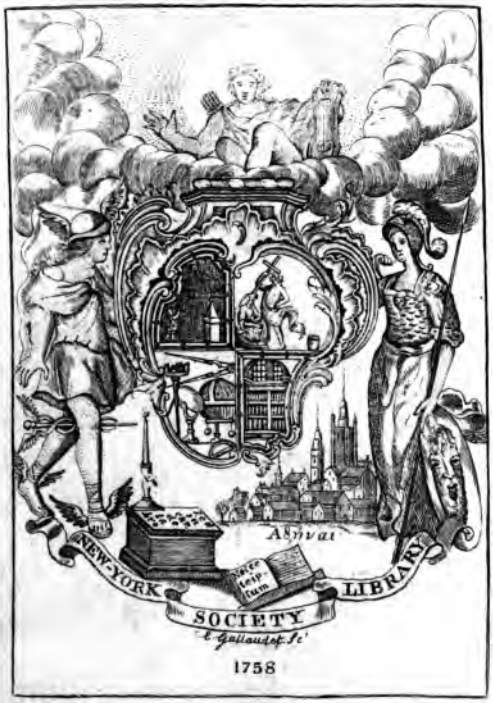
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CHECKERBERRY

BY

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To My Cousin Cordie

CONTENTS

CHECKERBERRY

CHAPTER I.

PHIL ANDREWS.

"HEY there! Get out of that grain!"

The little girl in the field near was startled at the commanding voice of the boy, in coarse patched clothes, although, had she looked closely, she would have observed that the large straw hat shaded a roguish face, with merry gray eyes, and the smiling mouth would have assured her that Phil Andrews was not a dangerous lad.

"Don't you hear? Get out of that grain!" repeated the boy, snapping the long stick which he used for driving his cows.

"I'm not in the grain!" retorted the child, who hurriedly climbed the fence. After seating herself on the top rail, she added: "I only walked close to the fence 'cause I'm afraid of those ugly cows and I won't go out of this field till you drive 'em away."

"Ho! Those cows wouldn't hurt a caterpillar. Don't you see how busy they are? They like that grass much better than they would to eat a girl," returned Phil, with a merry laugh.

"I ain't afraid they'd eat me, but I'm awful afraid of their hookers. Once a little girl was tossed 'way up in the air—it's in my picture book, and it makes me 'fraid of those miz'bul cows."

"My goodness! Did she ever come down?" inquired Phil seriously.

"I don't know—Oh, course she come down, and I think she was killed. I can't read very well—some of the words are long—or I'd tell you the po'try about it; it was aw—ful anyway——"

"I should think so. I'll hurry these cows to the pasture before they get a sight of you," giving his slender willow a flourish, which sent forth a swishing sound quite surprising to the child, who watched him, and when assured there was no danger she slipped from her perch and wandered down the country road, stopping to pick the delicate spring flowers which grew by the fences and roadside.

Having driven the cows to the pasture, and turning homeward, Phil saw the little girl in the distance and, interested in her quaint remarks and lofty manner, he hastened to overtake her.

She was humming a school song in a low musical tone while she gathered the delicate blossoms. She was startled when she heard Phil's voice, who, having quietly approached her, looked over her shoulders as she knelt before a bed of anemone.

"Judge Hunter will arrest you if you pick his choice flowers," he said in a gruff tone.

"No, he will not!" emphasized the child, "He don't care if I pick wild flowers, 'sides he won't know it 'cept you tell him. You wouldn't be so mean as that, would you?"

"How do you know how mean I might be?" repeated Phil, while he looked down to the earnest face, having before discovered that it was a beautiful face with eyes like the dark pansies which grew in his mother's garden.

The straw hat had slipped from her head, showing to advantage the golden hair which lay in rings about her forehead, and falling in fluffy curls to her shoulders.

Her dress might have been of the finest quality or the poorest, for it was hidden by a blue checked apron.

"Because you don't look bad, 'sides you talk worser than you look," she saucily returned.

"I'm the worst boy in town," he said seriously. "Ain't you afraid I'll eat you?"

"H'm, you are trying to scare me. I'm not one bit afraid of you!" she emphasized with an amused expression on her young face.

"What are you going to do with those flowers?"

"I'm going to take them to Miss Deborah," she replied, as she industriously arranged each stem.

"Where do you live?" questioned Phil; drawing from his pocket a jack-knife, he cut a piece from the willow stick.

"What are you cutting your whip for?" she asked, without heeding his question.

"Whips don't care how much they are cut." Having firmly cut into the green wood, throwing away the longest piece, he gave his attention to the piece he had reserved.

The child watched him while he skillfully cut a small opening on one end. She stood on her toes to get a better view.

"You haven't answered my question," said Phil, while cutting and smoothing the rough edges of his work. "I asked you where do you live?"

"I live over there in that big house next to Judge Hunter's——"

"Whew!" A low whistle followed this exclamation. "So you live there! What's your name?"

"My name is Rachel Berry. What are you making such a fuss about my living in that house? It's good 'nough, ain't it?" she loftily responded, quite amusing to Phil.

"Why I am surprised. I took you for a poorhouse kid," he laughed.

"Now, I do think you're a bad boy; a horrid, miz'bul boy, calling me a poorhouse kid." Her cheeks flushed and her dark eyes flashed with indignation. "I will tell Miss Deborah and then you will be sorry you—you—hurted my feelings," she said brokenly.

Phil was puzzled, for he could not understand this child, who having been so self-reliant was suddenly crushed by his thoughtless words.

"There, don't cry," pleaded the boy. "I didn't know that you would care. I never thought of hurting your feelings; I was only in fun, just fooling, you know."

"But you called me names. Miss Deborah said that it was very naughty to call names." She rubbed her eyes with her rosy hand and turned to leave.

"Then I'll cry too. You called me a bad, horrid, miserable boy. Boo—hoo—hoo. I don't like to be called a bad boy—boo, hoo—if I am the worst boy in town—boo, hoo." Rubbing his eyes with his dusty hand, he hid his face behind his bent arm and gave a sly peep from underneath to see how the child was affected by his feigned sorrow.

She stood for a moment, in open-eyed amazement, when she caught a glance of his laughing face. "You are making believe!" she exclaimed, "You didn't cry, and you did not care one bit, and I did; 'sides you mimicked me, and Miss Deborah said that is very naughty and unkind."

Phil looked quite serious and penitent. "I'll tell you what I'll do. If you'll forgive me and not tell Miss Deborah what a bad, horrid boy I am, I will give you this whistle."

Her face lighted. "Is it a true whistle?" she asked, while she watched him put the finishing touches to the bit of green wood.

"Yes, it is as true as it can be. I'm sure it will prove itself genuine." Placing it to his lips, he blew a long, shrill note, to the joy of the child, who held up her two hands to grasp the treasure.

"Oh! I'll promise never to tell anybody that you called me names, and I'll forgive you too."

"All right," he cheerfully responded, placing the toy in her hand, and added: "Now we are friends."

"But I don't know your name," she suddenly exclaimed, "and Miss Deborah and the girls will ask who gave me this whistle."

"You may tell them Phil Andrews gave it to you. Wait one moment." He gave a spring over the stone wall and tore a piece of birch bark from a tree near. After shaping it into a square and neatly trimming the edges with his knife, he drew from his pocket a blue pencil, with which he wrote his name in a coarse, boyish hand.

"This is my card, fair maiden. Please accept it and do not forget the name. Good-bye."

Phil heard the whistle sending forth her joy in long shrill notes. He watched her until she reached the gate to Greystone Home, then leaping the fence he crossed the field the nearest way to town.

The large iron gate which stood open during the day was closed and Rachel looked with dismay on the heavy

hinges which were fastened in the thick stone wall and knew that it would be impossible to swing the heavy gate or lift the strong latch which fastened it.

The stone wall enclosing the spacious grounds was too high for her to climb, although she looked about the rough wall to find a crevice for her foot, hoping thereby to scale the wall as she had seen the larger girls display the daring feat.

At that moment a boy leaped the fence between the Hunter estate and Greystone Home.

"I will open the gate for you, Rachel," was what she heard him say, while he hastened to lift the latch. The heavy gate, released from its fastening, yielded at once.

"Why, Ralph Hunter, how you did s'prise me," she exclaimed, while she looked earnestly at the boy, "What is that over your eyes?"

"It is a green shade to protect my eyes from the strong light, for they are very weak. I have been ill and obliged to leave school," he said, throwing back his head to get a better view of her face. "How you have grown," he added. "I suppose you are going to school this year."

"Yes, I go to school half a day. Miss Deborah thinks I am too young to stay in school all day. I'm awful sorry that you have to wear that green thing over your eyes. Would you like to try this new whistle?" handing him Phil's gift.

"This is a nice whistle. I know how to make them," returning it to Rachel. "I have a whistle much better for me, for I can play tunes with it."

He drew from his pocket an ebony flageolet and placing it to his lips he breathed a few measured notes. The music rose higher until it became a lively air, to which Rachel, stirred by the alluring melody, bounded off into a

sprightly dance, her small feet keeping time, while she skipped to and fro, round and round over the grass, treading the scattered wild flowers beneath her feet.

Faster and faster she skipped, not only stopping to take a fresh breath, her golden hair flying about her heated rosy face; she seemed to have forgotten everything save the delightful harmony which sent a thrill of rapture through her sensitive little body.

Ralph had also forgotten himself in the lively and graceful movements of the child. Inspiration seemed to have filled his soul, and the rollicking tune changed to softer notes, influencing the small feet to new changes, surprising Miss Deborah Lee, who had come out in pursuit of her little charge. Their ardor ceased at the sound of her voice.

"Why, Rachel dear, where did you learn to use your feet in that way? Who is your teacher?"

"How do you do, Miss Deborah? You did not expect to see me, I'm sure. I saw Rachel trying to open the gate and I came to her assistance," said Ralph, approaching the lady.

"And helped her to a dancing lesson?" grasping his delicate hand. "I see that you are up to your old tricks, meddling with my girls. While I am pleased to see you, I am sorry to see those weak eyes and your delicate condition. I hope that you have not been overworked. You are here two months earlier than usual; has illness brought you home? It certainly appears so."

"Yes, Miss Deborah, the doctor ordered me to the country, and I'm not to look in a book during the summer. What am I going to do with myself if I can't read? I arrived last evening, and I can assure you this has been a long, tiresome day."

"Unoccupied time will drag. However, I am sure that you will not be in this condition all summer. As you gain strength your eyes will be better, and while you are resting you must solicit some of the girls to read to you. Mamie Hartwell is a fine reader, and I am sure that you will enjoy Nan Mason's reading also, providing that she can settle down long enough——"

"Is Nan as lively as ever? I just know that I will get better when I hear one of her hearty laughs," Ralph interrupted.

"Yes, Nan is the same happy-go-lucky girl. However, she is doing good work in school and seems to have remarkable taste for painting," returned Miss Deborah.

"Nan always did amuse me. There goes our tea bell and I must bid you good evening, for grandfather is very punctual, you know," said Ralph, turning to leave.

"Good night, Ralph. I will see that you do not get lonely," returned Miss Deborah cheerfully.

During this conversation Rachel had been looking about for the wild flowers she had thoughtlessly trampled under her feet.

"Oh! Miss Deborah," exclaimed the child, holding up a few wilted flowers, "I picked them for you, and now they are spoiled."

"Never mind, dear. You know there are more which you can gather to-morrow," was Miss Deborah's encouraging answer.

CHAPTER II.

GREYSTONE HOME.

WHEN Miss Deborah Lee learned that her uncle, Peter Keekant, had left his large fortune to her with the request that she make his stone mansion her home, the thought of living in that lonely place at the foot of Greytop Mountain was unpleasant. Her early recollections were associated with large, dismal rooms, darkened by thick shutters to keep out dust and flies, sunlight and happiness during the summer, for her maiden aunt's strict sense of propriety would not allow her niece to roam over the orchard and meadows or up the rocky steep of Greytop Mountain.

She could only remember the large family room where she sat day after day and learned the mysteries of the needle, while her heart went out to the birds, flowers, and sweet summer air which the bowed shutters kept out, while her Aunt Patty's stern eyes were ever watchful that she sat straight posing both feet and hands in a proper manner.

Only once had she been to stay for a short time in winter. It was on the occasion of her father's death, his remains having been taken to Rocktown for burial by the side of her mother, who died when her daughter was but six years old.

Deborah Lee's father had also left her a comfortable fortune, with which she had been enabled to assist in charitable work. She had become deeply interested in

eleven young girls in the mission school, all of whom were orphans, and it had been her dream that some day she would help them to fit themselves for their life work, and this was one reason for her sorrow in leaving her work in the large city, where she had been so happy.

One spring morning Deborah Lee found Prissy Underwood house-cleaning, with doors and windows wide open, the bright sunlight pouring in, brightening the large rooms and permeating the musty walls.

The lawn was like velvet, and the orchard a glory of pink and white blossoms, with old Gray-top forming a background of various greens as the shadows and sunlight played hide and seek through the dense foliage.

It was quite unlike that which she had anticipated. Everything seemed bright and beautiful. Prissy Underwood, the stern, grim servant of her Aunt Patty's time, appeared different as she hurriedly wiped a chair with her apron, apologizing for the disorder and sorry not to have known when her new mistress was coming.

"Do not mind my being here, Prissy," said Miss Deborah. "It is all lovely. I'm pleased to have this welcome; every door and window is open to give me a hearty greeting. We must have no more silence in these rooms, Prissy——"

"You'll hear noise enough, ma'am, when the wind gits to performin'," returned Prissy, rolling her sleeves above her elbows, "It howls and roars like wild bears," she added, as she left the room to prepare a lunch for her mistress.

For days Miss Deborah roamed about the old place trying to become acquainted with every shrub and tree. She found the mountain path; she visited the large pines which stood out like sentinels from the dense foliage

of younger growth; following the roaring brook, she found herself at the large marble quarry where her uncle had employed hundreds of busy workmen.

She was conscious of a feeling of awe when she realized that the noisy drills and startling blasts were silenced by reason of her uncle's death, he having owned and controlled the extensive business.

Many times she had questioned herself. Why had she been called to this place? What good could she do for others in the way of resuming this work?

"I will write to Louise Joy," she told herself. "This is her spring vacation and the change will be restful. Dear Louise is so wise; she will help me to decide this serious question."

It was a timely letter, for Louise Joy was about to resign her position as a teacher in one of the fashionable young ladies' boarding schools. One afternoon a few days later Miss Deborah Lee welcomed her friend to her Greystone mansion.

Prissy Underwood's predictions of the howling wind were correct, for the evening of Miss Louise Joy's arrival a wind and rain storm came howling down the mountain, tearing up roots, breaking long branches from the trees, and scattering the wreaths of pink and white blossoms from the gnarled apple trees. It filled Roaring Brook and Hunter Creek, while it furiously howled about the corners of the house and mercilessly bent the tall elms and maple trees on the lawn.

Miss Deborah and her friend were enjoying the warmth from the large fireplace in the sitting room. They had been talking of their work in the mission school, where they had first met, and of the pleasant memories of their city life together, when Deborah Lee suddenly exclaimed:

"Louise, what am I here for? Why was I taken from my useful work? What can my misson be in this lonely spot? Surely this wealth must be used for the good. Uncle Peter especially requested me to make this place my home, and I have sacrificed my happy New York life to obey his request. While there may be work here for me to do, the same as in New York, I do not know where to find it. Dear Louise, advise me; you are always so wise, I am sure you can solve the problem."

Her friend did not answer at once. After a few moments' reflection she turned to Deborah Lee, who observed the soft spiritual light in her face when she said:

"Your life, dear, is hallowed by the same love here as when you were working in New York. You have started for the altar with your faggots; now leave the rest for God to find the lamb.

"You have obeyed the leading to come here; be patient until the revelation comes. I think I have not told you that your orphan girls in the mission always ask me if you are never coming back to them. They love you more than you can know, dear, and I am thinking what a happy home you could make for them here."

"Oh! Louise, dearest friend, will you help me? Will you be their teacher? Will you help me to make eleven good women of these dear orphans? Say yes, and I will go for them at once," exclaimed Deborah Lee, her face radiant with the thought.

At that moment Prissy came hurriedly into the room. She seemed to be laboring under great excitement, and asked the ladies to go to the kitchen at once and interview a poor woman, who with her child, having lost her way, had sought refuge from the storm.

When they entered the kitchen they found a foreigner,

with a sleeping child in her arms. The water was running from her garments, while she vainly endeavored to tell them her story, and before they could decide her meaning the woman fainted and came near falling, had not Prissy been near to save her.

"She is a German peasant, and that is the reason we could not understand her," said Miss Deborah. "However, I think I caught enough of her words to understand that she had lost her way. She walked from the depot in this furious storm, poor little woman. I presume she fainted from exhaustion and hunger."

It was days before Miss Deborah could learn anything from this strange guest. The child seemed to be but three years old, and the ladies found themselves deeply interested in its happy winning ways.

One morning she found the woman on the back piazza, talking to the child as if preparing to leave. She told Miss Deborah that the child's parents were dead and having left home, expecting to place it in an orphan asylum, owing to the storm she lost her way and guided by the light, she wandered to Miss Deborah's home.

When Miss Deborah told her that there was no orphan asylum in Rocktown, and that she must have made a mistake by getting off at the wrong station, the woman wrung her hands in despair and was quite willing to accept Miss Deborah's offer to take the child and bring her up to be a good and useful woman.

Two hours later Miss Deborah found her friend on the side piazza watching Jacob Rodder, the man of all work, putting up a climbing rose vine. As Miss Deborah approached, Miss Louise was surprised to see her friend leading the strange child.

"Here is my mission, dear," she exclaimed. "She is

mine to keep. Do you think I can do justice with this offering?"

The two looked down on the sweet baby face, with the dark liquid eyes and full rosy lips, the broad white forehead and the crown of golden hair.

"This is only the beginning of your work, Deborah dear. Go at once for your orphan girls and I will help you," said Louise Joy, while she embraced the child and pressed her lips to its white brow.

It was then that the large stone house was christened Greystone Home. Two weeks later children's happy voices rang out over the lawns and orchard. Greystone Home had passed its third anniversary when Rachel Berry met Phil Andrews for the first time. While the older girls had met him in their rambles, Miss Deborah thought her little charge too young to wander beyond a certain limit.

"Do you know that it is three years to-day since we christened our home?" said Miss Deborah, as they stood on the piazza and watched the moon as it floated in the heavens, sending weird shadows on the lawn.

"Three happy years of love, joy and peace; everything seems to work in harmony——"

"Except Prissy," interrupted Miss Deborah, "I fear that she will never be reconciled to this change in her life; she seems to despise the girls, and I am at a loss how to manage her."

"Do not try, dear; let the love of the girls do that. Train them to know the meaning of the word 'love' and let it do the work," returned Louise Joy.

"Ah yes, that is what I desire to do, and for the past three years I have been puzzled to know just how to be-

gin. Prissy is as methodical with her disagreeable days as she is with her housework," sighed Miss Deborah.

At that moment Prissy appeared before them. As the moon came out from behind a cloud it defined every line of her stern face.

"Miss Debry, what's the meanin' of that big bundle on the kitchen piazzar?" she asked in quick, rasping tones.

"I am sure I do not know, Prissy. How long has it been there?" returned Miss Deborah. Stepping down from the piazza, she followed Prissy to the rear of the house.

"There it is, ma'm. It takes up perty nigh all the room that I have to git in an' outer the door. I told Jacob he hadn't no biz'ness to fill up the piazzar in this way, but he never pays no attention to what I say——"

"Oh! I remember now," interrupted Miss Deborah, "Jacob informed me just before supper that the tent had arrived by express, and he asked me if it would be all right to leave it here until to-morrow morning, when he will put it up on the lawn near Judge Hunter's wall."

"A tent?" repeated Prissy shortly, "What on earth are you havin' a tent for? I s'posed it was only cirkis folks who had tents."

"This tent is for the children to play in," explained Miss Deborah. "They have needed something of the kind for some time."

"My land! My land! Miss Debry, I think you are the curiousest person I ever heard on in all my mortal days—buyin' a tent fer them nobodies to play in an' squan——"

"Prissy!" emphasized Miss Deborah, "You must not question my acts. I am doing that which I think is best for those dear orphan girls. I intend their childhood

to be as happy as I can make it. I do not forget my own lonely childhood, with no mother to love and pet me, and you, Prissy, have no bright memories of those tender years, when you needed a mother's care and love. Your life was saddened by hardships and work, for Aunt Patty was a stern mistress."

"Wal', if she was I don't need to be twitted of it," returned Prissy sharply.

"As I mentioned at first, it will not be there long. Directly after breakfast Jacob Rodder will put up the tent where it will remain all summer. I am doing this for your comfort as well as for the children's pleasure. Every Saturday after they have finished their work in the house they will go to this tent, where they will learn the first rules of housekeeping.

"I intend that they will occupy one hour in sewing, and also take their suppers there every pleasant Saturday, where they will learn to set their table properly, wash their own dishes, and keep their house in perfect order. After a while I shall have either you or Nora teach them to cook."

"I never will. I never will hev' a thing to do with the miz'bul nobodies. You kin give that job to Nory, fer I won't be upsot by the rompin' tomboys. I'll do your housework as nigh right as I kin, but I will not hev' a thing to do with them brats; an' you can't make me, an' you can't turn me outer this home nuther, for you know's well's I that your uncle's will left me a home here as long as I lived; an' if you die 'fore I do I'm to hev' ten thousand dollars to take care of me. You see I know about that 'ere will, Miss Debry, an' that's the reason I'm so particular about your squanderin' the money," rasped Prissy.

For a moment Miss Deborah was silent; never before had Prissy been so insulting. She seemed unusually excited and irritable.

"Prissy,"—Deborah Lee's voice was tender as she spoke—"do you realize, dear, that the years which will make you and I old women will also make young ladies of these children? If we are patient with them now there will come a time when their strong young arms will be our prop and we will need their tender care for us. They will love you, Prissy, if you will open your heart to them. Can you not afford to be patient and wait——"

"No, I can't an' won't nuther," interrupted Prissy, "love them miserable, sassy——"

"Prissy, you must not forget that God is their father, just the same as He is our father, therefore they are our sisters——"

"Sisters! Sisters!" shrieked Prissy. "Miss Debry, you are gittin' crazier every minute, an' I won't argy the p'int any longer."

