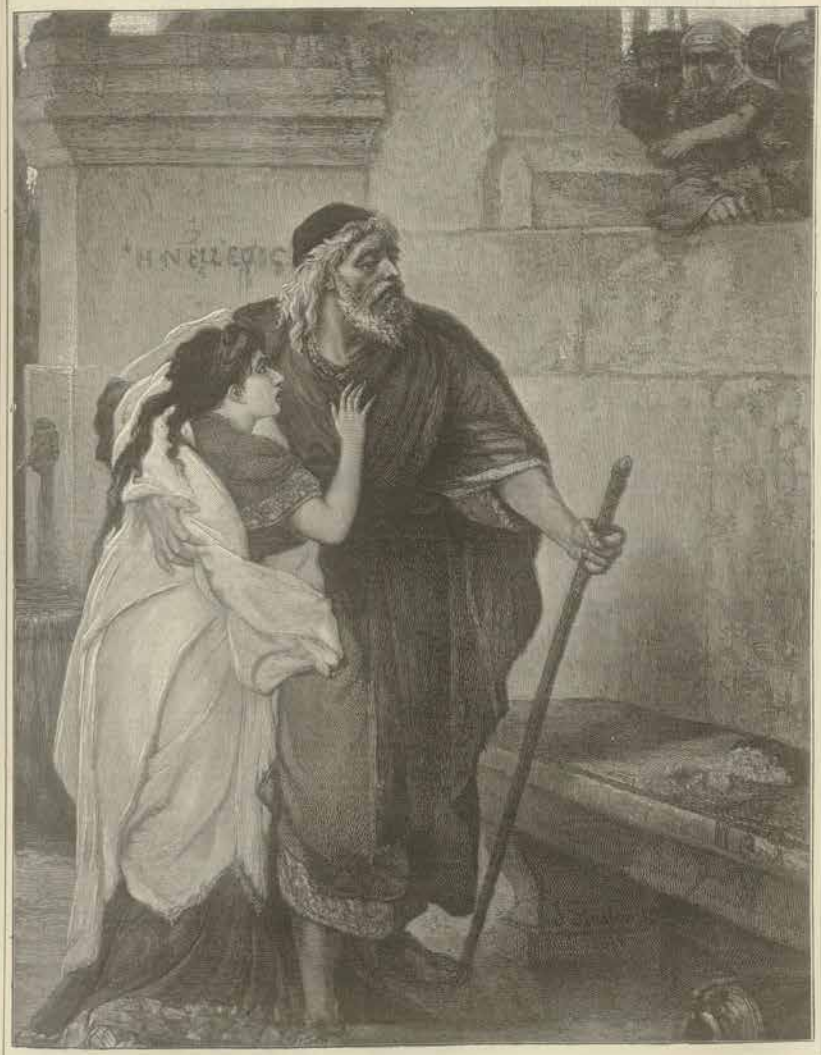


No. 268. AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.—"The Christians to the Lions!"—See page 26.

At the Eleventh Hour.

A STORY OF OLD ROME.

I.

MORNING broke slowly over the Imperial City. In his palace the noble yet slumbered, in his hut the slave stirred uneasily upon his rude couch, as the faint beams of coming day disturbed his rest. The narrow streets were still and quiet, save for the unsteady tread of some reveller, returning homeward from the long-protracted banquet or the midnight wine cup. Suddenly along the path came a firm stately step and a young man, his rich dress shrouded by a heavy mantle, advanced towards a low doorway situated at the extremity of the lane, which ran at right angles from the main thoroughfare, and down which he had turned. His mien, his dress, his haughty air and lofty bearing, alike marked him out as a member of the patrician or noble order—one of the lords of Rome.

Behind, him, but at only a few paces' distance, walked a man in humbler dress, a freedman or servant of a superior class, such as were generally to be found in attendance on the Roman nobles, and were often entrusted with their most important and confidential concerns. Seeing that his master had halted by the doorway, the freedman advanced, and knocked loudly. The summons was answered by a deep voice within, demanding their business. The freedman gave his master's name, and adding that they bore the Emperor's order for admission. The portal opened, they stepped within, and it closed behind them with a sullen clang. They stood in a long vaulted passage, gloomy and dim, lighted only by a rude oil lamp suspended from above. The jailer glanced at the patrician and his attendant, and then asked, in a tone in which his own authority was blended with deference to the other's rank, "What would the noble Clodius?"

"I seek an interview with Valeria Gabrini."

"Valeria Gabrini!" repeated the jailer, wonderingly.

"Ay, behold the Emperor's order." The official made no further demur as he noticed the impatience visible in the patrician's look and gesture, but saying only, "This way, noble Clodius," moved down a long corridor which ran at right angles from that in which they stood. Motioning to the freedman to remain where he was, the young noble turned and hastily followed the jailer. Unlocking a low, heavy door, the latter signed for him to enter, and no sooner had he done so than the portal was closed behind him. At the sound of footsteps and the gleam of the light carried by the jailer, the occupant of the cell came forward with a startled anxious gaze. For a moment the young Roman was silent then dropping the heavy cloak that partially hid both face and form,

"Valeria," he said, in a low and troubled tone.

The captive sprang gladly forward. "Clodius," she exclaimed, "this is more than I had hoped." The young patrician took her hand in his and looked mournfully and earnestly in her face. Pale and worn were the loved features, but clear and faultless in their beauty, and bearing upon them the imprint of a perfect peace. She returned his gaze affectionately and calmly, but after awhile the anguish on his face disturbed and troubled her, and her own eyes grew sad. But she strove for his sake, and womanlike, to speak cheerfully.

"How have you obtained entrance here?" she asked.

"I have been of service to the State, and this brief interview is but a small boon to ask of the Emperor. We have but an hour together. Valeria, hear me once more. Give up this new faith, this delusion that has drawn you from our country's altars. Listen, Valeria," he implored, for she had already made a gesture of dissent. "I come to save you. A word, a sign, will be enough. Come back to the belief of our fathers, the belief in which we were trained. Come back, O Valeria, for my sake if for naught else, and, far away from this gloomy dungeon, we will yet be happy. What is this new creed that you should give up for it fortune, fame, and life itself, that you, a delicately nurtured Roman maiden, should have to face and endure the shameful degradation of the arena and death from the wild beasts. Come with me! come with me! While you remain you draw nearer to a dreadful doom. Come with me, Valeria! back to happiness and love." He held both her hands in his, and his eyes sought hers with a glance so full of appeal and sorrow that she wavered, and for a moment well-nigh yielded. As he said, the fate before her was terrible. Not less clearly than he did she realise its terrors.

Like most Roman women, she had seen the contests in the arena, though her soul had sickened as she gazed; and, after once seeing the spectacle, she had steadily refused to be present again. But she could not forget the scene. The countless faces, the deep muffled sound of the voices of a great multitude, the benches rising all around, tier after tier, and in the midst the sand-strewn arena, on which the trained gladiators fought to the death, or, worse still, the savage beasts of the forest were let loose upon helpless, unarmed captives, sparing neither age nor sex. And now this fate was to be her own. Already in fancy she saw those pitiless eyes looking down at her from the sloping benches, already she heard the angry shout, "The Christian to the lions;" and the womanly nature recoiled and shrank at the thought. Only a few weeks since had she not seen an old man and his daughter, pointed out as Christians, hooted, reviled, and carried away to their fate? "The Christians to the lions" was an old cry—it rang ever in her ears. And here, in this prison cell, had come her sharpest trial. He to whom her affections were given, was offering her freedom, life, hope and all that made life worth living, if she would but put aside her new belief and come back to their common faith of childhood. Could she have dared to yield?—but no. The Cross had been marked upon her brow, by its teaching she would live, and for His sake who died upon it she would die if need be. And with that sublime faith which inspired saint and martyr in those earlier days, she put aside all hope of happiness on earth, and turning to the young Roman laid her hand in his.

