lena's mind, and had been the means of bringing her, in the true spirit of humility, to sue for pardon and strength to do what was right. How thankful and happy Lena now felt that she had told all, and that there was no longer in her heart or life anything that she desired to hide from her parents.

Oh, if children would only remember that the good or evil they do affects, not only themselves, but may, both by example and bearing, have a powerful influence over their companions, I am sure one and all would strive to deserve the name that David had bestowed on Mary Roberts, and be, in deed and in truth, little Christians. How happy they would be, not only themselves, but would make all around them equally so!

Long ere the autumn passed into winter, Lena was well and strong, and Astbury was no longer looked upon or called a new home; and although they were not able, now the cold and wet weather had set in, to spend their time in the fields and garden as at first, they found there were pleasures and joys in a country life in winter as well as in summer, and sunshine reigned indoors, for Lena and her sisters were very happy and loving together. Storms came occasionally, as among all small people; but there was not only love, but perfect trust and confidence between them all now; and when that is the case, there must be happiness in the home circle.

Christmas was drawing very near, and with it the prospect of Aunt Mary's promised visit. No word had been said to Miss Somerville about Lena's wrongdoing and its long concealment. Mrs. Graham wished Lena to tell her Aunt herself, and though at first she shrank from the task, she acknowledged that she ought to do so, for, as she said to her mother, "I know I ought to, Mama, for Gerty saved me the pain of telling you, though now I should not want any one to tell you or Papa anything for me, but then it was different."

Christmas also brought back, for her first holiday, Bessie Freeling from the boarding-school that she had looked forward to with so much dread, and that she had found was not so dreadful in reality as in anticipation. Like many other things in this world that we dread and think of as misfortunes, it turned out, as is so often the case, to be a real blessing when it came. Bessie was beginning to see that running about wild in the country was not all that was required to make life either useful or happy.

The first evening of Aunt Mary's arrival Lena joined her in her own room. Miss Somerville sat quietly in her chair before the fire, and listened to Lena as she poured forth the account of her doings since they had parted in the summer, ending with, "I know, Auntie, that you must be disappointed and grieved with me after all my promises."

"I did not expect those promises to be quite fulfilled, Lena," was her Aunt's answer.

"Did you think so badly of me as that, then, Aunt Mary?"

"Not badly, darling. I fear I thought too much of my little niece, and helped to spoil her by being too indulgent and easy."

"Then why,—what do you mean, Auntie?"

"I mean, darling, that you spoke so confidently, and as if you were so sure of your own strength; and Lena, you know now that our own strength is but utter weakness when we are tempted."

Lena's eyes filled with tears, but she made no answer as her Aunt, drawing her close to her, went on lovingly to say, "However sorry I am about the past, I am now much more happy and hopeful about your future than I was when we parted in the summer, for I feared you would have many trials and temptations to go through, that you little dreamed of in the quiet life we led together."

"You warned me, Auntie; you said I must learn to give in, and share with Milly and Lucy."

"Yes, dear, experience teaches us many lessons, and God has been very good to you: He has shown you the misery of wrong-doing."

"Yes indeed, Auntie, I was very miserable," interrupted Lena.

"But, my darling, if that misery has taught you to be humble and trust less in your own strength, I cannot be sorry, but thankful for it."

"And you won't love me less?"

"Lena!" was all her Aunt said, but it was enough.

"No, no, Auntie, I didn't mean that; I know you won't. You will be like Papa and Mama, who only seem to love me more, if that is possible; only," she added with a smile, "Mama says the love was always there, but I wouldn't see it."

"Thank God, dear Lena, that you do see it at last."

"It was only sometimes I didn't, when I thought they liked Milly best, but she deserved it if they had. O Auntie, she has been so good, and so has little Lucy; they never said one unkind word when I came home, though I had behaved so badly."

A loud knock, and an impatient "Do let us in, Aunt Mary," from Lucy, interrupted them.

Lena ran and opened the door, and there stood Lucy, all eagerness and excitement, and beside her was Milly, holding a big parcel in her arms, her face beaming with delight.

"It's for you, Lena; see, it is addressed 'Miss Graham.' It's from Mrs. Clifford," she added softly.

"Then it must be meant for you," answered Lena, flushing scarlet and drawing back.

"Never mind, Lena; open it quickly, do, and see what is inside," burst out Lucy impatiently.

"It is meant for you, Lena dear, so don't be afraid to open it."

"I heard from Mrs. Clifford this morning that the box was sent," said her mother, coming in.

Thus bidden, Lena, with her sister's help, undid the string and took off the paper. Opening the box, Lena took out and laid on the floor two parcels directed to Milly and herself. Then she drew out one with Lucy's name on it. There was no mistaking what Lucy's was.

"A doll for me! Oh, how lovely! My first Christmas present!" she exclaimed in delight.

Lena looked at hers. On the paper was written, "For dear Lena, from Milly's godmama." Opening it, she saw a pretty soft brown hat, with a long curling ostrich feather of the same colour, and looking up she saw Milly holding one exactly the same in her hand.

"O Lena, how nice! We shall be exactly like, I am so glad. Aren't they lovely?"

"Mama," said Lena, after a pause, "may I give Lucy the feather? she deserves it, I don't;" and she tried to unfasten it as she spoke.

"Wait a moment, my child. Ask Lucy first if she would like it."

It was difficult to get Lucy to attend to anything they said, so absorbed was

she in the delights of her new doll; when she did hear, she asked in surprise, "Give it me! what for? It's your present, Lena; you should not give away presents—it is wrong."

"But, Lucy, you forget what I did to Milly's white one, and let you bear the blame."

"Oh, I didn't mind; at least, I knew I did not mean to spoil the feather; but I kicked it, you know."

"Do let me give it to her, Mama," Lena pleaded.

"I don't want it, Lena, I don't want it; you and Milly will have hats alike. I mustn't speak of the white one. Milly and I decided we never would; and Bessie said she would think me very mean if I did, and I won't."

"How good you are all to me!" said Lena, giving her little sister a kiss.

"That's because you are so much nicer now than you used to be—you are not always"—Here Lucy stopped, abashed at Milly's indignant exclamation.

"Always what?" asked Lena after a moment's pause.

"Always wanting to be first, and going on about being the eldest. I love you ever so much more now since you have been to Sidcombe;" and the child looked round at them all, as much as to say, "There now, I have spoken out what I really think."

"Dear Lena, I should rather have had that testimony to your character than all the promises of last summer, and I am sure Mama agrees with me," said Aunt Mary.

Mama's answer was a loving kiss as she placed the hat on Lena's head. Then doing the same to Milly, said, "Now run down together, and show them to Papa, and ask what he thinks about them; and then put them away in your own room until Christmas morning, that day of joy, peace, and good-will towards man."

As the two girls left the room together, Miss Somerville said to her sister, "They are very fond of each other."

"Yes, dear," was the answer. "It makes me very happy to see their affection. I know the value of a sister's love, and I trust that no root of jealousy may ever again spring up to interrupt their perfect friendship."

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