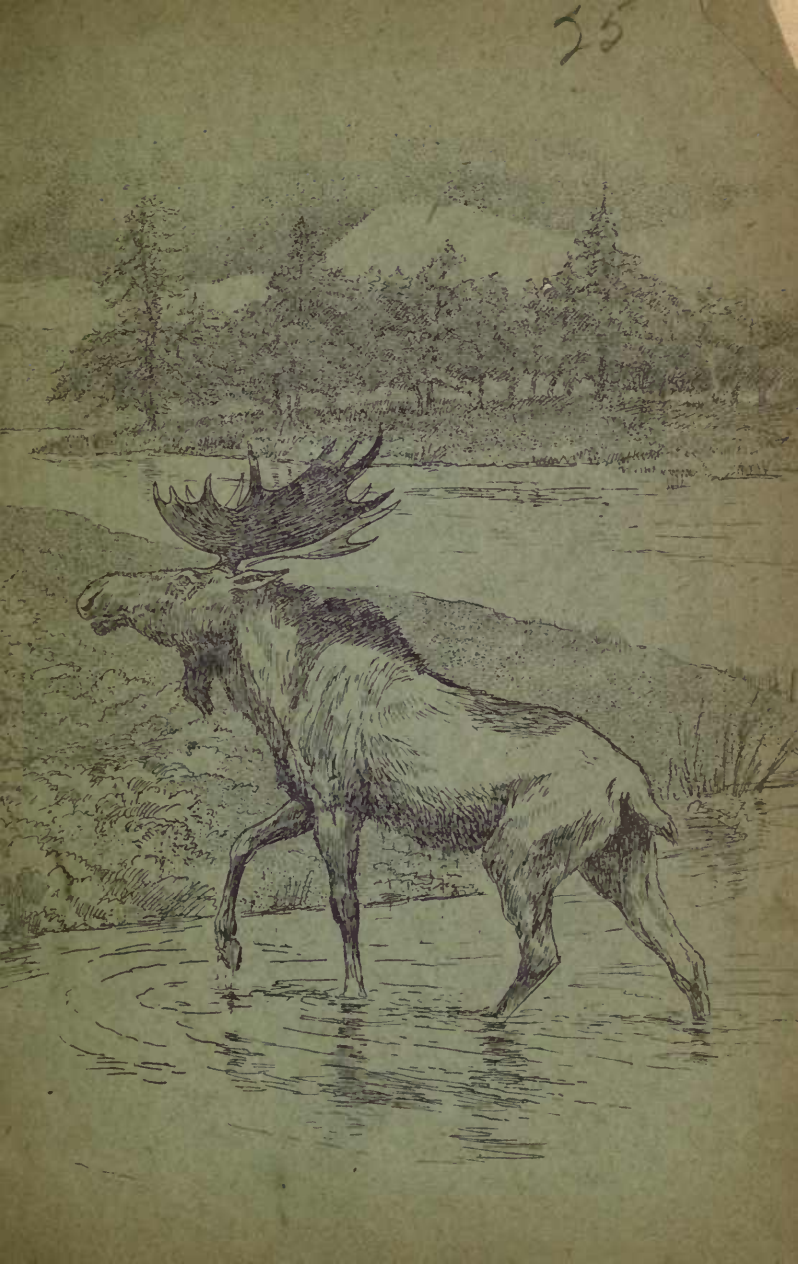
OUR WINNIE


A. Pearse



OUR WINNIE



The child watched them with an increasing sense of fascination, for she knew that it would not be very long before she lost her friends, who would fly far, far away.—*Page* 8.

Our Winnie

and

The Little Match-Girl

BY

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CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	WATCHING THE SWALLOWS	7
II.	WINIFRED'S TROUBLE	18
III.	A STRANGE JOURNEY	31
IV.	THE FIRST ATTEMPT	50
V.	LITTLE PHIL	61
VI.	WINIFRED'S BROTHERS	72
VII.	WINIFRED'S PARTY	89
VIII.	SUNDAY	107
IX.	THE LAST FLIGHT	119

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THE LITTLE MATCH-GIRL.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

A LITTLE MATCH-SELLER 127

CHAPTER II.

IN THE STUDIO 138

CHAPTER III.

WONDERFUL DAYS 149

CHAPTER IV.

AT BROOKLANDS 160

CHAPTER V.

DARK DAYS 171

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION 182

OUR WINNIE,

OR

"WHEN THE SWALLOWS GO."

CHAPTER I.

WATCHING THE SWALLOWS.

WINIFRED sat by the nursery window, upon the wide cushioned seat, leaning her little pale face against the glass and gazing with big blue eyes towards the rosy sky, where the sun was setting in a blaze of golden glory.

It was a pretty view the great oriel window commanded—garden and shrubbery just below, and beyond the close laurel hedge, low-lying pasture lands dotted with pine trees, and a large piece of water, which lay shining like molten gold in the glow of sunset radiance.

The swallows were enjoying the beauty of the evening as much as living things could do. They were darting this way and that in the bright, soft sunshine; now flying high, now low, and ever seeming drawn by irresistible attraction towards the shining surface of the water, which lay smiling and placid, without even a ripple to break its glassy smoothness.

Winifred was very much interested in the swallows. In the springtime she had watched them with the utmost absorption as they built their nests and hatched their chattering broods amid the many eaves and jutting lead-pipes of the old-fashioned manor-house in which she lived.

When the summer came, and the young birds had left the nests, she still fancied she knew "her swallows" from all the rest, and was always interested in their movements; fond of foretelling the weather according as to whether they flew high or low, and making stories about them and their cleverness which would rather have astonished an ornithologist.

And now that autumn was drawing on, the child watched them with an increasing sense of fascina-

tion, for she knew that it would not be very long before she lost her friends and playmates (for in her eyes they were friends and playmates), who would fly far, far away from England with the first approach of winter.

"I wonder why they want to go?" the child sometimes said. "I shall so miss them. I wish they would stay here always."

Winifred was nine years old, but she was so small and thin that she hardly seemed so much; and yet her little face, with its large, thoughtful eyes, and grave, serious lips, looked almost older than a nine-year-old child's should do.

She had been very, very ill last winter, so ill that nobody had thought she could get better; and even now, although the summer had brought a little strength to her limbs, and a little colour to her face, she was still very delicate, and her father and mother often looked anxiously into the deep eyes of their only little daughter, and wondered how long they would keep her with them, and if she would ever grow up strong and hearty like Charley and Ronald, her two big brothers.

Winifred did not know this; she only knew

that she could not run about and play like other children, that she soon grew tired, and that it was much more pleasure to her to sit on the nursery window-seat and read a favourite story-book, or watch the swallows, than it was to romp and race about the garden and fields as the boys so loved to do. The little girl was not discontented; she was very happy in her own way, and was fond of being quiet, and indulging in her own dreams and fancies. She saw no reason why she was to be pitied.

A door opened softly, and without turning her head to look, Winifred knew that her mother had come in.

Nobody but mamma had such a soft, gentle step; nobody else seemed to bring into the room that kind of brightness and sweetness which Winifred always felt accompanied her mother's presence. Sometimes the child would think to herself that it was like music and moonlight just to feel that mamma was near.

Mrs. Digby was a tall, graceful, sweet-faced mother—an ideal woman for a child's love and worship, so gentle, so firm, so loving and sympathising.

Winifred's little face smiled all over, a slow smile of satisfaction, although she never turned her head until her mother had seated herself in the great rocking-chair that stood beside the window. Then she left her seat and crept into her mother's arms, laying her head against that comfortable shoulder, and looking alternately out of the window and into her mother's face.

"What was my darling doing all alone? What was my little girl thinking of?"

"I was watching the swallows, mamma dear."

"You are fond of the swallows, Winnie."

"Yes; so many of them are my swallows—and soon they will go away."

"Yes, darling."

"Mamma," asked the child, with a serious, wistful look in her eyes, "how is it that the things we love best and care most for always seem to go away soonest?"

It seemed to Winifred that the warm, loving arms closed more tenderly and closely round her as the mother answered gently:

"Does it seem so to you, darling?"

"Yes, mamma. It was my favourite rose-tree

that died last winter, and my favourite oak-tree that was blown down in the storm. Ronald lost his best puppy, and papa's favourite horse went lame. I like all the birds very much, but the swallows much, much the best, and it is the swallows who go, and the robins and chaffinches that stay behind. I wonder why it is."

"But the swallows come back again, darling," said the mother, kissing her child's broad brow. "I remember how sorry my little girl was when they had all gone last year; but here they are again, and it was such pleasure to watch them build that you told me it made up for the long time of waiting. It will be the same again this year, Winnie."

"Will it, mamma? It seems as if it would be winter for such a long, long while. I cannot fancy that the spring will ever come again."

Mrs. Digby made no reply, and by-and-by Winifred went on.

"And last year I was so disappointed, for I never said good-bye; I never saw them go. I had watched them gather, and gather, and gather, and I did so want to see them start, and I never

did. Do you think they will gather here again this year, mamma?"

"I think it is very likely. They very often do."

"If they do, I will be *sure* not to miss them; I do so want to see them go, and say good-bye."

"What is it you are not going to miss, my little girl?" asked a kind, cheery voice from the other side of the room.

Winifred and her mother looked round, and saw that Dr. Howard had entered unobserved. He was never very many days without paying the child a visit, and she had grown fond of the old man, and was not afraid to talk to him freely.

He came and sat in her vacated seat—the wide window-ledge—and looked into her face, and took the thin little hand in his, and patted it in a friendly fashion.

"Well, Winnie, what is it you are so anxious not to miss? Do you want my leave to go to a children's party, or to do something else bold and daring?"

"Oh no!" answered Winnie, smiling; "we were only talking about the swallows. We think they will gather here before they fly, as they did last

year, and I do so want to see them go. Last year I missed them somehow."

Dr. Howard smiled and shook his head.

"I never saw the swallows go yet, little maid, though I am an old man now; and what is more, I never knew anybody who had, either."

Winifred's eyes opened wide.

"Does nobody ever see them go? Somebody must. They do not turn into fairies and vanish away, do they?"

The old doctor smiled and answered in a fanciful way for a little while, until seeing the child was growing puzzled, he said at last:

"No, no, my little girl, it is nothing so strange after all; you need not open your big eyes, and look as if I were telling you mystic fables. The swallows always start in the night, that is all; and in the morning we wake up and find them gone, but we do not see them go."

"In the night?" echoes Winifred, with a cloud passing over her face. "Then sha'n't I be able to see them go this year, either?"

"I'm afraid not, little one."

"Oh I am *so* sorry!" said the child with a deep

sigh; "so very, very sorry. I did so want to see them go."

"Dr. Howard," said her mother's voice in the pause that followed these words, "do you think this little bird had better follow the swallows and the sunshine, and leave the cold and the rain behind? Sometimes I fancy we ought to run after the swallows and catch them up where they have caught the summer. What do you think?"

"I think," answered the kind old man with a look in his eye which the child did not understand, "that this little bird is best in its own warm nest, under its mother's wing. It does not suit all little birds to fly away."

And then the doctor rose, and Mrs. Digby too; and Winifred was left alone to rock herself in the vacated chair and think about the swallows.

She was lying in her little bed that night, cosy and warm, when she became vaguely conscious that her father and mother had come in, and were talking together softly, and as it seemed, sadly. Unless it was a dream (and Winifred did not feel quite sure which it was), papa had his arm round mamma, and seemed to be comforting her. She

almost looked as if she had been crying, and her voice shook when she said :

"There is nothing that we can do. It is God who gives, and God who takes away, but it is very, very hard to lose her. You must help me, Ronald, sometimes I fear my faith will give way."

"God will give His strength with the trial if He sends it. Perhaps in His mercy He will spare it us."

"Yes, we may still hope and pray ; but I must struggle for resignation to His Holy Will I fear —I fear—"

"I know what you fear, my sweet wife. Did Dr. Howard hold out no hope ?"

"He would not—or could not—say anything definite ; but he thought—he thought our darling would not be long after the swallows."

There was a deep sob, and the sound of tender caresses, then came Mr. Digby's voice.

"Our precious little daughter. It is hard to spare her ; but think, dearest, to what a happy place she is going."

"I know—I know. I try not to be selfish. It is her gain, her happiness. Oh yes, I know what

a happy, happy thing it is for children to be taken in all their innocence. But oh, I shall miss her so sorely."

"I know, I know. But we believe that trials are sent us in love and not in anger; and we must think of our Winifred's gain and not of our loss."

Some soft kisses and warm tears were dropped upon the child's sleepy face. She had moved, and the voices ceased, but both parents were bending over her little bed. She opened her eyes drowsily, smiled and kissed them, and then she sank off to sleep again holding her mother's hand in hers.

CHAPTER II.

WINIFRED'S TROUBLE.

WINIFRED awoke early the following morning, to find the sunshine playing over the window-blind and the swallows twittering in the eaves.

She fancied that something unusual had happened in the night; but she could not, all in a moment, recollect what it was.

Gradually some of the sense of what had passed between her parents in her night-nursery came back to her as she lay in bed puzzling things over, and she began to talk softly to herself as she had a way of doing.

"I think they said I was going away somewhere, to some nice place where I should be very happy. I can't quite remember, and I thought Dr. Howard

meant I was to stay at home; but I don't always understand what people mean. I'm almost sure papa and mamma said I was to go—I suppose it's to some nice place where little children get strong and well again. I should like to be able to run about again and play with the boys. I should like to do what other children can."

But a little more thinking brought other considerations.

"Mamma was sorry—I think she cried. I'm afraid she isn't coming with me, because she talked about losing me. I suppose nurse will take me—that will be next best; and mamma could not be spared. Papa wants her and the boys, and there are the servants and the house. Oh no, they could not possibly spare her. I must try to be brave, and not to cry and make her more sorry. I won't seem to mind leaving her, if I can help it, though it will be very, very hard; and I will try to get better as fast as ever I can, so as to come back soon strong and well as Charley did when he had measles, and nurse took him to the sea-side.

"I wonder where I am going—a good way off,

I think, because I don't think mamma would have cried if it had been only a little way or for a little while. Perhaps I am going where the swallows go—perhaps I shall see them again. I should like to do that. I think I am going when they go—I will try to get well to come back when they come. That would be very nice, for I think they would miss me when they began to build their nests; and I don't think I *could* do without mamma longer than that—Oh no, I must come back when the swallows come."

Winifred was smiling now; but by-and-by her face grew grave.

"I wonder if people will miss me when I am gone. I wonder if they will be sorry. Mamma will, I know, but is there any one else? I should like to think some of them would miss me and want me to come back; but—but—I'm not sure that they would!" and here the child's face grew rather red.

Children all have their faults, and Winifred was no exception to this rule. Perhaps there were excuses to be made for this little girl, because her bad health had made it needful for her to be very

quiet and rather idle, and because, with all her faults, she was always gentle and docile; but at the same time Winifred was selfish, and she was more idle than she need have been; and when she began to think whether people would miss her, she could not help remembering many little things which she did not quite like to think about.

Charley and Ronald were very fond of their little sister, and would have liked to spend a good deal of their spare time in the nursery, which they had once shared all together; but since Winnie's illness the nursery had been given up entirely to her service, and she had not failed to assert her right as mistress of her domain.

It was often quite true that the noise the boys made at play tried her head and made it ache; but there were other days when she could have borne the noise quite well, only she did not care to let the boys in because she felt more inclined to be quiet. Then she never tried to do any little services for them, or for any one else, thinking nobody could expect it of her when she had so little strength.

Winifred was a gentle, loveable child, in spite of

her tendency to selfishness, and everybody seemed fond of her. Indeed, it was not every one who knew what her chief faults were. Charley and Ronald never thought for a moment that she was selfish, and would have been indignant if any one had called her so; but at the same time they knew it was no good ever asking Winifred to do anything for them.

Perhaps Mrs. Digby and nurse knew best where the gentle child's weakness lay; but it had not been very easy in her present state of health and spirits to make her see her own faults in the proper light.

But as Winifred lay in bed thinking, it dawned upon her slowly that her going away would make very little difference to anybody in the world—that only mamma would miss her, and that only because mamma was mamma, not for anything her child had ever done for her.

A resolution came into Winifred's mind.

"I will be different," she said. "I will do something before I go to show them I am fond of them, and then perhaps they will miss me more. I should like to do something for a good many

people. There are the boys, and the servants—and—and—Oh, I must think about it. I have a good deal of money: I will see what I can do."

Winnie turned over this idea very many times in her head, as she lay waiting for nurse to dress her. She rose late, and breakfast was not over till nearly half-past ten.

"There doesn't seem any time left to think this morning," said Winnie, after she had taken a little walk in the garden with her mamma. "I feel tired now, I will watch the swallows a little, and think after dinner."

Presently nurse came in.

"Miss Winifred, dear," she said, "Mary wants to clean out the young gentlemen's play-room to-day; but it's their half-holiday, and she doesn't like to begin unless they can come here when they come home. You look pretty well to-day, I think. You won't mind letting them into the nursery?"

"Oh, not to-day, nursey, I couldn't do with them to-day," answered Winnie, looking distressed. "Indeed I would if I could, but I have so much to think about to-day. I can't think when they are here—and it's about them too. It can't make

any difference to Mary what day she cleans the room. Please tell her I'm very sorry, but I really can't to-day. I don't think she can mind."

Winifred's pale little face looked pleading and earnest. Nurse said no more to urge her.

"Very well, dear, we will arrange something somehow. Mary does not want to put you out. Have you anything you want to do to-day?"

"I have a great deal to think about."

"Do you think with your fingers?"

Winifred smiled.

"No, of course not, nursey. What do you mean?"

"Well, I was wondering if you could not do something with your fingers, whilst you were doing all this thinking."

Winifred was not fond of employing her idle fingers, and her face was not very responsive as she asked rather slowly:

"What do you mean, nursey? I have not anything special to do."

"No, Miss Winnie; but I think there is something somebody would be very much delighted if you did do," and nurse nodded her head mysteriously.

Still Winifred did not look eager, though she asked:

"What do you mean? I think I'm rather too tired to work."

"Work rests as well as tires folks," answered nurse, looking wise.

"Tell me what you want me to do, please?" said the little girl, who knew quite well whither all this was tending.

"Well, dear, I thought you might like to finish the tail of Master Charley's big kite. It is all done but the tail, and if they had that to fly, they would play in the fields with it all the while the room was being done; but it's a good hour's work it wants at the tail, and they would be so pleased to come in and find it done. Shall I bring you the paper and the string?"

Winifred's face put on its little wearied, fretful look. She did not speak crossly, only as if she felt it rather hard to be asked or expected to do things for other people—"little silly things," as she said to herself, when her head was so full of the great things she meant to do.

"I don't know how to make kite-tails, nursey."

"I could show you."

"I feel tired. The boys can do it themselves quite well. I don't think I could make a kite-tail and do my thinking too."

"Is your thinking very important, Miss Winnie?"

"Yes, very."

So nurse went away, and Winnie was left alone; but somehow or other the thinking did not seem to get on. A little puzzled frown began to pucker the child's forehead, and before long Winifred was talking slowly to herself, rather as if she was arguing with somebody, who certainly was not to be seen.

"I don't see why I should. It isn't *that* sort of thing I meant. I want to do something big which the boys will understand and care about—they would have forgotten all about the kite-tail by to-morrow. Besides it would be so tiresome—like keeping their book-shelves and toy cupboard tidy, as mamma sometimes wants me to. I don't like doing that sort of work. It's not interesting, and it doesn't seem worth the trouble. If I could only think of it, I'm sure there must be some much better way. I hope I shall be able to find it out soon."

Puzzling her head over the matter, however, did not seem to help Winifred much, and she did not feel happy in herself, though she could hardly have told the reason why.

She looked pale during the early dinner, and it seemed to her that mamma was more gentle and tender to her than ever.

"Would you like a drive with me this afternoon, my darling?" asked Mrs. Digby.

"Where are you going, mamma?"