"Clodius, my Clodius, hear me for the last time. This faith, this belief that you think a delusion, is to me more real than life. I have talked of it with you ere this, and now there is no longer time. But one thing I would ask of you, Clodius. When I am gone"—her voice shook a little, but she went on bravely—"you will not put this all aside as an idle dream. You will think of me sometimes, Clodius, you will think of your Valeria; and when you think of her, think also of this faith for which she died, and it may be that He who sees both our hearts will bring us together to His kingdom in His own good time. Promise me that you will do this, you are a Roman, and will keep your word."

His voice was hoarse and broken as he answered, "I promise." For awhile they both were silent, and then Clodius, rousing himself with an effort, was about to speak, but she checked him.

"There is one thing more. Come not to-morrow to the arena. It will rend your heart, and do no good. Fear not for me; I am in higher hands than those of earth. I die for Him who died for me. Hark, the jailer's footstep! Can it be the time is past?" Even as she spoke the door opened partially, and a dark figure appeared. Clodius moved hastily towards it.

"A few moments more," he said, pressing a purse into the other's hand. The jailer seemed to hesitate, but yielded, and the door reclosed. Scarce a word more was spoken by the twain whose parting had in it the bitterness of death, only from Valeria's white lips came a silent, but an anguished prayer for him who knelt with her for the first and last time. Then, locked in one embrace, they stood, forgetful of all around. Again came the tread of an armed man along the corridor, and the low vaulted door swung back, and Clodius knew that the supreme moment had come. Was it Valeria's voice, or a spirit that breathed in his ear words that were present with him through years to come?

"None but Christ, none but Christ!" He heard nothing more, he saw nothing; he was only conscious that the door had closed between them, and that, leaning on the arm of his faithful freedman, he was traversing the narrow streets once more, while in her lonely cell the Christian maiden sought refuge in prayer, unseen of all but God.

II.

YEARS rolled on, and the fate of the martyr maiden was forgotten amid the many other instances of a like nature that were of daily occurrence at the time. But in the minds of a few her memory yet was cherished. The little band of Christians with which she had been connected thought and spoke of her as a friend who was not lost to them, "but departed for a season." Some others, also, who had been her companions in other days, before the faith of Christ had drawn her from their side, yet regretted and remembered her; but in their regret there came no ray of hope, such as cheered the Christian life. But above all and beyond all, in intensity of sorrow, in continuance of regret, was her memory cherished and preserved by him who had parted from her at the very gates of death. "You will think of me sometimes, Clodius," she had said. How long ago it seemed! Since then he had steadily risen in reputation and position, till there was now apparently no post in the Imperial service that was not within his reach, if he liked to aspire to it. But his advancement had not been from his own seeking, but from the concentration of all his powers on the work before him. The man's whole demeanour and bearing were changed. The careless, lighthearted young patrician had become the stern and silent soldier, indifferent to danger and despising death, laying his plans carefully, but carrying them out at any cost and in spite of any odds; and the bronzed legionaries knew that the service was an arduous one when Clodius Camillus led them on. With the people generally he was rather respected than liked, but there was a section who held his name in high esteem—the sect of the despised Nazarenes. For, true to the past, and for the sake of her whom he had loved, Clodius ever, if possible, stood between the Christians and persecution. As yet the faith had not entered his own heart. He had no sympathy with the scoffing, sceptical tone so prevalent upon all matters of religion with men of his rank and age; but there seemed as yet to him something unbefitting his pride of nature as Roman and patrician in the thought of turning aside from the faith of his country and his fathers. His determination to protect the Christians, when it could be done, was easily accounted for by those who knew him. Valeria had come of a house as noble as his own, and their union would have been graced by the presence of the highest families in Rome. True, that in the lapse of time the exact incidents had been forgotten; but it was still remembered that he had loved a noble Roman maiden who had embraced Christianity, and had in consequence suffered martyrdom. His course of action, therefore, seemed natural enough, and as it was joined to the strictest fidelity in the path of duty and to continuous military success, it was allowed to pass unchallenged. And many a fervent prayer went up from Christian hearts for the stern, silent man, who, though not of their faith, and standing ever apart from them, yet so often turned aside some threatened evil that was about to fall upon their homes.

Clodius sat alone in his tent at close of day. He was in command of forces that were to operate against one of those ever-swarming tribes that now and again threatened the far frontier of the over-grown empire, and were a constant tax upon its energy and resources. There had already been skirmishes between the Romans and their enemies, and a pitched battle was daily expected. The general's plans were matured and arranged, and the soldiery, who had the fullest confidence in their leader, were eagerly anticipating the conquest. But Clodius seemed, as ever, indifferent to all. His head resting upon his hand, he was lost in thought, his mind and memory busy with the past. As it happened, it was the anniversary of Valeria's death, a day always set apart by him as sacred so far as duty would permit, and a day on which more than ever his thoughts turned to that mysterious faith in which, and for which, she has died. Better than any other Roman of his rank and station, Clodius was competent to gauge the steady continuous progress and increase of the followers of Christ. His uniform kindness toward them, his quiet yet persistent, though concealed efforts to check the rage of persecution, had brought him into contact with the leaders of the movement many a time and oft. "What was there," he asked himself, "in this strange wondrous story of the Cross that could lead men and women, of all ranks and ages, to go willingly to death?" He had heard from some few Christian lips the first principles of the faith, but as yet in secret and by stealth, for they knew as well as he, that in propor-

tion as he consorted with them openly, his power to benefit and protect them would decrease, even if he himself were not placed in an unpleasant, nay, a dangerous position by his efforts on their behalf. As he mused and pondered, the curtain shrouding the opening of the tent was lifted, and his freedman stood in the entrance. He was the same as had been with him on the night they had visited Valeria's dungeon, and he had followed his fortunes ever since. Clodius looked up inquiringly.

"An old man desires an audience, and as a token"—the freedman's voice sank into a whisper—"bade me say that he is kin to one whom you lost nine years ago to-day."

The general started, but controlled himself.

"Admit him," he said briefly; and the other withdrew, returning in a moment and ushering in a man of venerable aspect.

"Do you not remember me, Clodius?" said the visitor, with a faint smile. "Have you forgotten Publius? You have not forgotten her who was once his daughter?" The other rose to his feet in wonder. Was this the lofty patrician whom he so well remembered? The new-comer guessed his thoughts.

"Sorrow changes us as well as Time," he said quietly. "I have sought many times to see you, but have ever been baffled till now. Your departure from Rome, the uncertainty of your movements, and my own changed position, together with the fact that my health was irremediably weakened by a long illness following on Valeria's death, all these things have kept us asunder. But the old regard for you was strong within me, and I have travelled far to see you once again. I hear that a great battle is expected, is that so?"

"Yes," replied the general, "to-morrow, or the next day at the latest. But there is no need to speak of my own career yet," he said. "Tell me of yourself. What have you been doing since we parted? Do you still serve the State?"

"I am an ambassador," said the other quietly.

"An ambassador!" repeated Clodius wonderingly.

"Yes, though an unworthy one, an ambassador of the kingdom of Heaven, of the Prince of Peace. Clodius Camillus, what think ye of Christ?" The question, so sudden, so unlooked-for, took Clodius by surprise.

"I know not what to think," he answered after a moment. "Would that some man would teach me!" There was a sorrowful accent in the tone that woke an echo in his hearer's heart.

"Clodius," he said gently, "you and I alike mourn one who died to-day, one who was very dear to both. Her life and death won me over to her faith, though she knew it not then. I would win you if I could, as she would also have done."

"She pleaded with me to the last," said the other, in a hoarse, husky voice; and they were both silent for awhile. Then Publius spoke again, at first in a low, kindly, persuasive tone, but gradually kindling into enthusiasm, poured into the willing ears of his listener the story of the Cross.