Miss Deborah Lee drew a long sigh as she heard Prissy slam the kitchen door and turn the lock.

CHAPTER III.

CHECKERBERRY.

"I DECLARE, I do dread Saturdays more than any day in the week," Prissy Underwood remarked as she rolled out the mass of dough on her moulding board.

"An' why Sathurdays more thin ither days?" inquired Nora O'Connor, who vigorously hurried the spoons and forks from the hot suds, while she gave an occasional glance to the open door, where she could see the children at play on the lawn.

They were watching with noisy interest a large tent which Jacob Rodder was putting up, which they knew was for their special use.

"Because," returned Prissy shortly, "them girls are always under foot on Saturdays. I don't like young ones anyway, but if I must hev' 'em around give me boys, fer they'd be off to the mountains or creek."

"Sure now, an' ye talk very quare," laughed Nora. "How could they be's aroun' whin they be's off tew the mountain an' the creek? Girls are no worser'n boys. Whin at play havin' foine fun, I likes to hear 'em, bliss their little bodies."

She placed the silver on the tray and resumed her dish-washing.

There was a brief pause in the conversation. Prissy silently rolled and fashioned the molasses cakes and arranged them in the long baking pan. Her voice was harsh and severe when she spoke, for this was one of

Prissy's indigo days, which were usually very trying to Nora.

"I can't see what on airth Debry Lee is thinkin' about to squander so much money on them good-fer-nothin's," snapped Prissy. "Every one on 'em will be so sot up there will be no livin' with 'em b'fore they are ten years older, 'en I sh'd like ter know what they'll be good fer."

"Sure now, they's be larnin' books, an' Miss Lee told me that her mind was to make 'em grow up useful to git their livin', t'achin' school, er paintin' picters, er playin' the pianner. Sure it's good of her to take the poor orphings and give 'em a home and t'ach 'em to be useful."

"Useful! H'm, that looks like it," retorted Prissy, pointing with her rolling-pin to the pretty canvas tent where Jacob was at work.

A shriek was heard, followed by merry voices and hearty laughter, which startled the nervous Prissy, who exclaimed:

"Fer the land sakes, what has happened? Somebody killed or nigh it, jest ez likely ez not. If they don't stop that racket, I'll spile every one of these molasses——"

"Nobody is hurt, ma'm," laughed Nora, "It's only Jinny Gardner thryin' to run with the whalebarry an' the leetle Rachel sittin' inside as foine as a nobleman's child. Jist look at 'em an' see how smilin' an' happy they be's, enjoyin' the warm spring mornin' afther the long winther——"

The oven door gave a decided bang, which caused Nora to leave her sentence unfinished, for it was convincing proof that Prissy's temper was rising.

"Stop my work to look at a lot of tomboys? There is plenty to do without standin' an' lookin' at that 'ere

circus tent an' them tramps what Derby Lee's pettin'; an' the best thing you kin do is to hurry up them dishes an' git ter yer cleanin'."

Nora had long since learned that "silence is golden," so she calmly lifted her tray of shining silver and started for the dining room pantry.

Long before the dinner hour Jacob Rodder had finished the tent and left the twelve to take possession. They had brought odd pieces of furniture from the attic, among which was an ancient table dating far back to Deborah Lee's grandmother's early housekeeping. It was a small, square table, with leaves at the side which could be raised when needed for their afternoon tea.

They were nearly settled when Miss Deborah appeared, followed by Jacob Rodder, who placed a wooden box on the table. Lifting the lid, she proceeded to take from its depths a full set of dainty dishes. The attractive display brought forth a burst of noisy exclamations from each of the surprised girls, which assured Deborah Lee of their joy and gratitude.

A portable cupboard had been fastened near the end of the tent, and during the process of arranging the dishes on the shelves and putting everything in order the twelve kept up a merry chatter, while they dusted their furniture and drove out the intruding spiders and inquisitive bugs which had wandered in.

The younger girls were sent to the mountain path for ferns and wild flowers. They climbed the fence and crossed the rustic bridge over Roaring Brook. Following the wooded lane, they soon reached the mountain path, where they stopped to gather the evergreens and ferns which grew on each side far into the dense forest.

With exclamations of delight they found a bed of late arbutus.

"Oh, you darling sweet flowers," murmured Sadie Barton. "I wish that I could pick every one of you."

"Then you'll be greedy," uttered a gruff voice which startled the children. Fanny Wheeler grasped her basket and ran wildly down the path, followed by the girls, all save Rachel, whom they left staring with amazement at a pair of roguish eyes peeping from behind a tall pine tree.

"Hello! Checkerberry, you ain't a coward," laughed Phil Andrews, approaching her.

"Oh! You miz'bul boy. Why did you try to frighten me? 'Sides you said you wouldn't call me names again; now you have told a lie, you bad wicked boy."

"Why, I've not called you names. Ain't you checkered all over with that big apron, and isn't your name Berry? If that don't make Checkerberry, you may take my head for a football."

"Why! I never thought of that," looking down upon her apron. "I liked Red Ridinghood's name 'cause she wore a red hood, you know, but I don't like that horrid name you called me; and you must never call me that again."

She tossed her head scornfully and turned to leave.

"Don't go! I want to tell you that checkerberries are the prettiest berries that grow. Don't you think these are pretty?" handing her a basket filled with the scarlet fruit.

Her face lighted as she took the basket with exclamations of joy. "No," she said, "these are wintergreen berries. I've seen lots of them. They are sweet and taste like wintergreen candy," filling her mouth with the crimson fruit.

"Some people call them wintergreen berries, but I like checkerberries better, and so does Bessie."

"Who is Bessie?" she asked, dipping her hand in the basket for more berries.

"She is my sister. When I go home I always have something to tell her that is pleasant, and I often take her checkerberries for she is fond of them. One day I told her of you and the whistle I made for you. She named you Checkerberry, for I told her that you wore a checkered apron and that your name was Rachel Berry, and that is the reason why she wanted me to pick these for you. Last year she used to come up the mountain with me to pick berries, but she will never come again."

Rachel observed the sad expression in his face, unlike the merry boy of only the moment before.

"You look awful sober. Is she sick?" inquired the child.

His voice was low and sad when he explained that his sister, who was younger than himself, was now a cripple from having fallen from a steep embankment into a deep ravine while coasting the winter before. "For weeks she could not be moved and the doctors thought she would not live." His last words were uttered brokenly.

"But she did live. What makes you look so sorry? And I do believe you are 'most crying," for she observed the moisture which had gathered in the boy's eyes.

"I'm not crying. Bessie cannot walk and when I think of her suffering so much pain I can't help feeling sorry for her, although for the past few weeks she has been able to sit up in an arm chair with cushions to rest against. The doctors say that she can never walk again.

"I wonder that Miss Deborah has never told you about

Bessie, for she and Miss Louise often call to see her, and Mamie Hartwell and Nan Mason frequently bring Bessie flowers and something nice from Miss Deborah. Last week Miss Deborah sent them with a basket of oranges and bananas."

"Oh, I know about her!" exclaimed Rachel, "Is that little girl who broke her back your sister? Miss Deborah told me all about her an' she said that she was lovely and patient, but she wasn't 'zactly a orphan like me, for she had a mamma."

"My father died when Bessie was six years old. He used to preach in the stone church. Everybody liked my father, for he was a good man," returned Phil soberly.

"I'm awful sorry you haven't a papa. It makes you 'most a orphan, just like——"

"Someone is calling you," interrupted Phil, for voices were heard from the mountain path.

"I'm coming!" cried Rachel, turning to leave Phil, when at that moment Nettie Walton parted the bushes, while Flossie Cameron was hurrying to reach them.

"Why, Phil Andrews! Are you the boy who frightened the girls?" exclaimed Flossie.

"Yes, I'm the bad boy who goes about frightening little kids, but I've promised to be good and not do it again, haven't I, Rachel?"

"Yes, you are a good boy now, and will never call me names again, 'cept checked apron berries," said Rachel approvingly.

"What do you mean!" exclaimed the girls, laughing heartily, to the surprise of Rachel, who wondered what she could have said to cause this hearty outburst.

"Once upon a time I called her a poorhouse kid, just for fun, and she was offended," Phil explained. "Now

my sister has given her a name which she likes better." Pointing to her apron he explained the meaning of Rachel's words.

"Now we know your secret, Rachel," laughed Flossie. "Phil, she told us of the whistle you gave her, but she said there was a secret about it and she wouldn't tell even Miss Deborah——"

"Of course I wouldn't tell a lie, an' Miss Deborah said that it was right," interrupted the child.

"Then you kept the secret and never told about that horrid miserable boy. Good for you, Checkerberry; I'll tell Bessie all about it. Good-bye," were Phil's parting words, as he turned and went further up the mountain, while the girls took the path home.

Through the open door of the tent the May sunshine gave a warm coloring to the picture within of bright young faces bending over their work while their voices were raised in a harmonious song as they industriously piled their needles, for this was their sewing hour.

Their voices floated out on the spring air, to the Hunter lawn, where Ralph was lying under the maples, his arms folded under his head and the green shade drawn over his eyes to keep them from the sunlight. He was conscious of a sense of loneliness, and he longed for a congenial friend of his age. Having been deprived of outdoor sports, books and school life, he envied these girls their freedom and happiness.

A new thought entered his mind, to which he quickly responded. With a bunch of peonies fresh from his grandfather's garden, he appeared within the tent door.

"Ins't this jolly!" he exclaimed, lifting the green shade to get a better view of the interior of the pretty room.

"I have brought these flowers in return for your

lively concert," he replied to the chorus of voices and cheery greetings. "My spirits went down to zero as I thought of the good times you were having, when it suddenly occurred to me that I would come over and steal a bit of fun from you."

Rachel, more thoughtful than the others, guided him to an ancient divan and hospitably bade him to be seated.

"This is just suited to a lazy boy like me," he laughed, as he reclined on the restful seat.

"Girls," said Mamie, "I'm sure our sewing hour is over. Who will go and see what time it is?"

"If you were at work when you first began to sing, you have ten minutes over an hour," Ralph remarked, looking at his watch.

"What is that on your watch chain?" observed Rachel, her eyes on a tiny locket suspended from the chain.

"This is a picture of my baby sister who died several years ago," returned Ralph soberly, as he detached the locket and handed it to Rachel.

The girls were interested at once and clustered around her to get a view of the sweet face looking out from the gold frame.

"The circumstances of her death are very sad," remarked Ralph in a low tone. "It occurred five years ago; papa took us to the sea shore. Molly was Lily's nurse and we were very fond of her, because she was so devoted to my sister and was faithful in every way.

"When we had been there a fortnight Uncle Richard came; for it had been arranged that they would go for a week's sail in papa's yacht, with a party of friends. Lily and I remained at the hotel with the nurse.

"The day before the party returned, late in the afternoon, Molly put my sister in her carriage, hoping that

she would go to sleep, for Molly said that she was fretful. I remember that she had not been gone but an hour when a furious windstorm suddenly arose and we were obliged to give up our game of croquet and hurry into the hotel.

"I became anxious about Molly and Lily. Although I was only eight years old, I started out to find them, for I was sure Molly might need my help.

"Imagine my surprise and distress to receive the news that my baby sister had been carried out to sea. Molly let go of the handle to the carriage to fasten her hat, and the wind swept the carriage from the shore before she could grasp the handle.

"The umbrella top served for a sail, and owing to the roar of the wind and waves her screams could not be heard; everything was unfavorable for the rescue, the night was black, and the waves rolling fearfully."

"Oh, that careless nurse," cried one of the girls.

"No one blamed the nurse, for she never realized that the carriage could be taken so suddenly. If she had not been so near the water there wouldn't have been any danger," Ralph answered soberly.

"I should have thought your father and mother would have blamed her for staying out so late," Flossy remarked, while she studied the lovely baby face looking into her own eyes from the small frame.

"It seemed late because of the storm," returned Ralph. "Although no one censured her, she blamed herself for going out with Lily, and it was dreadful to listen to her moans. But the hardest to bear were poor mamma's cries and shrieks. No one could comfort her and it was feared that she would be insane. She was very ill for weeks, and that is the reason that papa took her to

Europe. She has been under the care of a skillful physician, and papa writes that if she continues to improve they will be home in September. They have been absent three years," he sighed.

The sad story and the pathos with which Ralph related it drew sympathy from each of his listeners, who soberly arranged their work in the large basket without a word.

"I fear that I have spoiled your pleasure by relating this sad story. It is seldom that I mention it, although I never can forget its terror," said Ralph. Rising from the divan where he had been reclining, he took the locket from Rachel and replaced it on his watch chain.

At that moment Nora appeared bearing a well-laden tray covered with a napkin. She was obliged to hold it high above the heads of the excited twelve, who were noisily inquiring to learn the hidden mystery under the white napkin.

"Don't ye come forninst me, ye'll make me shpill yer illigant supper," cried Nora, as she hastened to set the tray on the table.

"Miss Lee bade me tell ye that ye must have yer supper airly, agin the sun goes down, fer it will be too cool whin the sun bes away; indade, an' don't ye look foine," gazing about the tent. "Yer dishes are grand enough fer the quane. I washed ivery wan iv them an' put 'em in the box as Miss Lee directed;,' for Nan Mason had proudly opened the cupboard door for Nora's inspection.

"Now mind and git yer supper airly. Ye'll hev none tew much time," were her parting words.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STRANGER AT THE TENT.

As Nora left the tent, Judge Hunter's servant, Pat Murphy, appeared at the door; his face was red and heated while he hurriedly assured Ralph that his grandfather wished him to go home at once.

"Anything serious, Pat?" inquired Ralph.

"Bedad, ye has a foine expriss from New York," returned Pat, while a merry twinkle gathered in his blue eyes.

Ralph hurriedly followed Pat, for he was surprised at this unusual summons.

The happy preparations for supper began. They were a busy twelve, flitting to and fro, each one eager to assist in arranging the table and placing to advantage this new set of china.

Flossy was sent to the kitchen for hot water with which to fill the china teapot for the make believe tea.

The dainty supper from the tray was placed on the table and artistically arranged. Sandwiches cut in wafer slices were heaped on small platters at each end of the table with a generous supply of Prissy's molasses cakes for companion pieces.

Golden custards in dainty cups were placed by each plate, and conspicuous in the center was the dish of scarlet berries bordered with shining leaves.

"Here is your hot water," cried Flossy, holding up a steaming pail, "I had to wait for it to boil; and we

have our orders from Prissy not to be racing in that kitchen for another thing. She said that we made more work and trouble than forty suppers made in the dining room. Imagine it, girls—forty suppers," laughed Flossy.

Nettie Walton's face flushed with anger. "Who cares for her!" she ejaculated. "I suppose she thinks that she can rule us as she pleases and can say anything to hurt our feelings; yesterday she called me a tramp, and once she said I was a worthless piece of trash, and——"

"Oh, I never mind her crazy tongue," interrupted Nan. "You know that she has her cranky days. I suppose this is one of them."

"I imagine she has them every day," pouted Nettie.

"Supper is ready!" cried Flossy, arranging the chairs about the table.

It was an attractive picture on which the two ladies gazed as they stood within the tent door. They had arrived in time to hear Rachel repeat a blessing.

When about to begin their meal there was a pause, as if something had been forgotten. At that moment Rachel exclaimed: "You 'most forgot to pray!"

"Yes, dear," said Mamie, who sat at the head of the table, "we did forget. Will you ask a blessing?"

Although Rachel was a sensitive child, she was always obliging, ever ready to do a favor, and her willing response caused them to bow their heads while, unconscious of self, Rachel clasped her hands and reverently repeated in a sweet voice:

"Please God give us this day our daily bread and make us good." She paused, while the rest responded: "All this we ask in the name of Christ, Amen."

"Blessed are the pure in heart," murmured Louise Joy.

"We will not disturb them; they do not need us,"

returned Deborah Lee, "They seem harmonious and I feel like giving thanks daily for this work which came to me through that dear chid."

"I have been thinking," said Mamie as she poured the second cup of tea for Sadie, "that it would be a good idea to organize a society."

"What do you mean? How can we?" questioned the girls.

"You know," replied Mamie, "that Miss Deborah and Miss Louise are always talking about love and returning every unkind act from another with a loving word, or trying to do something pleasing for them. Don't you think it would be nice to form a society to be kind to Prissy?"

"Be kind to that horrid old thing?" ejaculated Nettie.

"What can we do for her? She will not allow us to go near her or speak to her wherever she is," remarked Nan.

"I heard her say that she wanted some dandelion greens, and that she had no time to go for them," said Susan Blake. "I know where there are a lot of 'em down in the Willow Brook meadow."

"That will be our first work to do for her, and I am sure other kindnesses will be thought of for us to do, and we must have a good name for our society." Mamie's suggestions were always approved by the others, for it was her amiable unselfish nature which had won them, and as she claimed one more year to her age above the rest they believed her to be wiser and were quite willing that she should be their leader in their work or play.

During the conversation, Prissy was speeding across the lawn toward the tent. Something had happened to

ruffle her, for she looked more repellant than ever, as her angular figure hastened on. Her apron fluttered on the breeze, the long strings flying out from her swinging gown; the faded silk handkerchief on her head held at the corners by her teeth heightened the severity of her stern face and cold gray eyes.

"More cambric tea if you please, and don't scrimp the sugar. The other cup was——"

Flossy did not finish her sentence, for Prissy appeared in the doorway; her severe face and harsh, rasping voice was startling.

"Who upsot my peppers?" she snapped.

"Peppers—peppers?" they murmured in surprise.

"Yes, peppers!" she stormily repeated, "Who upsot the box on the kitchen piazzer? You did it, Floss Cameron, an' don't you dast deny it. You was mad 'cause I druv' you outer the kitchen. Answer me, you good-fer-nothin' nobody." She was about to grasp Flossy's arm, when Jacob Rodder appeared before them.

"What is the trouble, Flossy?" he inquired when he observed her white, frightened face.

"Floss Cameron has upsot my box of pepper plants, that's what's the trouble, an' I'm goin' to take her to Miss Debry an'——"

"The peppers are in the garden; I planted them an hour ago," was Jacob's cool reply. "I upsot the box and left it on the back piazzer."

While accustomed to Prissy's attacks of temper, they had never seen her in such a rage. Their faces were white as they looked upon the tall figure before them and Nettie, who was not in favor of the new society, exclaimed:

"I hope now that you are satisfied, you cranky old chestnut burr."

"Remember the society we are planning," warned Mamie in a low voice, as she drew near Nettie.

"Let her talk!" snapped Prissy. "Miss Debry will know what a heathen she's got when I tell her——"

"Tell her what you please. I'll tell her how you scold and order us about as if we belong to you, and I'll tell her that you call us good-for-nothing nobodies. Anyone would think you lived on vinegar and pickled peppers!" Nettie's face was flushed and her voice was loud and angry.

Prissy was furious. She grasped Nettie's arm and attempted to draw the struggling girl from her chair.

"I'll shake the life outen you——"

"Prissy, what is the meaning of this!" It was Deborah Lee's voice, which caused Prissy to release her grasp and turn her glittering eyes on her mistress.

"I'm taking care of my repertation. I ain't goin' to be sassed an' called a chestnut burr, nor a pickle nuther. I've had my feelin's biled an' riled by her sassy talk, an' if you don't give her what she deserves, I will!" emphasized Prissy, her face gray with anger.

"Very well, Prissy, I will inquire into this matter and if Nettie has insulted or offended you she must apologize to you. However, if the case is serious enough to require punishment I will see that she has it; you must not attempt to punish one of these children. If they are rude or troublesome bring your complaints to me and I will decide the question; you must not," said Miss Deborah firmly.

"H'm! I ain't goin' ter be riled an' sassed by a lot of young ones," Prissy muttered. She picked up her hand-

kerchief, which had fallen from her head, and grimly left the tent.

"I am sorry that your afternoon is closing unpleasantly," said Miss Deborah to Nettie, who hastened to her and with sobbing voice tried to explain the meaning of her anger and impudent remarks to Prissy. "You are too excited and grieved, dear, for a talk with me at present. Finish your supper and when you leave this place come to my room." Miss Deborah's voice was soothing as she passed her cool hand over Nettie's hot brow.

"No, no, don't wait, dear Miss Deborah," pleaded the sobbing girl. "I shall not be happy until I have explained."

"If it will make you happier to tell me now, you may do so. Perhaps it may be better for you to explain the meaning of this outbreak," said Miss Deborah calmly.

Nettie confessed her error and admitted that she did not like Prissy because she called them "good-for-nothing nobodies."

"And thus you have exhibited the same disposition which Prissy has shown," returned Miss Deborah soberly.

"I couldn't help it. Prissy is always cross. She—she is never kind like Nora. We all love Nora; she never scolds or calls us names," murmured Nettie brokenly.

"You may not have thought, when you gave Prissy the name, that a chestnut burr has something good and sweet hidden within its rough exterior which we all enjoy. I am sure, with all her harsh rough ways, Prissy has something good within. The real chestnut is not the thorny covering, you know, and so it is with Prissy, and with all of us; our real selves are hidden with a rough

covering of evil. We do not know ourselves as God knows us, and we will not until we find God; and the way to find Him is to strive to do right; and best of all is to love everybody, for God is love. We must find a way to Prissy's heart by loving her." Miss Deborah's low, gentle words were a surprise to the children, for they thought it impossible to love Prissy.

"Bear in mind, dear girls, that Prissy had no happy childhood, no playmates, no sports of any kind. My aunt took her when she was twelve years old. She was brought up to work, and she knows nothing about children. She did not govern her temper when young, and the result is, she is an irritable woman. Nettie, you have exhibited the same disposition this afteronon that you censured in another. If you continue in this way, you will grow to be a harsh, disagreeable woman. Promise me, dear child, that you will try to overcome this unfortunate temper."

Although Miss Deborah's voice was low and soothing, her words were a rebuke; for it was her gentle chiding which assured the children of their errors, and many times their young hearts were pierced with sorrow over their misdeeds, fearing they had wounded her.

"I wouldn't like to grow up to be as disagreeable as Prissy," said Nettie, after a brief pause, "and I'll try very hard to be better natured; and if you wish, I will apologize to Prissy."