"To see Mrs. Hedlam. You can go and play a little while with Violet whilst I am there. She will be pleased to have you for a little visit."

"I should like to go, mamma; but I would rather stay in the carriage, thank you. I don't think I am very fond of Violet, and I don't feel inclined to play to-day."

"I can send her out to talk to you instead, then."

"No, thank you, mamma, I think I would rather be quiet, if you don't mind?"

"I don't mind, darling, but I think poor little Violet would be disappointed. She has few playfellows, and it would give her pleasure to see you, I am sure," answered the mother gently.

"She need not know I have come," said Winifred. "I don't want to talk to-day, I want to think."

Just at this time Mrs. Digby did not feel as if she could urge the child against her wishes, even though the wishes were a little selfish. Her heart was sore and heavy that day, and very little talking was done upon the drive.

Winifred sat still in the carriage as she had wished, and yet she could not feel happy or satisfied, and the trouble which had weighed upon her all the day seemed to grow heavier and heavier.

"I don't believe any one will miss me. I don't believe any one will be sorry when I go. I must be quick and think what to do for people, for I should like them to be a little sorry and to want me back. Oh dear, I wish I was grown-up. Grown-up people can do such a lot of things. I haven't thought yet of a single one, and I've been thinking hard all the day."

When Mrs. Digby came back she thought the child looked tired.

"Not very, thank you," answered Winifred, nestling up to her. "I have only been thinking. Did you see Violet to-day?"

"Yes, dear."

"She didn't ask if I had come?"

"Yes, Winnie, she asked, and I told her you were in the carriage, but I did not let her go out. I explained that you were poorly to-day."

Winifred's face grew red.

"Did—did she seem sorry?"

"I'm afraid so, a little sorry and a little vexed too; but she will not think about it long."

Winifred was very silent on the way home. She seemed still thinking very much, but thinking did not make her face look brighter.

As they drove through the gates of the lodge, she saw a pale little face looking out of the lattice-window, and her mother leaned out to ask of the woman who opened the gate:

"How is little Phil to-day?"

"Much the same, thank you, ma'am."

"I will send him some more jelly soon."

"Thank you kindly, ma'am."

As Winifred climbed the stairs to her nursery her face was graver than ever.

"Why, I've never finished those mittens I promised little Phil months and months ago. And

I haven't been to see him for ever so long. I don't believe even he will miss me when I go away, and he used so to watch for me to come, and be so pleased. Oh dear, dear, he must go on to the list of people now who are to have things given them—or something. But I can't think whatever I can do to make them sorry when I go."

When Winifred went to bed that night she still had seen no way out of the trouble.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE JOURNEY.

THAT night Winifred could not sleep. Turn and settle herself as she would she could not even fall into a doze; and all kinds of troublesome thoughts kept flocking into her mind.

Chief amongst these was the old fear about the swallows—the fear that they would go when she was not watching them, and that she would not be able to bid them good-bye and wish them a pleasant journey.

Winnie's head was tired and confused that night. She did not remember that the swallows had hardly even begun to gather for flight as yet. She fancied they were there in myriads in the water-meadows, and that any time they might make their silent start.

"Oh dear!" sighed the little child, "perhaps they will go to-night. Didn't somebody say they always went at night and nobody ever saw them? I should so like to see them go. I don't think they would be angry with me. I am so fond of them—I think they are fond of me too. I must just get up and look out of the window."

It was a mild night, and Winifred wrapped herself well up in her little flannel gown, and folded the eider-down quilt about her shoulders.

She stole to the window and drew up the blind and looked out into the dusky night. There was a little moon, but not much, and enough wind to stir the leaves of the trees and make them look almost like living things, bending over, and whispering one to the other.

Where were the swallows?

Surely they were flying about the trees, chattering excitedly, whirling from place to place, planning, discussing, and preparing for flight? Winifred listened and looked, and felt convinced of this. She was sure she could see in the uncertain light the darting black forms chasing one

another, hurrying through the air, and sometimes darkening it for a moment, as a cloud of winged birds rose together from the trees, and then as suddenly dispersed again. Yes, they were certainly going to fly away that night, the child thought, and she must wait and watch to see them go.

She curled up her feet under her little gown, pulled the soft quilt more comfortably about her, rested her head against an angle of the window-frame, and prepared to stay for the flight.

How long she waited she did not know. Gradually it seemed to her that the moonlight grew brighter. It became almost as light as day, only that there was a softness and beauty in the light which seemed hardly like sunshine.

Then all at once came a whirring of countless wings. It was a soft, *feathery* noise, as Winifred afterwards told herself, that made her think of the angels flying through heaven. And this sound of wings came nearer and nearer, and the air seemed dimmed by a dark, soft cloud of flying birds.

"The swallows!" said Winifred, softly; "they

are going. I must open the window and say good-bye."

The window was soon thrown wide, and the child leaned eagerly out and called to the birds who were whirling past.

"Oh swallows, dear swallows! Good-bye! good-bye! Where are you going?"

And the swallows answered in a sort of musical chant:

"We are going to the land of sunshine and flowers;
We are leaving behind the darkness and cloud;
We are going whither the great power leads;
We are going we know, yet know not where."

And as the child listened, a great longing came over her to fly with the swallows to the bright unknown land whither they were bound.

"Swallows, swallows, I want to go to the sunshine and flowers. Can't you take me with you?"

And the swallows chanted again:

"Can you trust the unseen power?
Dare you fly out into space?
Dare you leave the known behind you?
Have you faith to fly away?"

Winifred clasped her hands and leaned out more and more, gazing at the flying swallows.

"Oh, please stop! Please one of you stop and tell me some more. I want to fly with you. I have to go away one day, I don't know where. I should like to go with you, if you'll take me. Do please tell me when you are going, and please wait and take me too. I want to fly with you."

And then suddenly one of the swallows did stop, and perched upon the ledge of the open window; and Winifred found that it was a beautiful black, glossy bird, as big as herself, and yet she was not a bit surprised or afraid.

"Dear swallow," she said, stroking the bird's soft, feathery head, "dear, pretty swallow, won't you let me fly away with you?"

"Why do you want to fly?" asked the swallow.

"I want to know where you are going. I want to know why you go; I have to go away too, very soon. I should like best to go with you."

"But I don't know where we are going," said the swallow; "how do you know you would like to come?"

"You said it was to a nice place, with sunshine and flowers," said the child.

"Yes, so it is. I know that, but I don't know where it is."

"Do none of you know?"

"No; none of us know exactly."

"Then how can you find the way?" asked Winifred, with grave interest.

The swallow looked at her with his bright eyes as he answered:

"We cannot lose the way. Something always tells us how to go. It never tells us wrong."

"And you are not afraid?"

"Oh no!"

The swallow looked at the child with grave, bright eyes, and asked:

"Would not you be afraid, either?"

"N—no. I think not," answered Winifred, with just a little hesitation in her voice.

"Not afraid to leave your home and your parents, and brothers and friends, and go somewhere right away, you don't know where?"

Winifred was silent. She did not know what to say. She was beginning to feel a little fear, yet she hardly knew how or why.

"You are not afraid, swallow?"

"No; I know I shall be taken care of."

"Then why should I be afraid?"

"I don't know; but I think you are."

Winifred pondered again.

"Do you know what makes you not afraid?"

The swallow turned his head from side to side, and by-and-by answered:

"I think it's because I always do just as I'm meant to do—stay when I ought to stay, and fly when I ought to fly, build when I ought to build, and do just what I ought. If swallows always do that they need never be afraid."

"And how do you know what you ought to do?"

"Something inside me tells me."

"Does it never tell you wrong?"

"No, never."

Winifred sighed, and shook her head.

"But I never have anything inside me to tell me what I ought to do and what I ought not," she said.

"Do you not?" said a soft voice quite close to her, and the child started, for it did not seem as if it was the swallow who had spoken, and looking round, Winifred saw a beautiful figure in white standing beside her, and looking with grave, kind

eyes into her face. He had great white wings, and Winifred said half aloud, half to herself:

"It is an angel."

"Winifred," said the angel, softly and yet gravely, "have you nothing inside you that tells you when you do right and when you do wrong?"

Slowly Winnie's eyes fell, and the rosy colour mounted to her cheeks.

"I do try not to do wrong. I don't think I am very naughty," she said, as if excusing herself.

"Did I say you were?" asked the angel.

"It seemed as if you did."

The angel smiled at her a sort of pitying smile.

"Is it I that spoke, my child? or the *something* in your heart to which you do not always listen?"

"I do what I can," said Winifred, still seeming to answer a different voice from the angel's. "I am not strong. I can't do like other people; and besides, little girls can't do things. I am going to try before I go away, but I've never been able before."

"Never?"

"No; there never seems anything for me to do for anybody else."

"Nothing?"

"No; only such silly little things that it isn't worth beginning."

The angel looked gravely down upon the child for some minutes, and Winifred felt a strange sense of pain and humiliation falling upon her. Then he turned to the swallow who was still sitting upon the window-ledge, and said quietly:

"Show her."

Then the angel disappeared, and Winifred and her friend were left together.

"Can you get on my back?" asked the swallow.

"Oh yes!" cried Winnie, eagerly, glad to have something to distract her thoughts. "Are you going to take me with you? I should like that."

"I am going to take you a little way, and show you some things," answered the swallow. "You will come back by-and-by."

Winifred had no difficulty in making herself comfortable and secure upon the swallow's back, and very soon they were flying quickly through the dark night.

"Are you going after the other swallows?"

"Not just yet."

"Won't you be afraid of getting lost if you are left behind?"

"Oh no, we never get lost whilst we are doing our duty."

Winifred began to feel rather uncomfortable. She was half sorry she had agreed to go with the swallow.

"Is it your duty to do what the—the angel told you?"

"Yes."

"I think he was vexed," observed Winifred rather discontentedly. "I was glad when he went away."

"Hush!" answered the swallow, "you ought not to talk like that."

Winnie was silent for awhile, and then she asked:

"Where are you taking me, swallow? What are all those lights down there?"

"The lights of a great city. I am going to show you some pictures."

"I like pictures," said the little girl, brightening up at the idea. "I am glad now that I came with you, swallow."

All in a minute Winifred found herself looking

into a pretty garden. There were some little children at play there, one little girl sitting by herself with a book, and two younger boys trying hard to mend a broken toy. It would have been an easy task enough for any more experienced hands, and by-and-by one little fellow looked up and said:

"Please, sister, will you do it for us?"

"Oh, I can't; I'm busy. You can quite well do it for yourselves."

The two little fellows returned to their task, but their efforts only made the damage worse, and soon they burst out crying in their disappointment.

"What babies you are!" said the little girl rising, going further away. "You make my head ache with all that noise."

"What a horrid little girl!" cried warm-hearted Winnie. "Why couldn't she mend the toy? Anybody could have done it at first. Why doesn't she go and comfort them? Poor little boys!"

"You see it was such a *little* thing," answered the swallow, "only a toy, and only a few tears. It was not worth while troubling over a little thing like that. It would be different if it were something great."

Winnie was silent, and the swallow flew on again.

Now they were in a room, and a little boy was lying on a sofa, and he had no books or toys within reach.

"I wish somebody would come—it is so dull," Winifred heard him say. "I wonder when the others will be coming in."

Just then there came a sound of children's voices laughing and shouting. They came nearer and nearer, and seemed to pass the door of the room, but nobody came in. The little sick boy called; but in the noise of laughing nobody heard, and the tears came into his eyes.

"They have all gone up to play," he said, "and nobody cares to see if I want anything, and I did so want to have somebody to talk to!"

"Oh, swallow!" cried Winnie indignantly, "what horrid children! That poor little boy! How could they?"

"It was such a *little* thing, coming in to speak to him, I don't suppose anybody ever thought of it," answered the swallow. "They are not horrid children. They are fond of their little brother;

but people cannot always think of little things, you know."

Winifred said no more. She felt subdued and ashamed. How could the swallow know what she had been thinking about that day?

The next time the swallow paused it was again in a room. A lady was half lying upon a sofa, and she did not look ill, only unhappy. She had books and flowers and all sorts of nice things round her, but she was not doing anything.

"Who is that?" asked Winifred. "Why does she look unhappy?"

"She is unhappy," answered the swallow.

"Why, is she ill?"

"No, she is unhappy because she has nothing to do."

"What does she generally do?"

"She has never done anything yet. She has been waiting all her life for something, and it has never come."

"Why!" said Winifred in a puzzled way, "grown-up people can do such lots of things. My mamma is always busy."

"What does she do?"

"Oh, ever so many things. Sees after the servants, takes care of us all, is kind to poor people, and works for the sick. I can't think of half the things, but she is always doing something or other."

"What little things those are though!" said the swallow almost, as it seemed, contemptuously. "They would never suit that lady. She is waiting and has always been waiting for some great thing to do. She would never be satisfied with 'little silly things' like those."

"Why, swallow," cried Winifred indignantly, "how can you talk so! Why it's little things that make big ones. If mamma never did all those little things every day, I think everybody would be miserable and everything would go wrong."

"Ah!" said the swallow, turning his head knowingly from side to side. "So you have learnt your lesson at last. Now we will go back."

Again came that whirling flight through the dark air, and Winifred found herself at her nursery window again.

The angel was standing there, and it seemed to the child as if he lifted her gently in his arms.

"Little child," he said tenderly, "tell me what you have seen."

Winifred felt in a very different mood from the one in which she had set out. Looking into the angel's face she answered humbly:

"I think I see now."

"I think you do. You will not think things too little now to be worth thinking of—little acts of self-denial, little words of love, little deeds of kindness—you will not despise them now."

"No, angel, I will try not. I did not understand before."

"You did not; and yet, my child, you might have done."

"How?"

"You might have read it in your Bible—in the life of Jesus Christ, our Pattern."

"Please explain."

"He came down from Heaven to live for us—that was a great thing, was it not? And He died on the Cross for our sins—that was a great thing too. But He took little children up in His arms and blessed them, and that *seemed* a little thing to those who stood by; but has it proved such a little thing?"

"Tell me," said Winifred earnestly.

"I think it has made little children and loving parents very happy ever since. I think it has made a great difference to the world, knowing that He loved the children and did not think them *too little* to be blessed and noticed and loved. If nothing is too little for Him, need we find it too little for us."

"Dear angel," said Winifred, with tears in her eyes, "I will try never to forget."

"Try, little child," answered the angel tenderly; and looking down into Winifred's eyes, he added almost solemnly, "and when you have learnt the lesson, will you be afraid to come with me?"

"With you, where?"

"To a bright, happy land, where no sorrow is—to a beautiful home where you would live always in the light of your Saviour's love. Would you be afraid to go there, my child?"

"I don't know," answered Winifred slowly. "Do you mean heaven?"

"I mean a happy, holy place, where no sorrow or pain can ever come. You were not afraid to go with the swallows over the sea to a land of

sunshine and flowers. You were not afraid of a long strange journey with them, you knew not whither. Would you be afraid to trust to me? Would you be afraid to let me carry you across a river, and into a new land far more bright and beautiful than the one where the swallows go?"

Winifred lay still and quiet in the angel's arms. She did not quite know what he meant. She felt languid and dreamy; but she was not afraid. She could not feel afraid looking up into his face and seeing his kind eyes bent upon her.

"I am going away soon," she said.

"You are, my child, you are."

"Did you know?"

"Yes, I knew."

"Will you come and take me when I go?"

"Yes, if you would not be afraid to come with me."

"No, I should not be afraid, I think. I will be ready when you come."

And then it grew dark; the angel and the swallow both faded away and Winifred knew no more.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST ATTEMPT.

THE next thing of which Winifred was conscious, was the bright sunlight streaming into the room, and her mother's face bending anxiously over her.

She woke up wide with a smile and a start.

"Mamma! Is it late?".

"No, dearest; but I have brought you some breakfast, before you get up. You may have to stay in bed a little while longer than usual to-day."

"Why, mamma?"

"I am afraid you may have taken cold. Do you know where I found you last night, when I came up for a last peep? Curled up in the nursery window-seat, fast asleep."

Winifred began to smile.

"Oh yes, I remember now; but I didn't mean to go to sleep."

"Why did you go there at all, darling? You know you might have taken a bad cold, though you do not look any the worse."

"I did not think of that—it was careless," said the child quickly. "I think I must have been rather silly, for I thought the swallows would go last night, though I know it is not time yet; and I wanted so much to see them fly away that I got up and sat by the nursery window to watch, and then I suppose I went to sleep."

"You certainly did that, Winnie, and slept so soundly that you never even woke when I carried you back to your little bed."

Winifred smiled, and looked up half-wistfully into her mother's face. She was thinking of her dream; but she did not feel as though she could tell it to anybody yet, not until she had thought it all over in her own head first.

"May I get up soon, mamma?"

"Not for another hour or two, I think, darling. Then you shall do so, if you wish."

For a moment Winifred was disappointed. She

wanted to go to the boys' play-room and tidy their cupboard, and do all the little things for them which she had neglected so long. For one moment her face fell, and the little frown appeared; but then a sudden thought struck her and she smiled bravely.

"Very well, mamma dear, I will do just as you like; only do you think I might sit up a little while, so that I can *do* things?"

"Yes, Winnie, I think that would not harm you. What makes my little girl so anxious to be busy this morning?"

"Because I think I have been very idle for a long while—ever since I have been ill," answered Winifred gravely. "Idle and selfish too. I want to be better now for two reasons, partly because I want to be good and do what God would like to see me do, and partly because I should not like people not to miss me, or to think I had been selfish, when I am gone."

"Gone!" echoed Mrs. Digby, with a little falter in her voice.

Winnie coloured quickly. She had not meant to say so much. She thought she ought not to

speak of the journey she was to take, until her mother told her of it. Perhaps she ought not to have heard that conversation—perhaps it was only a dream like the one she had just awoke from.

She looked into her mother's face with a little laugh, and kissed the soft hand she still held in her own small one.

"I dreamt I was flying with the swallows, mamma. One of them took me on his back and carried me; but he brought me back home again, you see."

Was mamma crying? Winifred wondered, for Mrs. Digby had turned quickly away, and the child fancied she put her handkerchief to her eyes.

Nurse, however, came in just then, and Winnie's thoughts were directed into a different channel.

"Nursey," she called eagerly, "did Charley and Ronald finish the kite-tail yesterday?"

"No, Miss Winnie, they went out to the Rectory instead, and never touched it. I heard them this morning wishing it was done; and then they'd have time to fly it before dark, when they came home in the evening."

"Oh, I am so glad! now I can finish it for

them!" cried Winnie eagerly. "Please go and fetch it for me, Nursey—I mean when you have time to spare."

"Won't it tire you, dear?"

"Oh no, not to-day."

"You haven't got anything to do to-day then?" asked nurse with a smile, and Winifred smiled too as she answered:

"Oh, I can think and work to-day both; and I should so like to finish the boys' kite for them."

So in a very short while the child was hard at work, and before her dinner-time came the long tail of the kite was quite finished.

"Mamma," she asked whilst she was taking her dinner, "can I go and see little Phil to-day? I haven't been for a long while. I thought he looked as if he would like to see somebody, when we passed yesterday. May I take him the jelly?"

"The jelly will not be ready till to-morrow, Winnie; and I think I must keep you indoors to-day; but if you have taken no cold, you shall go out to-morrow if it is fine. Will that do as well, darling?"

Mrs. Digby looked with an inquiring glance into

her little daughter's face; for when Winifred had taken a fancy into her head, she was not always ready to give up without a struggle. The gentle little girl had a good deal of self-will in her composition.

But to-day, after one little struggle, she looked up and smiled cheerfully.

"To-morrow will be just as nice; and then I can put the boys' toy-cupboard tidy for them this afternoon. It is in such a mess!"

"Why, Winnie, I thought that toy-cupboard was your pet horror!" said the mother with a smile.

"I want to put it tidy to-day, mamma," answered Winifred gravely. "I know I shall find ever so many things that the boys have lost. You see the boys have their lessons, and so much to do, and I have hardly anything. I ought to do little things for them when I can."