Time and sorrow and loneliness had lowered and subdued the native pride of the Roman general. From any lips he would have willingly received the Gospel now. How much the more from him who was the father of her he loved! Through the long evening, far into the night, they sat together; and, as the stars gleamed forth, they shone upon another soldier sworn to fight beneath Christ's banner to the death.

* * * *

Another day had come and gone; a great battle had been fought, and victory once more lighted upon the standards of Rome. The legions rested upon their arms, triumphant yet saddened. The strife had cost them dear. A javelin had struck down their leader, and his life was counted by hours. Faithful to the last, Flavius supported his master's head upon his shoulder, and ever and anon moistened the pale lips.

Suddenly the dying man opened his eyes, and Publius and the freedman stooped over him. "I can say them now," he murmured, but in so low a tone that they could scarcely hear. "I can say them now, those words she uttered when we parted. I know their meaning now. 'None but Christ, none but Christ!'" The pulse ceased, the head fell back—the soldier had gone to his Captain, the disciple to his Lord. Upon the pale grey face the freedman's tears fell thick and heavy, but the Christian stood erect beside the couch—though sorrowful, yet rejoicing—thanking God that so brave a soul had been won, though even "At the Eleventh Hour!"

R. Stanley Williams.

"I will not leave You Comfortless."

Come sit by me, my lassie, while I hold your hand to-night;
I've watched the stars since twilight, for I love their mystic light—
I mind me when a lad I crossed the brine like bird set free,
I always read some message in their silver rays for me.

'Tis such a long, long time since then, I cannot count the days,
I often thought that life was hard to understand and praise;
But what we christen life is but the waiting day by day
Till eyes have clearer vision, and we see the better way.

But waiting is not idling: there is much to say and do—
There are kindly words to utter, there is work for me and you.
Our greatest joy should be the task that life has set for each,
And joys should make us humble by the lessons that they teach.

The hardest task of all is that of learning how to wait;
But God is merciful, I trust, though some remember late,
The world has many wiles to lure, and men are only frail,
'Tis best to pity, not condemn, the hearts that try, but fail.

One day when life seemed bitter, and all hope was crushed by pain,
I heard a strain of music which refreshed me like the rain,
A voice I never heard till then came near with words to bless,
And said in accents low—"I will not leave you comfortless."

A deep content stole in my life, a trustful, calm delight,
A radiance pure and tender as the stars that shine to-night;
I know that voice was human, though it sounded so divine;
And suffering then seemed noble to the weary heart of mine.

And every day as life went by, I listened for that voice,
That something in the birds and flowers which made my heart rejoice,
And joy came in my life like Spring, it was new Spring for me,
An April bud whose flower should grow for God's eternity.

You understand me, lassie? Let me clasp your hand again,
Nay, do not weep, the purest joy is tinctured oft with pain,
There is no grief that I have felt that I would cancel now,
He suffered more who wore for us the thorns upon His brow.

And I have learnt to trust Him well in all He gives and takes,
There is a compensation saved for every heart that aches;
There is a grander sweetness given to souls that work and bear,
And holier meaning to a life that knows life's pangs and care.

He loves the most who feels the least of selfishness and pride;
All comes in God's own time to him who knows the way the bide;
Shall we be babies still, nor learn the alphabet of love,
That we may spell out gratitude, and lift our eyes above?

The time is nigh, I ween, when hearts of men shall closelier lean
With yearnings for the common good—and men as brothers meet.
More precious far than riches is the humble, struggling mind;
And oft the frailest floweret is the sweetest of its kind.

Griefs are God's messengers to show that He does not forsake,
To tell us that He deems us fit to suffer for His sake.
Strive not to catch to-morrow's wings: work now, lose, patient be,
In every day that passes by we hold eternity.

Harriet Kendall.

On helping One Another.

Of course every Christian who at all realises what the great law of love is knows that it is a distinct duty to help one another, and in this world to try and bear each other's burdens.

Duty is a cold kind of word to use, but still there are some souls who respond very heartily once they clearly recognise a thing as being their duty to do. Well, duty to your neighbour involves your helping him, and it is right that to the fullest extent you should endeavour to perform that duty. Let it be plainly set before you all—all you who, as working women, desire to act as your Lord would have you do—that you should try and help each other.

A wise and good man has most truly and beautifully expressed it—"No one comes near us, or across us, but it is through an intention of God, that we may help, soothe, or elevate him."

Now as you all know that charity begins at home you are aware that your duty lies first with those "near" you. Your family, your husband and children, those who work with you, those over you or those who work under you; to all these you owe the duty of helping them, and you will soon find out how to do it if you ask God to help you, show you and teach you.

You can help them by setting a good example. It is to be feared that very few people realise how great a hindrance to others a bad example is, but if they would only pause for a moment and consider the matter they would see the truth of this. If in your home you are careless of religion, stay away from church for trifling causes, are inattentive when there; if you omit having family prayers and are yourself constantly giving way to temper, whether it be sulky, irritable, peevish, or passionate; if you are impatient at troubles, murmuring at what God sends you in the way of trial and difficulty; if you speak unkindly of others, and judge them harshly, by all these things and many more you are setting a bad example, and that bad example may be followed by some one, although you may not know it at the time. Thus instead of helping those near you—you will be hindering them.

Then those across you. Those people who come accidentally in your way, and whom you call perhaps chance acquaintances. Well, they did not come across your life and your path by chance, remember that all is wisely ordered in God's providence, and that there is really no such thing as chance. If you only see them once or twice you still may help them.

It may be a poor pedlar who stops at your door to sell his wares. You can help him by a kind word, and perhaps be allowed to say something in season to him. Something that may help his soul far more than you ever imagined it possible your words could have done. You can help him thus, and surely you can help him temporally. In many ways you can obey this law of love, and go through life helping others. Helping by example and word, and sympathy expressed in many ways, those in your house, and out of it. Those you meet in the street or shop, or perhaps some one who is near you in church or in the train or omnibus. If you are on the look out and watch your opportunities you will find very many will be given you.

And surely if you really are a servant of the Lord Jesus you will soon get to do all this from love, and you will find the "love of Christ" constraining you. That will be the kind of duty it will be to you then; and it will indeed have a present reward. And as for the future you know that all done for Him will be recompensed. All acts of love and charity, even the very cup of cold water, will be glorified then in that Great Day when the King will stoop to crown them with His gracious "Inasmuch."

L. E. D.

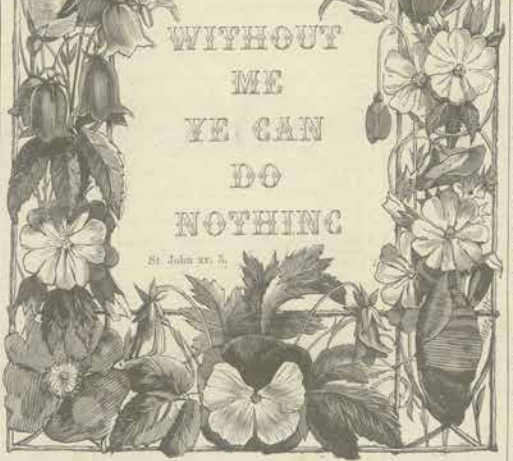
Thoughts on the Life of Moses.

Heb. xi. 24-26; Acts vii. 21-29.