"Not particularly because I desire it, dear, but for your own happiness I would not only like you to ask her forgiveness, but I hope you will forgive and love her; not her errors, but the real Prissy, who while she may not know it has much that is good in her heart. I would advise all of you to send out loving thoughts to Prissy,

for there is a power in thought, more than we can know now."

"Finish your supper, and all of you be ready to come in when the sun goes down." With these words she left them.

"Miss Debry sent me in with this!" exclaimed Nora, her cheery face beaming above a basin of hot water she held in her strong red hands. Hurriedly placing it on the table, she added:

"And she directed me to show ye's how to wash dishes. Now, thin, whin there is no glass ye must wash yes forks an' spoons an' knives an' wipe 'em on yer foine new towels. Ye'll be foine housekeepers," she added, while she vigorously rushed the dainty silver through the hot suds and laid them steaming on the tray.

These busy little housekeepers had become so absorbed in their new play that they did not observe the stranger looking in at the tent door, who eagerly turned his handsome head with a surprised look in his brown eyes. He gave one bound into the tent, startling the children with his heavy tramp and good-natured whinny; for the intruder was a Shetland pony, who stepped to the table, snuffed at the dishes, and upset the sugar bowl, helping himself to the sugar; then, turning he tossed his head to the children, who were speechless with surprise. Again he turned for more sweets from the sugar bowl, while Nora tried to reach his foretop.

"Pretty one, pretty pony," she said in alluring tones, vainly trying to reach him.

He gave a good-natured whinny and shook his long mane, then bounded out of the door and through the open gate down the road, passing Judge Hunter's residence, his head up and his long mane flying, surprising

Phil Andrews, who, having turned his cows down the lane, heard Pat Murphy calling in the distance:

"Sthop him! Sthop him. Sthop that pony, Phil."

Phil needed no advice what to do. Thrusting his hands in his pocket, he drew forth a bag of candy. Selecting a sugar plum, he held out the tempting morsel in his palm.

The pony shook his head and, eyeing Phil's palm, he looked as if inclined to accept the sweet.

In gentle tones Phil called, "Nice boy, nice fellow," while approaching the excited stranger, who had lessened his speed, evidently to deceive Phil. Slowly approaching with his eyes on the sugar plum, he suddenly dashed on to the walnut tree.

"Ah! That is what you are going to do," said Phil, as the pony threw himself on the grass and rolled, giving Phil the advantage of getting near his head. The pony rose and sniffed at Phil's hand, while Phil held tight to the foretop.

The pony ate the candy and asked for more by sniffing about Phil's coat.

"Sure, it's worth me month's wages to git this spalpeen by the head," said Pat, approaching Phil, who was patting and talking to the pony. "Indade, he gave me a foine scare; Judge Hunter is that mad, it'll be all me place is worth to ristore his timper."

"Whose pony is it?" inquired Phil while Pat was adjusting the halter.

"It's Masther Ralph's pony sure, a prisent from his uncle in New York. It come by expriss this afthernoon, an' a great surprise to all of us," returned Pat, wiping his heated face on his shirt sleeve.

"You see, I was ordered to put the saddle on him,

an' I sez to mesilf, "I'll jist thry how he'll ride," an' sure, didn't he raise thim tew fore egs an' throw me off his back. Me head sthruck foreninst the fince an' when I waked up from me drame of sthars the foine city fella was gone. I could see him nather up or down the road, whin he wint gallopin' out of Miss Lee's grounds down the road where ye found him."

"Where was he, Pat?" called Ralph, hastening toward them.

"He wint callin' tew the neighbors, right in the tent where the childers were."

"Are you sure he went in the tent?" inquired Ralph eagerly.

"Indade he did; the childers towled me theirselves. An' this foine boy caught him," said Pat, turning to Phil, who was stroking the pony's shining coat.

"I'm sure you are Phil Andrews," said Ralph, lifting his green shade. "I have always wanted to know you," he went on, "and I thank you for your timely rescue of my pony."

"And I will thank the pony for introducing us," laughed Phil as they turned into the Hunter grounds.

"What is his name?" questioned Phil as he walked by their side after Ralph had mounted the pony for a ride to the village.

"His blanket is marked 'Blowser.' Uncle Richard sent him from New York instead of a bicycle. Dr. Sutton ordered me to ride morning and evening as long as my eyes are weak. Grandfather is afraid to have me ride his horses and wrote Uncle Richard to send me a wheel. Imagine my surprise when I saw this fine pony." Leaning forward, Ralph patted his new playfellow on the head.

At that moment to their amazement the animal lowered his body to a kneeling posture. Ralph dismounted at once and anxiously asked Phil what was best to do.

"Let us examine his saddle," said Phil. "Perhaps it is strapped too tight. Get up, boy; get up, Blowser," Phil urged in gentle tones, as he patted him tenderly and lightly pulled the reins.

Blowser obeyed the gentle command and stood before them, only for a moment, however. He settled back on his haunches and put out a forefoot, to the surprise and amusement of the boys, after which he astonished them as he gave a spring, and once more on his feet he proceeded to sniff about Phil's pocket.

"He wants more candy," laughed Phil, while he gave the pony another sugar plum. However, one was not sufficient to satisfy him. The little fellow tried to get his nose in Phil's pocket, to the delight of his new friends.

"You greedy fellow, are you going to eat all of Bessie's candy?" Handing him another, Phil explained his sister's illness to Ralph and the accident which occasioned it.

Ralph, who had been interested in Phil's account of Bessie, said: "Give Blowser the rest of the candy, Phil. I'm going to the post-office, and I will stop at the grocery store and get more candy for the two Bs' Bessie and Blowser.

"Ah, my fine pony, I'm not sure that you are reliable. Do you think we had better lead him, Phil? I don't care to be thrown," Ralph remarked, with his hand on the saddle.

"Give him another trial. I do not think him vicious. It was the candy he was after, and I believe he knows that I have given him all," returned Phil.

Ralph easily mounted the gentle animal and soon they reached the post-office.

After leaving the office Ralph went to John Porter's grocery store for the candy, taking the opportunity while waiting to read a letter from his uncle, Richard Bossford.

He surprised John Porter by rushing from the store and called to Phil with the exciting news that Blowser was a trick pony, having formerly belonged to a circus.

"That explains everything," laughed Phil. "His begging for more candy with his forefoot, and hunting my pockets were tricks which he has been taught. And his call at the tent is nothing strange, now that we understand him. I presume he thought the street parade was over and that he must proceed to the circus tent; did you, Blowser? I won't pat you, for you'll be showing off some of your circus airs." Mounting him once more, they turned homeward.

"I must leave you," said Phil, as they drew near a pretty white cottage.

"Do you live here?" inquired Ralph. Lifting the green shade from his eyes he observed a pale face at the window who nodded to Phil.

"She is my sister," returned Phil, in response to Ralph's inquiring look.

"Ah! You must tell her what a greedy fellow Blowser was to eat her candy," exclaimed Ralph, handing Phil a package. "Give this to your sister with Blow-

ser's thanks." With a pleasant good-bye he galloped away.

Ralph was happy over this new acquaintance which Blowser had been the means of introducing. His keen perception assured him that Phil's coarse patched coat covered a warm generous heart, and he smiled when he recalled Phil's cheery laugh and happy assurance when Blowser surprised them with his tricks.

"Pat, he's a dandy!" exclaimed Ralph as he drew near the stables where Pat was at work. "I've just received a letter from Uncle Richard and he explains everything. Why, Pat, he is a trick pony and once belonged to a circus."

Ralph then told of their adventure on their way to the village.

"Ye don't mane it now! A sarkis horse. Sure he behaved very indacently fer a horse wid a edicashin. I wur thinkin' ye had been badly cheated, for may I niver live ter be kicked by Saint Patherick's ghost if I iver see so bad a leetle horse."

"What do you mean?" laughed Ralph. "Certainly he shows no vicious temper."

"Sure en' I thryed to ride him an' he gave me a black eye near me timple," said Pat, rubbing his head.

Ralph took his uncle's letter and read a portion of it to Pat:

"You must not allow a man to ride your pony; while he is gentle with children, he will not tolerate a man on his back. I consider myself fortunate in procuring him. The company failed and Blowser was sold at auction. A showman has already offered me a large price for him; I refused it, for Blowser must

never be a circus pony again. He is your property now, and I trust to your kind heart to treat him with respect due to this distinguished stranger," etc.

Ralph folded his letter and dismounted, giving the bridle to Pat.

"Ah! Ye rapscallion, yer not as mannerly as ye are ripresented," Blowser having elevated his forefeet to Pat's shoulder as he started for the stable.

CHAPTER V.

THE NEW SOCIETY.

Books and slates were neatly piled and laid away in the desks and the children of Greystone Home were impatiently waiting for Miss Louise Joy to strike the bell for their dismissal.

This particular Monday afternoon they were brimful and bubbling over with curiosity to learn the meaning of the mysterious notes found on each of their desks when they came to the school-room that afternoon.

It was Mamie Hartwell's handwriting, they were sure:

"Meet at the tent right after school," were the contents of the notes; therefore, it had been hard to repress their curiosity all the afternoon, as they gave occasional glances over to Mamie Hartwell's desk, hoping to glean from her quiet face a ray of intelligence on the subject.

Accordingly, at the first tap of the bell there was a general flutter and rush for the pretty tent.

Seated in an ancient chair before the table on which lay a writing tablet and pencil, Mamie Hartwell's childish dignity and sober, earnest face were in striking contrast to the merry expectant faces clustered about her.

"Girls, I have a secret to tell you, and first I must know how many of you can keep a secret. All who can keep a secret raise their hands," said Mamie, rising.

Every hand went up, with murmurs of "I can" from each of the eleven.

"Well, then," said Mamie, "you must all sign this paper." Taking the tablet from the table, she paused for a moment while the children with breathless expectation waited the announcement.

In clear earnest tones she read: "I solemnly promise not to divulge the secret which Mamie Hartwell is about to tell. If I do, Mamie can go and tell Miss Deborah; for telling lies is against the rules of this home."

"Who will sign this!" exclaimed Mamie, to which invitation the children's curiosity drew them to the table, willing to sign the important document around which hung an air of mystery.

"Now you must all be seated," said Mamie, with the dignity of a woman.

There was a general hustling for seats and pushing each other to be conveniently near the speaker. There were twisting and turning and happy confusion of voices before they could settle down to listen.

With the eleven pairs of bright, eager eyes fastened on Mamie, who stood before them with the bearing of the typical school mistress, they silently waited for her to begin.

"Last night I was restless and couldn't sleep. I heard the clocks strike nine and ten. After a while I heard Miss Deborah and Miss Louise coming upstairs. Miss Deborah came in to the dormitory from the north door; I lay quiet with my eyes closed, for fear that she might think me ill by my being awake. After she had been to each bed she went to the hall and stood by the bay window. She called to Miss Louise

to come and see the full moon and the shadows on the lawn. You know my bed is by the east door, and I heard every word they said, for they sat on the window seat and talked a long time.

"Miss Deborah told Miss Louise all about the trouble between Prissy and Nettie; and Nettie, she said your temper was a trial to her, but you were nice and sweet this time and went and asked Prissy to forgive you, and that she wouldn't; she thought Prissy must have been very unkind. Miss Deborah asked Miss Louise to advise her what to do. For a long time they did not speak; I thought they must have left the hall.

"After a while I heard Miss Louise talking to Miss Deborah. She said many beautiful things and then she kept saying, "God is love, dear. Give love thoughts to Prissy and let your faith keep away all anxiety, and in a little while there will be a change in Prissy."

"I couldn't understand all that she said, but it was enough for me to know that our dear Miss Deborah is anxious about us and that is the reason I have told you. I mean to try to do everything I can to please them and make them no trouble.

"I propose that we form a society for the purpose of being patient with Prissy and to watch our own tempers. All of you who wish to join must sign this pledge." She held up a cardboard on which, conspicuous in large letters, were the words:

"I PROMISE TO BE KIND TO PRISSY AND I ALSO PROMISE TO TRY TO OVERCOME MY QUICK TEMPER."

The children, deeply impressed with Mamie's recital, were ready to sign their names; all but Nettie, who quietly remained in her seat.

"Why Nettie! What is the reason that you do not sign this?" exclaimed Mamie, surprised at her sober silence. "Don't you think it a lovely plan?"

"I do not care to be one of the society if it has anything to do with Prissy," pouted Nettie.

"Why! I supposed everything was settled between you and Prissy and that you had asked her forgiveness," exclaimed Flossy.

"Yes. I did humiliate myself for Miss Deborah's sake and went and asked Prissy to forgive me for calling her names, but I will never do it again. As soon as breakfast was over yesterday morning I hunted everywhere for Prissy. Nora said she was down cellar; I went to the cellar and found Prissy drawing vinegar from a barrel in the corner, and to my surprise, girls, I saw her drink it."

"Oh! Horrors! Drink vinegar! Who ever heard of such a thing!" they all exclaimed.

"Are you sure it was vinegar?" asked Flossie.

"Why of course; my eyes can't deceive me," returned Nettie. "The light was dim in the cellar and I did not see her at first; I looked about and thought I was not going to find her, when I heard the vinegar running into the pitcher. I stood a moment and waited for her to finish, when to my surprise she took from her pocket a small tin cup and placed it under the faucet, and I saw her drink it and put the cup back in her pocket. When she heard my voice she started. Oh, how she did look! I was frightened and hurried upstairs, and she after me. She did not recognize me

in the cellar, but when I stood on the top stair she said, 'Nettie Walton, is that you? Well, I've caught you, miss, tryin' to steal them jumbles and cookies. I'll report ye.'

"I said, 'No, Prissy, I have no desire to steal; I went down cellar to find you.'

" 'So you are taggin' me around, tryin' to spy out my business. Well, you just go tattlin' if you think best. I'll shake you to pieces if you tattle on me.'

" 'Why Prissy!' I said, 'what can I say about you? Do you ever do anything to be ashamed of?' And girls, she said, 'Shut up, sass-box.' "

"Oh! I'd never, never ask her forgiveness!" exclaimed Nan Mason.

"Well, I did," resumed Nettie. "I said, 'Prissy, for Miss Deborah's sake will you please forgive me for calling you names?' and she said, 'I'll be hanged if I will, so clear out.' "

"My goodness!" exclaimed Nan, "give me that pledge; I want to erase my name. Kind to Prissy? Why, I'd like to——"

"Nan," interrupted Mamie, "I do not think that we will have any trouble. Do you remember what Miss Louise said this morning in her lecture on kindness? She said, 'Kind acts often ripen into a lasting affection.' I now understand why she gave us a lecture on kindness; it was the talk she had with Miss Deborah. Don't, I beg of you, be discouraged before we make a fair trial."

"There will be no affection for Prissy from me," pouted Nettie.

"For Miss Deborah's and Miss Louise's sakes; we want them to know how much we love them and that

we do not forget what they are doing for us. Be good, Nettie, and join our society. I'm sure you will enjoy the work," said Mamie earnestly.

"Besides, Nan, you and Nettie will want to go green gathering. We'll have a lot of fun, and you must not be left out. It will be a proud moment for us when we present our offering," laughed Flossie.

It was late the following afternoon when, with heated happy faces, the twelve appeared in the kitchen where Prissy was ironing. In earnest, hesitating tones Mamie presented the basket of overgrown dandelion green and hurriedly skipped away before Prissy could respond.

"It's nothing but a mess of weeds," snapped Prissy, "and they've brought 'em to me jest fer meanness and to rile me. Here, Jacob," she said as he passed the door, "fling these on the compost bed over the brook."

"What for?" asked Jacob with surprise. "The girls gathered them this afternoon."

"If they did they ain't good fer nothin'," snapped Prissy, "and I want 'em slung over the brook."

"I haven't time," remarked Jacob indifferently as he passed on to the barn.

"I'll be even with them youngsters. It's got ter go over the brook." Taking the basket, she started for the brook further down than the willows, where the water fell over a high rock forming a dark pool underneath.

Climbing the rail fence at the edge of the meadow, she struggled on to the brook, stopping for a moment to recover her breath. Then, giving her basket a toss, to her surprise and chagrin, through her insecure foothold she found herself lying in the middle of the

stream, her head bobbing under the rock, dipping the water of the dark pool.

Adding to her uncomfortable position, she realized the startling fact that her foot was fastened under a large stone, causing excruciating pain. In vain she struggled, but to no purpose.

"My land! My land! What shall I do?" she moaned, making an effort to extricate her foot from the vice-like pressure of the stone. I'm goin' to be drownded alive, and no one to help me out," she groaned.

"Not this time, Prissy!" cried Phil Andrews, who saw her fall and hurried to her rescue. He lifted her to a sitting posture, while with exclamations and groans she told him of her foot which was fastened by the stone.

With difficulty Phil lifted the stone, then turned his attention to the formidable woman who was sitting upright in the brook, where dandelion greens floated about mingling with her wide spreading gown, all of which reminded her of the true cause of the accident.

Dripping and limping, he helped her to the bank, while he ran to the house for help.

"My stars!" she cried, putting her fingers in her mouth, "They air gone! Forty dollars on a gold plate. My stars! My stars! What'll I do ter eat?"

Although Jacob Rodder boasted of more than ordinary muscle, it was no slight task to convey the stalwart Prissy, with Phil's assistance, over the rail fence, through the meadow, across the flats and orchard to the kitchen door.

She was an object of ludicrous pity as they placed her drenched form before the kitchen fire. The coarse

iron-gray hair fell a dripping mass upon her square shoulders; her thin lips were well drawn, while her tongue wagged between her toothless gums as she tried to lisp her sorrow.

Supper was late that evening, for Greystone Home was in a commotion. Nora assisted Prissy to her bed and Doctor Snell was sent for at once to examine the injured ankle. He gave the startling information that it was a serious sprain and would take a long time to heal.

As Prissy lay in her bed that eventful evening, with the aching ankle, and wearying pains searching about her head, for the first time in her life she felt herself powerless, bound down by her own wilfulness, which she was unwilling to admit.

After this episode the days slipped away with nothing to vary the usual routine of the daily life at Greystone Home, save that Huldy Rodder came to the rescue assisting Nora, which proved to be a happy and harmonious change.

Miss Deborah, having learned all about the new society, was pleased to assist them in their work, and the children enjoyed her wise counsel.

One Saturday morning they were gaily chatting over a triumph of a headrest, conspicuous for its various colors, they had pieced for Prissy's high-back rocker, when Miss Deborah appeared within the tent bearing a brown paper package, which she at once opened.

There was breathless suspense for a moment, while the twelve eagerly watched for the contents, which proved to be an illumined text, the words of which were, "God is Love," framed in dark wood.

After the excitement and chorus of exclamations

and thanks had subsided, Miss Deborah seated on a low ottoman examined the gay headrest which Nettie handed her, while they all watched, hoping to discover a gleam of approval in her kind face.

"It is very pretty and artistic, and the needlework is an honor to your patience and application," they heard her say.

Returning it to Nettie, she continued: "It is a precious gift, because it is one of love, and I trust that some day Prissy will realize it as such.

"But we did not do it because we love Prissy," said the conscientious Mamie. "We wanted to please you."

"That may be true as you realize it now," returned Miss Deborah, "but you must always bear in mind that good thoughts come from God, who is love, and to which you must respond. God unfolded this plan to you, to which you obeyed at once, thereby taking your first step in love for Prissy: while you may not realize it, a kind word or act like this changes many a life from bitterness to joy. And I am sure that some day you will see the real Prissy a kind and loving woman."

"I can't imagine it," murmured Nan Mason.

"Neither can I," returned Flossie, while the rest echoed the same.

"She will not allow one of us to help her in any way; she threw away the greens we gathered without thanking us for our work," said Nettie fretfully. "Besides, we are wondering how we will get the headrest to her room."

"Love never fails, dear children; Prissy will accept it gladly of you. Go to her with thoughts of love,

as God's stewards always go, and you will not fail. Never have a fear as to how you will carry out your plan of love. Remember that you are God's children, and in the degree that you get into the consciousness of God's love for you, just so much love do you give out to others. Here comes Jacob to hang your text." After giving a few directions to Jacob she left them.

Prissy was aroused from a nap in her chair by a rap on her door, to which she sleepily responded; to her surprise Rachel approached her, followed by the eleven girls.

"What on earth does this mean!" exclaimed Prissy. "Can't I have a bit of peace without you young ones racing into my room when I'm all crippled up? What do you want anyway!" she stormily ejaculated, while Flossie and Nan stuffed their white aprons in their mouths to suppress their merriment.

"Prissy, we've brought you this bu'ful headrest because we're sorry your ankle is hurted and we love you and we want you to love us," said Rachel, laying the gay headrest in Prissy's lap.

"Well, you'll have to behave yourselves if you want me to like you," she said severely. "What's this high falutin' thing for?" she went on, while she turned the bright gift to examine both sides, with a puzzled expression on her stern face.

"It is a headrest for the back of your rocker," Mamie hastened to explain. "I will fasten it on the chair and then you'll know how restful it is." Lifting the gift, she proceeded to tie it fast to the rocker with its crimson ribbons. "Don't it look lovely, girls?" she exclaimed, delighted over the grand success, while the rest echoed their approval.

"I don't need such fol-de-rols. I've rested well enough without it, and I sh'd think you orter be in better business than to spend your time on such nonsense." Prissy's tones were severe.

"Just try it, Prissy," said Mamie gently. "Lay your head back and see how restful it is." Playfully pressing the iron-gray head upon the artistic cushion, she tenderly smoothed the coarse hair with her soft white hands.

"Well yes, it is kinder easy," returned Prissy with a faint smile, quite surprising to the children, who could not remember of having seen a kind look on her face.

"We all hope you will enjoy it, for every one of us has helped to make it; even the little girls who couldn't sew assisted in picking out the bastings." Mamie's voice was sweet and tender as she went on: "We hope your ankle will soon be well, for we miss you——"

"There, there, you've said enough. Miss me—h'm! If you'd behaved yourselves and kept them weeds out of my sight I might have been 's well as ever. Yes, I s'pose you do miss tormentin' me with your tomboy actions," retorted Prissy, her face once more under a cloud.