So the little girl got a duster and went up to the play-room, and opened the cupboard-door. It was rather a dreadful sight that met her eyes—toys, books, papers, string, nails, pieces of wood, bottles, baskets, battered pieces of metal, odds and ends

of every description all tumbled together in one heterogeneous mass of disorder.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Winnie, "what a mess!"

But she would not be discouraged, and she set manfully to work at her task.

First she emptied all the contents of the cupboard on to the floor, and dusted out all the shelves. Then out of the dreadful heap upon the floor she selected all the books and carried them over to the book-case where they should have been, and made room for them upon the shelves there.

This involved a good deal of time and labour, and arrangement of other books; and little Winnie, whose stock of strength was but small, began to feel tired already.

Still she would not give up yet. She went down on her knees before the heap, and picked out all the unbroken toys and the most useful and respectable of the miscellaneous articles before her; and these she dusted and arranged upon one shelf by themselves. Broken toys and odds and ends which might come in useful, were placed in another; and a big heap of "real rubbish" began to grow upon the floor behind her.

Then the string was collected and wound into little knots and put into a box; and by that time poor Winnie was so tired she felt almost ready to cry, and still a vast heap of queer things lay before her, which seemed as if it defied her to reduce to order. Her head began to ache and her eyes to swim; she felt as if she never should make an end of the task, yet she could not bear to give in.

The door opened softly, and somebody looked in.

"Well, Winnie, is the work done yet?"

Winnie bent her head to hide the tears which stood in her eyes; but her voice would shake a little as she answered:

"Not quite, mamma. There were such lots of things; I don't know what to do with them all."

Mrs. Digby came nearer and looked at the heap and at the child.

"I think, darling, you have done enough for one day. You are tired now. We will get nurse or Mary to finish the rest now."

But tired as Winifred was, she could not bear to give up before she had finished the work she had set herself to do.

"Oh please, mamma, let me finish," she cried,

whilst a round tear splashed down upon the paper in her hand. "If other people finish it will spoil it all. I wanted to do it myself."

"But you are making yourself quite poorly, my darling. I cannot have you do that. Let me do it for you, and you tell me how to put the things."

"No, no. I want to do it all myself," repeated Winnie with a little sob. "I've been very selfish to the boys—I've never done anything for them. Do please let me do this."

Mrs. Digby sat down near to the child, and answered very gently and lovingly, yet with a tone in her voice which made Winnie feel half-ashamed:

"Well, darling, if you have set your heart upon it, you shall try a little longer."

So Winnie went to work again; but with less and less success. She could not see the things for tears, and a little voice in her heart, that sounded like the swallow's, kept saying:

"You ought to please your mamma, not yourself. Self-will is only selfishness in a new dress."

At last Winnie could stand it no longer. She burst into tears and ran into her mother's arms.

"Oh mamma, I wanted to be good and kind,

and I've only been naughty and disobedient. Why is it so hard to be good?"

"Because, darling, we sometimes set about it in not quite a right spirit, or we let a wrong spirit creep in and master the right one, with which we started. Even in little, little things we must ask Jesus to help us with His Holy Spirit."

"I think I forgot to do that," said the child. "It seemed too little to ask Jesus about."

"Ah! darling, we all make that mistake only too often in our lives; yet nothing is too little for Him to help us in."

Winifred looked up into her mother's face, and said with a gravity beyond her years:

"Mamma, I sometimes think there aren't such things as *little things* in the world. They seem little, but really they are quite big."

Mrs. Digby held her child closely in her arms, feeling that there was something strange in hearing so advanced a thought fall from such childish lips. Of late she had fancied that Winifred's mind had developed rapidly.

After a little silence the little girl said:

"May Mary come now and finish the cupboard?

I should like everything put straight before the boys come in."

With Mary's energetic and willing help, the task was soon accomplished. Winifred directed operations, and the maid with her strong hands soon carried out all her wishes. Chaos resolved itself into order, and the cupboard soon became a pattern of neatness. It was so tidy that Winifred could hardly believe her eyes, and she could hardly believe, too, that everything except actual rubbish had been replaced.

She returned to her nursery in a much happier frame of mind; and the delight of the boys on their return with their finished kite and tidy cupboard more than repaid her for her trouble.

They had all taken tea together in the nursery by Winnie's special request, after she had watched the flying of the kite from the window with the greatest interest. And the boys had been so kind and so merry, and had made so much of their little sister, and what she had done for them, that she went to bed in a very happy frame of mind, wondering how it was she had not thought more of being kind and useful to her brothers.

CHAPTER V.

LITTLE PHIL.

IT was not for several days after this that Winifred was able to pay her visit to the little sick boy at the lodge.

It seemed as if the night-watch for the swallows, and the day of hard work which followed, had tired the little girl more than at first appeared, and for a good many days following she was very weak and poorly, and could only just creep from the night to the day-nursery and back again; and even reading story-books tired her head and made her eyes ache. The utmost she could do was to work at the red mittens she was knitting for little Phil, and it was not always that she could even do this.

"It's almost like being ill again," she said one day to her mother, as she lay in her arms

nestling her little curly head against the supporting shoulder. "I was so much better in the summer. Am I always going to get ill when the winter comes? I try to be good; but I do get very tired."

"My darling, I know you do," answered the mother tenderly. "But I think my little girl will be better soon—not ill a very long while."

"I am glad," said Winnie; but she could not quite understand why mamma's voice sounded sad when she told her this, nor why a great bright tear rolled down from her dear eyes and fell down upon her own curls. Why should mamma cry if she were soon going to get well?

But Winifred was learning not to ask questions upon some subjects. She still believed she was going away, and that it was the thought of the parting that made her mother sad; but as yet no one had mentioned the matter to her, and she had refrained herself from alluding to it in any way. She never felt quite certain whether or not it had been a dream.

Winifred had thought a great deal during these past days. She was not unhappy, and yet a sort of weight seemed to hang upon her. She could not get rid of the idea that some great change was

drawing near, and the idea made her feel serious and thoughtful. She read her little Bible as she had never read it before, and especially any parts where it told about birds or angels, and about Jesus Christ noticing or blessing little children.

Winifred wished so much that Jesus was living on earth now, that she could go to Him and ask Him to take her in His arms and bless her. She could love the dear Lord Jesus very much, she knew, if only she could go to Him like that. It was so different from saying prayers at her bedside.

She did not speak of these thoughts and fancies even to her mother; they were hardly clear enough to her own self to be uttered in words to a grown-up person. And she never told her dream, either, about the swallows and the angel, although she thought very much about it. She fancied perhaps it would make mamma sad, though why she should have this fancy she could not tell.

When she began to feel better again these fancies still haunted her, although she had expected them to go away; and even when she was so far well that she was able to drive out with her mother one sunny afternoon, and be put down at the lodge to talk to Phil till the carriage returned, she still felt

grave and serious—not merry and gay as she had done on former occasions when she was first allowed out after a few days' detention in the house after any little attacks of illness.

Little Phil's face was very bright when he saw his visitor enter. The sick boy led a lonely life, for there were very few people who ever passed that way, and a visitor was a rare treat to one who could never leave his couch to run about, but always had to wait for somebody to come and see him.

"Miss Winnie!" he cried joyously, "how kind of you to come! I was afraid I'd not see you again all the winter when I heard how poorly you'd been. I am so glad!"

Phil was twelve years old, although he was so small that he was always spoken of as "little Phil." His spine was diseased, and he had not grown since he was seven years old; but he had thought a great deal whilst lying on his bed or couch, and his mind was of a thoughtful, devotional bent, which sometimes led people to say that he was "too good to live."

Winnie had known him all her life, and a sort of intimacy had grown up between the two children. At one time the little girl had been a constant



He set her upon the stile where she could see everything.—*p.* 63.

visitor at the lodge, but since her long illness this habit had been broken through; and little Phil had sadly missed the visits to which he had grown used—missed them more than Winnie had ever imagined.

"I am better to-day, Phil, and mamma said she would drive me to see you. Are you any better?"

"No, Miss Winnie, I don't suppose I'll ever be better; but I'm used to it, and it don't make me fret—leastways not often."

"Only when the pain is very bad?" suggested Winifred compassionately, contrasting in her own mind, as she had never done before, the difference between this boy's lot and her own.

"Well, Miss Winnie, I don't think it's the pain as I mind most; I'm kind of used even to that; 'tis the lonesomeness as makes me fret sometimes."

"Lonesomeness!"

"Why yes, you see, there ain't hardly any folks to come in and chat a bit, and I can't get to school; and I've read all my books till I know them by heart; and since you've been so weak like and poorly there hasn't seemed anything to make the time pass."

Winnie's heart smote her sorely, and her face

flushed suddenly with pain and shame. She knew it had more often been idleness than weakness which had kept her during the past months from visiting Phil as before; and certainly there could be no excuse for forgetting to lend him books, as she had always done before, from her well-filled shelves. When she thought of the piles of brightly-bound story-books which had been showered upon her during her tardy convalescence, she hardly knew how to look Phil in the face, so ashamed did she feel of her neglect.

"I am so sorry, Phil," she faltered, blushing and looking down.

"Oh, don't you trouble about it, Miss Winnie. Folks didn't ought to fret for little troubles like that. Besides, I think sometimes it's done me good, all that thinking I had time for then."

Winifred drew a little nearer, interested by the look on Phil's face.

"What did you think about?"

"Oh, ever such a lot of things; and by-and-by it seemed quite clear."

"What seemed clear?"

"Why, that it was wrong to fret as I'd been doing—wrong to feel so lonesome."

"But why was it wrong?"

"Because it seemed kind of not trusting the Lord Jesus. He said He'd always be with us to take care of us and comfort us; and sure enough He is, if only we'll just look up and find Him."

Winifred looked awed and reverent.

"Did you look up and find Him, Phil?"

"I did after a bit; but it was a good while before I seemed able to see Him."

Winifred sighed, and looked wistful.

"I wish I could do that. I do so wish Jesus lived down here, so that we could just go and see Him and talk to Him, then it would be all so nice. Heaven seems such a long way off; it doesn't seem as if He could see us or hear us right away there."

"Well, just at first perhaps it doesn't," answered Phil, with a far-away look in his eyes, "but that feeling goes off by-and-by, and He seems quite near—at least he does to me; and I *know*, just as well as if I could see Him, that He's listening to me, and that He loves me, just as He loved those little children as He blessed when He did live down here."

"Do you feel like that, Phil?" said Winifred. "I wish I could too."

"I think you will, Miss Winnie, if you think much about Him, and ask Him to help you to see Him. It seems as if He likes folks to ask Him things, so as He can give them what they want; leastways, it has always seemed so to me."

"Do you like thinking about Jesus?" asked Winnie, after a few minutes' silence.

"Why, yes, to be sure I do. You see—you see—" and there Phil paused.

"What, Phil?"

"You see, Miss Winnie, I can't help thinking as I shall go to Him before so very long. Folks don't tell me so, but I can kind of see it in their faces, and it sets me thinking."

Winifred looked grave and awed. She hesitated a little before she could bring herself to ask the next question, and when she did so it was in a very low voice.

"Do you mean that you think you will die soon, Phil?"

"Why, yes, Miss Winnie; I know the doctor doesn't think I can live very much longer."

Winifred's face was very grave and rather pale; she drew a little nearer the boy's couch.

"Doesn't it make you frightened to think about dying, Phil?" she said.

"Not now, Miss Winnie; it did once. I was ever so much afraid at first, and couldn't bear to believe it. But I couldn't help thinking about it, do what I would, and now I don't feel a bit afraid."

"I think I should be afraid," said Winnie.

"Not if you loved Jesus," answered the boy, with a sudden smile like sunshine lighting all his face.

"I think now I am glad to go, if it is His will to take me."

"Glad!"

"Why, you see, Miss Winnie, I'm not like other lads. I can't do no work in the world, I can only lie here and bear the pain. I'd be ashamed to fret and make a fuss over it, when the Lord bore such a deal more for us; but it do make me glad to think as it won't last always, and that He will call me soon to come to Him, where there won't be any more pain to bear or any sorrow either."

Something in the words struck a chord of memory in Winifred's heart.

"That's just what the angel said to me—no pain, and no sorrow," she said in a dreamy way. "Will He send an angel for you, Phil?"

"Sometimes I fancy He will, Miss Winnie; but we don't know His ways, we can only guess."

"I wonder if He will send my angel," said the child, still intent on her own thought.

"Your angel, Miss Winnie?"

"Yes, the one that came the other night to teach me how naughty I had been. Oh, I forgot, you don't know, I had *such* a dream a few nights ago, Phil, I think I should like to tell it to you."

So Winifred told her strange dream, and Phil listened with absorbed attention.

"That was a nice dream, Miss Winnie," he said at the close. "You wouldn't be afraid to go away with the angel, would you?"

"Oh no. I don't think I should be afraid to go with the angel—only I should be afraid, I think, to die."

"But," said Phil in a slow, thoughtful way, "I think dying just means going away with God's angel. I don't think there's any difference."

Winifred was silent awhile, and then said slowly:

"If that's it, Phil, perhaps I shouldn't be afraid, for I do love Jesus, and I should like to see Him. Phil, do you think the angel will come for me soon?"

Phil looked at the child, his great hollow eyes full of thought, and answered gravely:

"I don't know, Miss Winnie."

"I am not ill like you, am I?"

"No, not like me."

"Do you think I am ill?"

"Some folks think so, Miss Winnie, by all I hear; but nobody can tell when we shall die except God, and it can't much matter so long as He knows, can it?"

Winnie sat grave and pensive for a long while; but there was no fear in her face, hardly any surprise. Both children were too much in earnest to feel that anything strange had passed between them.

"I wonder if that is what they meant. I wonder if I am going *there* when the swallows go."

CHAPTER VI.

WINIFRED'S BROTHERS.



INIFRED went away from little Phil's home in a grave and quiet mood; but she did not feel unhappy, and she did not feel afraid.

This serious mood lasted for many days, during which the child did a great deal of thinking, although, with the invariable reticence of childhood, she did not speak of her thoughts to those about her.

She did not leave Phil's couch under any distinct impression of approaching death. What had passed between the two children was not sufficient to make Winnie think she was going to die; but the talk with the sick boy had put new thoughts into her head, made plain some

puzzling questions which had troubled her before, and given her food for much meditation.

The sense of approaching change seemed to overshadow her more and more as days passed on.

Nobody spoke to her of any journey, and yet something in Winnie's heart seemed to tell her every day that she was going away—that a time would soon come when she would have to say good-bye to those around her, and go, she knew not whither.

She watched the swallows with an ever-increasing interest, for were they not going too before very long? They, too, were feeling as she was feeling, that some power stronger than themselves was working within them, and would in time urge them to the last flight. They would have to go when they were bidden, and they would obey the voiceless call without a murmur and without a fear, and why should she not do the same?

"They don't know where they are going, and I don't know where I am going," mused the child sometimes. "They don't know the way, and I don't know the way. But they aren't afraid to go. They know that something will show them the

way, and will take them to a nice place where they can be happy. I don't see why I need be afraid either. Mamma knows where I am going, I think. She will take care of me; and God knows too, and He will take care of me. I think it must be God who takes care of the swallows and shows them where to go. If He is so kind to the birds, He is sure not to forget me. I don't see why we need ever be afraid of anything, because He can always take care of us."

But in the midst of new thoughts Winifred did not forget the old wish, to do things for other people, and make herself of use.

She took the boys' play-room under her special care. She looked after their toys, their books, and all those nameless treasures which a housemaid despises, and destroys, but which she could appreciate and care for.

She let them come to her now with all their stories, either of sorrow or joy, and was always ready with sympathy or congratulation. She mended their gloves, and sewed on refractory buttons, and never sent them out of the nursery because their noise made her head ache.

Charley and Ronald were affectionate boys, and very fond of their little sister. Now that she had begun to be interested in their affairs, and to encourage their attentions, it seemed as if they could not make enough of her, and a very happy nursery party was always to be found round the fire each evening, the brothers chattering away to Winnie of all the day's adventures, she listening with unfeigned interest, and more often than not working with her active little fingers at some light task in their service.

She liked to hear about the other boys who shared her brothers' studies with the tutor in the nearest town. She soon learnt to know their names, their characters, and dispositions, and to take an interest in every one; and by-and-by she revealed a little plan which had long been working in her head.

"Charley," she said one evening, "do you think it would be nice to give a tea-party?"

"A tea-party, Winnie?"

"Yes, a sort of a tea-party on a Saturday afternoon, and ask all the boys. Do you think they would care to come?" asked the little girl.

"Come here!"

Charley and Ronald looked pleased and interested; and both fastened their eyes eagerly upon Winifred, as if to make sure of her meaning.

"Yes, I feel as if I should like to see them, before—I mean I have heard about them and I think it would be nice to know them a little. Do you think they would come?"

"I'm sure they would!" cried Ronald, "they'd like it awfully."

"Would you like it too?"

"Of course we should. You're a brick, Winnie, for thinking of it," cried Charley. "What could have put it into your head?"

Winifred smiled in the quiet way which had grown upon her of late.

"I don't quite know. I seem to think of a lot of things now."

"You do," assented Charley with an emphasis that brought a flush of pleasure to Winifred's pale face. "You think of everything now. I can't think what we did before you were well enough to look after our things. I knew they were always in a horrid muddle."

Winnie smiled and sighed too.

"I wish I'd begun before," she said, "when I had more time. I wish I hadn't been so lazy before."

"You weren't lazy, you were ill," said Charley stoutly. "But you're getting better now—you'll soon be well, won't you, Winnie?"

Charley spoke with a certain earnestness of manner which made his sister look at him to see what made him ask the question.

"Oh yes, I think so, Charley," she answered. "I think I'm going to get well quite soon."

Ronald's thoughts were busy with the proposed plan of the tea-party.

"It would be jolly," he said, "awfully jolly. Do you think mamma will let us have it?"

"Oh yes, I am almost sure she will," answered Winnie. "I will ask her to-night. I was waiting till I had asked you, because I wanted to know first if you thought it would be nice."

"Will it be soon?" Ronald asked eagerly.

"I should like it to be soon," answered Winnie, "just as soon as we can have it. Next Saturday, perhaps. That is three days off."

"Oh, jolly!" cried Ronald. "I like things to come soon. I can't bear to wait."

"No, I don't think it would do to wait," answered the little girl, her eyes turning towards the window, which overlooked the water-meadows where the swallows were beginning to gather.

Charley's eyes followed the direction of her glance, and then returned to her face.

"Why wouldn't it do to wait?" he asked with a touch of uneasiness in his voice. "What are you thinking of, Winnie?"

"Of the swallows," she answered still absently; "we must have it before they go, you know!"

"Why?" and Charley opened his eyes wide, not seeing the connection.

Winifred awoke from her day-dream with a little start, and smiled.

"Oh, I don't quite know. Perhaps it is all fancy. Only it seems sometimes as if everything would be different when the swallows go."

Charley looked still half-uneasy and half-puzzled; but Ronald had so many questions to ask about the tea-party that there was no time to wonder more about Winifred's thoughts.

"Will anybody else come beside our fellows?"

"I shall ask Violet," answered Winifred. "She will be pleased to come, and can stay with me whilst you and the boys are playing in the garden before tea. We will get it all ready for you. Violet will like that; I don't think I have been quite kind lately. I have forgotten her sometimes; and poor little Vi has no brothers, and not half so many nice things as I have. I wish I hadn't been so selfish."

Winifred sighed a little, and Charley stood up and put his arm about her neck.

"You're not selfish, Winnie. You're just as nice as you can be. Everybody says so. Everybody loves you—I know it, if you don't."

"Of course they do, Win," added Ronald, waking up to what was passing. "All the fellows ask about you. They all want to know how you are when you're ill. They don't know you hardly at all; but they all like you—everybody does."

Winifred was pleased to hear this, although she hardly felt to deserve praise.

"People are very nice and kind," she said smiling. "I shall like to see the boys. I know mamma will

let us have a very nice tea-party. Cook will be pleased too; she will like to make us nice things."