MOSES was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. It was a great position for him to occupy. One in which riches and honour lay before him, and also the learning of a mighty people. We have evidence now remaining of the wisdom and greatness of Egyptians in early days. Their pictures cut in stone, their writings upon the ancient walls, are still to be seen. Their great stone figures—their wonderful pyramids, still the wonder and admiration of the world, are tokens of the wisdom of the Egyptians. Was it a light thing to live in the palace of the king of such a country? Moses did live there till he was forty years old (Act vii. 23). *Then* he threw it all up! What! was it possible that he could turn his back upon such a position? What could induce him to do so? The oppressed state of his brethren. Moses had a choice set before him. On the one hand, riches, greatness, prosperity, safety. On the other hand danger, difficulty, reproach, suffering. It was the great step of Moses's life, and he took the rough road. The same kind of step was put before Matthew when our Lord said to him, "Follow Me." We know that the business he was engaged in had made him a rich man, as he was able to make for our Lord a "great feast," in his house; but he arose to leave *all for* Christ, and bear the reproach of His name's sake. The same step was put before the rich ruler: "Sell that thou hast, and come, follow Me" (St. Mark x. 17-23); but *he* could not take the rough road with Christ, and he turned away to his "great possessions." There comes the same choice to most of us at some time or other in our lives. It may not be a choice between riches and poverty, but it will be a choice between the "broad" road and the "narrow." What *has* been, or what *will* be, our decision? We see what Moses chose. "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. xi. 25). The Israelites were an afflicted people, but they were the "people of *Him*," and Moses knew it; he knew that God was on their side, and it was better, Moses felt, to be with *them* than to be in Egypt. His palace life was very *grand*, but it was not *good*. We gather that from the word "the *pleasures of sin*." Sin has a terrible pleasure—sweet at first, but bitter afterwards! What is said of the sin of drunkenness is true of all other sin—"*At the last* it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder" (Prov. xxiii. 32). And sin creeps in everywhere—into the cottage and into the palace. Moses saw it in the palace, and looking forth perhaps from its windows he could see that land of hardly used, toiling people who were his brethren. A voice within him pleaded, "Give up all, for their sakes and God's." It was a *great* sacrifice. Moses asked himself perhaps more than once, "Can I give up all?" And then he said, "I will"—a blessed decision. But was it all *giving up*? St. Paul speaks of "a recompence" (Heb. xi. 26.) Was it an earthly recompence that was before him? In a measure it was so, for it was given to Moses to fill the position of a great leader. But this did not come to him without great trials, and we are sure that the "recompence" Paul speaks of must have been a heavenly one. Moses knew by faith that if he followed God and His people he would be sure of blessing in the future. "Treasure in heaven" was what Christ promised the rich young ruler, but *he* loved the earthly treasure best. He was like the man with the muck-rake of whom we read in "Pilgrim's Progress," who, occupied in raking together some glittering fragments among the dust, saw not the golden crown hanging over his head. It was not thus with Moses, he let Egypt go, *looking up* to the bright reward. There are some who think it is all *giving up* to be a Christian. No, indeed, it is *receiving*; and Moses counted it "greater riches" to join himself to Israel than to have what Egypt could give him. Egypt was rich for this world only; Israel was rich for the world to come. Earthly treasures soon pass away. The "pleasures of sin" are said to be but "*for a season*." Heavenly treasure *abides*. Thief cannot steal it, moth cannot corrupt it, it is "laid up," in the hand of God.

Moses's first step in taking up Israel's cause was a mistaken step. He saw one of his brethren beaten by an Egyptian. He slew the Egyptian, and hid his body in the sand (Ex. ii. 11, 12). God did not tell Moses to do this. His was in haste; he wanted to *save* his people all at once. His mistake is shown by the result. Next day two Hebrews strove together. Moses went to them, hoping to make peace, but he was met by the words, "Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" (Acts vii. 26, 27). It might have been thought that these people, so harshly used, would have been only too glad to have one come to them who would do anything for them. Their conduct seems very ungrateful. Perhaps Moses was allowed to have this trial to teach him *patience*. God's time is often not our time. When a man thinks that he is going to do great things God has often to teach him that he can do *nothing*! "Without Me ye can do nothing" (St. John xv. 5). "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor. iii. 5.) *Without* God *nothing*, but *with* God *all things*; this is a great lesson for every Christian. Finding that his brethren misunderstood him and reproached him for having slain the Egyptian, Moses had to flee and hide himself, and it was a *long* time—forty years—before he was allowed to do the work he so desired. It was in this way that God prepared him to be His servant. God cannot use a *proud* man. The lowly pass and the weak ones are ready to God's Hand. "God hath chosen the weak things of the world;" and why? "That no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. i. 26, 29). If we glory in ourselves, God will have to bring us down. God intended to do great things by Moses, but he must *be low first*. May we be made willing to be in ourselves nothing, that "God may be all in all."

MARGARET ECDAILE.



WISE SAYINGS FROM CHINA.—Here are a few Chinese sayings handed down for over two thousand years:—Regard faithfulness and sincerity as first principles. A good man is serene; a bad man always in fear. To see what is right, and not to do, it is want of courage. —*Confucius.*

Under the Microscope.

BY CHARLES WORTH.

THE inventor of the microscope may with truth be described as the discoverer of a new world. The possessor of a microscope has that given him which may be likened to the return of sight to a blind man. Thousands of objects which it would be impossible for him to see, and scarcely imagine, may by its aid be easily observed. The microscope has done more to make us acquainted with the wonders of Nature than anything which the genius of man has yet invented. There is scarcely any science to which it has not been an assistance;

but for anatomy, physiology, botany, zoology, mineralogy, geology, and medicine, it has now become a necessity.

Its name is derived from two Greek words—*mikros*, small, and *skopio*, I see. Its early history is involved in obscurity, but in its simplest form it was probably known before the Christian era. The first compound microscope, the parent of the present form, is said to have been invented by one Zacharias Janson, a Dutchman, in 1590; this was a very imperfect instrument, distorting all objects, and colouring the edges with the prismatic colours. For many years the microscope was looked upon more as a toy than a useful scientific instrument. It was not until the invention of the achromatic lens—that is, a lens free from colour—by Hall and Dollond, and its application to the microscope by Lister and his contemporaries, that it attained to the position which it now holds, not only as an aid to all scientific investigations, but as a source of wonder and delight to the uninitiated possessor. It is to these amateur observers that we particularly desire to address ourselves.

First of all, a word about the microscope itself. Many people appear to be possessed with the idea that it is necessary to expend a considerable sum of money in the purchase of an instrument, being chiefly guided in their ideas by the elaborated and expensive specimens which they see exhibited in the shopwindows of opticians. Such as these are not for beginners. A very good microscope, with two object glasses, may be bought for about thirty shillings, sufficient for all purposes to which a beginner can put it. The simpler the instrument the better; the most essential thing to observe in choosing is that you get good glasses. They may be tested by their power of showing minute markings; and be particular to notice that the outside of the field of view is not tinged with colour, and that the object magnified is as clear at the edges as in the centre. It is much better to begin with low powers, so that a two-inch and a one-inch object glasses will be best. A glass shade to keep it under is necessary, and is better than a case, as it obviates the necessity of taking it to pieces when done with; and if interrupted you can easily put the objects you are working and all under it without the trouble of packing anything away. For manipulating the various objects, a pair of forceps, some needles fixed in handles, and some camel's-hair pencils are necessary, as well as a sharp knife, or, better still, a razor ground flat on one side, for making sections. Some oblong pieces of glass, and their circles or covering glasses, will complete the equipment. We shall say something about the mounting of specimens later on.

And now let us take a few common objects, such as are always ready to the hand of the owner, and try to look at them with the eyes of the amateur who is seeing them for the first time. For instance, let us look at the various parts of this fly which we have just immolated on the altar of science. We will take the wing first, and place it under the microscope. We find that what to the naked eye looks like a piece of plain shiny skin is in reality covered with minute stiff, short hairs, and the black network of lines, which may be seen without any assistance, are elastic, horny tubes, over which the membrane of the wing is stretched, like the silk over the ribs of an umbrella. If we have carefully removed the wing from the main body, we may examine the muscle by which it is joined to the thorax; it is of the same size all through, and, compared with the size of the insect, of immense power. It has been computed that the fly makes six hundred *strokes* with its wings *every second*, and, if startled, can fly a distance of thirty feet in that time.