"Prissy, I hope you will believe me when I tell you we intended to do you a kindness; we thought we were picking greens to please you, and we are truly sorry it turned out as it did. I'm sure the girls will tell you the same"; to which the rest murmured their assurance of kindness to the turbulent housekeeper.

"They wasn't fit to eat and I had to throw them away. I'm much obliged to you," returned Prissy

in a softer tone, as the girls left her with her head resting on their precious gift.

"Oh! It was a success!" exclaimed Mamie. "Rachel, you little dove, you presented it beautifully. I know that she was touched, although she showed her chestnut-burr nature. Never mind, Prissy will yet love us," she added, "and we must think up something more to do for her."

"It will be a wonder if she ever gets civilized," laughed Nan.

"Mamie Hartwell! We are throwing away our play hours in working for that vinegar drinker, who looked sour enough to make a barrel of pickles, even when she tried to smile. I don't think it was a success," exclaimed Nettie, her face flushed with indignation.

"Wait a few days and see," returned Mamie. "I'm sure, Nettie, if we are patient with her that she will change, particularly when she finds we are really trying to please her."

CHAPTER VI.

BLOWSER MEETS AN OLD FRIEND.

ONE day in early June, Phil Andrews called at Judge Hunter's greenhouse to ask the gardener's advice about a sickly plant which his mother was anxious to keep alive but did not know what it needed.

"I haven't time to look at it now," said David Green, the gardener, "I must get these plants in the ground at once, and there are a dozen things to do this minute. I wish I could find someone that I could trust to set out those verbenas; they are two weeks behind."

"Suppose I help you," Phil answered hesitatingly, for he understood David's exact requirements.

"You, plant verbenas! Do you know how?" David asked with surprise.

"Mother has pretty fair luck with her flower garden; I always plant the verbenas and geraniums," Phil replied, while he wiped his moist face.

"If that is so, you may set out those verbenas," pointing to a lot of small pots outside the door. "Plant all the crimson in that empty bed, and be careful and not mix the scarlet and crimson, as that booby Jim Jackson did."

Two weeks passed and Phil was kept at work; each day revealing to David some new capability in Phil.

Ralph Hunter failed daily. The tonics and eye lotion and other remedies were not a success, while he seemed to have lost all ambition and lay in the ham-

mock under the trees or on the piazza, anywhere away from the painful sunlight.

Blowser had also failed to interest him and it was an effort for him to take his usual rides.

One day, after having finished his work, Phil started down the road instead of going homeward; as this was unusual, Ralph called to inquire where he was going.

"Down to the creek for a swim," said Phil. "Can't you go?"

"Doctor strictly forbids it for this summer; only warm baths for me. But I'll go as far as the lot and ride back on Blowser," returned Ralph, joining Phil.

Just as they stepped over the bars they observed a strange-looking boy coming up the road. He was smaller than Phil or Ralph; a pair of shoes the worse for wear were tied together and hung over one arm; his ragged coat he carried over his shoulder, and a cap much too small for him rested on his bushy head. His blue flannel shirt was patched and worn; his grey trousers, rolled above his knees, exposed a pair of thin brown legs; his freckled face was worn and pinched, and his grimy hands were small and thin.

"Hello, Bangup! where have you started for?" cried Ralph, as the boy drew near.

"I'm lookin' fer my first cousin, 'n your' the feller." Twisting his eyes toward his nose, he gave an idiotic stare, at which the boys screamed with laughter.

"Cramps and thunder! 'F there ain't Blowser!" exclaimed the boy, his eyes on Pat, who was leading Blowser by his mane.

"Blowser! Blowser!" exclaimed Ralph and Phil. "What do you know about Blowser and where did you ever see him?"

"I'll bet yer blinder I kin tell yer more of that pony 'n yer ever heard before; we air old friends, ain't we, Skippy?"

Springing over the bars without touching them, he ran up to Blowser and stroked his head and mane, while in low, soft tones he called the pony by name.

"Begorra! Ain't ye a foine jumper now, if ye do look loike a haythin," cried Pat, holding fast to the pony's mane.

The boy did not heed the remark. His face was close to Blowser's head, and the pony gave a whinny of recognition when he heard the familiar voice; throwing back his head the boy allowed the pony to caress his face and cheeks. Turning to the large maple near the fence, he climbed to the nearest branch and broke from it a small twig; with one spring he reached the ground, to the wonder and admiration of his three spectators.

Placing one end of the stick in Blowser's mouth and holding the other end in his hand he turned to the boys. With a stage bow, he said:

"Gentlemen, you see before you the most wonderful trick pony in the world. He is also a noted traveller, having been all over the United States, British Amerika, and the greater part of Europe. To prove that I am truthful in my statements I will proceed to show you some of his wonderful and most pleasing performances."

Changing his stage voice, he said, "I wish I had a harmonica, fer I need music."

"I have something as good," returned Ralph, drawing from his pocket his ebony flageolet.

"Play a waltz," said the boy; then, resuming his stage voice, began:

"Now, gentlemen, Blowser will proceed to waltz as soon as the orchestra begins."

When Ralph had breathed a few notes of a lively waltz, Blowser lifted his feet and, bending his head, he gracefully turned, keeping time to the music. His long mane nearly touched the grass, as round and round he turned, to the astonishment and rapture of the boys and the open-mouthed wonder of Pat.

"Bedad! and I belave he'll spake before he gives him up." Taking a seat on the fence, Pat stared at Blowser and his friend and waited for new developments from the educated pony.

The boy snapped the slender twig, and Blowser settled back on his haunches as Phil and Ralph had seen him do on the day of his arrival.

Placing his ragged cap on the pony's head, the boy resumed his speech:

"Gentlemen, I will now give the aujence an opportunity to shake hands with Blowser by paying the small sum of one nickel."

Phil and Ralph hastened forward and dropped the desired sum in the boy's soiled palm.

"I didn't make it, but I'll take it," said the boy with a happy, light laugh, for it was a surprise to find himself in possession of even so small a sum. "Blowser, shake hands with the gentleman, and bow yer thanks fer their kind attention."

Blowser obeyed at once by holding out his right forefoot, to the amazement of his spectators.

"It's gittin' late, an' I'll be obliged to close this

stupenderous exhibition," exclaimed the boy. Bowing with a stage air he turned to leave.

"Yer a quare chap, bedad," said Pat, leading Blowser over the bars. The boys followed, for it was too late for Phil's desired swim.

Ralph's ill health and listless manner had become habitual to the once gay and frolicsome boy, which was a source of anxiety to his grandfather, who, having heard his happy laugh on this eventful evening, dropped his newspaper and stepped to the back piazza to watch the boy's approach.

"Who have you there, Ralph?" inquired the judge, his eyes on the strange boy.

"Grandfather, this boy knows all about Blowser; he was with him in the circus. Can I invite him in? I want to learn more of Blowser's tricks and habits," exclaimed Ralph in his old hearty, joyous tones.

"Most assuredly you can, my son; Blowser's friend is welcome," returned the judge, his eyes on the strange little figure.

"He has walked from Ashtonville since morning and he must be tired and hungry by this time," said Ralph earnestly.

"That is where you talk squar'. My terbacker is all the company my mouth has had since sunrise, 'n my stomach is kickin'," was the stranger's ready response.

"What is your name?" inquired the judge, after having sent Ralph for Mrs. Blodget, the housekeeper.

"Well, I kin suit you with most any name, for I hev about three hundred 'n sixty-five all told," striking an attitude that caused a burst of merriment from the judge and the boys.

"If that is a fact you have a name for every day in the year. What is your name to-day?" the judge asked, his face beaming with smiles.

"I ain't partic', mister." The boy surprised the group by striking up a lively air! he kept time by snapping the thumb and finger of both hands, gracefully dancing round and round while singing in a rich, mellow voice:

"I'm Jerry, the boxer,
Or High, the jumper,
Or Slam, the young cannibal king.
I'm Poodle Winks,
Or Captain Jinks,
Or Bub Tumble in the ring.

"For I can dance and I can sing
When I am in the ring, ring, ring.
For I can dance and I can sing
When I am in the ring."

"You are quite a character," laughed the judge; turning to Mrs. Blodget, who had followed Ralph, he requested her to give the boy a good supper and a comfortable bed over the kitchen.

The following morning Ralph surprised his grandfather by his early appearance at breakfast, for it was an unusual occurrence; since his illness Ralph had been allowed to sleep late.

"How does it happen that you are up so early?" inquired his grandfather, pleased to see Ralph's bright face.

"Because I couldn't sleep, for I was constantly think-

ing of that boy. He seems to know Blowser by heart and the pony recognized him at once, and that is the reason I have confidence in him. He told us that Blowser could do some wonderful tricks."

"Did he tell you of his plans, and where he was going and what sent him to this place?"

"We had no time for questions. He began at once to show off Blowser. He is a queer little tramp, jolly, and ignorant, and yet I like him for his love for Blowser, and I want to see him before he leaves and learn more of Blowser's tricks."

"If the boy is not too rough we will keep him for a few days, for he needs rest. And in the meantime you may take lessons, after which you will give an exhibition of the pony's tricks when your Uncle Richard comes," were words from Judge Hunter which sent the color to Ralph's pale cheeks.

"Oh, grandfather! how good you are. I know that the boy is rough, but I'm sure it will do me no harm; besides, he will amuse me and help pass away the tedious days."

Phil Andrews was mowing the front lawn, when Ralph called to him.

"Can't stop now," returned Phil, cutting away the tall bits of grass close to the fence.

"I wish you weren't so particular about two minutes," returned Ralph impatiently. "I want to ask if you have seen that boy this morning. Ah! there he comes now. Isn't he a strange looking little fellow?

"Good morning," said Ralph cordially.

"Hello, me lord!" returned the boy, with a bow, and drawing a dark piece of tobacco from his pocket he

offered it to Ralph. With his peculiar dialect he said, "Will yer hev a chaw?"

Ralph scornfully drew away. "Is it possible that you can chew such stuff as that!" he exclaimed.

"Cert', me lord. It's white bread and cheese, roast turkey, an' beefsteak smothered in onions when my stomach kicks in empty fight; then I goes fer this 'ere friend." He twisted the black substance in his teeth and, rolling his eyes at one side, he was the picture of a dilapidated circus clown.

"But you are not hungry this morning, you had a good breakfast, I'm sure," returned Ralph soberly.

"It's no worser ter chew 'n it is to smoke the stuff. I'll bet me shoes you've had yer mornin' smoke, me fine lord," holding up his worn shoe, which told a tale of better days when the circus was a success.

Ralph dropped his head without replying.

"Will you back him 'n hold the money, Clipper?" addressing Phil, who, having finished cutting the grass by the fence, stood up to resume the mowing.

"I don't encourage betting," laughed Phil, starting the lawn mower.

"Say, Clipper, I'll add me cap ter the bargain." Snatching the cap from his head, he tossed it on the toe of his worn shoe; hopping about on one foot, he continued: "I'll bet cap 'n shoes that feller smokes; I'll prove it, too. What do you say ter that, Squintum?" addressing the confused Ralph.

There was a moment's pause, while Ralph watched Phil go across the lawn, and not until the click of the mower was heard in the distance did Ralph venture to speak.

"Why do you think I smoke?" exclaimed Ralph boldly, looking the boy in his eyes.

"Why! Me lord, because me eyes air me best judge. Clipper 'n me was in that 'ere property tent," pointing to the tool house. "We watched yer take yer mornin' smoke down by the stun wall behind the bushes." When he saw Ralph's anxious, confused face, he exclaimed: "Who cares, me lord? We'll throw up the bet."

"I'm sorry Phil knows that I smoke; it's a habit I acquired at school and I think grandfather would be displeased if he knew it. Phil won't tell him and you must not," emphasized Ralph.

"Great cats! Wha'jer take me fer? I ain't a yap ter squeal. Ha! Thar sets yer ol' squire puffin' his cigar as happy as a turtle on a raft." His eyes were on Judge Hunter, who sat on the piazza reading his newspaper. The boy lowered his voice: "Shoot me 'f he'd care a durn 'if you smoked or didn't."

A call from Judge Hunter brought them to the piazza. The judge kindly bade the boy good morning, while he studied the white pinched face.

"Top of the mornin', Squire," returned the boy, lifting his cap. He rested one foot on the lower step.

"Can you tell us this morning what name out of your three hundred and sixty-five we can call you?" said the judge. "Now, this is an honest question," he added, "and I want you to answer it," for he observed a peculiar smile on his face that suggested mischief. "Tell me by what name your parents christened you."

"Golly! I—I—don't believe they ever did christ'n me. I'll be chewed 'f I remember." Knitting his

brow, his freckled face wore a perplexed expression, for he did not quite comprehend the judge's meaning.

"Possibly you may not have been christened, but your parents must have given you a name. What was your father's name?" persisted the judge.

"I'll be chewed 'f I kin tell you, Squire, 'n that's dead smooth. My dad died in my youth. He was kicked by a trick donkey, and thereby lost his life, 'n I was left ter sing, 'I'm a Lone Orphing Now,'" replied the boy with tragic solemnity.

"And your mother; is she living?" questioned the judge, the suspicion of a smile under his grey mustache.

"She has gone with a show to Calaforny, as the livin' specimen of a captured wild woman found in the jungle of Afriky," returned the lad.

"Why did you leave her?" The judge had become interested and amused at the boy's absurd replies.

"Because old Slippy Elum wanted me ter be the youthful joiant, so I skipped. I didn't wanter set on his shoulders 'n fool the innesant public, wid a tall hat on me head 'n a long cloak fastened to me neck, what covered old Slippy; jist fer two bones, 'n don't yer fergit it."

"Oh! That is the way you make a giant of yourself?" laughed Judge Hunter.

"Yep. Old Slippy said I made the best youthful joiant he ever had. But one night he got drunk 'n made a yap of hisself; yer see, while backin' to the rear before a smilin' au'jence, he fell an' I lost me repertashun 'n come near losing my head."

"How could it have affected your reputation? Surely you were not to blame," said Judge Hunter.

"Why, you see, the next mornin' the papers came

out with a full account of the wonderful height of the boy of twelve years 'n his interestin' performance until he was overcome with whiskey 'n fell drunk before a disgusted au'jence. Me ole mam was so mad at Slippy she came nigh leavin'. I thort they never would give up scrappin', 'n so I skipped in the night," said the boy, dropping on the upper step.

"Since then you have been roaming about with three hundred and sixty-five names, and yet do not know what name to call yourself," returned the judge sharply.

"It looks that way, but the name me first dad called me is a good un fer common, 'n don't take much ink er time to write it, so yer kin call me 'Si'. That's a good every-day name," he laughed.

"Ah! your name is Silas!" exclaimed Judge Hunter. "What is the rest of it?"

"Chew my rags 'f I kin think of the other end of it," returned Si, with a perplexed expression on his thin face.

After a moment's reflection he exclaimed, slapping his knee: "Gee whiz! I've got it—Si Underwood. Everybody called me Brush, 'n I hain't thort of that name in a long time. I'll keep it now; I won't be called Brush by nobody—'n when I git growed up I'll hev a good name when I'm nomernated." He cast a side glance at Ralph, who was laughing as he lay swinging in the hammock.

"What do you mean?" inquired the judge, interested in this peculiar specimen of boyhood, although so thoroughly ignorant of respect or politeness.

"Why! Yer see, I'm goin' ter be a prisident when

I gits growed up, 'n then I'll be a buster, 'n doncher fergit it," returned Si, with a sly wink at Ralph.

"Do you know, Si, to become a president of the United States, you must begin at once to make the effort? You need an education, which will take years of study, and you must strive to be good and honest, that the people will believe in you and love you. You do not realize what it means to take the first step toward such a high position."

"Prisidents don't hev to know nothin' but polerticks, 'n perades, 'n bands of music. Cramps! Won't I be a big un, when I rides in a fine kerrige sittin' up thar in me tall beaver a smilin' 'n bowin' to the crowd, 'n hev all the boys hootin' 'n hollerin' after me," laughed Si, shaking his bushy head.

"Would you like to give up your roaming life and go to school?" The judge's face was beaming with suppressed laughter, and it was with an effort that he could question the boy.

"Ha! What's the use of chaffin' a feller? Wha'cher take me fer? I ain't no yapoodle ter git licked the first day 'n kicked out the next; life's too short, Squire, ter spend so much time fer book l'arnin'," returned Si, rising from the step.

"Where do you go from here?" said the judge.

"I gives it up, Squire. I am in persuit of me rich relation, what lives near the Rocky Mountains, 'n I must be off at onct." He turned to leave.

"No! No!" exclaimed Ralph from the hammock, "You're not going to-day; is he, grandfather?"

"Si, we want you to remain with us for a few days," said the judge, doubting Si's story about his rich relation, supposing it was invented for the occasion. "You

must be very tired after your long tramp," he continued. "In the meantime you can show us some of Blowser's tricks and inform us in regard to his habits." Understanding human nature to a certain extent, he was sure there was nothing vicious or dishonest about the boy.

"Thanks fer your invitashin, but me luggage hes gone on ter the next stashin with me fine toggery, 'n me travelin' suit is rayther dusty for visitin'," looking down to his soiled and ragged coat. He added, "I discharged me bootblack 'n the situashin is embarrassin'."

"We'll make that all right," returned Ralph, springing from the hammock. "Come with me."

Si followed Ralph in silence, amazed at the rich carpet and furniture as they entered the spacious hall.

Two hours later the boys found Judge Hunter in the library engaged in writing a letter. It was nearly finished and he did not look up until the letter was sealed and addressed. Si stood before him clad in a dark blue suit.

"Behold the great transformation scene," said the boy in stage tones, bowing low to the judge.

"How did you manage it, my son?" addressing Ralph, who stood back of Si enjoying his grandfather's surprise.

"It is an outgrown suit of mine that Mrs. Blodget found for us and it fits him well," replied Ralph, with a look of satisfaction.

"It's the fine feathers wot make the fine bird," remarked Si, holding his straw hat above his bushy head. With another stage bow, he followed Ralph to the piazza.

Ralph sought a shady spot on the broad, vine-cov-

ered piazza, where an India hammock hung, while Si went to meet Phil, who was returning from the east lawn where he had finished mowing.

"Hello!" cried Phil, staring at Si, "Who has been paying your tailor's bill?"

"You see, Clipper, I was the envy of the crowd 'n was offered a fine sum for me travelin' suit, 'n I disposed of 'em, 'n these air to balance the bargain." Si straightened his small figure importantly and proudly walked about the lawn, singing in a clear, rich voice:

"Oh, I am Jack the dude,
A gentleman of fame.
I wears an artificial wig
And sports a dollar cane.
I've burnsides on me cheeks,
Gold glasses on me nose;
I wears a pair of russet shoes
With patent leather toes."

"Hurry up, Phil," David Green called, "there is a big shower coming and I want these geranium slips out of the greenhouse. They are well rooted and a shower will do 'em good."

"Take hold of one end of this box," said Phil to Si, who was bending over a bed of carnations.

"Them bouquets smell like mince pies in a bake shop," returned Si, hastening to assist Phil. They worked diligently until all of the desired plants were out of the greenhouse.

"Great cats! 'f there don't go me fine hat." Dropping a potted palm, Si raced after it, while it danced and rolled up and down the garden walks, over the ver-

benas, tumbling over the bed of seedlings, spinning on, to the lawn near the piazza where Ralph lay in the hammock sleeping.

A flash of lightning and the instant report which followed, also the deluge of water, caused Si to seek the nearest refuge, which aroused Ralph when he heard Si's hasty step as he rushed to the piazza.

"Say, me lord, the sun has gone under fer a spell 'n you kin lift yer blinder," was what Ralph heard, while he sleepily welcomed the boy.

"Here comes Clipper as wet as a drownded rat," laughed Si, as Phil suddenly appeared on the piazza, his hat dripping and his clothes dampened by the heavy drops.

"Ralph, how would you like me to read to you? The work is in the garden now, and it will be some time before I can go there," remarked Phil. Shaking his dripping hat, he hung it on a hook.

"Don't you think this would be a good time to talk with Si about Blowser?" replied Ralph.

"'F thar was a good smooth place around here I could show you a lot of tricks Blowser kin do, but it's so darned stunny 'cept this place," said Si, pointing to the velvet lawn.

"Does it need a level spot?" inquired Phil.

"'F you could find a place that ain't stunny it would do," returned Si.

"I know a fine spot," said Phil. "It's the flats back of Miss Deborah's orchard, if we can get her consent."

Later, when the shower was over the boys started for the flats.

CHAPTER VII.

BLOWSER, THE TRICK PONY.

Miss Deborah Lee and Miss Louise Joy were sitting on the west piazza, enjoying the beautiful clouds about the setting sun and the cool delicious air after the heavy shower.

Ralph and Phil, followed by Si, entered the large iron gateway and stood before them. Ralph explained their errand, introducing Si as Blowser's friend and trainer.

The ladies were amused at Si's droll remarks and gestures; although his face was unattractive, save his large blue eyes, there was a charm about his personality which won them. Their compassionate hearts were drawn toward this homeless little wanderer, and a desire to help him was their first thought as they looked in his pinched face.

Miss Deborah heartily entered into the boys' plans, suggesting an entertainment which all could enjoy, offering her assistance to make it a success.

The next day the girls were impatient to see Blowser's friend. Phil had told Mamie and Flossy about him, and soon all of the girls learned of the entertainment to be given at early sun-down. During the afternoon they watched Si go back and forth with mysterious looking bundles, cushions and blankets.

Miss Deborah offered the chairs and stools from the tent, which Pat and the boys conveyed to the flats.

Everything was ready and Si went for Blowser, thinking that the pony might need a little practice before the entertainment began.

Suddenly a shout was heard, for while Si was coming from one direction a party of rough boys were returning from a fishing expedition. Attracted by the sight of Blowser and his rider, also the preparations on the flats, they came up to learn the meaning of it. Phil, knowing them to be coarse in language and manners, coolly answered their questions and kindly informed them that it was to be a private affair and hinted for them to leave at once.

Tim Tuggs exclaimed: "Ye can't drive me off this place; it ain't your land," doubling his fist. "Do yer see that? Ye'll have a broken nose 'f yer try to boss me or try to drive me off."

"Give it to him, Tim," cried his mates when they saw Tim's raised fist.