"Jolly!" cried Ronald again, whilst Charley said more gravely:

"People like doing what you want them to, I think, Winnie."

Winifred was silent a moment, thinking, then she said half-shyly:

"Should you like to do something that I wanted you to, Charley?"

"Yes, to be sure I should."

"So should I," added Ronald.

It was a little while before Winifred spoke: but the boys waited eagerly to hear her commands. They had been wishing one to another that they could do something to please their little sister.

"I should like very much, if you didn't mind, if you would go every week to see little Phil at the lodge. He is so lonely."

"Oh yes, I'll go!" answered Charley. "I like poor Phil, but I'm afraid I've forgotten him often; but he likes you best, Winnie."

"I shall go to see him as long as I can," answered Winnie. "But—but—"

"Why, Winnie!" cried Ronald, "you're not going to be ill again this winter, are you?"

"Oh no, I hope not—I don't think so. Only—I—I fancy perhaps I shan't be able to go and see poor little Phil very much longer. I should like to think you would go instead, and talk to him and lend him books, so that he will not miss me very much. Sometimes I think he'll die before very long."

Charley's face was grave and troubled; but all he said was:

"We'll take care of him, Winnie. He shan't be dull if we can help it. I'll never forget him any more, I promise you."

"Thank you," said Winnie gratefully, and her heart felt the lighter for this promise. She knew Charley would not fail when he had once pledged himself.

Mrs. Digby gave a willing consent to Winifred's plan for the proposed tea-party; and entered into an animated discussion of its every detail. It was arranged for the following Saturday. The guests were to be invited for three o'clock, to have games in the garden, tea in the nursery, charades in the

play-room, and fireworks after supper just before going home.

Everything sounded delightful, and the boys went off in high spirits to prepare their lessons.

"Mamma," said Winnie, after she was in bed, her mother still remaining beside her, "may I give away some of my books and toys to Violet when she comes?"

"What makes you wish to do so, dear?"

"I have so many, you know, mamma, and Violet has so few, and she would be so pleased. Besides, I feel sometimes as if I was growing older. I don't seem to care so much for toys and fairy tales. I like some of my books better than ever; but I hardly ever read the stories I used to be so fond of, and I haven't played with my dolls —Oh, I don't know when!"

"And so you would like Violet to have them instead, would you?" asked Mrs. Digby, caressing the child's head.

"Yes, mamma, if you don't mind. I feel as if I'd not been quite kind to Violet all this while. She would have liked to come here oftener to play, and I haven't asked her; and I haven't

been to see her when I know she would have liked it. I didn't think about things once; but I do now, and I know it wasn't quite right of me."

"And you think Violet would be pleased by having the dolls and fairy tales?"

"I think she would; and I should like to feel that she had them. You don't mind, do you, mamma?"

"No, dearest. If you do not want your toys yourself, it is better to give them to some one who will be pleased by having them."

"Yes; and it will be nice to have seen the boys' friends, and to have made Vi happy. I wonder I never thought about it before. Mamma, the swallows won't have gone by Saturday, will they?"

"No, darling, no," and it seemed as if Mrs. Digby's voice shook. "They will gather a long while yet. What makes my little girl think so much of the swallows?"

"I don't quite know, mamma. Sometimes I can't help fancying that everything will be different when the swallows have gone."

The mother kissed her child very fervently and tenderly, and left the room without another word.

To her surprise she found Charley lingering about the door, as if waiting for her. His face wore a troubled look, and he did not speak at once, but followed his mother down the passage, and did not speak until they reached the window at the end of the corridor near to the staircase, which looked over the water-meadows.

"Mamma," he said then, looking up into her face, "have you been crying?"

"Just a tear or two, my boy. What makes you ask?"

Charley was nearly fifteen, and old enough to have been made anxious by one or two things he had heard and seen of late.

"Were you crying about Winnie? Mamma, is there anything the matter with Winnie?"

"Your little sister is in a very precarious state of health, Charley."

"I know, mamma, she is pale and thin and weak; but she was much worse last winter."

"She *seemed* to be worse, my boy."

"Mamma, mamma!" cried Charley anxiously, "you don't mean—Oh, mamma, she isn't—"

The boy could not say the words, but his eyes

spoke his meaning plainly enough. Mrs. Digby's tears fell for a moment fast and freely; but then they were checked, and she answered steadily:

"We are in God's hands, dear Charley, and our precious little child is under His care. He may be willing to spare her to us a little longer. We may all pray and even hope; God's ways are not our ways, and He is very merciful."

Charley's face grew pale. He saw by his mother's looks how little hope she had.

"Mamma!" he cried; "Oh, mamma!"

"Dear Charley," she said tenderly, "we must all be brave; we may still pray to God to spare our darling, only we must pray first 'Thy will be done.'"

The boy choked and a lump rose in his throat; then he commanded his voice and asked:

"What does Dr. Howard say?"

"He says that—that—he thinks Winifred cannot get any better."

There was silence after this, and then the boy said more slowly and calmly:

"Does Winnie know?"

"I do not know how much; but from what she says I feel sure she knows something."

"It was her talk to-day made me begin to think," said the boy with a tearless sob. "Oh mamma, she is such a dear Winnie; and she talks just as if she were going away."

"My poor Charley, we shall all miss our sweet little girl; but, dear boy, we must remember where she has gone, and Who has taken her."

The boy sobbed on still.

"She will never come back any more."

"No, Charley—could we really wish her back? She will not come to us; but we may go to her. That must then be more than ever the aim of our lives."

"Yes, yes," said the boy; and by-and-by he asked in a whisper, "When?"

"Ah, Charley, I ask that question every day. Sometimes I think it will not be very long after the swallows go."

CHAPTER VII.

WINIFRED'S PARTY.

WINIFRED'S tea-party was a great success. Preparations for it occupied the child's mind for the three days previous to the important Saturday, and by the time the day had arrived nothing had been neglected which she thought could add to the enjoyment of the expected guests.

They had arrived punctual to the appointed hour, and had had fine games in the garden and meadows, which Winifred and Violet had watched from the nursery window.

They had had a splendid tea in the nursery, and had fully appreciated the good fare which their little hostess had pressed upon them. They were all very gentle to Winifred, and seemed to wish to sit by her and talk to her, and the little girl had

been pleased to think that her brothers' friends liked her.

Every one had enjoyed the tea very much, and although Charley had looked a little grave, as he had done for three days past, he did not seem unhappy; and he made so much of his little sister, that she could not wish him other than he was.

The boys had gone away to romp in the playroom now, and Winifred was left alone in the nursery with Violet for her companion.

She was rather tired with her exertions on behalf of her guests, and was glad to curl herself up in a comfortable corner of the old sofa, and rest herself after her labours.

"It was a nice tea-party," said Violet, coming and sitting beside her friend; "I don't think I ever was at a nicer one; I do so like boys!" and the little girl sighed and wished she had some brothers.

"They were nice boys," said Winifred smiling. "I am glad I know them now."

"Didn't you know them before?"

"No, hardly at all."

"How funny! If I had brothers I should always want to know all their friends."

Violet was a merry little maiden, not at all given to grave moods, or over-much meditation. Her parents were poor, and she had never had many toys or books, or even as many friends as she would have liked. There were very few people living near, and there was no carriage to take her to other people's houses; so the little girl had been dependent upon her own happy temper and limited resources for most of the enjoyment of life.

Such a tea-party as the one in which she had just been joining was an immense treat to her. She could not understand how it was that Winifred had not cared before to cultivate the acquaintance of such nice boys.

"I'm afraid it was because I was selfish," said Winifred gravely.

"You selfish!" cried Violet, opening her eyes wide; "Oh, Winnie, I'm sure you're not."

"I'm afraid I have been, Vi; I wish I hadn't; but I don't think I knew it before. I didn't see things that I see now."

"Why do you see them now?" asked Violet with interest; but Winifred did not answer just at once, and the child, too excited to sit down, strayed to the window and looked out.

"What a lot of swallows!"

"Yes. They are beginning to gather. Don't you know that they will go soon?"

"Go!"

"Yes, they fly away, you know, to other countries, and come back again in the spring."

"Do they? How clever of them! How do they know when to go, and where to go?"

"I don't exactly know. I think it must be God who teaches them."

"God! But God can't care about the swallows!"

"I think God cares about everything," said Winifred dreamily. "If he didn't take care of the swallows, how could they find their way?"

"But swallows are such little things; I don't see how God can care for them."

Winifred did not say anything at first, so Violet turned from the window to look at her.

"Violet," she said presently; "I think if God didn't care about little things, He couldn't care about big ones either."

"Why not?"

"Because it is little things that make big ones. I don't think anything is really so very little."

"I don't see," said Violet, knitting her brow.

Winifred pondered awhile.

"Mamma once told me a story about it, when I was ill; I don't think I understood then—I mean I didn't think what it meant; but I have been thinking about it lately — I understand better now."

"A story!" repeated Violet, with more animation in her tone. "I like listening to stories. Tell me the story, please, Winnie."

"I will soon, when it gets dark. I want you to look in that box there in the corner, and see if you like the things in it."

Violet went eagerly to work, lifting the lid, and carefully examining each of the parcels disclosed to view. As she did so, rapturous exclamations of delight escaped her.

Winifred had taken great pains with her selection of toys and books and pretty trifles. Such a box as Violet was now examining would have filled any child with delight. Poor little Violet, who had always suffered from a lack of childish treasures, could not say enough, nor admire enough; she was in a perfect ecstasy.

"Oh, Winnie, how lovely! What perfectly sweet things! Oh, I never saw such a lot of lovely

toys! That doll is just a darling! Oh! whoever did send you such a splendid box?"

"Nobody sent it to me," answered Winifred, with a little smile. "I am going to send it to a little girl—a friend of mine."

Violet was replacing the things in the box with careful, gentle fingers. She gave a little sigh as she wrapped up the beautiful doll in its paper, and gave it one little kiss before she hid its pretty face.

Winifred heard both the sigh and the kiss.

"How pleased the little girl will be!" said Violet, as she closed the box-lid lingeringly.

"I hope she will. I don't think she has a great many toys; and she is fond of dolls and puzzles and fairy tales."

"Like me," Violet was just going to say; but she checked herself, and said instead,

"Does she? How pleased she will be!"

"I hope she will."

"Of course she will; she must be. Do I know her?"

"Yes."

"Do you like her? Is she a nice little girl?"

"I think so."

"What is her name?"

"Her name is Violet."

Violet gave such a jump that Winifred could not help laughing.

"Yes, Vi dear, the box is for you if you will have it, and you are to take it home with you to-night. You see, I'm getting too old now to care for dolls and toys, and then—and then—Well, I thought perhaps you would like them, and I should like you to have them, because I have been fond of them, and I know you will take care of them. And so the box is yours now."

It was some time before Violet could really believe the wonderful news, and then it seemed as if she could not thank Winifred enough. She kissed her and hugged her, and showed in every way in her power how delighted she was; and Winifred felt very glad she had thought of a way to make her little friend so happy.

"You are the dearest Winnie in the world," said Violet, nestling close up to her at last. "I love you a whole lot." And by-and-by she added, after a little pause, "You are not going away anywhere, are you, Winnie?"

"I don't quite know," answered Winifred slowly. "What makes you think so?"

"I thought I heard papa and mamma say something like it—something about how you would be missed—how sorry people would be when you had gone. I could not be quite sure, but I thought they were talking about you, Winnie. When I asked mamma she would not tell me, but I thought she *looked* somehow as if it was true; is it, Winnie?"

"I don't know, Vi; nobody has said anything to me. Sometimes I fancy perhaps I am going somewhere, but I don't know."

"Would you like to go?" asked Vi with interest. "Will it make you quite well again to go? Do you know where you are going?"

Twilight had crept into the room, and the dancing firelight made flickering lights and shadows upon the walls and low ceiling. Winifred held Violet's warm hand in hers, and spoke more plainly to her than she had ever done before.

"Vi," she said gently, "you won't cry if I tell you?"

"No, Winnie; why should I?" but the tone was a little apprehensive, and Violet crept closer to her little friend, and looked into her face.

"I think, Vi, that I am going to heaven."

Violet started, and held Winifred's hand closer and closer, in a frightened way.

"Oh no, no, Winnie! you can't mean that! Oh no, it can't be so dreadful!"

"It isn't dreadful, Vi. Going to heaven couldn't be dreadful, you know."

Violet made no answer.

"I thought at first that I was only going away with nurse to a warmer country to get well again, but now, I think—I am almost sure—that I am going to heaven soon. Don't cry, Vi."

"Why do you think so?" sobbed the child.

"I don't know if I can explain, quite. It seems as if something inside told me—just as something tells the swallows when they are to go."

"The swallows come back," said Violet, with another convulsive sob.

"Yes," answered Winifred dreamily; "but when we get to heaven, Vi, I do not think we shall want to come back."

Violet checked her tears presently, and asked:

"Aren't you afraid, Winnie?"

"No; not now."

"I should be."

"I was once; but I'm so *sure* now that God will take care of me. When the swallows go they're not afraid, and they don't know where they are going, and they don't know the way. God takes care of them, so I can't help being quite sure that He will take care of me."

Violet sat silent, staring into the fire. By-and-by she heaved a great sigh.

"How sorry every one will be! How they will all miss you!"

"Do you think they will?"

"Oh yes. Why everybody loves you, Winnie. You are so good and kind to every one."

"I'm afraid not," answered Winnie gravely. "I used to think about pleasing people, but since I've been ill I've got very selfish; I did nothing for anybody, and did not try to be even kind or pleasant."

"You were ill," answered Vi; "you couldn't help it. You couldn't come to see people. It was very naughty of me to be cross with you."

Another childish conscience was pricking its owner, bringing to mind sundry cross words and ungracious complaints which had fallen from her lips during the past months.

Winifred saw at once that her neglect had pained her little friend.

"I could have asked you to come to me," she said quickly. "It was very naughty and selfish of me to think of nobody else. It makes me very sorry now, that I was so lazy and so unkind."

"Don't, Winnie; you weren't," interrupted Violet. "And now you're just as kind as you can be—everybody says so. What will they do——?"

Violet stopped short, the tears in her eyes.

Winifred knew what she meant, and answered it.

"Mamma will miss me most," she said. "Vi dear, I want you to do something for me. Will you come to see mamma as often as you can, and try to comfort her? She is fond of you, and she will like it. She hasn't another little girl; but if you would come in and talk to her, and tell her things, and kiss her, and be fond of her, I am sure she would like it. She is fond of you, Vi."

"I will, Winnie. I love your mamma a whole lot. I should like to come and see her and tell her things. But oh, Winnie, I can't bear to think about it—it seems so sad and dreadful."

"We won't think about it, then, nor talk about it, if you don't like. I haven't talked to anybody

else, Vi, and I don't know—It is only what I fancy. I may—perhaps—be wrong."

Violet took courage from this idea, which she eagerly seized upon. Children soon turn their minds from a subject which seems sad or painful.

"You have not told me your story yet, Winnie; and it is quite dark enough now."

"Yes, and almost time to go down to watch the boys' charade; but I will just tell you what it was, as I promised, because I think perhaps it would be easier to be good if we could always remember that little things matter just as much as big ones, and are really often harder to think of, and to do."

Winifred paused a moment, whilst Violet settled herself to listen to the story.

"It isn't a very long one, and I can't tell it nicely like mamma; but it was about a little boy whom she once knew quite well—a nice little boy whom everybody was fond of, because he was so good-tempered and merry. His name was Frank, and he lived in a nice little house with his mother, and they were very happy.

"One day a pane of glass was broken in the green-house. It was Frank who had done it by

accident, but he told a lie, and said he hadn't. It was the first time he had ever told a lie, and it seemed a very little one, and he didn't think much about it. But then after he had told one story he told another, and then another, and at last his mother found him out, and was so shocked and grieved about it that she sent him to school.

"For a little while he seemed to do better; but by-and-by he began to tell little lies again to get out of trouble, and then he told big ones, and a wicked big boy found him out once in a great lie, and said he would tell of him if Frank would not help him in some wicked thing he wanted to do. So Frank promised he would, and the big boy led him into all sorts of dreadful mischief, and at last it got found out by the schoolmaster, and Frank was expelled."

"Oh!" ejaculated Violet, opening her eyes wide. "What did his mother say then?"

"His mother never saw him," answered Winifred gravely, "for he was afraid to go home; and he ran away to sea, and led a miserable, wicked life for a great many years, and never once wrote to tell his mother that he was alive, or what had become of him."

"How wicked!"

"Yes, it was wicked; and it broke his mother's heart; and when she could find out nothing about him, and months and years went by without any news, she grew weaker and weaker, and sadder and sadder, and by-and-by she died. Think, Vi, if he hadn't told that little lie about the pane of glass, or any other *little* lie, perhaps he might have grown up a good man."

"Is that the end of the story, Winnie!"

"No, not quite; for by-and-by when he was a man he thought he would go back and see his mother again. He was poor, and miserable, and wicked, and he had been very ill, and he thought he would go back and try and be a good son if only his mother would forgive him. Well, he came back to England and went to his own village, and found that his mother was dead, and that she had died through his wicked conduct. Nobody knew Frank because he had changed so much, and nobody said a kind word to him. They did not know him, though he knew some of them. He was so desperate and miserable that he determined he would kill himself; and in the evening he crept down the village street to get to the river, and he

meant to shoot himself there, and let his body fall into the water and be carried away."

"And did he?" asked Vi, in an awe-struck tone.

"No; for as he was passing down the street he passed the school-room, and the door was open, and he saw that the room was full of people. He just fancied he would like to see what was going on, so he crept into the porch and listened. The clergyman was talking to the children and people, telling them about the prodigal son coming home to his father; and then he said that he would give them just one little text to remember, three little words which would always be a help if ever they had done wrong and were afraid whether they could be forgiven. The little text was 'God is Love'—just that; and he talked to them about God and God's love so earnestly, that poor Frank forgot all about the wicked plan in his head, and listened for every word; and he could not help crying as he thought how wicked he was and how good God was, and he crept away to cry outside; and when the clergyman came out, he saw him sitting on the ground, and he went and spoke to him and found out who he was. And the clergy

man had been a friend of Frank's mother and had known him when he was a boy; and he was taking care of some money which the mother had left for him in case he ever came back. And so he took Frank home with him, and talked to him and comforted him and helped him to be a good man; and Frank tried very hard, and always thought of the three little words, and by-and-by he did grow to love God and to be a good man, and mamma knows him now, and says he is very kind and good. And he is never tired of telling people how important little things are; because it was just a little lie which began all his wickedness, and it was one little text of three little words which stopped him from killing himself, and made him try to be a good man again."

"That is a nice story," said Violet. "I am so glad he got good at last."

"I am so glad that 'God is Love,'" said Winnie.

"I will try never to do little naughty things again," added Violet; "I mean I will try never to call them little or think them little any more."

They had not time to discuss the subject any longer, for the boys came rushing up to tell

them that the charade was just going to begin, and that their presence was requested for the occasion.

The acting was very funny and amusing, and the boys did it very well. Winifred and Violet laughed heartily, and all grave thoughts seemed for the time quite driven away.

Then came the supper in the dining-room, and crackers were pulled and jokes cracked, and everybody was very merry and gay.

Winifred was quite the queen of the night; and so much attention was heaped upon her that she hardly knew how to respond to it all.

Mr. Digby and Charley let off the fireworks last thing, and the exhibition gave great delight to the whole party. Everybody agreed that it had been a splendid evening, and the guests drove away in the big waggonette in the highest spirits, Violet at the far end with the big box safe under her feet.

Winifred, from her sheltered nook by the hall-window, watched the carriage drive away, and kissed her hand in answer to the boys' farewell cheer; then she turned away with a grave smile on her little pale face.

"I think they were all pleased," she said. "They are nice boys, Charley. I wonder I never wanted them to come before."

"They can come often if you like them," said Ronald, eagerly. "They liked it awfully, and they all said you were a brick. They will come as often as you like, I'm sure."