But let us remove the wing and place under the microscope what is, perhaps, the most wonderful part of the fly, the structure of the mouth. This little insect lives entirely by suction, and is provided with what we may correctly call a trunk or proboscis, which is as essential to the tiny fly as to the colossal elephant. A portion of this trunk is packed away in the head when not in use, but is extended and stiffened by an elbow joint, as you may easily see if you watch the little robber feeding in the sugar basin. Within this miniature trunk is a beautiful arrangement of muscles which work after the manner of a pump; as particles of sugar are sucked up and moistened by the saliva, these muscles contract, causing the sides of the pharynx, or upper portion of the trunk, to stiffen, thus creating a vacuum into which the fluid rushes, the muscles then relax and the food is passed on to the gullet.

A MOTHER'S TEACHING.

Every one must have noticed how quick the fly is in detecting the approach of danger, which may be accounted for by each of its eyes being divided into several parts, each of which is a perfect eye. If we look at the eye through the microscope we shall see that it is divided into minute hexagons, like a piece of honeycomb, fitting closely together; each of these is covered with a transparent membrane which forms the front part of the eyeball called the cornea. There are said to be about 2,000 of these to each eye. If we are desirous of proving that each of these hexagon facets, as they are called, is a perfect eye, we may easily do so by placing a portion of the eye under the microscope, and passing a small object between the stage and the mirror, when, by a little adjustment, we may obtain a reflection of it in all of the eyes.

The foot of the fly is so perfectly arranged that it allows the insect to walk upside down on the ceiling with the greatest ease. Several theories were successively started to account for this. First it was stated the feet were suckers, and the phenomenon might in this way be explained, as it was by means of exhaustion and atmospheric pressure they walked. This idea was afterwards scouted, and it was said that the foot was a sort of grappling iron which hooked itself on to microscopic atoms by means of invisible hooks. Then the feet was proclaimed that the foot was something like a glue-pot which exuded a natural gum, gluing the foot to the ceiling at every step. But let us look at the foot for ourselves. At the end we shall see there are two hooks or claws; above these are the pads or cushions to preserve them, which no doubt were the original stickers; and this pad is also furnished with a number of hairlets, that exude a sticky fluid, so, as frequently happens in scientific observations that are made known in sections we find a large measure of truth, in each of the foregoing hypotheses.

All insects are furnished with little breathing holes, called spiracles—oval disks sunken in little pits—which are black with a white centre, situated in various parts of their bodies. The entrances to these spiracles is differently defended, but all are provided with some contrivance to prevent the ingress of dust and dirt. Some have a trap door, some are covered with a gauzy net, while others have an arrangement like a colander. In the fly the entrance is defended by minute hairs which cross each other and form a kind of sieve. The largest are situated in the thorax, or middle part of the insect, and some others, much smaller, in the under part of the abdomen.

We have now examined most of the external parts of a fly, we next come to the internal organs, and this is a rather more difficult operation, requiring a little practice and some patience before we can hope to perform it successfully. It may be facilitated by first soaking the fly in spirits for a short time, which hardens the muscles and nerves and renders them easier of manipulation. Perhaps many of our readers may be unaware that a fly has a veritable crop and gizzard, which may be easily traced under the microscope. If we open the fly carefully we shall find that the alimentary canal commences at the base of the trunk, passing round the brain it enters the middle part of the insect, or thorax, this portion forming the gullet. It then divides, and the food, coming down the gullet, travels along one fine branch which leads to the crop. After remaining there for a time it is brought up again, and passes along the other branch to the gizzard where it is digested. The gizzards of some insects are furnished with several rows of teeth, but as the fly lives entirely upon suction they are not needed and are consequently absent.

The beginner must not be disappointed if at first he is unable to see all we have stated respecting the fly; at least, we have indicated the chief peculiarities for which he should seek. It will doubtless be some little time before he is able to make a satisfactory dissection under the microscope; but the difficulties are only such as may be overcome by ordinary perseverance. One thing that will bother him at first, is, that the object is presented wrong end uppermost; in other words, the object is always the reverse in looking through the microscope to what it is when looking at it with the eye only; the right side becomes the left, and the left right, but in a little while the observer becomes accustomed to this.

Harold's Story.

By Edith C. Kenyon.

CHAPTER V.

THE EFFECT OF THE STRANGER'S WORDS.

As the stranger rapidly climbed the hill, until he was lost to sight amid the curves of the winding path, we boys stood and looked after him, half mechanically and half in amazement.

Then Alick exclaimed, "What a rare old codger he was, and what a queer tale! Guess it wasn't true. Come on, and let's be quick, or we shall have precious little skating!" So saying, he hurried forward, followed by Sydney, whistling lustily, perhaps to drown the uncomfortable reflections which the story had aroused, for he, being quicker witted than his brother, would, I felt sure, understand what it meant.

But oh! neither of them knew, as I did, the whole force of the lesson conveyed in the tale, and how the stranger had laid bare my base ingratitude to the Son of the King of kings.

Who was he that he knew about my having been brought up when young so differently to my cousins? How I wished I could find him again that I might question him! I would try; the others had gone on, and I was left alone, they would scarcely miss me for a time.

So thinking, I turned and began to climb the steep path up which the stranger had gone; it was more like a sheep-walk than a path for human beings. On and on I went, looking eagerly for some trace of the mysterious man; but, at last, I gained the top of the hill without seeing anything of him.

How cold it was up there. A thin coating of frost and snow covered everything; but I was very hot with hurrying, so I sat down on a great stone, and, burying my face in my hands, tried to think it all over.

I remembered my mother—how tenderly she had screened me from everything that was harmful, and how earnestly and lovingly she had tried to instil into my young mind the love of all that was good, and of the exceeding beauty of holiness. Ah! mother, that was no dream in those days, however I might have learnt to regard it since. How I had fallen! Would my mother have known her boy in his present character of a habitual Sabbath-breaker.

Then some evil spirit seemed to whisper, "Whose fault is it that you are living in a situation so averse to a better, holier life?" And I thought bitterly—yes, even angrily—of my father. For I had paid little heed to my mother's declaration of his innocence, because, child as I was, I knew she always took the most lenient view of the faults of others—and, besides that, she loved him.

"Would that I had never had a father!" I muttered. "It is all his fault, too, that I was led to tell a lie." For when my cousins had taken it for granted he was dead, I had assented, at first silently, but at last, in answer to much questioning, I had told them he died when I was a baby, and that I could not remember having ever seen him, which latter was the only true part of my assertion. And now I felt overwhelmed with shame and regret that I had done so. It was no use trying to lay the blame upon my father. I knew I had been ungrateful to the great good King. What must He think of me?

The Good Shepherd would be tender and full of compassion. With the thought of that came better impulses, and something like a prayer fell from my lips.

But now the intense cold made me rise and hurry down the hill. As I did so and proceeded to the lake where my cousins were skating, I resolved to try to do right in future.

So when I joined my cousins, I did not put on my skates, but stood watching them until Sydney came up to me.

"I suppose you won't skate any more on Sundays, Harold, it only required a Primitive Methodist preacher's eloquence to rob our noble cousin of all pluck and courage!" So saying, with a withering smile of contempt and a gesture of disdain, he skated away again.

Then Alick approached. "Sydney says you're the most out-and-out muff he ever saw, Harold!" he exclaimed, "but I won't go against you this time if you'll just lend me your skates. Now do, there's a good fellow, mine are such horrid ones."

Though firmly resolved I would not skate myself, it did cost me a struggle to hand over my nice new skates to Alick. For I had been saving my pocket-money to buy them for months, and this was the first occasion on which I was to have used them. I longed to try how they would act; and Alick so often spoilt things.

Alick seemed to observe the struggle that was going on within me, and how wistfully I looked at my property as I handed it over, but he only said, "Well, I must say, too, I never did see such a muff as you are, Harold!"

With flashing eyes, I sprang forward saying, "Give me my skates back."