"Naw yer don't!" cried Si; riding up to the boys, he raised a small riding whip over Tim's head. "Yes, scrap with him 'f yer want a black eye."

Tim, clenching his fists and with set teeth, started for Phil.

"Ah! Yer goin' to?" cried Si. Down came the stinging blow on Tim's cheek. He then gave Blowser the word, who obeyed by rushing between the boys and Phil and lifted his forefeet in the air.

With his whip raised, Si rode among the enraged group, who did not give up, but cried, "Git offen that horse or we'll make yer," while they hooted and screamed, hoping to frighten the pony. When they found themselves defeated in this they attempted to drag Si from the pony by pulling his feet.

"Yer can't work me for a yap!" cried Si, touching Blowser with his whip. The pony gave a leap directly over the heads of the astonished group, who fell upon the ground speechless with fear. Not allowing them to rise, he followed up this feat by springing back and forth as they lay tumbled together in a heap.

Phil and Ralph looked on with amazement at this wonderful performance, while the young ruffians lay in terror, not daring to raise their heads lest they were crushed by Blowser's feet.

After playing with the enemy for a while, he said: "Now chase yerselves outer here, 'f ye don't want to be kicked into smithereens," flourishing his whip. He found them willing to yield, for the memory of Blowser's lively feet over their heads caused them to leave without more demonstration on their part.

"Si, you are the pluckiest fellow I ever saw," said Phil warmly. "They took me at a disadvantage, there were so many of them; but that feat of Blowser's was a corker and no mistake."

"Oh! Them yappoodles don't know how to scrap," laughed Si.

"I was speechless with amazement," said Ralph. "I am so weak and blind, I knew it was useless to try to help you, and so I stood and looked on. My goodness! I thought Blowser would crush them to death." He patted and stroked the gentle creature, while Blowser whinnied his thanks.

"Blowser knowed what he was doin'; he didn't step onto 'em but they was squelched," laughed Si.

As soon as the sun was well on its way over Greytop Mountain Miss Deborah, Miss Louise, and the twelve little maidens found seats in front of a faded moreen

curtain, which Ralph procured from the attic and Jacob assisted in hanging between two trees conveniently opposite each other.

Just as Phil and Ralph came forth with their harmonica and flageolet—as they were to act the part of the orchestra—Judge Hunter was seen coming across the lawn with a gentleman whom Ralph recognized as his uncle, Richard Bossford. This unexpected arrival caused a delay. Ralph, flushed and joyous, ran to greet his uncle, whom he had not seen in a long time. For the past three years Mr. Bossford had been in Europe, although three months had passed since his arrival in New York.

Although Mr. Bossford was a stranger to the ladies, they had been schoolmates of his sister, Marion Bossford, who afterwards married Judge Hunter's son.

"We congratulate you on your timely arrival," said Miss Deborah, after the introduction, "I suppose Judge Hunter has explained to you the meaning of this entertainment and of Blowser's distinguished rider."

"Yes, the judge gave me a hurried account of this prodigy who has suddenly dropped in your midst; I hope that he will not disappoint you," returned Mr. Bossford.

"We are hoping that he is genuine and all that he seems to be," Miss Deborah responded.

"Judge Hunter informs me that the boy is burdened with three hundred and sixty-five names," remarked Miss Louise Joy. "Really, the boy should be rewarded by the government for his courage."

"That reminds me," said Judge Hunter, "that the young fellow is ambitious; he has decided to be a president when——"

The judge's sentence was not finished, for the faded curtains were parted and the orchestra struck up a lively air, while Blowser came forth in all the magnificence of gilt paper, red cambric and silk fringe.

His rider could hardly be recognized as Si, the tramp. From a set of damask curtains, which had been cast aside as worn and useless, Mrs. Blodget had made an artistic suit for the occasion. Broad lace ruffles were at his throat and wrists, which fell over his small thin hands. Ralph's bicycle stockings were stuffed to fill out Si's thin legs. A jaunty blue velvet cap with a long white plume rested on his bushy hair.

Bending his slight figure in a stage bow, Si was about to speak when a faint applause from Pat in the apple tree was heartily responded to by the rest of the audience. When the demonstration was over Si drew his slender form to his full height and began:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am happy to meet you on this stupendous occasion and proud to introduce Blowser, the greatest trick pony in the world. He has traveled over the United States, British Ameriky, an' the greater part of Europe. Crowned heads have looked with admiration on his wonderful feats; he has eaten sugar plums from the hands of kings and queens——"

"Begorra! I belave that's a lie," exclaimed Pat from the apple tree.

This interruption caused Si to turn to the intruder and, pointing his slender finger at him, he said with utmost coolness and dignity, "It is expected that children and fools in the gallery will keep quiet."

Turning to the audience he continued his speech: "It is an accepted fact that never has such an intelligent animal been known. The—the——"

He hesitated, for he had forgotten the rest of his speech; as he never expected to see Blowser again, it had gone from him. After a moment's pause to regain his memory, with perfect self-possession he continued:

"The reason of his unusual intelligence is that—that——"

Si knitted his brow and dropped his head in thought. The audience were getting impatient when he lifted his head and continued:

"From his earliest infancy he showed a desire to be with people of refinement; therefore it—it—it was the reason of his affection for me."

"Bedad! he showed poor taste!" cried Pat from the apple tree.

This was an oppirtunity for the audience to applaud, after which Si led Blowser forward.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," he went on, "that you may know I am speaking the truth, I will proceed to exhibit Blowser's wonderful tricks, while the orchestra plays a waltz."

Blowser understood the meaning of Si's gestures and obeyed by lowering his beautiful head, and lifting his slender legs he gracefully waltzed about the small ring, to the amusement and joy of the audience who, both young and old, shouted a noisy applause.

"Now that you know I am speaking the truth," Si resumed, "allow me to tell you that, while traveling through a jungle in Injy, he was bitten by a reptile and for weeks was obliged to give up work." To the amazement of the spectators Blowser, seemingly without a hint from Si, limped around the ring on his

three slender legs, until Si bade him go and ring the bell, for it was school time.

Blowser trotted to the apple tree, where he found a rope hanging from one of the higher branches to which a bell had been fastened. Taking the rope between his teeth, he gently pulled it, causing the old rusty bell—which the boys found in the storehouse—to ring long and loud.

"That will do, Blowser," cried his master, "Now go and get your book and go to school."

To the amusement of the audience, Blowser disappeared behind the curtain for a moment and returned with one of Ralph's books in his mouth, which he laid at Si's feet; then, sitting back on his haunches, with his forefeet extended, he waited for his teacher to place the book on them.

During the time in which Blowser patiently held the book Si was placing a set of rough pasteboard cards on the ground; they were covered with large letters, which the boys had hurriedly painted for the occasion.

"Now that you have studied your lesson so well, Blowser, I would like you to spell the word 'book,'" said Si, taking the book from the extended forefeet.

Blowser looked over the letters for a moment and promptly took the required letters in his mouth and laid them in a row at Si's feet.

"Now spell 'Pat' for that fellow up in the tree; take the letters to him or he'll say you are lyin'."

Blowser obeyed, going back and forth with the required letters, until the amazed Pat stared with wide open eyes on the strange feat.

"Begorra, an' if he is a thrick horse he is uncanny,

an' I'd be afraid of his raisin' the dead. I'd see spooks sure if he wid be aroun' o' nights," gasped Pat, as he descended the tree.

While Pat was suspiciously eyeing Blowser, as he was laying the cards in a row for other names which Si had given him to spell, Si took the opportunity to slyly drop a pair of gloves and a handkerchief in Pat's coat pocket.

"Blowser," cried Si, "I've lost a handkerchief; someone has stolen it. Find the thief!"

There was a merry twinkle in Si's blue eyes when Blowser, with almost human intelligence, trotted up to Pat and drew from his pocket the handkerchief.

"Ah, ye rapscallion, ye wanst gave me a black eye, an' now yer up ter more divilment, ye weeked little horse, thryin' ter make me out a thafe sure. Away wid ye! I've nothin' more!" cried Pat, running to and fro, while the pony kept close to his heels. "I tell ye I've nothin' fer ye," cried Pat, running in and out among the trees with Blowser close to him, while the air rang with shouts and laughter mingled with hand clapping, confusing Pat and inspiring Blowser to persist in getting his nose in the coat pocket, where he knew something was hidden. Si, having forgotten his dignity, was bent with laughter as he watched Pat, who vainly struggled to reach the apple tree.

When nearly there his foot caught in a tangle of grass and, thoroughly defeated, Pat lay prone on the ground while Blowser stood over him with his nose in his pocket, where, after a struggle, he succeeded in finding the hidden gloves.

"Now, Blowser, show us how Pat walks when he has visited a saloon," demanded Si.

As Pat rose from the ground, to his surprise Blowser was staggering after him, while his limbs seemed to grow weaker, till he fell with a groan on the ground.

"Be jabers, that's a bad condition fer a horse to be in, an'—an' it's a good lisson fer them who goes ter the saloons. I——"

"Show Pat what will become of him if he drinks too much whiskey," laughed Si, whereupon Blowser fell to the ground, closed his eyes, gasped a few times, while his limbs became rigid, and to all appearances Blowser was dead.

"Sure, now, I'd not be alone in it," said Pat, soberly.

At Si's command Blowser sprang to his feet. The twilight had deepened and Blowser's entertainment was over.

The interested audience, having been so pleasantly entertained, were loud in their expressions of thanks to Si for his cheerful efforts.

Judge Hunter, Mr. Bossford, and the ladies made up a generous sum for the boy and Mr. Bossford presented it in an amusing manner, which, had Si been at all sensitive, could not have embarrassed him when he accepted the gift. Instead, he responded in an amusing speech. Springing to Blowser's back, he stood for a moment in silence, after which he gazed upon the audience in the dim twilight, and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I thank yer for yer kind attention 'n ginerosity. I was perty nigh busted when I landed on the Squar's farm; me pockets was light and me heart was heavy. To me surprise, Blowser, the friend of me youth, was here to help me to bones."

To the amazement of his audience, he sang in a clear, mellow voice a crude song, the words of which he impro-

vised for the occasion. Although it met a response of laughter from the children, it touched the hearts of the older ones:

"When me pockets got empty
And rags on me back,
I started fer nowhere
Wid a calico pack.
The roads were so long,
An' the lanes dry an' dusty,
An' the bread in me sack
Grew dry, black, an' musty.
Says I to meself,
'You've lost all your pluck;
Travel on a leetle longer,
An' you'll find good luck.'

An' jolly come lolly, come yo, oh, oh!
Jim Flipper, Tom Skipper, ho, ho, ho, ho!
Filled to the brim,
My pockets so thin,
That they busted with silver an' gold."

With a proimse to the girls that they could ride Blowser the following morning, Ralph mounted the pony and the small audience left the flats.

CHAPTER VIII.

SI'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE following morning the girls watched for Si and the pony. Although it was vacation, their tent had no interest for them; everything was forgotten in their desire to ride Blowser. They ran back and forth from the lane leading to the orchard, occasionally giving a glance over to Judge Hunter's hoping to catch a glimpse of Si and Blowser.

If they had turned their faces in the direction of the flat below the orchard they would have been rewarded. For, with eyes on the ground about the ring where he and Blowser entertained the evening before, Si seemed to be looking for something.

Prissy's sharp eyes were the first to discover him, as she sat on the back piazza assisting Nora in shelling peas for dinner.

"It's my opinion that 'ere circus boy ain't here for any good," she remarked. Bursting a large pod she dropped the peas in the dish in her lap.

"Sure, there's nothing bad about the lad, only he's very quare. Flossy Cameron told me that he rode the little pony loike a prince an' he sung a foine song whin the ladies an' gintlemen gave him a bit of money," returned Nora earnestly.

"How do they know what he will do with the money?" snapped Prissy. "He'll jest go and squander it; that's what he'll do."

Evidently Si had been successful in his search, for at that moment he stood before them and asked for a drink of water.

Nora directed him to the spring, where the water was flowing from a wooden spout.

"That's the stuff," said Si. "It's better'n all the whiskey a feller could drink, 'n it don't cost a cent; 'n thar's where I make money."

"Sure, now, what wid a lad loike ye knew about whiskey? Ye's tew small tew be's thinkin' of sich things," said Nora soberly.

"I know enough about it," said Si, "that when a feller is dry it's hard stuff to squinch thirst. Give me a cool drink like that," his eyes on the flowing water near.

"Did you ever see so small a boy make sich owld fashioned speeches?" laughed Nora.

"Yes, I've seen tramps before this, and swearin' ones, too," retorted Prissy, throwing the empty pods in the basket at her side.

"You don't mean it, Granny!" laughed Si, dropping on the doorstep. "I used to swear when I was a kid, but dad licked it outen me, 'n I don't say nothin' now but durn, gosh, 'n golly, er some such respectable words as them."

"What do you call swearin' if them words ain't swearin' words? You don't look any too good for worser things, either," said Prissy severely.

"Great cats, Granny! Do yer take me for a chicken thief? Don't lock yer money up on my account, for I'm lookin' fer me rich relashin around these diggins. Mebby you are acquainted with 'em an' can give me some of yer valible infirmashin."

Si dropped his hand in his pocket and drew forth a small tin box, from which he took a faded, worn paper.

"There, Granny, if yer don't believe I'm square, jest read that," he said, handing the folded paper to Prissy.

"I hain't any use fer you er your trash," she ejaculated, without looking up from her work.

At that moment Deborah Lee came around the corner of the house from the flower garden.

"Ach! Miss Lee, will ye see ter the raidin' of this bit of paper fer the poor lad? Sure, my hear-rt is sorry fer him," said Nora, handing the paper to Miss Deborah.

Si earnestly watched the lady while she perused the faded slip of paper.

"Am I to understand that the person mentioned in this paper is yourself?" she said, in a surprised tone.

"No, marm, that's dad's character. He died in a horspitle, 'n afore he died he give this to me 'n tole me to git outen the cirkis 'n go 'n find my relation what lived at Rocktown. I didn't know this was the place till this mornin' I went with Pat to git Blowser shod, 'n I saw the sign over the tavern door, 'Rocktown House,' 'n I asked Pat 'f this was Rocktown, 'n he said it was. So I went fer dad's character in my pocket, 'n it was gone. I knew I had it yesterday, 'n so I sot ter thinkin' where I lost it, 'n it come to me that I must hev dropped it yisterday when I changed my clothes behind the curtain, 'n sure 'nough, I found it. I wouldn't lose dad's character fer nothin.' "

During the recital Miss Deborah was interested in Si's earnest face. He did not appear to be the droll boy of the previous day with twisting eyes and comic gestures, but told his story with a serious expression on his freckled face which assured her that he was telling the truth.

"Have you any other proof that this person mentioned is your father?" she asked.

"Yessum," with a nod. Drawing off his jacket, he rolled his shirt sleeve above his elbow, displaying a cross marked in India ink.

"Dad had one on his arm when he was a boy, afore he went to the poorhouse. Dad said his sister had one on her arm jest like it, 'n so he had one put on my arm, 'n if I ever find her she'll know I ain't lyin' to her."

Prissy had been a silent listener during the conversation. When Si exhibited his arm she started to rise, forgetting her lame ankle. She leaned forward to get a view of the mark, for she well remembered the day her uncle, who was a sailor, marked both her own and her brother's arm with a cross similar to this on Si's arm. A deathly pallor fell on her face when Miss Deborah read aloud the contents of the paper:

"This is to certify that Silas Underwood has been in my employ, a faithful workman, for six years. He is an honest, capable man.

"Peter Keekant, Rocktown."

"Prissy, this must be your nephew without a doubt," said Miss Deborah, kindly.

This startling announcement was as surprising to Si as it was to the others, and Prissy stared at the boy dazed and speechless.

"Sure, now, the Lord is good ter bring yes togither. May the holy saints bliss ye," said Nora. Lifting her dish of shelled peas, she left for the kitchen.

Miss Deborah's eyes moistened when she looked on the disappointed, freckled face of the little wanderer. She was sure he had expected a different welcome. Undoubtedly he had a vague conception of warm, loving

hearts beneath a sheltering fold. He belonged to the great army of homeless ones who were obliged to fearlessly fight their way through the world, and now, on the eve of victory, his wandering over, he found his success in a heartless, indifferent aunt whom his sunny nature repelled.

"Have you not a word of weclome to give your nephew?" said Miss Deborah in a low, sweet voice to this woman who seemed not to have known the meaning of the word love, but sat stern and forbidding.

"What on earth am I goin' to do with him?" Prissy found voice to say. "This ain't no home for boys, an' I hain't a home to give him. His father got well paid for leavin' a good business to run off with a circus woman, an' I always said there wouldn't no good come to him."

Throwing her head on the back of the rocker, she covered her face with her hands. The full veins on each temple told Miss Deborah of the tumult within; bringing up old memories and melting the icy barriers that for years had shut out all affection and love for anything but self.

Miss Deborah had never before seen Prissy exhibit the slightest emotion, and this surprising manifestation encouraged her to tenderly stroke the iron-grey head.

"Do not for a moment think that you have no home for Si. He is welcome to live here with you. He shall be educated and trained to be a good, honest man. There is nothing bad about the boy; he is a sunny, bright little fellow, and the making of a good man is in him. Prissy, you will yet live to be proud of him, I'm sure," she said in low, soothing tones.

Turning to Si, who was silently watching them, she

said: "Si, your wandering life is over, and this is to b your home with your aunt; she has never had any of he own to love, and she needs you. You belong to her, b the ties of blood; she never has had anything to make he very happy, and I trust your coming will be the means o good to both of you. You must be obedient and studiou and you shall have all the help for an education you ma desire."

"It's all right, marm, for them as wants book larnin'; don't. 'F you has horses I kin take care of 'em, or enn work you want 'round the place I'll help, but I'll b durned 'f I want ter be edicated," returned Si, twirlin his hat on his hand.

"There's one thing you can't do if you live with me, a that's swearin'. I won't have it!" said Prissy, in the sam old rasping voice.

A response vibrated on Si's tongue. However, it wa lost in a mutter which carried its import from his flash ing eyes as he scornfully looked at his new found rel tive.

"Where's your mother, that she ain't takin' care o you?" inquired Prissy, rolling her cold, grey eyes towar Si.

"She's gone to Californy; that's why I skipped," r turned Si brightly.

"Is your mother living?" Miss Deborah asked in su prise.

"Yessum," Si answered respectfully. "Yer see, m first marm died when I was born, so dad tol' me; the dad married ag'in. After dad died she got married t Slippy Elum, an' that made it a sort of double U co cern, an' giv' me a step-dad an' a step-marm, an' I'll t

chewed 'f I didn't fergit my first dad's name, fer everybody in the cirkis called me 'Si Slippy' when they didn't call me 'Brush.' My step-dad's name is Elmer Slippy, 'n that's why he got called 'Slippy Elum,'" Si replied with his usual drollery.

Si's disappointment in his new relative was mitigated when assured that he was to live at Greystone Home under Miss Deborah's fostering care. Having little self-conceit saved him the danger of being spoiled, for the girls were in a high state of glee when they learned he was to live at Greystone Home.

That first afternoon lived forever in his memory. It was the beginning of a new life to him; for never before could he remember of having received such kind words and sweet attention as these orphan girls bestowed on him.

They strolled about the grand old place, introducing him to every nook and loved spot made familiar to them by constant association during the three years of their life at Greystone Home.

They crossed the rustic bridge and wandered up the mountain path to the tall pines; returning, they found a shallow place in the brook, where they crossed on the flat stones to Willow Brook Meadow, down to the lot where Cowslip, Daisy and Dolly greeted them with a gentle low. The horses left their sweet grass and came, tossing their heads, to the bars for the lumps of sugar the girls had forgotten to bring.

"Duckey Daddle" and "Henny Penny" lodge were visited and the names of the various pets were repeated, from blind Cadwallader—whom they dubbed "Cad," having lost his eyes in his desire to fight—to Miss Cackle and

Flutterbudget, the seabrights; all of which was so surprisingly new and amusing to Si that he came near forgetting Blowser and the girls' promised ride.

Ralph had not forgotten; he had been restless and nervous all of the afternoon, and when the clock in the library struck the half hour after five the children heard him call.

"It is getting late, and if the girls care to ride Blowser they must hurry," was what they heard that sent them rushing across the meadow to the flats, where they found Phil and Ralph with Blowser.

Blowser seemed to enjoy the fun more than the children, as he frolicked and gamboled, trotted and galloped about the flats; kneeling before the girls—like a camel—giving them an opportunity to mount easily, while the air was filled with their screams of laughter when Si showed off more of his marvelous tricks.

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"This is your room, Si," said Nora. Going before him, she placed a small lamp on the bureau. "Yer must be a good lad an' kape yersilf clane an' nice. Brish yer clothes before ye pit 'em on in the mornin', an' here is a foine wisk broom; always pit it back in this illegant red case whin ye have used it, for Miss Debry wants iverybody clane an' orderly about her. Good night." Closing the door, she left him.

Si looked about in amazement. The pretty single bed and the bureau opposite, the wash-stand in the corner, and the white curtains which hung over the window shades were all new to him; his eyes went down to the pretty rug before the bed, and the floor covered with matting, and he wondered if it was all a dream.

There was a feeling in his heart which he could not define, a sense of restful protection which he had never known before, as he laid his head on the sweet pillows covered with slips fresh from the linen closet, where Miss Deborah kept bags of orris and prepared rose petals.

"Great cats!" he murmured, "Ain't I in clover! All but that aunt."

CHAPTER IX.

SI'S FIRST SUNDAY AT GREYSTONE HOME.

SI, having spent all of his young life in a circus going from town to town, knew nothing of Sunday as a day set apart for worship and rest. Therefore, after breakfast, he went to the carriage house hoping to find Jacob Rodder, of whom he desired to ask the loan of a fish-pole and line which he discovered lying on a beam near the door.

Although Si had received little discipline, he had never forgotten that which his father had instilled in his young mind—the importance of honesty—which made him conscious of a sense of guilt when he took the fish-pole from its place on the beam and stealthily wandered off to the brook, quieting the monitor within by telling himself that it was all right, he had only borrowed the pole for a short time.