Winifred smiled a little.

"I should like to think they would often come," said she, slowly. "If you like it and they like it, and mamma doesn't mind. It would make it nice for you, wouldn't it, Ronald?"

"Yes, jolly!" he answered, turning an agile somersault. "But you look tired, Winnie. I'll take you to mamma, and she'll say you ought to be in bed."

"Yes, I should like to go to bed," said the child, rather wearily; "but it has been a nice evening."

CHAPTER VIII.

SUNDAY.

THE next day was Sunday, such a warm bright day, it seemed almost like a little bit of summer come by mistake into September.

Winifred had slept soundly and well after her exertions of the previous evening, and she awoke refreshed and happy, feeling as every one else felt, the joyousness of all around in nature's beautiful world.

"I feel so strong to-day, mamma," she said, with one of her old, bright, childlike smiles. "So strong and so well. It is so nice!"

There was more colour than usual in the child's face, more brightness in her eyes, more strength in her voice and in her movements. The mother

folded her closely to her heart, and seemed almost to breathe a prayer over her.

"Mamma," said Winifred earnestly, "may I go to church to-day? I should so like to. I haven't been for six Sundays, and I do so want to go just once more, before—before the winter comes. I do feel so strong to-day."

"I will talk to papa, darling. We should like to please you if we can. We will talk it over together, and see what can be done."

"Thank you, mamma," answered Winnie brightly. She was standing by the window now, and presently she added with a smile: "Mamma, if the weather keeps warm like this, it will be a long while before the swallows go, won't it?"

"It will make a little difference, no doubt, dear," answered the mother.

"I don't feel as though I was quite ready for them to go yet," continued Winifred gravely. "It would be nice if they would stay just a little longer."

Mrs. Digby went away, and returned by-and-by to say that Winifred might be driven to church by Charley in the little pony-carriage, and then

she would be able to enjoy the service, and walk back without too much fatigue. The child was very much pleased, and was ready in good time for the promised drive.

It was a lovely autumn day; the sun shone, the birds twittered, the air seemed full of sweet sounds, and everything looked as bright and happy as if such things as frost and cold and winter winds did not exist—as if summer were perpetual.

"Oh, Charley, isn't it lovely?" cried Winifred with clasped hands and flushed cheeks. "Isn't it just a perfect Sunday morning? I think it feels as if everything knew it was Sunday, birds and flowers and everything. Do you think they do?"

"I don't know, Winnie," answered Charley; but he did not laugh at her fancy.

Winifred thought a little, and by-and-by she said:

"Do you think it is always Sunday in heaven Charley?"

"I don't know, Winnie; what makes you think about heaven?"

"I often think about it now, and to-day it just seems as if everything was like heaven. I wonder if it will always be Sunday there?"

Charley made no answer.

"I suppose it will, because, you see, Sunday is God's day, and in heaven all days will be God's, won't they?"

"I suppose so."

Winifred pursued the thought a little farther, and then added thoughtfully:

"Every day ought to be God's day here, too, Charley, I think, only we don't remember to make them so."

"We couldn't do with Sundays all the week, Winnie," answered the boy. "The work would never get done at that rate."

"I don't quite mean *that*," said Winnie smiling. "It would not be right to do no work. God would not like that at all; but it would be nice if all days seemed to belong to Him alike—working Sundays and resting Sundays. I've heard people say that lots of men and women never think about God, or about being good all the week, and think it's quite enough to go to church on Sunday. I don't think God can like that kind of Sunday-keeping."

Charley was silent. He was conscious that he

had been rather after this way of thinking himself—keeping his few thoughts of God and of heaven and holy things for Sunday use, and putting them quite out of his head during the busy week with its many pleasures and occupations. Was Winifred right in her theory? Ought every day to have its share of serious thought and prayer?

"It would not be very easy to work such a plan as that, Winnie?"

"Why not?"

"Why because—because. Oh, don't you know, it's so hard to remember about God always. I suppose it's wrong; but I don't feel as if I could keep it up, if I was to try and make every day a kind of Sunday. We can't always be thinking of one thing."

"No, I know we can't, we can't always be *thinking* exactly; but we can always be loving, you know," answered Winnie earnestly. "We are not always thinking about papa and mamma; but we always love them, and we try every day to do as they wish, not to break rules, and not to vex them."

"Ah yes, that is different."

"Is it?"

"Well, it seems different to me."

"I don't think it is really very different, Charley. I don't see why it should be, except that we ought to think even more about pleasing God than pleasing papa and mamma, though it is not very easy."

"No, it isn't; but I'll think about what you've said, Winnie. I can't think where all your grown-up ideas come from. Ronald and I never troubled our heads over such things when we were little—and we don't very much now for the matter of that. What is it has changed you lately, Winnie?"

The boy looked into her face with a half-troubled, half-playful look, which Winnie answered by a very bright smile. She did not reply, for they had reached the church by this time; but she held Charley's hand very fast as he led her to the pew.

Winifred felt almost as if she were dreaming, as she sat in her accustomed nook beside her mother, and looked round the grand old church, whose every detail was as familiar to her eyes as were the pictures and panelling of her nursery walls.

It was only six weeks since she had sat there

last—only six weeks—but what a long, long time it seemed to the child!

It was almost like heaven the little girl thought when the organ began to play. The sunshine streaming through the coloured windows, seemed like a halo of glory. Everything was very solemn, very beautiful, and very peaceful. Winifred said again and again in her heart:

"I am so glad God let me come once again."

Shadows of the darting swallows crossed the sunny windows now and again. Yes, the swallows never forgot her, Winifred thought, and the swallows were always fond of flying round the church. Dreamily the child recalled some verse of Holy Writ, which told how the swallows had made a nest in the sanctuary of the God of Hosts.

"I know God loves the swallows. I know it is He who takes care of them when they go, and shows them the way to go. He is sure—oh quite, quite sure to take care of me too."

The clergyman's text seemed to chime in peculiarly happily with the little girl's thoughts:

"Suffer little children to come unto Me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Winifred looked up into her mother's face and smiled. Mrs. Digby pressed the little hand that was slipped into hers, and her eyes sparkled through a mist of tears as she smiled back.

Winifred walked home between her two brothers, who seemed very pleased and proud of their charge.

All three children were very merry and happy together, and Ronald built fine castles in the air of all the things they would do in the future, when Winnie should be strong and well again.

Charley, with all the hopefulness of a boy's nature, joined in eagerly, and Winifred listened and smiled, and took her share in the talk, and she felt herself so strong and well that she wondered dreamily to herself whether she had made a mistake all this time, whether perhaps she would see the swallows go and come back again after all, without having herself to take an unknown journey into a far-off land.

As they neared the park-gates, Winifred made a suggestion :

"Let us go in and see little Phil. He will be so pleased ; and then I can rest a little while."

"Are you tired ?"

"No; at least only a very little; but I should like to go and see Phil."

"All right," said Ronald; "come on."

Phil's couch was in the little garden to-day. The summer brightness had tempted him out.

"It seemed a pity to miss the last of the summer," he said in answer to Charley's question. "It could hardly last; but it was just lovely to feel the sun and fancy the summer had come back again."

He was very pleased to see his visitors, and thanked Winifred over and over again for the books she had sent him, and the mittens she had made.

Winifred sat looking quietly about her, listening to the boys' chatter. Phil was a great referee in matters pertaining to birds, and beasts, and fishes; and Charley and Ronald wanted to ask many questions about the respective advantages of keeping pigeons or rabbits—a point upon which their minds had been much exercised of late.

The talk was carried on with animation, and Winnie became interested as she listened. The talk had taken a wider range.

"I think you'd like guinea-fowls, Mr. Charley,"

Phil was saying. "They're pretty things, and more interesting, I think, than pigeons. You say Mr. Digby's given you the little house at the bottom of the field; well, if you wired in a good run for them —he'd be sure to let you do that—why that is all you'd want, and they'd do splendidly, I'm almost sure; I kept a few once, and liked them a lot."

"Guinea-fowls are jolly things," cried Ronald. "I like to hear them call 'go back!' 'go back!' 'go back!' Let us have them, Charley. They'd be much nicer than rabbits or pigeons."

"But," said Charley, "it will cost so much more. We've got enough money to repair the house and buy some animals; but I'm afraid we sha'n't be able to have a run wired in, and we couldn't have them straying all over the place; we should lose them, and it would never do."

Ronald's face fell.

"Would it cost much?"

"Pretty much, I'm afraid. You see there would have to be the uprights, and the wire, and a door to get in and out; and they would want a good space or they wouldn't do. I'm afraid it would cost two or three pounds."

"Oh dear!" sighed Ronald, "then we can't do it. I should have liked the guinea-fowls."

"Oh yes," cried Winnie, eagerly, "do get guinea-fowls; they are so pretty and funny. I have got a lot of money in my box—more than three pounds, I know. I will get the wire and wood, and make the run for them. Oh please let me, Charley! I should so like it!"

"But, Winnie, it doesn't seem fair to take your money to spend over our animals."

"Oh, but I want to do it, Charley, I should so like it; and I'm sure you would so like them when you had them. Do please let me make them their run. I don't want my money—indeed I don't."

Ronald clapped his hands ecstatically.

"You *are* a brick, Winnie, a real trump! Charley, they have splendid guinea-fowls at Farmer Johnson's. We could go and talk to him about it to-morrow after school. Oh, won't it be jolly? I am glad you thought of it, Phil. You shall have some eggs by-and-by, and so shall Winnie. It's just first-rate!"

The children rose to go; all the faces were very bright.

"Shall you be able to come again, Miss Winnie?" asked Phil wistfully; "it is so nice to see you sometimes."

"I'll come if I can," answered the child slowly; "only I'm not sure,—I think sometimes—"

"We're afraid sometimes she won't be able to get out much, now that the summer is gone," broke in Charley, with almost nervous haste; "but we'll come to see you, Phil, Ronald and I, so don't look blue."

"Thank you, Mr. Charley, thank you kindly. Good-bye, Miss Winnie."

"Good-bye, Phil."

The two children smiled into each other's eyes. It was the last look they ever exchanged on earth.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAST FLIGHT.

THE summer weather lasted only three days longer, but those three days were not wasted.

Winifred was so anxious to get the guinea-fowls into their new home, that everything else for a while gave way to that plan.

The carpenter was called in to mend the little shed, and to wire in a great square from the field to make a run for the expected tenants. The thatcher came with his straw to fill up the holes in the roof, and the blacksmith fixed an iron drinking-trough in one corner, and brought up a padlock for the door of the shed.

Winifred watched all these proceedings with the greatest interest. She had not felt so strong again as she had done on Sunday; she could not walk to the lodge or do anything which

required much exertion; but she could just manage to get down to the home field where the work was going on, and sit upon a tree-stump near at hand to watch the men at work, and to ask questions as to how and why they did this or that. Winifred found it all very interesting, and was delighted when on the evening of the second day the home was pronounced complete.

"It's done, Charley! it's done!" she called to them gladly, as they came rushing down the field from their day's lessons. "Come and see how nice it all looks. When can the fowls come?"

"To-morrow," answered Charley. "We can bring them back with us to-morrow. We've arranged it all with Farmer Johnson, and we're going to start with ten. You'll see them arrive to-morrow, Winnie."

"Oh jolly!" cried Ronald; "you will like them, Winnie, they are such jolly birds. I'd sooner keep guinea-fowls than anything now."

Winifred was as much pleased and excited as anybody, and quite impatient for the arrival of the new pets.

"I do hope they will come to-morrow, and that it will keep hot!" she said to herself that night.

"For it can't be summer always, and the swallows are gathering so fast—so fast. It must be nearly time for them to go."

The next day the sun still shone warm and bright, and the thousands of swallows in the meadows seemed as full of life and happiness as though there were no winter cold and frost to drive them away.

"We shall be home early to-day, Winnie," cried Ronald, putting his head in at the nursery-door last thing. "Mr. Arnold has to go to town, and we shall get off early. You'll be down in the field to see the guinea-fowls come!"

"Oh yes!" cried Winnie, eagerly. "I do so want to see them. I hope they will like their new home."

Winifred waited eagerly for the appointed time to come, and was down at the new house in the field a good half-hour too soon. The boys, however, were punctual to their time, and soon the sound of wheels being driven over the grass became distinctly audible.

Farmer Johnson's light spring-cart was bringing its burden down to the appointed place; and with a good deal of clucking and calling and screaming,

the pretty, softly-marked birds were transferred from the cart to their new home.

"Oh, nice things!" cried Winnie, "how pretty they are, and how funny! I am glad they have come. I am glad I have seen them. I do hope they will be happy!"

"Not much doubt of that, little miss," said the good-natured farmer, as he mounted his cart and took the reins. "They'll be well looked after, I'll be bound."

"That they will!" cried Ronald, eagerly. "Aren't they jolly birds, Winnie?"

Mr. and Mrs. Digby came down to see and admire the new comers; and after much talk about the many perfections of the guinea-fowl, they all walked back together to the house, discussing as they did so the number of chickens to be hatched in the spring.

Winifred's face looked rather grave and wistful whilst this point was under discussion; but the smiles soon came back under the cheering influence of Ronald's delight at their new treasures.

That night the weather changed suddenly. The wind shifted from south-west to south-east, and brought with it cold, drenching rain, and piercing

blasts of wind, which rattled fiercely at door and window and would not be denied an entrance.

The leaves were whirled from the trees, the few flowers that remained were battered and knocked to pieces. The water-meadows began to show long furrows of glimmering silver, and the swallows gathered faster and faster every day. It seemed as if winter had come with one bound.

"It will come warmer again soon," people said to one another. "This cold cannot last. We shall have soft, mild days again before long."

And Winifred, when she heard them, said to herself:

"But the swallows will be gone before that."

The child had failed all of a sudden, just as a flower sometimes does, looking fresh and bright and full of life one hour, and then at a single touch losing its leaves and dropping quietly out of existence.

With the first breath of winter cold Winifred had drooped and failed, and lost in a day all the little strength she had seemed to gain.

By the end of the week she could not leave her little bed, and although nobody told her so she knew she never should leave it again.

"Mamma," she said one day, "I can't see the swallows now. May my bed go into the day nursery? I like so much to look out of the window there. I like to watch the swallows, and I like to watch the sunsets."

The child's wish was granted. The little low bed was moved into the west room, and as Winifred lay, she could watch her friends the swallows, and see the sun go down. Even when the days were wet, the evenings were generally bright, and the sky would grow gradually all crimson and gold, like a sea of glory, and great soft clouds of every colour of the rainbow would rise and float over the golden distance, and to the little grave eyes that watched the beautiful dying day, it seemed as if the gates of heaven opened night by night to take the great sun in, and she wondered dreamily if the floating clouds were the souls of the people who had died in the day, and who were finding their way home as the evening drew on.

A great many strange thoughts and fancies passed through the child's mind, as she lay day after day in her little bed, too weak and tired to talk, not always quite able to put her thoughts into words, but always able to think in a dreamy

fashion of her own. She always knew the people who came in and out to look at her, kiss her, or wait upon her, and she had a smile for every one, even when she could not talk.

She hardly knew how time passed. Sometimes she grew confused between day and night; but it always seemed as though mamma were in the room, whoever else shifted and changed, and Winifred always felt happiest holding her hand and listening to her voice.

Little Violet came sometimes with hushed steps and tearful voice; and the boys stole in each morning and evening to kiss her and whisper loving words. One day Winnie roused herself to ask after the new pets, and ten minutes later Ronald appeared, carrying in his arms a scolding struggling guinea-hen; and the little girl laughed a weak little laugh to see how it pecked and kicked and called "go back!" "go back!"

Dr. Howard came very often, as it seemed to the child, and papa was in the room almost as constantly as mamma, although he did not stay quite so long. The servants often stole in just to look at her, and Winnie had a smile for every one, and a word of greeting when she was well enough.

"You will give them all something of mine by-and-by, when I am gone," said the child to her mother one day. "And nursey must have as many as she wants—dear nursey, who has been so kind and good always! I'm afraid they would cry if I gave them away now."

"I will do as you wish, darling."

"Thank you; and you will take care of little Phil?"

"Yes, dear."

"Thank you; I know you will do everything right."

Winifred lay silent after that; it tired her now to talk even a little. The sunset was very bright that evening, and the swallows were making a great twittering; myriads there seemed of them now, gathered in the water-meadows, and there seemed an unusual bustle amongst them on this particular night.

"They will soon be going now," Winnie said half-aloud, and her mother answered gently:

"Very soon now, my darling."

Mother and child looked at one another, and Winnie smiled. These two did not need to talk of what was in their inmost hearts, they understood.

without words. Every morning when the blind first went up, the child had said, "Have the swallows gone yet?" and when she heard the answer she would say, "I am glad; I feel as if I should miss them."

A good many people came in to kiss Winnie that night, and she said "good-bye" to them all, not "good-night," though she could hardly have told why.

Papa and mamma stayed on, and nurse; and Dr. Howard seemed to come in the middle of the night.

"Mamma," said Winifred once, "I am very happy, I haven't any pain—I'm so glad God takes care of little things—swallows, you know—and children. He will take care of me, I know."

"My darling is not afraid to go to Him, then?" asked the mother very gently.

"Oh no—not now."

Talking was very hard, her tongue seemed heavy, and only whispers came from between the parted lips. A strange singing filled the child's ears.

Father and mother bent over the little one and kissed her, oh, so tenderly and so lovingly!—but they did not cry. Winnie was glad that they did not cry.

"Into Thy Hands, O most loving Father—"

Was it her father's voice speaking thus? The child thought so, but could not tell, for a rushing sound as of many wings seemed to fill the air drowning the voice that still spoke in solemn tones.

"The swallows!" she tried to say— "the swallows—they are going—at last—" but with that strange rushing of wings mingled another and a sweeter sound, that made Winnie clasp her hands and look up with a smile on her little white face.

"It is my angel—come for me—I am not afraid to go—now. Did God send you for me, angel?—I am ready."

In the morning there were no swallows in the water-meadows—they had all flown away in the night; and one little blood washed soul had flown in at Heaven's wide gate to rest for evermore in the care of the Heavenly Father, who watches over little helpless things, and thinks no child that trusts His love too small or weak to be taken in to the eternal Home at last.

THE END.

THE LITTLE MATCH-GIRL.

THE LITTLE MATCH-GIRL.

CHAPTER I.

A LITTLE MATCH-SELLER.



HE was a pathetic little figure for those who had eyes to spare for anybody so insignificant as a little street match-seller. She had been shivering just before in the chill February blast; but a dancing sunbeam had forced its way through the grey, hurrying clouds, and an answering smile seemed to light up the face of the child, as she watched it creeping nearer and nearer, till she could feel the warmth touch her bare feet like a caress.

Some boys not far off were playing marbles in the gutter, and the little girl was watching the play with great interest. She had a wholesome fear of boys, and seldom or never attempted to

exchange remarks with them, shrinking away if they seemed disposed to address her; but she took a keen interest in their games for all that, and was very ardently on the side of a curly-headed urchin with carroty, unkempt locks, who was the happy possessor of a couple of very fine coloured marbles that quite put all the others into the shade.

Bright colour of any sort was the little girl's delight. No matter whether it was the glow of the sky, the sunshine upon red chimney stacks, or the dresses of the passers-by, anything that was gaily coloured was such a joy to her that her little face would smile all over whilst the vision of colour flitted before her eyes.

It was a pathetic little face, with singularly delicate features for a child of the people; framed in a tangled mass of short, yellow hair, which if properly dressed and cared for would have been a real beauty. The blue eyes could sparkle with joy or swim in tears with equal readiness, just as the varying mood of childhood prompted. For the little one was singularly emotional for one of her hard bringing up, and was quickly moved to sorrow or pleasure by the passing events of daily life.

Just as the game of marbles came to an end, and the boys scampered away to their respective duties or amusements, a great church clock some-

where high overhead boomed out the hour of two. The little girl's face instantly took upon it a rather eager expression, and seizing her matches in a firmer grip, she ran a few steps to a certain corner, and there stationing herself in a nook, to which she was evidently no stranger, she began looking intently and expectantly in a certain direction.