But he said, "Nay, nay, I've got them now, besides I did not mean anything but a little friendly advice. For it so foolish of you, Harry, not to skate."

Somewhat appeased, I turned away and walked along thoughtfully by the side of the lake. Then hearing a slight noise, I glanced up to the top of some steep rocks on one side of the water, and I thought I saw the figure of a man looking down upon us.

Could it be the stranger? But no, how could that be? He had gone in such a totally different direction. However, my curiosity was roused, and I ascended by a rather round-about way to the place where I thought I had seen him. There was no trace of any human being, though, up there, only I fancied, quite away in the distance, I heard a deep voice singing,—

"There is a happy land far, far away;"

and it seemed to comfort me and confirm me in my new resolutions.

By-and-by, I went slowly home, but when I was nearly there, remembering it would be as well if my uncle did not hear what had passed, I walked back to meet my cousins.

They came, at last, seeming very tired, and talking in extremely angry tones.

When they saw me they stopped abruptly, and looked at each other as if in consternation.

"What is the matter?" I asked suspiciously, looking for my new skates, but not seeing them anywhere.

"It was Alick's fault!" cried Sydney.

"It was all Sydney's doing!" cried Alick.

"You lie, Sydney."

"No, I don't—you do."

"Oh, hush," I said; "tell me what you have done with my skates, where are they?"

By degrees the story was told. It seemed a great number of poor boys had come to slide on the ice, many of whom kept looking wistfully at Alick's pair of skates, which he had hung on a low tree, that he might see from time to time if they were safe. No one offered to touch them, and, after a time, thinking my new ones were rather small for him and that he would rather have his own, he changed them once more, soon after that a tall, ragged boy came up and proposed that he should try and have a race with him to the other side of the water, the boy maintaining that he did think he could run as fast as any skating. So Alick stupidly accepted the proposal, first, however, taking the precaution to ask Sydney to look after the skates. But Sydney's attention was absorbed in cutting figures to the intense and frequently loudly expressed admiration of the spectators, besides, he declared he had told Alick he would not look after them for he was foolish to run a race with a ragged boy.

As might have been expected, when Alick returned the skates were gone, and all the boys were disappearing in different directions.

"I could not possibly have caught the thief," he said, "though I took off my skates at once that I might do what I could. But it wasn't the least use, for by the time my feet were at liberty there wasn't a boy in sight."

"Of course there wasn't! I wonder who is the greatest muff now?" I cried indignantly; then, smothering my anger as well as I could, for we were not far from home, and my uncle's burly figure could be seen in the distance, I added, "But I won't do anything; no, I won't even want you to help me to buy another pair, if you'll both promise not to tell uncle or any one else what has happened to-day, and if you'll keep it quiet when I don't skate with you on Sundays, because I don't think I ever shall again, for I'm sure it's wrong to do so."

"Agreed," said the boys, with an air of relief, "we won't tell of you, if you won't of us about your skates."

Then they went across a field to join their father, while I went on alone to the house, thinking how very hard it was to do right, and almost repenting in my grief at the loss of my skates, that I had not used them as usual, and so kept them safe.

But when I went to bed that night, a little earlier than Alick and Sydney, that I might have time to say my prayers in peace, I felt almost happy again, and after I had fallen asleep I dreamt of the "better land" and of my mother there and brother Alick.

CHAPTER VI.

GOOD RESOLUTIONS.

At tea time the next day Kate asked abruptly, "Harry, how did you like your new skates?"

I looked up, stammered, and muttered, "Pretty well."

"They are good ones, aren't they, Alick?" said Sydney.

"Yes," said Alick slowly, "but they did not quite fit me."

"Did Harry let you try them. How very good of him," exclaimed Aunt Patty, smiling at me.

"It's a wonder he did not spoil them," remarked his father.

"I should think you had a good time of it on Sunday, hadn't you, Harry, with new skates and such a grand frost?" continued Katie.

"Of course we had," interposed Sydney quickly, as I was hesitating how to answer. "What a chatterbox you are, Katie, instead of passing a poor fellow some cake."

"The poor fellow is as near it as I am," retorted Katie, briskly, "and I did not know it was the fashion for ladies to wait on gentlemen."

A lively discussion ensued on the duty of politeness, and the subject of skating was dropped for a time.

The next two Sundays, as the frost continued, I went with my cousins to the lake as usual, though I did not skate, but wandered up and down instead, feeling very disconsolate and forlorn. Sometimes I stood so long in one place that I became very cold, then I would run round the lake to warm myself, until I felt so hot and tired that I had to sit down on a bank to rest and cool again. Altogether, it was a great wonder that I did not take cold, but I was then a very strong, hardy little fellow.

It was very tedious, however, waiting for the boys. And then I was not quite sure whether it was much, if any, better for me to come with them without skating, as it deceived a number of people, every one at home thinking I skated, too; and when they talked about it it led to not a few untruths, if not from my lips, at any rate from my companions. Yet I had not courage enough to tell them plainly I thought it wrong to skate on Sundays, and would much rather go to church.

On the second Sunday I took a small pocket Bible with me, thinking, as I longed so much to do right, I might read a little while waiting for my companions.

It was a fine, clear day, and the thin covering of snow upon the ground shone and sparkled as the pale wintry sunlight rested upon it, while every twig and tiny branch of the trees and bushes about was traced out fantastically by the active fingers of Jack Frost. The ice, however, was, to the delight of my cousins, swept carefully in all the best places.

"Jolly this!" said Alick, with a smile of satisfaction.

"Ah! but look there!" cried Sydney.

A solitary figure was skating at a little distance.

"Never mind. I dare say we have as good right to be here as he has." So saying, Alick sat down to put on his skates, and, muttering that he did not care to be with strangers, Sydney followed his example, while I walked slowly on alone.

By-and-by I found a sheltered nook behind a great rock, and, sitting down on a stone, began to read. At

first I turned over the pages rather recklessly, not feeling at all good or in the humour for Bible reading, for, I fear, in my heart I was really longing after the forbidden pleasure of skating. Before long, however, I became interested in the story of David and Goliath. Years had passed since I had heard that story from my mother's lips, and now it filled me with wonder and admiration. Walking slowly up and down, as the cold made it impossible to sit more than a minute or two with any comfort, I read and thought, and read and thought, until it seemed to me the whole piece was an appeal to me in my weakness to be "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." It was He who gave the young David strength and skill to conquer the great giant. He had equal power to enable me to overcome the giant of my fears. How cowardly I had been.

I would come forward boldly now, and express my determination to keep the Sabbath holy, and in all things to live like a good soldier and servant of our Lord Jesus—I *would* be brave!

"You seem to have an interesting book there," said a rich manly voice at my side, and, looking up, I saw the gentleman who had been skating alone when we came. He was looking at me earnestly, but with a half-mocking expression on his handsome face.

My fingers involuntarily closed over my little Bible. How strange he would think it if I told him what I was reading! His present employment showed he would not admire my fears. Alas, the book was hidden in my pocket, as I answered indifferently, "Oh, it's nothing particular."

"Why don't you skate?"

I muttered something about having lost my skates, and turned hot and then cold.

"Lost your skates, how?" exclaimed the gentleman.

Sydney, who had just come up to us, explained that they had been stolen.

"Dear me," said the gentleman, sympathisingly; "dear me, how very trying it must be for you to look on and not be able to join your companions. *Dear me*, why does not your father get you another pair of skates?"

I coloured, and said my mother was dead.

"Poor boy! But I said your father; surely he would get you a pair," continued the gentleman, looking at me with great interest and concern.

I grew crimson and my eyes filled with distress and shame.

"He is an orphan," said Sydney, laying his hand affectionately on my arm, and adding, "but he lives with us, and is just like another son to our parents."

"Dear! dear! I'm very sorry, my boy, I have pained you so much," said the gentleman, in a tone of sorrow; "but now, since I have heard all this, will you kindly tell me your name?"