Leaving his shoes and stockings under a tree, he crossed the brook and wandered on to a high rock. There was a glory of sunlight on trees and shrubs; it also lighted the brook with prismatic coloring, as it sparkled and danced over pebbles and stones, sending forth a rhythmic murmur as it wound its way to the willow meadow, where it was lost under the tall grasses and flags.

A dreamy, subtle influence took possession of him; flinging his fish-pole among the ferns, he threw himself on the bed of moss under the hemlocks, where, lying restfully, he folded his arms under his head and gazed at the clouds above him.

He listened to the gurgling water as it fell over the high rock, and to the chirp of a robin in the wild cherry tree near; there was a busy hum of insect life and a soft whispering of the pines not far away.

It was the happiest moment of his young life; there was the freedom of his tramp days without the weariness and pangs of hunger, or anxiety about the future. He realized a sense of joy and thankfulness and, while too ignorant to question his real self, he was conscious that something had taken possession of him which he had never before experienced.

His thoughts went back to his old life, the sorrows of the circus days, of Elmer Slippy's lash and abuse; he reviewed his brief experiences in this new home, while his heart went out to the teachers and children and the two boys, Ralph and Phil. He smiled when he remembered Nora's kind advice, although his face clouded when he recalled the cold welcome of his stern aunt.

He was aroused from his reverie, for he heard voices from across the brook. He was on his feet at once and hurried across the stones to find his shoes and stockings safe. The dark pool under the rock attracted him; he was sure that it was the home of the trout. And having given his line a throw he silently waited.

His eyes opened in amazement, for he was sure he felt a pull on the line, and he waited for it to return.

He was too absorbed in his enjoyment to observe Jacob Rodder's approach until he stood beside him.

"Have you caught anything?" Jacob asked, smiling when he noted Si's confusion.

"No," returned Si, "I had a nibble, but it's gone."

"Where did you get your pole?" questioned Jacob, while a merry light gathered in his grey eyes.

"I borrowed it," returned Si. His face flushed as he turned to look into Jacob's eyes and caught the meaning of his good-natured face.

"Don't yer fergit yerself. I ain't a yap to steal. There wasn't nobody aroun' ter ast, 'n so I took it on the borrowin' plan——"

"Be sure and put it back in the same place. You know sometimes boys do forgit when they borrow. But I guess you are all right."

"You'll bet I'm all right, 'n I'll find the place where I got it, 'f I didn't draw a chalk line aroun' it, 'n doncher fergit it," emphasized Si.

"You've been missed at the house and your aunt is worried——"

Jacob did not finish, for a shout was heard and they observed Tim Tugs and Bill Kinly hurrying to the spot where Si was fishing.

"Yer can't catch nothin' in that hole," cried Bill Kinly. "Shut yer mouth, you'll scare ever' durned one of 'em away," said Si in a low tone.

"I tell yer there ain't a fish there!" Bill insisted, while he bent over the pool and watched the line.

"Yes there is; if you'll plaster yer lip I'll fetch it." Si lifted the pole, for he felt a pull on the hook. There was a breathless silence when Si gave his line an important flourish and landed the loaded hook on the grass.

Jacob and the boys shouted with laughter while Si bent over the hook in open-eyed astonishment, for the curious thing which he had fished from the brook proved to be an upper plate of false teeth imbedded in moss.

Jacob explained to Si that they belonged to his aunt and the occasion of her losing it.

The Sunday dinner was over and Prissy, who had been

assisting, although her ankle was not strong, was glad to find the restful rocker on the back porch, where she usually went for an afternoon nap. She was not in a peaceful state of mind; her thoughts were of Si and his long absence.

"He'll git no dinner if he does come back," she murmured, "I'll teach him a lesson. H'm! I shouldn't wonder 't all if he's run away again—gone trampin'. Couldn't be respecterble; druther be a heathen, I s'pose."

These thoughts were crowding her brain and making her miserable; for deep down in her cold heart there was a germ of love for him, of which she had not been conscious until the moment when it occurred to her that, having become tired of civilization, he had returned to the old life and that it might be possible she would never see him again.

"If it wasn't for this weak ankle I'd go and hunt for him," she murmured, when at that moment she heard his quick step approaching. His face was beaming as he proudly held up a string of shining trout.

"You good-for-nothing, miserable heathen! Goin' fishin' on Sunday. Well, it's nothin' more than I can expect from a cirkis tramp. You go right back to that brook and throw every last one of 'em in." She had forgotten her anxiety of a few moments before as she looked into the disappointed face of Si, who remained silent without turning to obey her.

"Do you hear! Go this minute; I will not have 'em around," she demanded, rising from her seat.

Si turned and met Nora, who inquired, "What are ye goin' ter dew wid 'em?"

"Rat 'em!" returned Si, frowning.

"Sure, now, don't ye's be gittin' mad tew. Ye'll be all

right whin ye gits a bringing up." Nora lifted the string of fish which Si had thrown on the grass. "Indade, they are too foine to be pit in the brook; it is tew late fer 'em to git back their breath. I'll cook 'em fer the poor Gubbs family down forninst the quarry ,an' the holy saints will forgive ye the sin of catchin' 'em on Sunday."

"Silas, if you live with me you can't go fishin' on Sunday." Prissy's voice was sharp and firm. Although she knew nothing of tenderness, this was her idea of kind advice.

Si dug his heels in the grass and sullenly muttered between his closed lips. Suddenly his face lighted when he drew from his pocket the plate of false teeth.

Prissy's sharp eyes were on them at once; her voice trembled as she spoke:

"For the land's sake! Silas, where did you git them teeth? They are mine."

"I guess you are mistaken, Aunt, I fished them out of the brook. They was caught Sunday and was my first bite."

"Well, they are mine, and you give them to me at once." Rising from her chair, Prissy hastened down the steps to where Si was standing.

"They are too high mouthed for you, 'n that's good gold; I can sell it 'n buy me a dandy fish pole." There was a mery light in Si's blue eyes as he looked on the flushed, excited face of his aunt.

At that moment Miss Deborah appeared before them. Prissy turned her frowning face to her and said: "What a trial I have in this cirkis tramp. My land! Miss Debry, he don't know nothin'."

"What is your trouble, Prissy? Has Si been in mischief?"

There was an amused expression in Miss Deborah's face when Si held up the plate, exclaiming: "Ain't that a valuable catch fer Sunday?"

While Miss Deborah did not rebuke Si, she kindly explained to him the importance of honestly restoring any article found to its rightful owner and never hesitating to do it at once.

As Prissy took the treasure from Si, she remarked to Miss Deborah: "I s'pose it was a sin fer him to go fishin' on the Lord's day, but I'm dreadful glad to be able to eat solid food again."

Miss Deborah had explained the word "heathen" to the girls in one of her Bible lessons; therefore, it was not surprising that Rachel—who had heard Prissy's rasping voice denouncing Si as a heathen—took the opportunity to explain to him the meaning of the oft-repeated name which Prissy so freely gave to them in her angry or fretful moods. They were sitting on a rustic bench in the orchard near a gnarled apple tree, where Rachel had gone for harvest apples, when suddenly she amazed Si with the surprising question:

"Do you know what a heathen is?"

"Naw," returned Si, scornfully, "that's what my aunt called me, but I don't care a rap what it is."

"Heathens don't know anything about school, or learning to read, or the Bible; and they never heard about God——"

"Say, kid, you'd better fergit what you's sayin'——"

"Why, no, Si. That would be wicked, to forget to talk about God——"

"'F I ain't struck!" exclaimed Si, looking in her dark, earnest eyes. "Say, kid, you'd better not say that ag'in.

Dad licked me onct for sayin' it, 'n I hain't forgot; yer betcher life I hain't."

"Why! Don't you know about God and His Son, who is our loving Savior?" she exclaimed. Creeping close to Si, she looked into his bright blue eyes.

"Gee! I guess not! I never was acquainted with either of 'em. Dad would lick me to shoe-strings 'f I'd say them words, 'n you'd better not," he protested.

"Why, Si! Don't you know that you are God's child, and that He loves you, and He loves everybody—didn't you know that?" she asked, surprised at his ignorance.

"No! Never. Who told you this yarn? Where does He live? I'd like to git a look at him," he returned, with an amused expresion on his thin, freckled face.

"Why, Si! You are a heathen, sure enough. Miss Louise told us girls that nobody can see God; but if we are very, very good, and love everybody, and think good thoughts, then we can feel God in our hearts. Miss Louise said that God is everywhere——"

"Gee! What a yarn!" Si interrupted. "How can we feel Him without seein' Him? You've made a mistake, kiddie, 'n forgot," patting her soft cheek, for he observed that her face was troubled.

"I'm telling you the truth, Si," she said soberly, "Miss Louise knows all about it, and she said that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to show everybody how to live right and keep full of love. She said that God is love, and we must love everybody—the bad folks who are mean to us an' call us names as Prissy does. Miss Louise told us we must not talk back to Prissy, or to the girls when they are cross an' mad to us. She said that we must keep sweet and say—not out loud, you know—but think it: 'Great

peace have they who love Thy law, an' nothing can offend them'; an' bimeby we'll forget we're mad and——"

"Now, hol' on, kiddie; you are yarnin'. I'll be stumped if you ain't a good 'un to git off a string as long as ol' Marm Boodle used to about her wild hen."

Si looked into her serious face. His voice was tender, for he thought that he had offended her. "Why, little Checkerberry, do you believe all that? Don't let them chaff you again——"

"Please, Si, don't make fun of me. I am telling the truly true, just what Miss Louise told us this morning; and she made us repeat over and over that verse until we learned it——"

"I wasn't makin' fun of you, little Checkerberry," Si assured her, for she had slipped from her seat and was about to leave him. For a moment she stood in deep thought, after which she turned and looked up to Si's troubled face.

"I was just a little bit mad to you, Si"—her face seemed illumined as she spoke—"but I ain't any more," she went on, "'cause I said that verse, an' it made me forget the naughty in me. Good-bye."

Si watched her as she skipped across the orchard and disappeared around the corner of the house. Taking from his side pocket a cigarette, he proceeded to light it, then settling back on the rustic seat he gave himself up to the enjoyment of that which to him seemed a luxury.

"This is the last one," he told himself; taking it between his fingers, he listlessly examined it. At that moment Louise Joy stood before him.

"Silas, are you smoking a cigarette?" There was no tone of rebuke in her voice; it was the same as if she had asked him if he was eating an apple.

Si did not answer her, but quietly resumed his smoking, until he observed that she had dropped into the seat beside him, when he flung the cigarette far out into the grass.

"That is right," exclaimed Miss Louise. "Si, that cigarette is poison and a dangerous thing for a boy to smoke——"

"Nobody ever tol' me it was pizen, 'n lots of tony folks smoke 'em," emphasized the boy. "You'll betcher life they ain't pizen," he went on, "I've smoked 'em ever since I was a kid, 'n I ain't dead."

"Well, then," returned Miss Louise, "admitting that you have no belief in their being poison, will you tell me why you smoke them?"

Si was silent for a moment. He looked up to her kind face and knew that she was expecting a reply.

"I do' no," he said, "I guess it's because they air comp'ny like when I'm trampin', 'n I don't git so hungry when I hev 'em to smoke."

"But you do not tramp now," returned Miss Louise, kindly. "God led you to this home of peace and plenty, where you need never be hungry. Here you will be taught how to become a useful and good man and you can forget that you care for cigarettes."

He did not reply. There was a long silence; each of them was too absorbed with their own thoughts to observe the fast deepening twilight. And not until Miss Louise felt the heavy falling dew did she discover that they were late.

"I think it will be nearer to go through the garden," said Miss Louise, as they arose to leave the orchard.

"Si, did you ever have a real happy good time?" It

was the thoughtful expression in Si's face which caused Miss Louise to ask the surprising question.

"Yes'm, I've had good times," Si respectfully answered, sliding his hands in his pockets.

Miss Louise, interested to know what he considered a good time, said: "When did it happen, Si? Tell me about it."

"The first one was when I knowed I was goin' to live here," he replied, "an' I had a good time this mornin' fishin', and I liked loafin' on the ground under the trees by the brook. I'm havin' lots of good times now." His voice had a happy, glad ring, as if he were telling the truth.

They had reached the garden gate; Si rested his hand on the latch. She waited for him to open it. He hesitated, turned, and looked up to her face. It was light enough for Miss Louise to see an earnest expression in his large blue eyes, and she was not surprised when he said:

"Miss Louise, I'm thinkin' about that name. Rachel said it to-day, 'n you said it——"

"What did I say, Si?"

"Dad tol' me never to say 'God,' fer it was the wust kind of swearin', an' you said God led me to this place; 'n I'd like ter know how He did it."

"Come to the house, Si, and we will talk about it." Miss Louise was touched as she looked upon his slight figure and realized his ignorance.

They crossed the lawn to the broad piazza, where through the open door they could see Miss Deborah seated at the piano and the children grouped about her.

Miss Deborah's strong soprano led the weaker voices, while Mamie and Nan's alto gave harmony to the music, which held Si as he listened. When the hymn was fin-

ished he clapped his hands and exclaimed, "That's prime."

Miss Deborah invited him to join them, which he gladly accepted. Having selected a piece which was new to the girls, with a little practice they were rewarded by hearing his full mellow voice leading.

Through the open door Miss Louise observed the changed expression on Si's face as he sang. Inspiration had filled his soul and illumined his face. He was no longer an outcast and a tramp. He had been transplanted to a garden where he would be nourished and pruned into comeliness.

When the twelve bade good night to the ladies and went chatting up the broad stairs to the dormitory, Si also turned to say good night, as he had seen the girls do, when Miss Louise called him to come and sit with her on the piazza for the promised talk.

"Your father told you the truth, Si," said Miss Louise, as he dropped into a chair near, "your father meant that God's name must never be used in jest or anger, for that is profanity. Every good thought comes from God, and if you always obey them you will be led by the spirit that is constantly sending only the good."

"But how's a feller goin' ter know? My aunt tol' me I was a miz'bul heathen fer goin' to the brook fishin' this morning'; 'n I never had a better time; I thought it was all right."

"Did you fish all morning? You were not home to dinner, and we missed——"

"Oh! I didn't want any dinner. I laid on the ground under the trees 'n thort 'n loafed. I didn't think nothin' bad; I jest lay thar 'n listened to the birds 'n brook 'n flies buzzin', 'n to the squeak of the bugs 'n things; 'n it made me feel awful happy, 'n I can't tell why nuther."

Si twirled his hat and awkwardly twisted in his chair as he gave his experience.

"It was God's loving presence, Si," she said in low, sweet tones. "He was showing you, through these birds, insect life, trees and plants, and also the pretty rollicking brook, the meaning of peace and love. He was telling you that all life comes from Him and that you are a reflection of God, just as the rays of the setting sun reflect that body of light on which it is impossible to look with the naked eye. God is everywhere present, Si; go where you will, you cannot get away from God."

"But I can't see Him," said Si, taking a seat by her side on the wicker settee. "Rachel tol' me that we can feel Him 'f we're awful good, 'n I don't believe I'll ever be that." His earnest tones were encouraging to Miss Louise, who tenderly drew her arm about him.

"You are good, Si," she said, "The real Silas Underwood is God's perfect child now——"

"Gee! I'll betcher life you don't know me," he interrupted. "I've been licked fer meanness ever since I could see."

Although a smile rested for a moment about the corners of her mouth, she realized the full meaning of his words.

"Poor little lad," she murmured, brushing back the heavy locks from his forehead, "You do not know yourself; some day the blessed light of divine love will reveal to you the real Si. You are not the only one who has said, 'Show me the Father.' Now, dear, I want you to ask God every day to help you to know Him——"

"How can I when I can't see Him? How can He hear me? Don'cher think that's kinder chaffin'?" he said hastily.

Miss Louise was silent for a moment. How could she

explain to this crude, ignorant boy the meaning of the presence of God and of the Spirit which giveth all, were thoughts which rushed through her mind.

"Si," she said softly, "did you ever see the wind?"

"Nobody can see the wind!" he exclaimed.

"But, Si, you have seen the effects of the wind. You have seen tall trees bend and the grasses and flowers nod as if talking to each other; it has lifted your hat, I've no doubt, and sent you racing after it."

"You'll betcher life I have," he exclaimed.

"You could see the effect of the wind and you could feel it on your face, but you could not see that which did all this; and that is the way it is with God, who made the laws that cause the wind to blow. When you were over at the brook you listened to the voice of God manifested in His creations; although you could see His works all about you, He as Spirit you cannot see. The happiness you felt and could not tell why was the harmony and peace of His presence within you.

"God is everywhere, and you are His spiritual likeness. Live every day as if you could see Him; take Him for your companion, and in time you will feel His presence."

There was a serious expression on his thin face when he bade her good night, and Miss Louise was assured that her talk had not been in vain as she observed the new light in his large blue eyes. Rachel's mission work had been strengthened and Si was not the same boy who went fishing that morning.

CHAPTER X.

RALPH HUNTER'S RESURRECTION.

THE light of the long summer days was a torture to Ralph Hunter's weak, inflamed eyes until he refused to leave his darkened room. An eye specialist was employed, who administered eye lotions and ordered the patient to be kept from the light with some congenial companion to amuse him.

It was for this reason that Phil Andrews gave up his work in the garden to wait on the unfortunate Ralph, who lay on the couch with cooling lotions on his closed eyes, while from a ray of light which was allowed to fall on his book through the half-opened blinds Phil read aloud.

Si was a daily visitor. He cheered Ralph with his happy-go-lucky manner, causing hearty merriment over his circus songs and odd speeches. It was on one of these occasions that Pat appeared in the room with a paper from the postoffice and a package of cigarettes for Ralph.

"There's no use of offering Phil a cigarette," said Ralph, handing a package to Si.

"I've swore off, an' that's dead smooth," Si remarked, while he refused to take the package.

"Give me your hand, Si," exclaimed Phil in a hearty, glad voice, grasping Si's small hand.

"What's changed you, Si?" Ralph inquired, as he groped about for a match.

"I gits plenty to eat now, an' there is no need to chaw an' smoke; 'n somehow I don't care nothin' about 'em.

Miss Louise said I'd forgit to like 'em, an' I have, as true as guns."

"You are a brave fellow, Si——"

"No I ain't Phil; I didn't hanker after 'em. I jest forgot 'em. I never thort they was pizen, an' when Miss Louise said they was it didn't scare me, fer I ain't dead yet——"

"No! Cigarettes are harmless," puffed Ralph. "It's chewing tobacco that is injurious to boys——"

"You are wrong, Ralph," replied Phil; "I believe that it is cigarettes which has caused your illness."

"Oh, bosh! Phil, I wish that you'd give up the old chestnut. How many times have I told you the cause of my weak eyes is simply studying by gaslight," returned Ralph impatiently.

Phil made no reply, and Ralph quietly smoked, while Si became interested in the pretty flageolet, on which he breathed a few notes.

Suddenly Ralph inquired, "Did Pat bring me any mail?"

"Only a paper," returned Phil. "Would you like me to open it?"

"Why, of course!" was Ralph's quick response, while Phil thought he detected a tone of severity in the once genial, friendly boy.

"It is the 'Cincinnati Enquirer.'" said Phil. "Here is something marked."

"I used to know the Ronney boys who lived in Cincinnati, and Harrie Fondale. I wonder if Harrie sent it? We were roommates."

"The wrapper is marked 'H. F.' I presume he sent it," said Phil.

"I wonder what they are doing this summer. Why don't you read!" exclaimed Ralph fretfully.

"'Cincinnati, June 26th,' this is dated," Phil began. "'Charles T. Ronney, one of the best known young men in the city, has been pronounced hopelessly insane from the use of cigarettes.'"

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Ralph, rising from his couch. "Why, he was graduated from Irving only last year, and he was a fine fellow. His brother Frank is one of my chums, and he is a jolly good fellow, too——"

"Did he smoke cigarettes?" hazarded Phil, as he folded the paper.

"Certainly he did, and so did most of the boys. But we never thought cigarettes injurious; we thought they were the simplest thing we could smoke," returned Ralph, settling back on his pillows.

"Why smoke at all?" ventured Phil.

"Why eat peaches and cream?" returned Ralph petulantly.

"Because they were intended for us to eat; they are delicious and wholesome." Phil's voice was low and earnest.

"Sho! Lots of boys smoke cigarettes, and they never went insane; I could name a hundred this minute. But I don't believe that cigarettes were the cause of Charley's insanity. Probably he overworked last year; he was a fine student. Bosh! Cigarettes indeed! They haven't hurt me, and I've smoked a year."

Ralph lighted another cigarette.

"I can't understand why the teachers allowed cigarette smoking in the Institute," Phil observed in a quiet tone.

"They did not allow it," Ralph quickly replied. "It was against the rules to smoke on the grounds, but most

of the boys would steal a smoke in their rooms, while others would go outside of the grounds. We were all careful, although some of the bolder ones were discovered and punished; two were expelled. One day Professor Adding asked me if I smoked cigarettes. I told him that my father or grandfather wouldn't allow me to smoke them. I thought I crept out of that question pretty slick; he seemed to be satisfied, and I've no doubt he thought me a pattern boy, who——"

"It was a lie just the same, Ralph," exclaimed Phil, his face flushed. "You were dissembling—making yourself appear honest, when——"

"It was nothing of the kind! I simply evaded the question——"

"What is that but a lie—which you never would have told, Ralph, before you smoked those dangerous cigarettes. You are losing self respect and health——"

"Take that!" cried Ralph, flinging a book at Phil. "How dare you call me a liar? You'd better not go back on your promise, for if you tell grandfather that I smoke I'll make you suffer."

Ralph sank back on the couch exhausted. The three were silent. The French clock on the mantel was the only sound, as it noisily ticked off the minutes. Si quietly placed the flageolet on the table and left them.

The following day Phil observed that Ralph was worse. During the forenoon he fretted over the slightest cause, and before night his screams were appalling. The doctor was summoned at once, who pronounced it brain fever.

As the days wore on there were troubled, anxious hearts in the Hunter home. Richard Bossford never left the sufferer, but remained in the sick room, hoping

against hope, while he anxiously listened to the moans and shrieks of the raving boy.

The most skilful physicians were called to counsel with Dr. Orringer of New York, who was celebrated for his skill in diseases of the brain; but all to no purpose, save their verdict, which brought despair.