Crowds of business men were hurrying along, some to the train, others to the various omnibuses, which passed in endless succession at this busy junction of streets. The child held out her matches, and mechanically offered them for sale, but her eyes were always bent in one direction; and had anybody been watching her face, he could not have failed to note the sudden illumination which beamed out over it, as though kindled by some light from within.

Evidently somebody was coming for whom the little one was waiting with eager expectancy. The lips parted in a smile, the eyes began to sparkle and dance, a flush crept into the pale cheek. A moment or two later and another expression swept over the sensitive face, and the child said half aloud—

"Oh, he is not alone! He has a lady with him! Perhaps he will not notice me to-day."

Evidently much hinged upon this vital point; for the colour came and went in the child's face,

and her eyes were fixed immovably upon a certain face belonging to somebody in that hurrying throng. Her lips were parted in intense absorption, and perhaps there was something magnetic in the fixed gaze, for the successful young barrister, Bertram Clayton, who was walking with his sister through the crowded thoroughfare, paused suddenly just as he drew near to the child, and looking about him said in a pleasant voice—

"Ah, here is little Allumette! I must have a box of matches if they are not too dear to-day!"

The child's face was rippling all over now. At first his grave bargaining over her wares, and his way of shaking his head over their costliness, had half frightened her, and she had sometimes abated their price, thinking that she must be in the wrong. But now that she had learned by experience that the gentleman always gave her in the end double and treble their value, she was no longer abashed, and entered with a shy spirit into the game of bargains.

Almost always this tall, handsome gentleman was alone. Now and then he had a black-coated, grave-faced friend with him, in which case he seldom stopped to buy matches or speak to the child, but just gave her a passing nod if he caught sight of her wistful face and appealing blue eyes. Never before in her experiences had he been with a lady, and the child's eyes lighted

eagerly as they rested upon the soft fur and bright crimson cloth which composed the lady's dress.

"What a duck of a child!" she exclaimed to her brother, "I must really give her something!"

The gentleman had finished his bargain and got his matches by this time, and the little girl was smiling over the pennies in her hand. Not that it was the pennies so freely given which made this customer more to her than all the rest put together: it was the kind smile beaming from his eyes, the tones of his voice, the undefined feeling she always had that he looked out for her, and sometimes thought of her when he was elsewhere. For had he not brought her now and then a bag of sweets, or some trifling toy, such as are hawked about in the streets?

By this time the lady had opened her purse, and now held up before the child's astonished eyes a large piece of silver money that shone brilliantly in the gleam of sunshine.

"Little Allumette," she said, using the name by which the gentleman always called her—she never could guess why, "do you know what this is?"

"It is money, ma'am; beautiful new money!"

"Have you ever had anything like it before?"

"Only bright pennies sometimes, ma'am; not beautiful silver money like that."

"And what would you do with a whole silver crown if you had one of your very own?"

The child's eyes sparkled, but no words came. The idea of being possessor of such fabulous wealth was too big a one to be grasped in a moment. The lady laughed at the expression upon the upturned face, and put the big silver coin into her hand.

"There, little Allumette, there is a keepsake for you. You have such a wise little face that I am sure you will make a good use of it. Come, Bertram, we must not miss our train."

Before the child could find words in which to thank the lady the crowds had swallowed up both brother and sister, and she was left alone at her corner, grasping the wonderful piece of fairy silver (for such indeed it seemed to her) tightly in her hand, her heart beating thick and fast with the excitement of such a wonderful piece of fortune's favour.

It was Saturday afternoon, and trade was brisk. She had soon sold all her matches, and was ready to turn her feet homewards, but first she must think what to do with this wonderful treasure-trove. That was her own—her very own. She scarcely dared to look at it as she walked the streets; she was afraid lest some passer-by might get a glimpse at the shining coin, and might set upon her and rob her of it.

Where could she put it to keep it safe? At home there was no nook or corner she could call her own. Poor little Allumette! Her life was a sad and shadowed one now, and yet once nobody would ever have guessed that she would come to selling matches in the streets.

Her father had been a clever and respectable artisan, and her mother a farmer's daughter. But Allumette could not remember a mother's care, for her mother had died whilst she was but a baby, and her father had married again a woman of a very different stamp. Moreover, misfortunes had come upon him, and he had lost his health and then his work. Three years before, when Allumette was only five, he had died, and the stepmother had almost at once married a widower with three children—she herself had four.

So that Allumette had now neither father nor mother, and though she was still permitted to live in the double attic where this heterogeneous family party made their home, she was nobody's child, and nobody wanted her. She had to earn her own living in the streets, and though she met with no ill-treatment at home, she received no love or tenderness, and knew that her presence was felt to be a nuisance by the parents of the other children.

Moreover, some of the boys were of an age when teasing becomes a delight, and Allumette was

always reckoned as fair game, for she had nobody to stand by her and take her part.

It was before the days of School Boards, and Allumette had no chance of learning except at a ragged school which she frequented as often as she could in the evenings. But if she had been unlucky with her matches by day, she was always sent out again to dispose of her stock later on, and then she was too late and too tired ever to think of learning anything.

And yet the child was not altogether unhappy in her life. She made interests for herself, and sometimes friends too. Had she not several customers who showed her kindness in a fitful way? and was there not, above all, "her gentleman," as she called him, who was more to her than all the rest put together? And was there not the old cobbler and his wife at the end of the alley, who were always glad to see her when she came? She did not like to go too often, because Mrs. Gregg would give her bread and treacle, and she did not think they always had enough to eat themselves; but it was always pleasant to sit by their little fire and hear the old man's stories; and to-day she bent her steps there with great eagerness, for she meant to spend her own two pennies (given by the gentleman) on some herrings for them, and then she would not mind sharing the frugal meal, and could tell them about her wonder-

ful windfall, and ask their advice as to what she could do with her treasure.

Allumette's home was up a number of rickety stairs in a narrow court, and when she arrived there she found her stepmother in the midst of a Saturday clean, and by no means prepared to welcome anybody. The child only paused to hand in her money, and then disappeared down the stairs with alacrity; for one of the most valued privileges which had been accorded her was that her time was her own when she had disposed of her stock of matches.

Her bare feet went pattering up the alley, which grew darker and narrower towards the end. At the end stood a tall, grim-looking house, let out in rooms to a poor class of tenants, the lowest floor, comprising two rooms and a tiny kitchen beyond, being rented to the cobbler, whose front room was a sort of workshop where he was always to be seen cobbling and patching old boots, many of which seemed almost past the skill of even his dexterous fingers.

Sometimes Allumette picked up old boots in rubbish heaps and brought them to him, and often she found bits of leather which were useful to him in patching. The little girl was fond of the old couple, and they of her. It was always a treat to her to go and sit in the quiet of their room.

The herrings were bought at a shop in the alley,

where they were to be had cheaper than anywhere else; and with her odorous burden she hastened to the little house at the end, where her old friends received her with smiles and kind words.

It was a slack afternoon with the cobbler, as he had taken home his last batch of work, and had not much in hand until fresh orders arrived. So he sat holding the child's hand while she poured into his ears her wonderful tale, and displayed before his astonished eyes her wonderful shining coin.

Mrs. Gregg came up to look and admire and wonder, and eager was the discussion which followed.

"No, I shan't spend it—I shall keep it," said Allumette. "The lady said it was a sort of keep-sake. I shall keep it and look at it sometimes; only I don't know where it will be safe."

"I'll make you a little leather bag for it, ducky," said the old man, "and then I'll make a little hole in the crown itself, if you like, and you can hang it round your neck, bag and all. It'll be safest so, as you might lose it out of the bag if 'twasn't bored through itself; but we'll make it all safe for you!"

Allumette was delighted. She watched the whole process with eager interest, and when the coin was wrapped in its covering and hung about her neck, her little face beamed all over with joy.

"It feels as if it would bring me good luck!" she cried, with dancing eyes.

"Perhaps it will for sure!" said the old couple fondly.

A happy child was Allumette that night when she fell asleep, though she little dreamt of the golden hours that were in store for her.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE STUDIO.

"IT is provoking!" exclaimed Cora Clayton.

"What is the matter now?" asked bright-faced Madge, who had strolled into her sister's studio from the garden, her hands full of snowdrops and aconites from the shrubbery borders.

"Why, little Muriel Ellerton has just sickened with measles, and you know I was depending upon her as a model for my Academy picture. It is so difficult to get a really picturesque-looking child; and Muriel would have done beautifully. I really haven't any time to lose; and here I am at a perfect deadlock!"

"What a pity!" said Madge, who took great interest in her talented sister's drawing. Cora Clayton had achieved a rather considerable success for an amateur, and for two years past had

exhibited a small picture in the Royal Academy. During the winter months just past she had been away from home with her brother's delicate wife, who had been ordered to the south of France, so that she had not been able to do much painting. Now that she was home again she was eager to get forward, and it was provoking to be disappointed of her model just upon the very morning when she had reckoned to start work.

"Is there no other child who would do?" asked a voice from the couch beside the fire. Young Mrs. Clayton, the barrister's delicate wife, had established herself in Cora's studio, as she was fond of doing. The sisters were greatly attached to their brother's wife, and the family lived happily together in perfect harmony in their old-fashioned semi-country house at Hampstead.

"I can't think of one that just suits my ideas," answered Cora. "Muriel would just have done, with her cloud of fair curls and blue eyes with a sort of pathetic wistfulness behind their brightness. It was just the face for my subject. It is provoking! You know I am not like some artists; I know what I want to paint, but imagination doesn't do everything for me. I must have the model, and the right model, and I'm sure I don't know where to turn to next!"

"I wonder if little Allumette would do!" suddenly exclaimed Madge. "She had the

sweetest little face, and just such eyes and hair as Muriel; only I think she is prettier."

"Allumette! What do you mean? I never heard such a name!"

"Oh, that is Bertram's nickname. She is a little match-seller in the City. I saw her the other day when I was in town with him. Evidently she is often on his beat, for he had given her that cognomen, and one could see that she quite adored him. I daresay he has been kind to her often."

Cora and Eva were both interested, and when Madge had described the child, Cora declared she really had a good mind to go and have a look at her.

"It would really be easier in some ways than Muriel," she said, "for if I paid her I suppose her relations would be glad enough to let me have her over here; and they would keep her for me at the gardener's cottage for a week or two, so that I could have her backwards and forwards as I wanted, instead of being fettered by lesson hours and other things as I should be with Muriel. One does see very pretty children often in the streets; only, as a rule, it would not be practicable to get hold of them."

"We will ask Bertram about little Allumette when he comes home," said Eva, "and if he thinks it a good plan we could have her over here whilst your picture was being painted, Cora."

"Little Allumette," said the young barrister when appealed to at dinner that evening, "why, I should think you could get her, and that she would think herself in the seventh heaven to come! Oh, yes, I have asked her about herself sometimes. Her relationships are rather complicated. Her own father and mother are dead, and she lives with a stepmother who has married again. I like the little puss! She has always a smile and a bit of arch fun. Sometimes she brings me a button-hole when times are good. We are great friends in our way, little Allumette and I."

"Then I will come into town with you to-morrow, Bertram, and see if she will do for me, and what arrangements I can make."

"I'll come too," added Madge gaily; "I will give my valuable assistance in the matter, since it was my idea to start with."

Brother and sisters went up to town together the following day, and sure enough there was little Allumette with her tray of matches at the accustomed corner, eagerly scanning the faces of the passing crowd, to see if her gentleman was amongst them.

Cora was delighted with the little bright, sensitive face, and when the child caught sight not only of Bertram himself, but of the lady who had made her that wonderful present, she was at once resolved to get the little one for her model, and soon

Allumette was overwhelmed with shy delight, because the gentleman and two beautiful ladies had stopped in front of her.

"Allumette," said her friend with a twinkle in his eye, "do you know how to sit or stand very still?"

"Please, sir, I think so. I sit still with baby very often."

"And what do you get for sitting still with baby?"

"I don't get anything, sir, unless baby wakes up, and then I sometimes get a clout on the head."

Cora and Madge both laughed, whilst Bertram went on gravely—

"Then do you think that for sixpence an hour and your keep you could stand very still for this lady to draw? Did you ever see anybody draw pictures?"

"Please, sir, they draw them on the blackboard at school; and there's a man comes 'long here sometimes that draws them beautifully on the pavement, all red and blue and yellow. Ah! I could watch him all day, I could! It's real beautiful!"

Bertram looked at his sisters smilingly.

"Well, I must be getting on; you'd better finish settling the matter. It's a long way for her to go backwards and forwards. If you do have her, I should put her up at the cottage for a week

or so, and make what use you want of her at the time. I don't suppose she makes much by her matches; but of course you must pay her people a fair equivalent."

He moved off, and then Cora and Madge tried to explain to the bewildered and blushing Allumette what it was they wanted.

It was all like part of a wonderful dream to the child. She showed the ladies the way to her home; she heard them talk to her stepmother, and vaguely knew that something very strange and wonderful was about to happen; and then she was rather summarily hustled into the best clothes she possessed, which was not saying much, and was bidden to run and ask Mrs. Gregg if she could take her up to Hampstead at once, as the overworked woman with a large number of children to look after could not possibly do so.

Mrs. Gregg came and took the directions from the ladies, and promised to bring the little girl at once. She was given the railway fare, and Allumette stood by, dancing from one foot to the other with keenest excitement. She could not believe that this thing could really be true, and kept asking Mrs. Gregg if she was sure she knew how to get to the place, and whether she really thought the ladies meant it.

"Bless the child, yes! Why should they have taken all that trouble else?" was the reassuring

answer. "I've heerd tell before of fine folks getting others to come and sit for them. They call them models. It may be a good thing for you, ducky. It's poor work selling matches in the street. Perhaps the ladies will find you something better to do by-and-by."

It was all like a dream to Allumette. She had not to be at her destination till the afternoon; but Mrs. Gregg took her a wonderful walk upon the Heath first. The child had never seen such a place before, and although the wind blew cold the sun shone, and the child held her breath in awe and wonder at the great expanse of sky and the green sweep of broken ground, the shining water, the budding trees.

"Will heaven be like this, do you think, Mrs. Gregg?" she asked in a low voice.

Allumette was very hazy as to what heaven was, but she had an idea that it was a very beautiful place where the sun always shone, and she had never seen anything so beautiful before as the scene upon which her eyes now rested.

Later on, with a feeling of great awe, mingled with that of joy, she stood at the back door of a big house within sheltering walls, holding very fast to Mrs. Gregg's hand, and almost disposed to cry and run away when told that she must leave her friend, and follow the servant into the house.

"Don't be frightened, ducky, they'll be kind to you," said Mrs. Gregg, kissing her; "and I'm to have a cup of tea in the kitchen, they say; so maybe I'll see you again before I leave."

There was consolation in that thought, and Allumette rallied her courage. The servant smiled kindly at her as she went on in front, and although everything seemed to swim before the child's eyes as she walked, and she could not see clearly where she was going, she knew that she was taken down a long passage, and then a door was opened at the end, a curtain was drawn back, and she heard her guide say—

"Here is the little girl, ma'am!"

Allumette stood just within the threshold of this most wonderful place. She thought she had got into a fairy palace, and she rubbed her eyes and gasped in her astonishment.

It was a great square room with all the windows overhead; and wherever she looked she saw beautiful things, rich colours, pictures, hangings, ornaments—things of whose names and uses she had no idea, but the very sight of which filled her soul with awe and rapture, they were so wonderful and beautiful.

"Come, little Allumette; come to the fire!" said a kind voice. "You shall have a mug of hot tea and a piece of cake here, and we will see how to dress you up as a little model!"

It was the lady who spoke—the first lady—Miss Madge, as Allumette came to call her later on, and she came forward dressed in that lovely red dress with the soft grey fur upon it, in which the child had first seen her. And when Allumette had timidly advanced a few steps, and could see the room better, she saw that the other lady was there too, standing before an easel which held a picture, whilst upon a sofa near the fire a third lady lay, who had put down her book, and was now looking straight at the little girl, with a kind smile in her eyes.

"So you are little Allumette, are you? My husband has told me about you. He says you sell very good matches. Come and sit on that little stool here, and you shall tell me all about yourself. Madge, bring the mite some tea and cake. I'm sure she looks as though she wanted it!"

Allumette sat down where she was bidden, and soon a great wedge of delicious cake was put into her hands. But although she was so strangely happy in this beautiful place, she was almost too shy and excited to feel hungry; and as she nibbled at the unwonted dainty, she answered the questions of the ladies about herself and her life, gradually losing her fear of them, and beginning to smile and even to laugh at the funny remarks of Miss Madge, or the questions of young Mrs. Clayton.

Meantime the artist studied the face of the little one, and dashed off a few little pencil sketches with great satisfaction to herself. Yes, it was just such a face as she wanted—wistful without being sad, bright and sunny, yet pathetic withal. Eva Clayton had a knack with children which she was exercising now for Cora's benefit, and before half an hour had passed she was fully satisfied that she had got the right model for her picture.

It was a wonderful life that began for little Allumette. No more early rising in the dark and cold to do her household tasks, and lay in her store of matches for the day. No standing about at street corners in the cold wind and driving rain; no more hunger and uncertainty of the day's earnings; no harsh words and unkind teasing from boys either at home or in the streets.

Here everything was beautiful and happy. She lived with a kind couple who soon treated her almost as if she had been their child, and the greater part of her day was spent in that wonderful studio, where all that was asked of her was to stand still in a pretty frock whilst the tall lady painted her; and Miss Madge generally came in and out or sat still by the fire with a book, and often amused them by her play with the dog, or with her merry chatter, or else by teaching Allumette out of some simple primer.

"She's a dear little thing," Madge said to her brother a day or two after the commencement of the experiment. "I've often wanted an object for my benevolence, and an object on which to expend my superfluous energy in the matter of good works. I think I shall take up Allumette and make her my special charge. You needn't look so grave, sir! Wouldn't it be a very deserving object?"

"Perhaps; but take care, Madge, take care. You know how often you have failed from lack of perseverance. Don't unfit the child for her old life, or buoy her up with false hopes, only to forget her and disappoint her later on. It is always a serious matter taking the destinies of another human being as it were into our hands. Don't do anything rash; don't give the child cause to regret in days to come that she has ever known us!"

"Gracious! what a lecture!" cried Madge gaily. "I thought you'd be pleased at my desiring to do a good work; and, behold, I get a scolding!"

CHAPTER III.

WONDERFUL DAYS.

THE growth of that picture was a source of endless wonder and delight to little Allumette. Her naïve remarks amused the ladies vastly, and the child became, perhaps, more of a pet with them all than was quite advisable, considering the circumstances of the case.

To live in an atmosphere of warmth and colour; to be spoken to kindly and gently; to hear and see only pleasant things from morning till night, all this was a perfect delight to the little one, and she throve and blossomed out in the genial influence in a way that was wonderful to watch.

She was not admitted to the house itself, only to the studio by the little garden door; and she had that sense of native refinement which hindered her from taking liberties, or trading upon the kindness of the ladies.

To watch them with their books or needlework, to hear Miss Madge sing and play upon the studio piano, or to sit on a little stool beside one or the other, learning little lessons which they would teach her, constituted such pleasure that she never desired anything more; and even the sitting still for the picture was no trouble to the child. There was always something pretty to look at, and Miss Madge was often practising her music, and that always filled the child's whole soul with delight.

Her horizon was widening every day. Madge had discovered that she was very anxious to be able to read nicely, and thought she could not do better than devote some of her leisure in teaching her. And she got big-print fairy stories, which entranced Allumette and lured her along the path of learning faster than her teacher had dared to hope; and when left alone in the studio, the child would pore over one of these charming volumes, till she began to read the letterpress quite easily. Then young Mrs. Clayton had lessons to give her of a different sort.