"Harold Mortimer."

"And mine is Captain Merdant," said my new friend, "and I am staying at present at the house close by. Well, I hope I shall see more of you. Good-by for the present." So saying, he wheeled round and skated to the other side of the lake, where I saw him, soon afterwards, take off his skates and walk away.

But I was very uncomfortable. How cowardly I had been—having hidden my Bible as though I were ashamed of it, and then having made the gentleman believe a lie. Oh, why had Sydney come up! I might have ventured to say my father was not dead if he had not been there; but how astonished he would have been if he had heard that. What a great amount of deceit of mine it would have exposed.

How very wicked I had been!

I began to read again. This time, to my horror, the Bible opened to the story of Ananias and Sapphira: was not their deceit, their silent falsehood, which St. Peter called "lying to God," very much like mine. They wanted, and tried, to make men believe what was not true. Had not I done the same? Death had befallen them—death sudden and instantaneous. Death for ever might be my portion, for I remembered "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Trembling violently, I determined to bear anything rather than go on in a course of deception; and just then something happened as if to test my resolution.

(*To be continued.*)

Christmas Customs.

SOME of the old Christmas-tide customs and superstitions contain remnants of ancient fire-worship. On Christmas-eve it was deemed very unlucky to allow the fire to go out, and if by accident it was extinguished, it was difficult to obtain a light to re-kindle it. Superstitious folk believed if they permitted a light to be taken out of their houses, that good luck would depart with it. A curious ceremony, initiated at an early period in our history, lingered down to the beginning of the present century in Herefordshire, and other parts of old England. The *Gentleman's Magazine*, and other periodicals and newspapers, give notices of the old usage. A local journal of January 7, 1830, states:—"On the eve of old Christmas day there are thirteen fires lighted in the corn-fields of many of the farms, twelve of them in a circle and one round a pole, much larger and higher than the rest, in the centre. These fires are dignified with the names of the Virgin Mary and Twelve Apostles, and while they are burning the labourers retire into some shed or outhouse, where they can behold the brightness of the apostolic flame. Into this shed they lead a cow, on whose horn a large plum cake has been stuck, and, having assembled round the animal, the oldest labourer, our temperance friends will be amused to hear, takes a pail of cider and addresses the following lines to the cow with great solemnity, after which the verse is chanted in chorus by all present:—

'Here's to thy pretty face and thy white horn,
God send thy master a good crop of corn;
Both wheat, rye, and barley, and all sorts of grain,
And next year, if we live, we'll drink to thee again.'

He then dashes the cider in the cow's face, when, by a violent toss of her head, she throws the plum cake on the ground, and, if it falls forward, it is an omen that the next harvest will be good; if backward, that it will be unfavourable. This is the ceremony at the commencement of the rural feast, which is generally prolonged to the following morning."

WM. ANDREWS, F.R.H.S.

By Thorny Paths.

IT'S for the last time, Jenny."

"And a good thing too, isn't it Bill?"

A shade passed over the face of the young man at the girl's jesting answer. It was a pity she should have spoken so just then, for there was a ring of sadness in his tone, and almost wistfully he looked down at his companion and asked:

"Won't you be a bit sorry to miss me evenings, Jenny, and will you think on me once in a while?"

"It won't be very long before you're back again, I guess, Bill; and meantime I'll be bound to find some other fine fellow to keep me in hand while you're gone." She glanced up at him saucily to see how he took these words.

It was strange her mood should be so light on that evening, the last for many long days, it might be years, that Bill Myers would be by her side to be vexed and teased, or coaxed and fascinated, as her will might be, by pretty, winsome Jenny Clarkson, whose volatile nature sought always sunshine and merriment, careful to throw off each touch of sorrow, and to avoid all the disagreeable and more serious side of life.

They walked silently along the top of the high cliffs, below which the water was gently soughing against the jagged rocks. The blue sky deepened and darkened, stars gleamed one by one from the soft firmament, and the evening shades sank down on the peaceful sea. Bill Myers's honest face wore a more downcast look than was often seen upon it, as if the gathering gloom of nature were falling too on his spirit. Presently he stopped short, and turning on Jenny, he suddenly took both her hands, and held them in a firm clasp.

"Jenny, my girl, I don't, not for a moment, believe you meant what you said about another fellow, else I shouldn't trouble to say what I'm coming to; you're merry and gay as a young thing like you ought to be, and I know you're a bit fond, perhaps over fond, of making free and teasing a chap, but I'll not think it of you that you could play me false after what's been goin' on between us this last year and more. Howsomever, I'm goin' to speak plainer, and I'll ask you to answer me the same, will you, Jenny?"

"In course I will." She was startled, in spite of herself, by his earnestness, and listened quietly enough now.

"'Tain't much to say, dear, not the words ain't, but I don't mind telling you that it's more than all the rest of the world to me how you give your answer to it. Do you love me truly, my girl, and will you keep faithful to me till I come back to wed you?" He added no word of persuasion; the force of the appeal lay in the simple intensity of the man's feeling.

"I *do* love you, Bill; and I'll never take up with no other. Oh, Bill, don't you stay over long away now, don't you!"

Her impressionable nature was touched, and she sobbed almost wildly as she lifted her face, streaming with tears, and clung to him lovingly as he kissed her again and again, whispering to her all the fond words which he would not use to cajole her promise from her.

It was not long that sweet happy dream—sweet in spite of the bitterness of the near farewell, and with a happiness that no doubt or misgiving could cloud; but it was soon over, the last good-bye said, the last kiss given, the promise repeated once more, and Jenny went home to cry herself to sleep, nearer, if she had only known it, to becoming a noble woman that night of mingled joy and sorrow than she had ever been, or might be again. And Bill Myers, on his long night journey to join his regiment, on the point of starting for foreign service, cared for nothing but the warmth that was in his heart, and the glow which thrilled him each time he heard again the soft "I *do* love you, Bill."

Twelve months had passed since that evening walk on the cliffs, and it was the eve of Jenny's wedding day. Tom Ellis, the son of Farmer Ellis, of Holly Farm, had lately set up for himself, and drove a thriving trade as butcher in one of the finest shops of the principal street of the rising town of Hamerton. He had long set his heart on winning Jenny Clarkson for his wife; his rival had triumphed over him, but he waited his time, nor did he find it a very difficult matter to persuade her that he, present, was worth more than Bill Myers absent. The girl's vanity was his greatest help. She was flattered by his attentions, and it was a grand thing for her to have brought this prosperous young man, well known to have been a fickle swain to many who would have been glad to have him, into bondage at last.

There were not wanting warning voices which told her that his life and habits were not what they should be. Jenny heeded nothing, though she knew that he sometimes took a glass too much, and had more than once forgotten himself, and let fall an oath in her presence. But he was a well-to-do, dashing young fellow, and gratified her love of flattery, gave her handsome presents, and promised her, as his wife, all that gaiety, care, and ability to dress finely, which she so dearly loved.

She did not often think of Bill, not oftener than she could help; letter writing was irksome to her, and after one or two short notes, she had left his epistles unanswered, until, wearied with her silence, he too ceased to write. Sometimes, it is true, in moments when she was alone, his manly face would rise up in her memory, and once or twice when joining in some wilder levity and dissipation than even her easy conscience would sanction, suddenly his frank, serious eyes would seem to be fixed sorrowfully upon her.

His straightforward manliness and honest uprightness had aroused, though but so transiently, the girl's higher impulses. Though she was betrothed to Tom Ellis, and proud of her future position, yet the pure happiness of that other courtship could never be hers with a man who did not hesitate to take her to the public bar to share his glass, and would have laughed at any scruples as to the company into which he chose to introduce her.

Jenny was busy on this last evening of her unmarried life with some final preparations for the next day. She had not seen Tom since the early morning, when he had called on his way to Newmouth, the nearest large market town, where he was going to make some purchases and transact some business.