A week passed, and the shadow deepened over Judge Hunter's home. The Greystone Home girls went about with sad faces, looking often with tear-dimmed eyes up to the windows of the darkened room, their voices hushed as they heard the wild ravings of their playmate.

Daily Si rode Blowser to Mrs. Andrews' cottage with news of the invalid. It was late one afternoon when Si brought the despairing news that Ralph was sinking; his ravings were over.

Phil laid his head on Blowser's neck and sobbed. His heart was heavy with remorse for having kept the secret of Ralph's alarming habit.

It was on this eventful day that Louise Joy received a telegram from her cousin, Dr. Lester, who for the past two years had been travelling in Europe.

"He will be here this evening; dear old Jack, it seems such a long time since I have heard your voice," she was telling herself, when Miss Deborah entered the room and, in a broken, sad voice, told her of Ralph's condition.

"The doctors tell them there is no hope, but we know there is hope for every one of God's children. I told Mr. Bossford to take courage and try the Christ cure, but Mr. Bossford shook his head and said it was far better to let the boy die under the doctor's administration than it would be to have it said that he was killed by a metaphysical practitioner."

"Oh! He does not know. He does not know of this

wonderful truth." Louise Joy walked to and fro, while her heart went out in prayer for the unfortunate Ralph.

That same evening Dr. Jack Lester sat in the library and related his experience in the new work which had come to him through the realization that God was the one Power, and the knowledge he had received from learning of wonderful cures, after the most skilful physicians had given up all hope. When Louise Joy told him of Ralph Hunter, who was lying dangerously ill in the house next to them, he was deeply interested. Later, when he learned that Richard Bossford was Ralph's uncle, he gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Richard Bossford and I were old college chums, and we were travelling companions for a year. We were always congenial save on the subject of Christian Science. He could not be convinced that his sister, Mrs. Mark Hunter, could be healed. She is suffering from melancholy occasioned by the loss of her child——"

"We used to know her when a schoolgirl," Louise interrupted, "and I am sorry to learn of her sad condition. And yet, Jack, I cannot help the impression that your influence will yet be felt by these people."

Although it was past midnight when the three left the library, Louise Joy arose early the next morning and lost no time in going to the Hunter home to inquire for Ralph and urge Mr. Bossford to try the healing power of Truth.

Although haggard and worn from anxiety, Richard Bossford's face lighted when he learned that his old chum and travelling companion was so near. Later in the day he sent an invitation to Dr. Lester to come to him at once.

"Ah! Jack, old fellow, there is a curse on this house," said Richard brokenly, as the two entered the library, "My sister is dying in Berlin and her son is passing away

from us here, and you know the history of her little daughter's fate——"

"There is an ever-present help, my friend," returned Dr. Lester tenderly, which touched Richard Bossford. He raised his anxious face and looked into the kind, brown eyes.

"Can it be possible that you believe that our boy can be saved after skilful physicians have decided that he is past hope?" Richard Bossford questioned incredulously.

"God is omnipresent life. He is the only power and a fountain of inexhaustible love; therefore all things are possible with Him, for His laws are perfect; He cannot make discord or inharmony. Richard, you and I have discussed this question many times, and, while I may be unable to convince you, I can only add that there are thousands of cases which were pronounced incurable, which have been restored to health through this science." Dr. Lester's voice was low and serious.

At that moment Judge Hunter entered the library. Richard Bossford at once introduced the two gentlemen and explained that Dr. Lester was an old college chum with whom he had travelled when in Europe.

"Your name is quite familiar, sir," returned Judge Hunter, cordially clasping Jack's hand. "You find us in deep trouble. I understood Mr. Bossford to say that you are a doctor; perhaps you may be able to give us a ray of encouragement——"

"He is a metaphysical practitioner," Richard Bossford hastened to explain, "for which he has relinquished a successful medical profession. Do you not think him a brave fellow, Judge?"

"I do not know," returned the Judge, "I cannot give

my opinion as to his courage until I know what he has been obliged to encounter."

"The world's opinions, scoffs, sarcasm, and lost friendships——"

"And, I've no doubt, losses financially, Doctor," the Judge interrupted. "And do you have faith enough in this science to go on with it? Has it begun to reveal a gleam of success?"

"I have not given it a thought financially," observed Dr. Lester. "I was awakened to the fact that something was curing the world which the medical profession lacked. I realized that hundreds of people were being cured who I knew were beyond the skill of physicians. On investigation I learned that it was the same science which Christ used and taught His disciples.

"The more I studied this Truth, the stronger was I convinced, until I awakened to the fact that I could not serve two masters. I then closed up my business, broke away from the condemnations of friends, and sailed for Europe——"

"Then," said the Judge, "you are not a hypnotist or magnetic healer. What is your method with which you claim to heal the sick?"

"Let us leave this discussion until another time; the nurse has sent word that Ralph is going fast. I am anxious to have you see our boy, Doctor," exclaimed Richard Bossford, leading the way up the winding stairs.

As they entered the room where Ralph was lying unconscious, Huldah Rodder waved a fan before his face. "Sinking," she murmured, and turned with surprise when she observed the stranger.

"Too late," Huldah told herself when she saw Dr.

Lester approach the bed and place his hand on the white brow.

Judge Hunter and Richard Bossford watched the calm, spiritual face which was bending over the invalid. Stirred by an impulse that he could not resist, Richard Bossford begged Jack to tell them at once if he could help this loved one.

"Of myself I can do nothing. It is Divine Mind that heals, and there is nothing impossible with God——"

"Jack, dear old fellow, I do not understand you. I believe you are a noble man; your spiritual understanding is far beyond me, but I trust and believe in you. And if Judge Hunter will consent to place Ralph in your hands I shall feel satisfied that we have reached the limit and left nothing undone to save our boy."

"Most assuredly I am willing to do anything that can be suggested. Certainly you can do no harm." Judge Hunter turned from the group to hide his emotion.

They were surprised when Dr. Lester requested to be left alone with his patient, and they reluctantly left the room. Richard Bossford threw himself on a couch in the spacious hall, where he could be near if wanted, while he hopefully waited.

There was a sense of awe in the silence which followed as the moments went on.

When the deep-toned clock in the library struck the half hour, Richard became impatient and arose from the couch. He approached the door to Ralph's room and listened; the silence was painful. He softly opened the door and looked within.

Dr. Lester was kneeling before the bed, apparently in silent prayer. As Richard turned to leave, he observed that the Doctor had risen and was taking a book from the

stand. Richard Bossford could not be mistaken; although the flexible cover was a little more worn, he recognized it to be "Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures," by Mary Baker Eddy.

Richard watched his friend as he turned the leaves of the book, and, having found the desired page, read in distinct, rich tones the testimony of the soul.*

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* "Science and Health," by Mary Baker G. Eddy, page 149.

Richard was deeply interested in the words: "I give immortality to man, for I am Truth. I give life without beginning and without end, for I am Life," etc.

Richard turned and softly closed the door. There was a new light in his eyes, while his face beamed with hope; all anxiety had left him.

"Ralph will live, I am sure," he mentally emphasized, as he turned to the couch and lay with his arms folded under his head. The revelation that Jack Lester was a godly man in the true sense of the word had suddenly assured him that Ralph was having the best attention that he had received since his illness.

Richard was beginning to realize why he had been so strangely drawn to this splendid man, although he still realized that he could not understand his peculiar views. He remembered of having told him that he revealed a weak point in his character by giving up a successful medical practice for that of a metaphysician. But now the conception of the truth had come to him. Why had he so blindly misunderstood this friend who was slowly walking back and forth while reading those wonderful words? Had he not sacrificed his profession and many friends, and borne the condemnation of others and the

jeers and scoffing tongues of the world, in order to gain this spiritual height and to be as he appeared at that eventful moment—a true follower of the "Master Christian"?

While the minutes seemed slow to the anxious waiting ones, Jack Lester had not thought of time. The library clock announced the hour in four solemn cathedral tones, while the bronze clock in Ralph's room responded in soft, silvery notes.

Jack was kneeling before the bed. He had no thought save the one Presence, assuring him that God was the life of Ralph's life and that he would live. He was not groping in the darkness of doubt, for the light of Divine Love had strengthened his faith and illumined his being. His prayer was not of earnest entreaty, but like Christ at the tomb of Lazarus, he poured forth his thanks to the Father of all for giving this child back to his loved ones.

The half hour again struck, but Jack did not heed it. Uplifted and rejoicing, he felt the Divine Voice speaking the assuring words.

There was a hush without and within this anxious home, save the soft rustle of the trees and the chirp of birds, while the exigency of the hour was felt in the hearts of all who loved this unconscious one. The minute hand was nearing another hour, while the awe-inspiring words, "Be still and know that I am God," seemed to hover over the white bed and the trusting man who was kneeling beside it.

"Phil!" It was Ralph's voice, and Jack Lester arose at once and looked into the large blue eyes of the invalid, who repeated: "Phil, where are you? Will you tell Phil that I want him?" he said to Jack, whose face was beam-

ing with joy. "I want to tell him my dream," he added, while a faint smile lighted his pale, pinched face.

"Was it a good dream?" inquired the doctor, as he smoothed back the rings of golden brown hair which lay on the white forehead.

"Yes, it was good," he dreamily responded, and closed his eyes.

Jack was not alarmed, but listened to the regular breathing of the invalid and knew that it was well with him. At that moment the door opened and Judge Hunter, followed by Richard Bossford and the two nurses, entered the room.

"We heard voices," said the Judge. "I am sure I heard Ralph talking to you." He approached the bed and bent over the sleeping boy, disappointed to find Ralph seemingly in the same unconscious state.

When Dr. Lester explained that Ralph had aroused for a moment and spoken to him, the trained nurse became excited.

"It is the crisis," she exclaimed. "He will not live until midnight, for it is one of the worst symptoms for a person to sink so low and then revive enough to speak."

Huldah Rodder quietly placed her hand on Ralph's moist white brow. "It may be the crisis, an' I think it is, but it means life an' not death, if I'm a judge. There is a healthy moisture on his forehead that you never see on the dyin'."

She turned to Jack Lester, who was silently watching her, and said: "The Master led you to us, I am sure. I hear that you have a new way of believin'. I always thought my way was a pretty good standby in time of trouble, but this beats me, an' I want to know how you did it."

She wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron and awaited his reply.

"It is the same religion that Christ taught—the same religion which you are trying to live, only you ignore the command to heal the sick——"

"But He was Christ, an' I am only Huldy Rodder, a woman."

"I think that you can find a comforting promise in Christ's own words: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do he shall do also; and greater works than these shall he do."

At that moment they were startled, for they heard Ralph's voice: "Uncle Richard!" The tone was feeble and low that sent Richard Bossford to the bedside murmuring his joy while he bent over the delicate form of his nephew and took the thin hand, so painfully small, in his own.

"My eyes are as good as Phil's. Now please open the blinds and then give me a glass of milk," were joyful words to the eager, listening group, save Martha Rudd, the trained nurse, who solemnly shook her head and declared that this was only the beginning of the end.

"In all of my twelve years experience as nurse I never knew a person to be so low who after reviving and asking for food did not pass away in a few hours."

She was disappointed, however. When the week had passed and she realized that Ralph had grown stronger with every appearance of returning health, her services were no longer needed and she left him.

CHAPTER XI.

A LESSON FROM STONES.

ALTHOUGH the news of Ralph Hunter's wonderful restoration was the topic of conversation in the home, at the hotel, and at the various places of business in the little village, many were unwilling to believe it to have been otherwise than through the medical skill of Dr. Orrington, the New York specialist.

Mrs. Andrews shook her head and looked her incredulity when she learned from Phil of Dr. Lester. Phil begged of his mother to send for this doctor, assuring her of his faith that Bessie could be healed as Ralph had been. Huldah Rodder also lost no time in calling at the Andrews cottage, hoping to influence Mrs. Andrews to send at onc for Dr. Lester, and was disappointed when assured by the lady that she believed Dr. Lester to be a fake.

"Now, Mrs. Andrews," returned Huldah, "I was there through it all, an' I can believe what I saw with my own eyes. Three doctors told Judge Hunter an' Mr. Bossford that Ralph could not possibly live; an' even the trained nurse gave him up. Then comes Dr. Lester, without saddlebags or medicine, his only remedy God's word, and his counsellor Christ the Master; an' Ralph lyin' unconscious an' I thought struck with death.

"If you had been there an' seen him revive an' speak, with a heavenly smile on his face an' his eyes as bright as jewels, I think you would believe as I do that it was

God who raised the boy, and Dr. Lester told me that of himself he could do nothin'. God is the only power."

Mrs. Andrews did not respond until Huldah arose to take her departure.

"I quite appreciate your kindness, Huldah, and I may send for this doctor to see Bessie, and when he has learned of her condition we can better decide what to do."

"Well," returned Huldah, as she stepped into the hall, "It's my opinion it'll be a lost opportunity if you don't send for him."

The morning following this visit from Huldah Rodder to Mrs. Andrews, Dr. Lester looked at his watch and found that he had time for a stroll before the breakfast hour. Quietly descending the stairs he passed through the large gateway. Directing his steps toward the village, he soon found himself at the turn into a long street bordered with white cottages. Their vine-covered piazzas and neatly trimmed shrubbery, set in close-cut lawns, showed the taste of the inmates in their love for the picturesque.

The Rocktown guests, after an early breakfast, were seated within the coach, ready and waiting for the drive to the junction, which was five miles away. Already the open doors of the typical butcher and baker and candlestick maker indicated that the day's business had begun.

Suddenly Dr. Lester became interested in a cream-colored Shetland pony speeding down the street bearing a slender boy, who reined up to the public watering trough near the hotel.

It did not occur to Dr. Lester that this boy was Si Underwood, for he had heard nothing of Blowser. Miss Louise's mind had been so filled with Ralph Hunter that she had forgotten to mention the circumstances connected

with Si's coming to Greystone Home. He watched the boy as he stroked the long, graceful mane and the caressing return from the affectionate animal with his dripping mouth on the boy's shoulder.

"Your pony seems very fond of you," remarked the Doctor, while he patted the gentle creature, "and I am sure that you are quite as fond of him, if one can judge the actions."

"You'll bet," returned Si, with one of his peculiar smiles, which Jack recognized at once.

"Ah! You are Si Underwood, if I'm not mistaken. Your large hat shaded your face and I did not recognize you. The pony attracted me when I first saw him, and as he came nearer I was interested in his graceful steps and the ease with which you rode. You would not part with him, I presume, at any price?"

"No," returned Si. "If I could keep him, 'n he was mine, nothin' could make me sell him," placing his cheek on the pony's mouth for a caress.

"Then he does not belong to you——"

"Ralph Hunter owns him, 'n he's the greatest trick pony in the world——"

"Ralph Hunter!" interrupted the doctor. "Indeed, he is fortunate to own such a beautiful pony. However, I do not understand about his being a trick pony; did Ralph teach him?"

Si explained how Ralph came into possession of Blowser, also the circumstances of his being sold.

"And you are caring for the pony until Ralph is ready to ride him?"

"Oh, I ride him every day to this water trough. There is somethin' about this water he likes; horses are awful partic'. Judge Hunter has a good spring and the creek

water is clear as glass, but Blowser got a taste of this 'n he wont' drink nowhere else," laughed Si.

To Jack Lester's surprise, instead of turning homeward, Si dropped the bridle and Blowser galloped across the street to a white cottage, before which he patiently waited for Phil Andrews to open the gate, for the gentle creature did not forget the lump of sugar he was sure to receive from Bessie's thin hand.

"What a wonderful pony; with no ordinary intelligence, I am sure, for you are not afraid to trust him, I see," remarked Jack.

"He never passes that house, you'll bet. He likes that little girl over there 'cause she feeds him sugar, 'n I'm glad he likes her, for she's been shut up with sickness ever since last winter when she most broke her back slidin' down hill. The doctors have all give her up; mebbe you could help her." Si's voice was earnest and Jack observed a wistful expression in his large blue eyes.

"Then you believe that God can cure the sick and suffering ones if we ask?" Jack said in a low, serious tone.

"I don't know much about God. I never heard of Him as our Father till I came here 'n Miss Louise 'n Miss Debry said it wa'nt swearin' to speak his name right. I do'no how you do it, but 'f I could git Him to listen to me you'll bet I'd cure Bessie. She's awful nice, 'n Phil is dead sorry for her."

The purer element in Si's nature had been aroused; that part which he had never known had been coming for some time. The knowledge he received that eventful Sunday when he first sang with the children and Louise Joy's simple lesson lifted the first barrier.

His appearance also was changed from the tramp of a few weeks before, which had helped him to a feeling of

self-respect; his hands and face were no longer an evidence of grime, his clothes and clean linen and carefully-brushed hair gave him a wholesome appearance; if his ears were large, his face freckled, and his nose inclined to the pug, his eyes were bright and soft and his mouth always wore a smile and often displayed a row of even, white teeth, which he was learning to care for.

Dr. Lester was deeply interested in this boy, of whom Miss Deborah and Miss Louise had mentioned his unwillingness to accept the opportunity offered for an education. As they turned toward Greystone Home, Dr. Lester pondered how he could influence Si or interest him in the question of study, when suddenly Si stooped and picked up a small piece of black polished marble.

"Gee!" exclaimed Si, "ain't that a shiner? I'll bet Phil Andrews lost that. He found some just like it down to the ol' marble mill——"

"This must be from the quarries I visited yesterday with Mr. Bossford," returned Dr. Lester as he took it from Si. "I was surprised when I saw the long tunnels and immense walls——"

"It's a stunny hole 'n no fun when you gits thar; they ain't nothin' ter see——"

"Oh, I saw something quite important to this village, where hundreds of families could be supported," exclaimed Dr. Lester. "Si, perhaps you will be the man to start the wheels of enterprise and build up this village——"

"Me!" There was a flush of surprise lighting Si's freckled face. "What in loreness could I do to make a village?"

"Miss Deborah informed me that she is waiting for the right kind of a man to superintend the work, one who

is honest and kind. Your father was once a workman there; do you not think you could be educated to the work and look after Miss Deborah's interests?"

"I'll be cramped 'f I do," emphasized the boy, while he drew his fingers through Blowser's long mane and silently walked by his side.

Jack Lester made no reply. Si's crudeness and slang were not discouraging, for he had known of reckless, ignorant, mischievous, idle truants who, having received a few words of encouragement, had become intelligent citizens. At that moment they turned from the village street to the country road leading to Greystone Home.

On one side of the road the doctor observed a pile of marble rocks, from which he took an irregular, rough piece and handed it to Si and said, "Si, do you not think this is as fine a specimen as your polished piece?"

"Naw!" returned Si scornfully. "This is the feller fer me."

"Why," inquired the doctor, "do you like that one?"

"I'd be a fool ter like that measly old clinker——"

"You have given me no reason why you do not like it."

"Ho! This shiner is a beaut' 'n uncommon; 'n there is a lot of them good-fer-nothin' old settlers. Look at that pile of 'em——"

"But this polished stone was once like these rough ones——"

"You don't mean it!" interrupted Si. "Who tol' you? How'cher know it?"

"If you examine the back of it," returned the doctor, "you will see at once that they are alike, although the polished one may be a trifle smoother. This polished one is more attractive because it has passed through a certain process. If this stone could speak it would tell you a

story of hardships, of grinding between heavy weights; it would tell you of saws and chisels with which it was cut into a proper shape; it would tell you of being pressed between sand rollers and acids to polish.

"From the beginning it was constant work," the doctor continued. "It had stood for ages imbedded in the soil when suddenly it was driven from its home by the force of dynamite, and from that time it was constantly working, until it was fit for use."

"Could this feller be made like that shiner?" Si earnestly inquired, pointing to the rough piece of rock.

The doctor was pleased to see the interest Si was taking in the subject and replied: "Yes, the rougher the stone, the longer time it takes to polish. Your choice was the attractive one. We will compare this rough, jagged piece to an ignorant, idle boy, who uses slang and cannot read or write, and prefers a lawless life, lying about in the fields, tramping on dusty roads, or idly sleeping like these rough stones. He prefers this life to being educated, cultured and polished, that he can be respected and honored, that he may be able to become useful and do good to his friends and all mankind. God will give wisdom and knowledge to those who desire it——"

"I see what you're drivin' at," Si interrupted. "You thinks 'f I gits edgecated I'll shine; but I'll be chewed 'f I want a egecation, 'n that's dead sure."

"Yes, Si, that is what I mean. I think if you will put your mind and time to study you will become a useful man. Miss Louise told me of your giving up the tobacco habit; that is one step on the road to good, and I would be sorry to learn that you were too cowardly to pass through the mill because you are afraid of the grinding.

"I have but little time to talk with you," the doctor

wene on, "but I really would like to learn your idea of what you wish to be when a man. Six years from now you will be twenty years old. Most boys at your age have an ambition, although they may not reach it."

Si dropped the stone he was about to fling and looked up to the doctor's serious face.

"When I'm growed up I'd like to be a Prisident, 'n don'cher forget it."

"It means an education to be President of the United States," returned the doctor smiling.

"Yep, I know it. Judge Hunter tol' me I'd have to be egecated, 'n so I give it up."

"Therefore you intend to make no effort to be learned, but prefer an idle, tramp life. Is that your ambition?" queried Jack.

"Naw! I ain't goin' to be a tramp; I hates it. But I ain't built right to be shut up in the house with a book full of big words, 'n how in the loreness could I know the meanin' of them bustin' words?" Si's voice trembled and he soberly shook his head.

"Do you know your letters, Si?" Jack's voice was tender when he spoke and Si realized that this man was interested in him.

"Yep, I know 'em, an' can read little words 'n write my name," he brightly returned.

"Then you have already made a beginning. You have started for the mill; you have learned the alphabet, and how to put the letters into words. You will soon learn their meaning, then follow on with numbers, tables, and figures, and long before you realize it you will have become so interested that you will be eager to go on."

"Where does the grinding come in?" Si inquired; taking the polished marble, he rubbed it over his shirt sleeve.