"The poor mite is almost a little heathen," she had said to her husband a few days after the experiment of the little model had begun. "She seems to know nothing of religion, except what she has picked up from an old cobbler and his wife, who read the Bible in her hearing sometimes, and tell her a few elementary truths, which she

has got jumbled up in a very odd way. I must try and teach her a little better. Don't you think it would be a good plan, Bertram?"

"Yes, I think that kind of knowledge never comes except as a blessing," answered her husband gravely; "but have a care, Eva, and keep an eye over the sisters, that they do not spoil the poor little thing, making her life harder to her when she goes back to it. I am not quite sure that the experiment is not rather a dangerous one to Allumette. She will be so happy here, and the life of the streets will come so hardly afterwards!"

"Perhaps we could think of something better for her afterwards," said Eva.

"Possibly; but those things are more easily said than done. However, we must see what turns up. Only be careful all of you with the child. Too much petting and softness will not be really good for her. But teach her all you can; learning will never come amiss to her wherever her future lot may be cast."

And so Eva Clayton began giving the little waif of the streets simple Bible lessons every day, in which the child came to apprehend the mystery of Christ's redeeming love, and to believe that He loved her and was taking care of her, and wanted her to be a faithful little follower of His, that some day she might live with Him in His beautiful kingdom for ever and ever.

It was easy for Allumette to believe in this love and care now. She would look up at Mrs. Clayton with shining eyes and say—

"I think it must have been Jesus who sent me here. I shall always love Him for that."

On Sundays she was taken to church by the gardener's wife, who had made her a neat little frock and had soon taught her to wear the shoes and stockings provided by the ladies. Truth to tell, Allumette preferred running barefoot, as she was used to in the streets, although she had some old shoes and had put them on to come down here. But the footgear provided for her was so much more comfortable than what she had been used to that she soon grew reconciled to it, and she realised that it would not be at all proper to go about barefoot here.

She did not understand the services on Sunday, but she loved the sound of the organ and the glow of light through the painted windows. Her behaviour was irreproachable, and afterwards Mrs. Clayton would try and explain to her the meaning of what she had heard and seen, so that the child had food for much thought and reflection.

On Sundays too she always saw her "gentleman," as she always called Mr. Clayton in her thoughts. He would come into the studio and ask her what she had been learning in the week, and soon Allumette had a little bit of poetry or a

few verses from the Bible ready to repeat to him. He generally had some little gift for her in return, and these were the red-letter days in her calendar above all others.

The picture was finished in due course; and when the tea-party was given in the studio, and all the artist's friends were asked to come and see it, Allumette was permitted to be present, to hand round cakes and bread and butter; and people patted her head and asked if she were a little model, and one lady took a great deal of notice of her, and presently got Cora into a corner and began eagerly talking to her.

"If you would only do me some illustrations for the book I am writing, and use that child as the model for my little heroine, I should like it so much! I could easily arrange with the editor about the illustrations; and she has exactly the face I want. Do you think you could manage it for me, Cora?"

The girl's face lighted eagerly.

"Oh, Mrs. Maberley—I should love it! I have often longed to do illustrating; and to illustrate one of your books would be delightful! I will keep the child a few more weeks, and you shall tell me just what you would like each picture to be. She is a dear little model, and I shall like keeping her. I have quite a number of studies I have taken when she has been having lessons from

Eva and Madge. I will get my portfolio and show you."

The pencil sketches, dashed off impromptu, delighted Mrs. Maberley. There was Allumette sitting beside Eva's couch with her eyes fixed on the lady's face in eager attention; Allumette curled up in a corner with a book, her curls falling over her face; Allumette standing beside the piano, with a rapt expression of wonder and pleasure.

"It will be charming!" cried Mrs. Maberley, delighted. "I shall bring the story to read to you one day, and we will settle on the pictures. Some of these would almost do as they stand. You have quite a gift for drawing children, Cora."

Allumette heard nothing of all this, which was passing in one corner of the studio; but she was deeply interested in another little scene going on elsewhere. She had noticed a little while before that Mr. Clayton, when he came in to show himself at his sister's reception, brought with him two gentlemen (there were not many gentlemen in the room as compared with the number of the ladies), and the quick eyes of the child observed that Miss Madge's face flushed a rosy red at the sight of them, and that almost at once one of the strangers came over towards where she stood at the tea-table, and seemed disposed to remain there.

She had made him useful, handing cups about

for a time, after which he had come back to her side, and they were talking eagerly together.

Allumette had been dipping deep into fairy lore, and knew all about what princes and princesses did; and how the prince came and told the lady that he loved her, and that by-and-by they went off together and lived happily ever afterwards. Miss Madge had told her that in a different sort of way people did that still. Indeed Allumette had watched with the keenest excitement a wedding party from the next house, in which Miss Madge had played the part of bridesmaid. It had given Allumette quite a different idea about marriage from any she had had before, and she had heard the servants talking and saying that they supposed soon they would lose one of their young ladies, and wondering whether it would be Miss Cora or Miss Madge who would be first to go.

Somehow all this came back to the child's mind as she saw the gentleman standing beside Miss Madge and talking to her.

"You know you have promised, Madge," he said, in a rather louder tone. "You will not disappoint us?"

And Madge laughed as she made answer—

"Oh, yes, we will be as good as our word; we will pay a visit to Brooklands by-and-by. We shall all be glad of a change when the hot weather comes; for Hampstead is after all only a make-

believe at country—and one likes the real thing sometimes."

"I hope the country is not all the attraction!" said the young man, bending an intent look upon Madge's blushing face.

"Don't fish for compliments, sir," she replied, in her bright, saucy way. "You won't get change of that sort out of me!"

"I don't want compliments," said the young man in a very low voice; "you know very well what I do want, Madge."

Later on little Allumette heard from the gardener's wife who the gentleman was.

"His name is Mr. Arthur Brook, and he's the only son of a baronet, and they have a beautiful place in the country, where the young ladies sometimes stay. He and Mr. Clayton were at college together, and have always been great friends; and we all think that he wants Miss Madge for his wife. And a bonny one she will make him, if she ever decides to have him; and I think he is worthy of her, which I wouldn't say for many!"

It was all very interesting to little Allumette, who henceforth regarded Madge even more as a fairy princess, who would one day be carried off to live in a grand house or castle of her own.

Mr. Brook came rather often to the house during the next weeks whilst Allumette remained to serve as a model for the set of illustrations; and one day

Madge came into the studio half laughing and half crying, and flinging herself on her knees beside Cora she cried out——

"Kiss me, darling, and tell me you don't mind! I have given Arthur my promise at last!"

And then Cora threw down her brush, and the sisters clung rather close together; for they were deeply attached, and though both had felt that the separation would come, it seemed rather strange to both when the thing had finally been settled.

However, Miss Madge was very happy during the next days, Allumette thought, though both the sisters were a little preoccupied; and the drawings were relegated to a secondary place.

Besides, there was commotion in the house of another sort, for young Mrs. Clayton was taken ill, and the doctors advised that she should be taken into the country as soon as possible; and so there was a great deal of discussion and talk; and by-and-by Allumette heard that the three ladies were going to stay near Brooklands, which was the home of Mr. Arthur Brook, who was to marry Miss Madge some time during the year.

"I must finish my drawings quickly, little Allumette," said Cora, next time the child was called in for a sitting, "for I shall be going away very soon; and we have let the house to some friends, who want it very much."

And then it suddenly came into the child's mind

that this beautiful holiday was over. She would have to go back to her match-selling in the streets; and for a time there would not be even her gentleman coming and going, for Mr. Clayton had been called away on some important business latterly, and though he had come home for a few days when his wife was ill, he had gone away again, and might be detained some little while.

Great tears gathered slowly in the child's eyes. She tried to keep furtively brushing them away, but they would not be altogether hidden, and when Madge came dancing in she saw them there and guessed their source.

"But we won't forget you, little Allumette," she said kindly, "I have thought sometimes about you. I've got some plans in my head. Allumette, have you ever seen the country—the real country, where the fields are full of buttercups and daisies, and there are woods and birds and cows and farms?"—and Madge plunged into a description of the sights and sounds of rural country life, whilst Allumette listened with a rapt expression that was instantly caught and transferred to paper by the delighted Cora.

"Well, Allumette, if you have not seen such things, you shall some day. I shall look out for a nice farmhouse or cottage, where the woman will take you in for a few weeks, and some day I shall send for you, and you shall come down in the train

and have a real good holiday, and go on cultivating those roses in your cheeks which we are teaching to bloom there now. Will that make up to you for going back to the streets for a little while?"

The child's face was answer enough. With such a prospect in view she dreaded nothing, could bear with courage and equanimity the life of the dusty streets. So through the last days she kept a brave face, and when she saw the beautiful picture-books and the clothes she had had given her made up into a parcel for her to take home, it seemed like an earnest of those joys that were to come.

Tears swam in her eyes as she said good-bye, and was led away by the gardener's wife who was to take her back; but she held them bravely in check, saying to herself—

"I shall see them again, I shall see them again. Miss Madge said she would not forget."

CHAPTER IV.

AT BROOKLANDS.

"AND you like your future home, my dear one? You think you can be happy here?"

"Oh, Arthur! it is beautiful, beautiful! I think I never knew before quite how exquisite everything was! I am only afraid of being too happy!"

"That is an ailment we do not often suffer from in this world, Madge," he answered smilingly; "but I intend my wife to be the happiest woman in the country. She shall not know an ungratified wish if I can help it."

"What a selfish creature she will become!" cried Madge with a soft laugh, and an arch upward glance into her lover's face; "I wonder how soon you will grow tired of your bargain!"

"Try me," he replied, taking her two hands in his; "I am ready to be put to the proof as quickly as you will."

The colour flooded her face, for she knew that he meant he wanted her as soon as she could be persuaded to come to him, and so far she had not actually fixed the date of the wedding, although she had said it should be "soon."

She had been a month in the neighbourhood of Brooklands now, and Eva Clayton was much better, and was to be taken by Cora to the sea to complete her restoration. Madge had intended to be one of the party, but Lady Brook had persuaded her to come and be her guest at the fine old baronial hall, as she was anxious to make more intimate acquaintance with the betrothed wife of her idolised son. She had known Madge for several years, but not very intimately. Now she was anxious to become the friend and mother of the bright, loving girl. She did not grudge the love her son lavished upon the woman of his choice; she only desired that Madge should learn to love her too, and be willing to be a daughter to her and her husband.

Madge was a warm-hearted girl, and was ready to love and be loved. She had consented to the proposed arrangement, after a little hesitation about leaving Cora before the time. But Cora said it would be right for her to accept the invitation, and had said that she must learn to do without her sister's constant presence, and the matter was now settled to Arthur's satisfaction.

"We shall have so much to think of and to plan,"

continued Arthur, "for you know what they have set their hearts upon—my father and mother? That we shall live at Brooklands, using the great west wing as our very own, having our own servants and establishment, but being all under one roof. My mother spoke of it to you, did she not, Madge? You will not think that a difficult arrangement?"

"Oh, no," answered the girl eagerly; "I think Brooklands is charming, and the west wing has lovely rooms, and I have never cared for being shut up alone. People said that when Bertram was married Cora and I would find it so difficult to go on living with him, but we never did. If your father and mother will let me, I want to be a daughter to them; and your mother will tell me how to do everything, for I never lived in a grand house before, and I don't know the ways of country people," and Madge made a little whimsical grimace.

"My Madge's ways will be good enough for me," answered Arthur with a smile, as he took her willing hands in his; "only tell me how soon you will come to me, Madge. I don't want to wait long. What have we to wait for?"

"There is the trousseau," said Madge, blushing and laughing; but her lover swept away all such trivial objections with masculine logic. In the end Madge promised that early in September she would come to him for good and all. As May was now

well advanced, and another week would see June upon them, the young man could not complain that she was keeping him over long.

But the idea that the thing was definitely settled turned Madge's mood into something graver. The lovers were walking through a shady woodland glade, carpeted with wild flowers, and full of sweet sounds and scents. Madge suddenly paused and exclaimed—

"But we must not be selfish, Arthur, we must not be selfish! We must try and do some good in the world. If we are happy ourselves, we must make other people happy too."

"With all my heart," he answered gaily: "you shall be as philanthropic as you like, Madge, and I will learn of you."

"I wonder what we could do," mused Madge, looking round her. "Arthur, shall we be rich?"

"Well, sweetheart, that depends upon what you call riches. We shall not be millionaires, but I have an income sufficient for all our needs, and a margin over. I suppose that will do?"

"Oh, yes; I am not thinking about ourselves. Arthur, you know I have a little money myself. I have three hundred a year of my own. Do you think we shall want that when we are living at Brooklands?"

He smiled an amused, indulgent smile.

"I think we can do without it. Do you want to

keep your private fortune to yourself? You know married women have no property. I shall be able to despoil you of your fortune, unless you tie it up very tightly!"

"Don't tease, Arthur," she answered; "do be serious, for I am really in earnest. I don't want the money for myself. I would rather take everything from you. But I want to do some good with it. I should like to use it for some special purpose."

"What sort of purpose, dearest?"

"Oh, I don't know. I must think. I want to make people happy. Some have such sad lives always. It hardly seems fair. Oh, I know what I should like best!—to take a dear little cottage, and have a nice woman there to look after things, and to bring poor children down from London for a month at a time, to give them a real holiday and outing. Oh, yes, that would be lovely! and little Allumette should be the first. Do you remember that pretty little model Cora had for her picture? She was a dear little thing, and I told her she should come into the country one day. I would have her for the first of the children. Don't you think it would be a delightful plan?"

"It might; but some of those delightful plans sound better than they work out. No, no, don't look so crestfallen, my Madge; I am not throwing cold water. On the contrary, I will help you all I

can. And, by-the-by, not far from here is a very pleasant and roomy old farmhouse, which is going to be empty at Michaelmas. It is only a small one for a farm, but it might serve your purpose, and I daresay you could coax my father to let you have it rent free. He wants to take the land and throw it into the home farm which it adjoins, as small farms don't pay now, and the tenant is giving up. The house might do very well for some purpose of that sort. Would you like to go and see it?"

Madge was eager to do so, and was delighted with the place when she got there. It was a small farmstead, picturesque and overgrown with creepers, with a tumble-down old barn that would make an ideal playroom for children on wet days, and a tangled orchard full of gnarled old apple trees just going out of bloom, a duck pond, a nut walk, and fields and copses all round.

The house was quaint and fairly roomy, and Madge was enchanted with the flagged kitchen, the dormer windows, and the little odd stairs up and down at every turn.

"Oh, Arthur!—it would be a sweet place for them to come to—poor little darlings! I should like to see little Allumette's face when she was set down at the gate. Michaelmas, did you say? That will be after we are married, and if I had arranged about a woman, we could have a few little things

down in October, could we not? The nuts would be ripe then, and you know how lovely the trees are through October. And on wet days there would be the old barn. It would be delightful, would it not, Arthur? And for little children from London no doing up of the house would be needed. It would be better not too spick and span. Just a few beds and chairs and tables. Oh, I could see to everything like that, and tell little Allumette that she should be the first visitor. Perhaps I would let her introduce me to some friends of hers, and bring them all down together."

Madge was so full of delight with her new scheme that she could talk of nothing else all the evening with Eva and Cora.

They were both quite pleased and interested in the plan.

"But I thought you half promised little Allumette a country holiday this summer," said Cora. "Won't she get rather tired of waiting if you put it off till the autumn?"

"Oh, but this will be worth waiting for; and I haven't had time to think about the other. I did speak to one or two women in the cottages, but they had children of their own, and didn't seem to like the idea of a strange London child. One can't wonder at it. People fancy London children bring dirt and disease and other unpleasantnesses. It

will be far better to work it oneself on a regular footing."

"Yes, in some ways it will be better. I was only thinking that the child might be disappointed."

"Ah, well, she shall have it made up to her if she is; and she had a nice long happy time at Hampstead which seemed to her quite like a country holiday. I didn't forget her, but things aren't just as easy to arrange as one thinks they will be. Besides, I shouldn't have time here to look after her as I should like. Arthur wants so much of me, and he might not quite care for me to be running off to see little Allumette in a cottage. Men don't understand that sort of thing!"

So Madge dismissed the thought of any immediate summons of the little match-seller, and busied herself with eager plans as to the management of her little institution when it should be organised. Sir John and Lady Brook were quite ready to interest themselves in it. The house was to be given rent free for the purpose, and Lady Brook said that she should pay the salary of a capable matron. Madge's little fortune could go to the working of the scheme, paying the fares to and fro, and the keep of the little inmates. The girl made numerous calculations, and amused her lover not a little by the results thereof at different times. But in spite of blunders, Madge had plenty of

shrewdness, and Lady Brook was pleased to note her interest in domestic details, as well as her desire after a sphere of usefulness.

"You are quite right, my dear, to resolve not to live too much for yourself alone, or even for that joint life which you will lead with Arthur. We are not put here in the world just to pass our lives as pleasantly as we can. We shall have one day to give an account, and it often seems to me that to us, to whom God's gifts have been lavishly furnished, He will look to give a good account of the use we have made of them."

Madge's face was full of eager assent.

"That is just how I feel about it. I have had such a happy life! Except the death of our parents, Cora and I have had no troubles, and we lost our father before we were either of us old enough to feel it very keenly. I think I should not really enjoy my happiness if I could not do things for other people. At home I often felt that I wanted to do more, but I seemed to have no work there. I did try one or two things, but somehow they did not succeed. I daresay it was my fault, but I do like the idea of a thing like this. It will be always there, and even if I have not quite as much time myself as I should like, it will always be going on."

Madge had plenty to think of just now besides her scheme of benevolence. She had innumerable

preparations to make for her coming marriage, involving a great deal of correspondence with dressmaker and milliner, the selection and discussion of patterns, and a great deal of correspondence with private friends, whose congratulations still continued to arrive, and whose presents began to follow.

Cora and Eva betook themselves off to the sea, but Madge remained at Brooklands week after week. The house at Hampstead was let, the tenant wanted to keep it on. Bertram was well off, in comfortable rooms, running down each week to spend Sunday with his wife. London was said to be unbearably hot and stuffy, and none too healthy this season. The Brooks urged Madge to stay on with them, and she was nothing loth. It was most interesting to see how her new home was being transmogrified to receive her. It seemed to her that she had only to express a wish to see it instantly gratified. Again and again she had to remonstrate with Arthur for "spoiling her so dreadfully." But it was a very delightful experience and she was as happy as the day was long.

Her brother wrote to her from time to time, sometimes on business matters, sometimes just a little brotherly note. There was a letter from him one morning which contained a sentence which puzzled Madge a good deal.

"I am glad you have remembered your promise

to little Allumette at last. The poor little child has been looking very white and thin of late, but the country air will pull her up again. How happy she will be when she sees all the beautiful things about her. I have been sometimes afraid that those weeks at Hampstead rather unfitted her for the sharper battle of life she has to fight at home."

"What can he mean?" said Madge, half aloud. And when she read the passage in the letter aloud, Lady Brook said—

"I suppose somebody else has given the child an outing, and your brother thinks it is you."

"Oh, I suppose that is it," answered Madge; "but I will ask Bertram when I write."

Nevertheless, the letter was never written. For a moment Madge's conscience had been uneasy, but the press of things crowding into her life quickly drove all thoughts of little Allumette out of it.



CHAPTER V.

DARK DAYS.

"WHY, little Allumette! Where have all your roses gone? I thought you had learnt to grow them in Hampstead! What have you done with them now?"

The child's face had been pinched and wan the moment before, but at the sound of that well-remembered voice the blood came rushing back, and the light sprang into the wistful eyes.

"Oh, sir, you have come back!" she exclaimed, as though the sunshine itself had returned with him.

"Yes, I have come back. Did you think I had gone for good? I shall be going away again by-and-by; but I am here for a few weeks. What have you been doing with yourself since I saw you last? Sitting for any more pictures?"

"No, sir, I've only been selling matches."

"Which do you like best?"