She was rather surprised when bedtime approached and he did not come as he had promised; but as it grew late she thought something had prevented his return, and went to her room.

She was suddenly awakened by a knocking at the

front door, and heard her father unlock it, then came the sound of feet and low voices. Her curiosity aroused, she slipped on her dress, and crept softly down the stairs till she could peep through the chink of the sitting-room door. But what a sight met her startled eyes!

"He was just dead drunk, there's no mistake about that, sir, I'm sorry to say. Why, no sober man could have missed the path in broad moonlight, let alone there's the smell, and this here found in his pocket—it's just a wonderful chance it were not smashed to pieces." The policeman held out a small bottle of brandy, not quite half full, to Jenny's father, who stood listening, stupified with horror, while the men who had brought the body told how they had found it lying at the bottom of the cliffs.

"Father, he is not dead; send for the doctor!" It was Jenny who entered, pale, with dilated eyes, but walking steadily through the little group to kneel down beside the motionless form.

It was one of the others who answered :—

"He'll be here in less than no time, we comed by his house and he wasn't within, but they sent straight after him—'tain't no manner of use though, he's gone."

"Yes, he's gone, Jenny." It was her mother who gently repeated the cruel words; but her daughter paid no attention to her, she only said again :—

"He is not dead: why does not the doctor come?"

Just then he arrived, and overheard her words.

"The girl is right, he is alive," was his verdict, as he bent over the unconscious man.

Then they took him upstairs, and Jenny was left alone.

Mechanically still, she made up the fire and prepared all that she thought might be wanted, then she sat and waited.

She had uttered no cry and shed no tear, it was as though mind and senses were paralysed. He was alive, but although she had been the first to divine this, there was little hope in her heart.

To-morrow—it was already to-day; but the blinds were closed and she did not realize that the night was passed—the day of her wedding would be, instead, the day of his death! Perhaps Jenny had never really prayed before, but her voiceless prayer went up now, dumbly her heart cried out to Him who alone has power to help in our extremities.

"My poor girl, you'll have no wedding, it's over with his marryin' days." Her mother descended at last, and sought her stricken child. The white face grew whiter, and the lips moved, striving to express the words she could not speak.

"He'll likely live, they say," she answered quickly, answering the mute appeal; "but he'll be a hopeless cripple, poor lad, poor lad; and he with no mother neither."

Jenny made little sign even now, the dull tension relaxed somewhat, she let her mother kiss her, and obediently went to bed as she advised, then she fell into a deep sleep, and did not wake, until her marriage day was already half over.

When she rose, she went straight to the sick room.

"It's all the same as if I was his wife," she replied, when they tried to get her away; and she nursed him, with her mother's help, through all the long weeks of suffering that followed.

"If he lives we shall be married just the same mother," she said, one time when her mother was crying over the sad ending of the grand preparations which had been made, and was busying herself in carefully folding and putting away the bridal finery, a task which Jenny herself had never thought of.

And in spite of all remonstrances, she held, quietly, but firmly, to this resolution. As soon as he was well enough, they endeavoured to persuade him to show her the impossibility of this; but her first words made him silent.

"I belong to you just as if there'd been the service read, and that night, whenever I saw you was alive, I said to myself, I said it to God, Tom, as how I'd be a faithful wife if you was only spared, so don't say nothing more, dear; who should take care of you but me?"

And they were married as soon as he could be moved from his bed to the sofa.

Very different from the life her brilliant hopes had pictured were the years that succeeded. Many pitied the young and pretty wife tied to the helpless man whom she tended with such devoted care.

And yet how much better, how much more truly happy were even the darkest of those days, to what might have been her lot had it been otherwise.

Bound to his couch of weariness, often of pain, Tom Ellis was a changed man, and bore his sufferings with Christian fortitude. Jenny had always had the germs of good in her, and from that night when her whole being was overturned by the terrible shock she received, her finer nature triumphed.

They settled at Holly Farm with old Mr. Ellis, and if life there was necessarily monotonous, it was not without its deeper joys; and when, three years after the accident, Tom gradually sank until he quietly passed away to a better home, his wife mourned for him long, and missed painfully the loving duties which had filled her days.

"You've been the best wife a man ever had, my Jenny. I thank God every day that he gave you to me. I wouldn't have it other than it is, darling—not if our wedding day could come again as we'd meant it to be, these years have been the best of my life." The words were amongst the last he ever spoke, and Jenny treasured them as her greatest possession.

His years of service passed, Bill Myers returned to his native land. He had heard of Jenny's marriage, but no particulars had reached him. He was very lonely in the world, and when his leave of absence set him free, impulse brought him again to Hamerton.

Passing round the cliffs on the afternoon of his arrival, he strolled up the hills beyond, stopping to lean on a farmyard gate, and watch the cows assembled there for milking. As he stood, a step approaching caused him to turn his head, and advancing towards him he saw the girl whom he had left his promised wife; and now they met almost as strangers.

She knew him at once—had known him even before he turned—and gave him a calm, though kindly greeting as he held out his hand to her. It was the same piquant countenance, but with a sweeter, softer expression; her black dress made her fair face—paler than it used to be—yet fairer. He noticed it all as he walked by her side through the farmyard and in at the open house-door.

There was an old man seated beside the fire; he was very infirm, and evidently deaf, for he took no notice of their entrance, till Jenny touched him gently, and said slowly and clearly, though not very loud—

"Father, here is a visitor. You remember him, don't you?"

Bill felt as though it was all a dream. He talked to the old man, trying his best to find the right pitch of voice to penetrate his dull ears; he watched Jenny, and exchanged some observations with her, but he asked few questions, nor did she volunteer any personal news of the time of his absence. Soon he got up to go.

"Eh, lass, ain't you goin' to give us a cup of tea? That's not like you, Jenny, to let a neighbour go without bit nor sup; you'll stay, sir, and welcome, if you're not tired of an old man's chatter?"

But Bill would not remain; he only promised to come again.

He found his way many times to the farm, and his stay in Hamerton lengthened out to weeks. He did not ask himself why. There was no need to ask. He knew all about Jenny's history now, partly from herself, but more from the old man's garrulous talk; he was never tired of telling the story of her faithfulness to Tom.

"She's the right stuff in her, she has, sir," he would say to his unwearied listener. "Talk of love strong as death, it was most more than that, I'm thinking, for that young lass to give herself to my poor son. It might have been for a long lifetime, too, they were both so young. Well, he's gone, and he was a good one, sure. I'm not saying but what the Lord's way were best, though 'twas a rough one. Howsomever, there's no doubtin' 'twas the turnin' of him, that there accident; yet 'twas hard to see him lie so helpless, and ofttimes weary."

Then he would wipe the trickling tear away, and begin again his never-ending memories.

"I've been living at the farm ever since Tom died, but now the youngest son is coming to manage it altogether, and his wife will take my place; so I shall go back home again." Jenny spoke sadly, for it was the end of the task which she had set herself on that eventful night when she took it up as a duty, but had found in it both sweetness and love. It was finished, and had been faithfully discharged. Her life seemed to have grown doubly empty now that the care of his infirm old father had passed into other hands.

They were standing at the farm gate—she and Bill.

"Jenny, I've not changed to you—shall we begin again where we left off before? I know you can be faithful now." It was the only shadow of reproach he ever breathed. She looked up in his face.

"Can you forgive me, Bill? I never knew till *that* night what wrong I'd done you"—then faltering and low, "and myself too." Faith to the dead husband whom she had grown to love with something of a mother's love for her helpless child, mingled with a tender reverence for his noble endurance that ever remained to her a sanctified memory, forbade all clearer words, but Bill understood enough.

He folded her in his strong arms: "Just say it, again, Jennie, them words I've carried with me always, darling, but never thought to hear again."

"I do love you, Bill."

Even the suffering and sorrow brought on us by sin our merciful Father turns to our highest good.

EMMIE LARTER.