Bertram was almost sorry he had put the

question, for sudden tears sprang to the child's eyes, and he saw that she could not reply. Some chord of memory had been struck. Plainly she could not think of those happy days at Hampstead without suffering the pangs of longing and regret.

"There, there," he said kindly, "perhaps there will be some more sitting for pictures to do by-and-by, but the ladies are in the country still. We are not living at Hampstead just now."

"No, sir, I know. And are the ladies quite well?"

"Yes, quite. I hear from them often. They are in a very pretty place."

The child's face lighted and beamed all over.

"Yes, sir, Miss Madge told me so, and I am going there soon!"

"Are you? That is right! You look as if you would be the better for a holiday."

"I didn't ought to want it; I had such a beautiful one up at your house. But the streets do get so hot, and I just think and think and think about what Miss Madge told me of the place I was to go to. Mother says I'm a lucky girl, and I think I am too! I can think about it all day, and then when it's night I often dream about it too. I wonder if it'll be like the dreams when it comes? They're so beautiful, they are!"

"Miss Madge will keep her promise—you needn't be afraid!" said Bertram, as he put a shilling into

the child's hand and passed on. He was very busy just then, but he found time to feel a real sense of pleasure that his sister should remember their little protégée, and arrange a country outing for her. He had been a little afraid that the experiment of transplanting her for a time had not been entirely successful. And the child's appearance when first he saw her had been a shock to him, she had looked so frail and white.

"But I will tell Madge to keep her for a really good outing when she does get her," he said to himself as he went on his way. "The child looks as though she needed it. She is not of the stuff of the average street waif. I will bear the expense of some extra weeks. Perhaps when Madge settles at Brooklands she might find a nook for the little one somewhere."

Bertram was exceedingly busy just at this juncture, having been away on professional business for some time, and having his own holiday in view not far ahead. Moreover, his daily road did not now lead by Allumette's corner, and he only saw her by chance once or twice during the week that followed.

Each time he thought she looked more white and wan than the last, and it was with real relief he observed one day that she was missing from her corner at the very hour she was always there to look out for him coming from the Law Courts.

"Ah, then Madge has got her!" he thought with a sense of satisfaction. "She is revelling in the joys of the country. I should like to see her little face light up as she gets out of the smoke of town. I will take care that she does not come back too soon. I will run down to Brooklands one of these days, when I can make time, and see Madge and the Brooks and little Allumette."

Yet at the very time when Bertram was picturing the child happy in the midst of wild flowers, scented hay, and the glories of summertide in the country, and Madge was busy with her preparations for receiving her later on when the woods should be scarlet and the nuts hanging ripe from the bough, little Allumette was sitting, languid and suffering, pent up in a close and reeking attic with three sick children, all prostrated by a sort of low fever which had broken out in the locality, and which was carrying off little victims by the dozen.

It was not a regularly infectious fever, and it was practically impossible to isolate or remove the sick. Many children recovered after a few days' prostration, and seemed little the worse, but some died, and others lay helpless and weak for a considerable time, and though the overworked doctor did his best to cope with it, he was able to do but little except offer a few hints as to feeding and treatment, which too often could not be carried out.

The children in Allumette's home had sickened rather early. One little boy had died, whilst the rest were struggling back to convalescence, their recovery greatly retarded by the heat of the attic, and the bad air they constantly breathed.

Allumette had gone to her match-selling as usual for some considerable time. It was a relief to get out of the unwholesome place, and even the hot streets seemed almost fresh by comparison.

Yet never had the life of the streets seemed so hard or so uncongenial to little Allumette as they did upon her return from the gardener's cottage at Hampstead.

She shrank from the rough words and rough ways of the boys and girls plying a like calling with herself as she had never shrunk from it before. They jeered at her, too, in her neater clothes, and made game of her when she spoke of what she had been doing in her absence. Her gentleman was not in London, and the days seemed so long and dreary. She could not eat the coarse food with the old relish, and the uncleanly odours of the court and of the attics where she lived, which before she had taken as a matter of course, now turned her sick.

She still snatched a few happy minutes when she could to go and pay a visit to the old cobbler and his wife. Here she was doubly happy in being away from all that was foul and disagreeable, and

in being able to talk freely to the old people of all the joys of those wonderful weeks in the studio.

She was never tired of telling, and they were never tired of hearing about them ; and Allumette had left in their charge the picture-books Miss Madge had given her, and the Bible which had been young Mrs. Clayton's parting gift. Allumette shared with her old friends all the knowledge she had come by during her stay in that wonderful house, and it comforted her to talk of Jesus and His love, and to try and believe that He saw and cared for her, just as much as He had done when she had been so happy and cared for. Moreover, old Gregg and his wife were always cheering her up by telling her that very soon she would be sent for into the country for a beautiful holiday.

"It's not till the middle of July as folks begins to think much about holidays for children," they would say. "August is the real month for it, but it begins before that sometimes. The young lady won't forget, don't you be afraid, little one. You'll get a letter or a message one of these days, and then you'll have fine times!"

So Allumette lived on in hope, and in spite of increasing languor and weakness kept a brave heart, and never forgot morning and night to say the little prayer taught her by Mrs. Clayton, always adding, "and please let Miss Madge remember about me!"

The sight of her gentleman's face in the streets again had come like a ray of sunlight, and his kindness had warmed her heart. She thought, perhaps, he would say something to Miss Madge to remind her if she had forgotten. But Allumette did not believe Miss Madge would forget, only she did hope she would remember soon, for every day life seemed harder and work more burdensome, and at last she hardly knew how to drag her weary limbs over the hot pavements to her accustomed corner.

Then came the day when she dropped down in a giddy fit, just as she was going out as usual, and her stepmother said with a sort of kindly impatience—

"There, child, just you stop at home and mind the little ones. You're not fit for the streets. You've got a touch of the fever yourself. I've got a day's charing, and I'll be glad to leave you at home with the children. Keep them as quiet as you can, and I'll ask Mrs. Gregg to look in upon you whilst I'm away. I daresay she'll cheer you up a bit."

For tears of weakness and depression were running down little Allumette's face. It had come into her mind that if she really had the fever the summons to the country would arrive too late. They would not let a sick child go lest she should do harm to the others. She had been fighting and

fighting against the fear that she too was sickening —fighting against it for a whole long week. Now she could not fight any longer, and whilst Bertram Clayton was picturing her revelling in the delights of rural life she lay upon the wretched bed with the other sick children, parched with thirst, wasted by fever, talking in low, soft tones of happy days which seemed present to her again in a dream, but by no means always conscious of her surroundings, or certain who was with her.

At the beginning of August the tenant of the Hampstead house gave it up, and the Claytons came back to make preparations for Madge's wedding, which was now little more than a month distant.

Blooming and radiant was Madge after her happy time at her future home, Eva was almost strong again from her visit to foreign baths, and Bertram and Cora looked quite brown after their climbs amid the surrounding hills.

They had so much to say that first evening that it was only just last thing before they parted at night that Bertram suddenly exclaimed—

"Ah, by-the-by! did you get my letter about little Allumette? I can't remember when or how I posted it; but I daresay it reached you all right."

"What letter?" asked Madge, and seemed about to say more, only he spoke again quickly—

"Oh, the one telling you to keep her longer

—to let her have August too down there. But I daresay you would not want prompting about that."

"I don't know what you mean," said Madge. "I never got that letter at all. The only time you mentioned Allumette to me was once when you said you were glad she had got away into the country. I meant to ask you who had taken her. I am going to have her down to my new home (I'll tell you all about that some other time) as soon as it's ready, but that won't be before October. But we'll make up to her for the waiting when we get her."

Bertram looked a little puzzled.

"I thought she had gone to you when she disappeared. She told me you had promised, and I said that if you had promised you would not forget, and a day or two afterwards she disappeared from her corner. I made sure you had sent for her, and that is what I meant in my letter."

Madge's face was rather hot. This was not the first time in her life that Bertram had had occasion to show her how she had let fall the chance of doing some small kindness through her eagerness to do something bigger by-and-by.

"Did you promise the poor child a country holiday, Madge?" asked Eva half-reproachfully. "I wish I had known. I would have taken care that she was not disappointed."

"It wasn't exactly a promise—at least I don't think so, Cora, was it? I said something, I know, and I meant to be better than my word, only it wasn't convenient just then, and I thought this would be so much better."

Madge's face was glowing, and her heart was beating rather fast. She felt as though whilst planning an act of rather munificent charity (which after all would cost her no self-denial) she had shirked the little present trouble of seeking an asylum for one little waif, half afraid that Arthur would think her absurd over the child, and that the cottagers might not like it. She knew it was little half-formed thoughts like these which had hindered her, and she felt a qualm of shame and self-contempt.

"I did not hear exactly," answered Cora. "I was drawing at the time, but I certainly thought you had spoken of the summer, and I was surprised when you put it off till October."

"And you might have written and told her," said Bertram. "It would have cheered her to know herself remembered, and she would have had a definite hope to look forward to, instead of suffering the pain of feeling herself forgotten."

"I was so busy, and I didn't know how to write to a street child, and I had forgotten the address," said Madge. "Oh, don't all scold me! I have been very selfish. But I hope somebody else has

taken her away, and to-morrow I'll go and see about it!"

"Do," said Bertram rather gravely, "for I begin to be afraid that instead of a country holiday it is illness which is keeping the child from her post. She was looking very white and thin when I saw her last. You know what the saying is about hope deferred, and it is especially hard for children."

"Oh, I will go to-morrow! I will go to-morrow!" cried Madge, springing up. "I will make up to her for everything that has gone before!"

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION.

"I SHALL go with you, Madge," said Bertram; "I do not like your visiting such places alone. My work is quite slack now, since the vacation has commenced. It matters little enough whether I appear at chambers or not."

So brother and sister went into town together, and soon found the steamy, airless court which was the home of little Allumette. Madge gave a little shudder as she passed into it.

"Oh, Bertram," she exclaimed suddenly, "I shall never forgive myself if harm has come to her from my neglect! I had been here before. I ought to have remembered what it would be like after taking her out of it for so many weeks."

"It made her very happy; but perhaps it was a mistake. It is difficult to judge in some cases. One of the lessons we have to learn in life is that there is an element of danger in intermeddling too

much with the lives of others, unless we can do something permanent and substantial. We must not rush into responsibilities which are not given us to bear without due thought and consideration; but then we must not, on the other hand, hold back from any effort, lest we should not be quite successful."

"I rushed my attempt at benevolence!" cried Madge. "When Allumette was with us I was always teaching her and making much of her, and I was quick to promise another holiday, without thinking whether I could be as good as my word And when I was down there so busy and happy I let it go out of my mind, and could not take any trouble over it. I always put it off till I could carry out my big scheme. Oh, Bertram, I feel as though I were not worthy to attempt anything!"

"Cheer up, Madge! though perhaps that is a better frame of mind than to feel able to attempt anything and everything. There is a worthy old soul signalling to you over there. She seems to know you."

"It is Mrs. Gregg!" cried Madge eagerly; "she will tell us about little Allumette!"

"Oh, thank God you have come, missie!" cried the woman, hastening up. "I was just saying to Gregg that I would go off to try to find you. Though he did say as fine folks was never at home this time of year. The poor

lamb keeps calling and calling for Miss Madge, till it's pitiful to hear. It don't seem as though she could go quiet till she's seen you again!"

"Do you mean little Allumette?" cried Madge breathlessly. "Is she ill?"

"I'm afeard she's dying, miss. She's had the fever on her a long while now, but she wouldn't give way. She kept saying as Miss Madge was a-goin' to send for her into the country, and she fought and fought against it, till she could fight no more. If she could only ha' bin got away a week or two earlier—ah! that would ha' made all the difference. But maybe the Lord knows best. 'Tis a hard world we live in. The tender lambs are best in His keeping maybe!"

Madge felt as though a cold hand were clutching at her heart.

"Can I see the child?" she asked in a low voice.

"Yes, miss, for sure; the fever ain't one of the catching kind—not to folks as don't live down about here. The children get it, but grown-up folks take no harm from them. There's abin a many little one die down here this summer, and the poor lambie up there will be the next!"

They went into that wretched attic, and stood beside the child's bed. She was the only sick one there now, the other children having either died or recovered.

Madge felt the hot tears rising in her eyes as she saw the white, wasted face, and saw the restless, fever-stricken tossings of the child she had always seen before with a laugh in her eyes and a bright responsive smile upon her lips. She would have spoken her name as she bent over her, but no voice came. The dim eyes were roving round and round in the listlessness of fever. Words began to form upon the parched lips.

"Please, dear Lord Jesus, let Miss Madge remember! Please let her remember. I do try to be patient; but I am so tired! If I could go where she said I should be able to rest. Please help her to remember!"

"Allumette! Allumette!" cried Madge, with a note of almost passionate entreaty in her voice. "Little Allumette, don't you know me?"

The voice seemed to penetrate the child's dimmed understanding. Something like the shadow of the old smile crept over the pinched face; the little transparent hands made a groping movement as though trying to stretch themselves out.

"Miss Madge! Miss Madge!" she gasped feebly. "Miss Madge has come! Oh, Mrs. Gregg, are you there? You see you were right. You said Jesus always heard, and that He would answer by-and-by!"

She spoke the words in feeble gasps, trying to raise herself up; but the excitement and

exertion were too much, and she fell back in a state of unconsciousness.

"Ah, poor lamb! she's going! But she's got her wish. She is happy now!" breathed Mrs. Gregg, drawing Madge away from the bedside. The girl turned to her brother, and caught his arm almost fiercely.

"Bertram, we must save her! we must save her!" she cried. "Don't tell me she is dying! I won't—I can't believe it!"

"Not actually dying, I think," he answered gravely, "but in a very critical condition. If she remains here she will certainly die. We must bestir ourselves if we are to save her."

"Oh, tell me what to do! What can be done? Bertram, you will help me! You will not let me have this burden to carry about with me!"

She was growing painfully excited. He led her away, promising Mrs. Gregg that they would make speedy arrangements for the removal of the little patient to some better place, and asking the good woman to have her ready for the bearers when they should come.

"You must not give way, Madge," he said, when they were in the street. "It has been rather a sad experience for you; but we will still hope for a happy ending. I trust and hope we may save this little life, and make it a happier one in the future. But think of the thousands of children

who are growing up in dens like that! It almost crushes the life out of one to think of it!"

"I won't think of it!" cried Madge, clenching her teeth to choke back the wave of emotion which threatened to overcome her. "I will think of the individual little ones whom I shall be able to help and cheer and make happy for a little while in their small lives. I must be careful, I see. I must not unfit them for the battle of life. I must not promise or attempt more than I can perform, or make pets and playthings of the little ones. All their surroundings must be plain and homely. But they shall have their fill of fresh air and sunshine and liberty. Oh, Bertram, my heart bleeds for them! You will not think that I ought to give up my scheme because I have been so foolish once. I have had such a lesson. And there I shall have wiser heads to counsel me."

"I would never give up anything planned for the help and benefit of our suffering brethren—least of all of suffering children," answered Bertram gravely, "and I think you are building on a better foundation now, Madge! The less we trust in ourselves, the more we ask help where it is to be found, the firmer our building will be, and more abiding will be the results."

Madge nipped her brother's arm fast. She understood much that was implied in that speech. He was not a man to speak readily of his deeper

feelings; but Madge knew that they were there, and that they had been deeply stirred to-day.

"Now for some hospital where they will take the child," he said in a different tone after a long silence. "I think I know one place where they will take a case in which I am specially interested, and make a nook for the little one somewhere, whether they are full or not."

* * * * *

"St. Luke's summer, my lamb! Just the day for Miss Madge to come home! But we mustn't call her Miss Madge any longer. We must learn to say Mrs. Brook; and one day it will be Lady Brook, when the old gentleman is gone; but he's wonderful hale and hearty still!"

Mrs. Gregg was bustling about the cheerful kitchen of the old-fashioned farmhouse, of which mention has been made before, and Allumette was sitting curled up on an antique oak settle in the ingle-nook, with a book open beside her. She was still a little white, frail bit of humanity—"a bag of bones," Mrs. Gregg had called her when first she appeared at the farm, just after her own installation there as caretaker of the infant experiment. She had picked up a little flesh since then, but was still very weak and wan; only the light was coming back into the wistful eyes, and the lips were ready to smile with pure happiness and joy of life.

Life had indeed become a very wonderful thing for little Allumette since her awakening to the consciousness of her surroundings in the cheerful hospital ward. Everything since then had been so beautiful—so wonderful! Nothing but kindness had been her portion; and to crown all had come Miss Madge's visits, upon the last of which she had heard that the cobbler and his wife—her best friends—had been sent down to live in a farmhouse close to the lady's future home, and that Allumette herself was to go there as soon as she was well enough to leave the hospital, to live in the country always with her old friends, and by-and-by to be trained for service in Miss Madge's own house, with the prospect of becoming her little maid in the future.

Miss Madge had told her all this just before she was to be married; and since then the child had not seen her. For, when she reached this delightful place, Mr. and Mrs. Brook were away upon their wedding trip, and only to-day were they to return.

"Hark to the bells!" cried Mrs. Gregg suddenly. "That means that the carriage is in sight of the village. Run, ducky! It will pass the place I showed you this morning. Take your posy and run and see them go by!"

A huge and very tasteful arrangement in brightly-tinted autumn leaves and flowers, tied with a white

riband, lay upon the table. Little Allumette started up, tied on her hat, seized her bouquet, and started off like an arrow from a bow. She was strong enough to run a short distance now, and she knew just where the carriage would pass.

"They be a-coomin', ducky!" cried the old cobbler, who was now working busily in the garden, rejoicing in the sort of toil to which he had been brought up, and which seemed to infuse new vigour into his bent frame. He and his wife both appeared to have taken a new lease of life since coming down into the country. It had been one of their unfulfilled dreams to save enough to leave the cruel city and make a little home in some quiet country place such as both remembered in their youth. But they had long given up hoping for it, when the unexpected offer from Miss Madge brought about its realisation.

The child ran swiftly down the sloping meadow to the stile at the end. The road ran along just below, and from that vantage ground she would see the carriage pass, and be able to throw her posy into Miss Madge's lap. She could not yet think of her as anything but Miss Madge, though she practised the new name conscientiously with Mrs. Gregg.

But hardly had she reached the stile before she uttered a little exclamation of rapture, for there was a tall familiar figure standing beside it,

his face turned away, watching for the arrival of the carriage.

At the sound of the pattering feet he turned and smiled.

"Little Allumette!" he exclaimed; and, lifting her up, he set her upon the stile, where she could see everything to the greatest advantage.

"Oh, sir!" she exclaimed in a sort of ecstacy; and he laughed as he said—

"I had to come down on business. I was in the down train, and walked up. I thought I should get to Brooklands before the bridal party arrived. But I heard the bells begin, and decided to let them pass me. So you are down here for good, are you, little Allumette? But we shall have to find a new name for you now. Matches don't belong to you any longer."

"No, sir," she answered shyly; "but I shall always like the name you gave me better than any other!"

The roll of the carriage wheels began to be heard.

"They are coming!" said Bertram Clayton, and stood the child up on the broad ledge of the stile, holding her with one strong arm. Two or three mounted tenants trotted past on horseback, and then the carriage dashed into sight round the bend.

Allumette was quivering all over with excite-

ment and a sort of vague fear lest Mrs. Brook might not be quite the same person as Miss Madge had been; but when she saw the smiling face in the carriage all fear left her, and, holding up her posy, she waved it in the air and threw it deftly into the lady's lap.

But Madge had already seen the pair, and was signalling to the coachman to stop.

"Bertram, this is too delightful! Get into the carriage, and tell me all the news at home!"

But though she spoke first to her brother her eyes were on the child too, and when he led her up to the carriage she held out her hands, and bending down, kissed the little quivering up-turned face.

"Little Allumette!" she said softly, and there was a sparkle of tears of thankfulness in her eyes.

The carriage drove off; the child stood looking after it. Happiness was written on every line of her face. Her lady had seen her, had spoken to her, had kissed her. It was more than enough for little Allumette.

THE END.



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