"The grinding is the close application to your work, the constant perserverance until you are fit to fill a grand and good position which has been waiting for you. Promise me, Si, that you will not live in idleness. God has given you intellect; it must not be squandered. Use it for Him." The doctor's low, earnest voice was full of tenderness as he rested his hand on Si's shoulder and Si, who had never known kindness until he came to Greystone Home, was deeply touched.

Dr. Lester observed Si's earnest face and knew the boy had felt his influence when he said: " 'F you think I could know as much as you, I'd go through the measly old mill 'f it ground me to flinders."

"Ah, Si! It does not crush or mar. Its work is to polish and the real boy is not harmed. Only the rough, unattractive exterior is left in the mill, from which God's child comes forth with illumined face and, I trust, a heart ready to work for the good."

They had reached the iron gate at Greystone Home and Jack Lester was amazed when he heard Si's exclamation:

"Three cheers fer a egecashin! Sawin', grindin', acid, 'n sand! Hurra! Hurra!" cried the boy, swinging his broad-brimmed hat, while Blowser gave a spring and settled back on his haunches. Dr. Lester placed his hand on the boy's flaxen head and murmured: "God bless you, Si, for your noble decision."

CHAPTER XII.

A MISSION OF LOVE.

"RAP, tap, tap," announced the brass knocker on the open door of Mrs. Andrews' cottage.

It was not a hurried business rap, with the butcher or grocer impatiently waiting, but a gentle rap such as Jack Lester would give when he knew an invalid was within.

"Rap, tap," again repeated the knocker. As no one responded, Jack Lester ventured into the square hall.

It was a pretty picture on which he gazed as he stood in the doorway leading to the plain sitting room where opposite, near a window, Bessie Andrews nestled in a large arm chair among bright cushions, which formed a suitable background for the beautiful, pale face framed in a wealth of brown hair, which lay in rings above the broad white forehead. Her closed eyes showed to advantage the long, dark lashes which lay on her cheeks.

If Jack had not been assured by the color of the lips and the gentle vibrating of the chest beneath the pink wrapper, he would have been alarmed at the still white face of the sleeping child, with her thin hands folded over the grey kitten as it lazily opened and closed its eyes, too sleepy to purr a welcome.

A long sigh, a restless movement of the white hands, which hugged the kitten closer, the fringed lids lifted and her brown eyes looked with wonder up to the gentleman who approached her.

"I am sure you will not be alarmed at my presence when I tell you that I am Dr. Lester."

Her eyes lighted and the color rose to her pale face as she greeted him.

"Thank you for coming so soon. We did not expect you until afternoon, for we know you are very busy. Phil is in the garden and mamma cannot be far away."

Dr. Lester took her thin hands in his own. He was impressed with her musical voice and touched when he observed the patient light in her dark eyes and the lines of suffering in her white face.

"Bessie," he said, dropping into a chair by her side, "did you send for me because you want to learn how to get well?"

Bessie looked up to the kind brown eyes which were beaming upon her. "I don't know as I can learn how to get well; but I hope I'm not too bad and wicked to get a little better, so that I can walk and—and—if any one can help me I am sure you can. Mamma and I have always thought that God caused me to be sick and helpless, to make me good. I might have been a very bad, naughty girl, you know, for I never used to think about God, only when I said my prayers, and sometimes I would be too sleepy to think about Him then.

"I used to like pretty dresses and ribbons," she went on, "and I have cried many times because I could not have a pretty pink or blue dress for school, instead of a brown or grey calico. The Cranston girls and Susie Stewart dressed so lovely that it made me unhappy, and mamma said I was very naughty and sinful, but I am trying to be good," she sighed.

From a blue pitcher which stood on the old-fashioned piano Jack took out a rich crimson carnation and held it before her.

"Isn't it beautiful!" she exclaimed. "There are twelve

of them. The Greystone Home girls sent them with a name attached to each. This crimson one is from Nan Mason; Phil says she is a real jolly and happy girl. And this scarlet is from Checkerberry, the youngest in the home; and Miss Louise says she is a very good child and tries to help the others to be good. That pure white is from Mamie Hartwell; she is lovely too and gets up little societies to improve their temper and help them to love each other and the old housekeeper who does not like them. This lovely pink is from Flossy Cameron; Phil says she looks like a doll, she is so dainty. I wonder if she longs for lovely clothes as I do."

Jack lifted the pitcher to enjoy their spicy fragrance.

"Bessie," he said, "who painted and gave life to these lovely flowers?"

"Why God, of course," returned Bessie, surprised at his question.

"Then God must love beautiful things; and could He love His children less for desiring bright ribbons and pretty dresses? He gave the animals fine coats and some of them are exquisitely beautiful; and where do you find anything half so rich and rare as the plumage among the birds? Everything in nature which God's hand touches speaks of the beautiful; therefore, it is no sin to love the bright colors in one's clothing, so long as we love and trust the Father who gives all good gifts to His children. And all that He asks in return is love to Him and all mankind."

"You don't mean bad wicked men, drunkards, thieves, and all such?" she quickly responded.

"I mean everybody, Bessie," returned Jack seriously. "When you can realize that you love the whole world and feel a tender compassion for the poor outcasts be-

cause they are not their true real selves, and when with this you have a consciousness that God is your life and who is always near you, closer than your breath, an inexhaustible fountain of love, then you will get well."

"Oh, sir, I thought you would help me as you did Ralph. I never can do those things; besides, I'm not sure about God. He may have done this for my good," she said brokenly.

"A loving Father could never do it, Bessie," he answered tenderly.

They were interrupted, for Mrs. Andrews entered the room. Bessie hastened to introduce Jack to her mother.

"I took advantage of Bessie's nap to do an errand," she explained. "I had hoped to be here when you arrived," she went on; "however, I am sure my daughter has given you a full account of the serious accident which has caused her helpless condition."

"Bessie has told me nothing of the nature of her claim or its cause. It is quite unnecessary," said Jack earnestly. "My object in responding to her request to call is to teach her how to get well——"

"And I can never do it," exclaimed Bessie in a sobbing voice.

"She is quite discouraged, poor child," said Mrs. Andrews compassionately. "After having learned of Ralph Hunter's speedy recovery, I have very reluctantly consented to send for you, hoping to learn what means you use for your healing power."

There was a moment's pause before he replied:

"I use no power of my own; of myself I can do nothing. If you believe the Bible, then you must admit the Christ healing; and if you admit this, then you cannot ignore His words: 'Go preach the gospel, heal the sick.'

I can assure you, dear madam, that there are many thousands of incurable cases restored to health through this science."

"But this is not the day of miracles," Mrs. Andrews returned, while a faint color touched her cheek, "Christ was talking to His disciples when He sent them out to preach and heal."

"All who follow Jesus Christ's example," said the doctor, "those who earnestly strive to live a Christ life, are His disciples to-day. And those who have a perfect realization that God is the only power can in the name of Jesus Christ heal the sick."

Mrs. Andrews looked into the frank, kind face, illumined with the spirit and light of love, and decided that this man was no fake.

"Then do you think," said Mrs. Andrews hesitatingly, "that you can through your effort heal my daughter if you——"

"Ah, no, madam!" interrupted the doctor, "of myself I cannot help her. God is the only power. One must not only have faith, but knowledge; one must know. Bessie, don't you know how the fish dive and swim in the water? They are fearless because they know that water is their life. You once realized the fact that you could walk across this floor; you were not afraid that the floor would break, for you knew that it would not. Once you could walk up steep embankments and climb hills; you could run and jump without fear, because you knew that you were strong.

"Since the accident and long shut-in life you have been held with the error fear, until you believe that you cannot walk. However, I believe and know that Christ is your strength to-day, and that you can walk as fearlessly

as the fish can swim if you have a consciousness that God is your life and strength——"

"Oh, Doctor!" Bessie sobbed, "If you will only help me as you did Ralph, I am sure I will walk; but not without that something that you do. Phil thought it was prayer. Won't you please ask God to help me?" she pleaded.

Dr. Lester did not answer; he bowed his head in his hands. At that moment Phil Andrews stepped into the room and his face paled as he gazed on the silent group.

Mrs. Andrews had silently reached Bessie's chair and was kneeling, while her bowed head rested on the cushioned arm.

Phil softly approached his sister's chair and, folding his arms on the back of it above her head, he hid his face in his arms and suppressed a rising sob. His heart was beating with excitement. He questioned himself what he could do. He was sure that Dr. Lester was praying. With throbbing heart he listened to the voice within: "Whatsoever ye ask in my name, believing, that shall ye receive." As the minutes went on, Phil asked for the blessing.

Bessie also, with closed eyes and hands reverently clasped, asked the Father to show her the meaning of implicit trust.

"Bessie, I know that you can walk." Dr. Lester's words startled her, and for a moment she could not speak.

"Now! Do you mean now!" exclaimed Mrs. Andrews. "She has not stepped her feet on the floor in eight months. Do you think it possible for her to walk under such circumstances?"

"It must be possible when the Spirit speaks," he answered, and lifted Bessie from the chair and stood her before them.

"Bessie, you can do all things in Christ, who is your strength. Walk to me," he said, extending his arms toward her.

"She will fall! Dr. Lester, she never can do it," cried Mrs. Andrews, wringing her hands in distress.

For a moment Bessie stood motionless, then, looking up to the strong, kind face, she took courage and walked with tottering steps to him.

"Bravo, Bessie, bravo! You have learned that God is your strength," he exclaimed, as he lifted her in his arms.

"Oh, I am so happy!" cried Bessie. Folding her arms about his neck, she laughed and cried with joy with her face hidden on his shoulder.

After a few minutes silence he said: "Bessie, you now know that you can walk. My advice is that you walk every day until you have implicit trust in God, when you will be fearless to go about as usual. I trust that you will answer my letters; and remember, Bessie, that there is no limit to Mind, also that there is power in thought; therefore, through Divine Mind my thought for your health will reach you and soon you will be strong and healthy."

"I will try very hard to be good and love everybody, and I thank you very much, Dr. Lester, for coming to see me," Bessie returned sweetly.

"I cannot express my thanks to you," said Mrs. Andrews as she took his hand at parting. "Words are inadequate when my heart is so filled with gratitude. My means are limited, but I give you cheerfully that which I have at present and will cancel all in due time." Taking it from her purse, she handed him a bill.

"My dear madam, do not mention indebtedness, I beg of

you." Taking the money from her hand, he laid it on the table.

"I have been in Rocktown a fortnight, and it has been my joy to be able to prove by these demonstrations that God is the only power and that He alone is our life. Therefore I am deeply grateful to the Father for the spiritual realization I have experienced in your home this morning."

Mrs. Andrews murmured her adieu in a broken voice, while Phil Andrews followed him to the gate.

"Doctor Lester!" he said brokenly, "What can I do for you? Mother and I are so grateful, and Bessie is overjoyed. Ask me anything that it is possible for a boy to do and I will not refuse."

Dr. Lester looked down to the flushed face and the moist eyes of the boy and tenderly responded to his pleading question.

"I have learned of your patient attention to Ralph and your loyal friendship also. I only ask that you will take up the study of this science. Let it be your highest aim in life to be led by the Spirit of Truth and Love. Take it with you in your home, your school, or work. Be true to yourself and honest in your desire to do right; not simply to gain praise from others, but through your sincere wish to be good. Then it will bring you sweet peace and harmony, which constitute true happiness."

"Why, Doctor, you have given all this advice for my

"Do as I advise you, Phil, and it will bring me joy you can never know," were Jack Lester's parting words as he stepped into the carriage.

CHAPTER XIII.

DR. LESTER'S DEPARTURE.

THE midsummer days had begun, when Dr. Jack Lester announced his intended departure. He was assured that his daily visits to Ralph Hunter and Bessie Andrews were no longer needed, and other fields of usefulness were calling him.

It was late in the afternoon when he reached Judge Hunter's house, where he fonud Ralph, Phil and Si on the piazza, interested in a book which Phil was reading aloud.

"I have called to say good-bye. I fully intended being here an hour earlier," the doctor observed, taking the arm chair near Ralph, who was swinging in the hammock.

"We are sorry to have you leave us, Doctor. We were all hoping that you would remain another week," was what Phil was saying, when he was interrupted by an exclamation from Ralph.

"Doctor!" Ralph hesitated; the color flushed his pale face.

"Go on, my boy; what do you want to say?" was the encouraging response from the doctor.

"Do you thing that cigarettes were the cause of my illness?"

The doctor did not reply at once. The boys eagerly watched his serious face while they waited.

"Ralph, your friends all think that you smoked them

to excess; therefore, it would be natural for them to believe that your illness was caused by the excessive use of them——"

"Doctor, what is your opinion—do you think cigarettes injurious to the smoker?" It was Phil who abruptly asked the question.

The doctor was impressed with his eagerness and the faint tremor in his voice. "I have no authority or assurance that they were ever good for the smoker, and since they do not belong to the good they must be classed with evil if they produce evil results. However, I am sure Ralph will never smoke them again."

"It will be all right until I return to my school," Ralph soberly remarked.

"What has your school to do with it?"

"Why, Doctor, most of the boys smoke cigarettes, and when they find that I have given them up they will sneer and laugh at me and call me a kid or Miss Nancy or taunt me in other ways," was all the excuse Ralph could give.

"Very well, then is the time when you can demonstrate a decision of character. You can help those boys by giving your reason for not smoking. Then will be the time to show your belief in this Truth, when you can bravely tell them that you refuse to smoke cigarettes from principle.

"Although I do not think the desire to smoke will return, I can assure you that you will be helped by the thought that error causes unhappiness. You will earnestly strive for the good which will bring health, happiness, and restful peace.

"Ralph, your restoration has been a wonderful lesson to me, for it has strengthened my faith in the meaning

of implicit trust in the One Power, the Omnipresent God."

For a moment they were silent, when Ralph suddenly exclaimed: "Doctor! Never as long as I live will I smoke another cigarette. I could not after this."

"I believe you, Ralph. You are a brave boy. God will bless you. I leave you in His protecting care."

Turning to Phil, the doctor took his hand and said: "While you have been honest and loyal to your friend, I believe it is far better never to promise to conceal an error which one knows is ruining another.

"You have learned the meaning of implicit trust in God, Divine Mind as our life and health, through your sister's healing. I hope you, with Ralph and Si, will study this science and learn how the Master rebuked sin and healed the sick."

"We can but try," said Phil seriously, "and yet——"

They were interrupted by Judge Hunter and Richard Bossford, who assured the doctor that he had no time to spare after paying his adieus to the ladies at Greystone Home.

After watching the carriage out of sight which conveyed Dr. Lester to the depot, Si Underwood slowly walked toward Greystone Home in sober thought. He was sorry to part with this new friend whom he loved too deeply to refuse any request.

"'F it had been somethin' else," he murmured, "I'd work my head off fer him; I couldn't help it. But I do'no about books. I hate ter, but I gotter."

He had reached the gate. He was troubled because of his promise to the doctor; he loved the freedom of outdoor life, and the thought of the close confinement in a

schoolroom, obliged to do that in which he had no heart or interest, caused a sorrow to this happy-go-lucky boy.

He opened the iron gate and silently fastened the latch. As he turned, the light of the full moon suddenly revealed the long line of stone wall, on which he was surprised to see Nan Mason, perched near the gate waiting to catch the effect of the peculiar clouds which floated in a broken mass about the great shining satellite. Her busy fingers hurried the crayon over the canvas, for she wanted this study for her moonlight scene which she was painting.

"Oh, Si!" she called, "Do be good and bring me a lantern. I'm anxious to get these clouds in the right place."

"Why it's as light as day now," he replied. Giving a spring, he reached the top of the wall and looked over her shoulder.

"It is not the right kind of light. I can't see the canvas, where to work in the shadows. Hurry, Si, or I will lose it."

Ten minutes had passed when the light from the swinging lantern announces Si's approach.

"That's a corker!" he exclaimed, holding the lantern near the canvas while she worked.

"Do you think so?" she murmured absently, while she shaded the lines of light.

"You'll bet! Only you orter make them stars, 'n put some trees below. It's all moon 'n sky now."

"It is all that I need, for this will be copied in my painting I began last week for a moonlight scene, and Miss Louise told me to come out this evening and sketch from the real moon. Oh there goes my pretty clouds!" she exclaimed in a disappointed tone.

"Ha! Them is beauts. Can't you make 'em 'n put

'em back of the moon?" Si suggested, while they watched the vapory masses as they floated in a broken circle, followed by a glimmering silvery sheet, which suddenly burst into light and illumined their faces, also touched Nan's brown hair in dancing shadows.

"I must not work any more until Miss Louise sees it." Gathering her materials into the box, she snapped the spring lock and turned to leave the wall.

"Nan, don't go; I want ter tell you somethin'." Si's tones were unusually serious. Nan gave him a look of surprise, while she waited to learn his meaning.

"You know I've tol' you 'n the other girls that I wouldn't be egecated; but I've changed my mind, 'n I'm goin' through the mill. I'm goin' to git polished, sand, acid, grindin', 'n all, 'n that's dead smooth."

"Si, what do you mean?" laughed Nan, while she twisted herself on the wall and hung her feet over the edge.

Si explained his meaning in a few words by telling her of his talk and promise to the doctor. "I hate ter, but I gotter, because I've promised," he sighed.

"I don't like to study," remarked Nan, "I would prefer to sit and paint, but I suppose I must get my lessons and not grow up to be an ignoramus——"

"It's them bustin' big words what sticks in my jaw. Now what does ig—ig—noramus mean. What in the loreness is it, anyway?"

"Oh! That mean an ignorant person, one who don't know anything," she laughed.

"That's me. I'll be whizzed 'f I hain't learned that," he confessed.

"Well, what is it? I'm sure you've forgotten the word already," she merrily returned.

"No I hain't. It's ig—ig—noramus, 'n it means a durned fool."

Nan's response was a burst of laughter, which quite offended Si, who remained sullenly silent.

"Si, you are so peculiar I can't help laughing."

"Why can't you talk so a feller can know yer meanin'. I talk Ameriky; I ain't a dago," he muttered.

"It's no compliment to your country, Si,—the language which you use. You certainly need to go to school. Miss Deborah says you are full of slang. Do you comprehend, or know, what that means?" inquired Nan good-naturedly.

"No I don't," muttered Si.

"Miss Deborah told us that it was coarse, rude, and unrefined to use slang, when you say 'I'll be jiggered' and 'durned' and all such words. Ralph and Phil do not use them, and you will not if you live with Miss Deborah," she kindly remarked.

Si was silent, for he did not understand her.

"When I came here three years ago I did not know my letters, and now I am studying arithmetic, geography, and the rudiments in grammar; and Miss Louise is giving me painting lessons, because she thinks I have a taste for it——"

"I couldn't paint a picture or moons 'f I was ground to flinders," he exclaimed.

"But you can study and try to improve. You must not get discouraged and run away, Si; you'll be sorry if you do——"

"You think I'm a yap," he laughed. "You'll bet I don't run away from all this," he added.

"I heard Miss Deborah say that she thought you would get tired of this kind of a life unless you went to school,

and that she was uncertain about how you would accept the school life. Miss Louise said that you have such a good memory, it will help you to be interested."

"Ha! They, or you, needn't fool yourselves about my skippin'. I knows a good thing when I gits it, you'll bet," laughed Si.

"I thought perhaps you'd be foolish enough to hate school and leave us," she explained.

"Nan, would you care 'f I should skip?" Si earnestly inquired, as he watched the shadows dance over her white apron.

"Of course I would care! And all of the girls would be disappointed if you should leave us now, for it seems nice to have a boy around—something like a brother, you know. Don't you think you would like to be our adopted brother? Imagine how rich you would be with twelve sisters——"

"And a a'nt," laughed Si.

"Oh, she is your real truly true aunt, but we are make-believe sisters, you know. I have often heard Miss Deborah say that she thought it was good for boys to have sisters. She thinks they are apt to be more refined and mannerly," returned Nan in a confiding tone.

Before Si could reply they heard the bell calling for them to go in.

CHAPTER XIV.

ATTIC DAY.

THE following morning when Nan awoke she heard the rain beating against the dormitory windows.

"It is raining, girls!" she exclaimed, springing from her bed, "Wake up, every one of you; it is Attic Day."

"We must hurry and do our work," Flossy remarked, while she brushed out her fluffy curls. "I'm glad it's only bed-making and dusting day; how accommodating the weather is to give us Attic Day on Thursday, when we have so little work to do."

"I'm going to fix up that old wheel and try to spin," laughed Nan; "I wonder if Prissy would box my ears if I asked her to show me——"

"What will you spin?" Nettie Walton inquired, "One must have lamb's wool. Don't you remember the story of the woman who made her husband a suit of clothes when he had to go to the war?"

"Well, what has that to do with my learning to spin?"

"Why, this woman had to shear the sheep and make the wool into yarn, and then she had a machine to weave it into cloth," returned Nan, "and she did all this in one day and one night. Besides, she made the cloth into a suit of clothes."

"Judge Hunter has some sheeps," said Rachel from the depths of her dress skirt, which she was endeavoring to get over her head.

"Goodness! I would as soon think of asking him for

gold. They are very choice; they were imported from—'m—'m—Europe, Asia, or Africa, or some foreign place," observed Flossy.

"I think I saw some woolly-looking material in the box of the spinning-wheel. It must be something to use about the work," said Nan.

No one responded, for they heard the breakfast bell, the tone of which they all recognized, for they were sure Prissy's nervous hand was shaking it, which evidently echoed her impatience.

If there was anything which Prissy Underwood held dear at Greystone Home it was the airy garret with its two large windows at each end of the spacious room. She always enjoyed the semi-yearly clearing-up times, looking over her old mistress' wardrobe, which had been laid away among camphor bags in the large chest near the spinning wheel in the north corner. There were also many odd pieces of furniture which brought memories of her youthful days, for each had its history, and she carefully dusted the stiff antique forms and set them back in their places near the trunks under the rafters.

This particular summer Prissy was always out of humor on rainy days; for Miss Deborah had given her consent that, every rainy day during the long vacation, the attic was to be the children's play-room.

When the rain awakened Prissy on this particular morning she was in an agitated state of mind, for the day before she had been up to inspect this chest of clothing and had discovered that, regardless of her watchful care, the moth had found some of the ancient wardrobe. Hoping to 'nip the worm in the bud,' she sprinkled with camphor and laid out various articles on chairs and

boxes; she also hung some of them on nails by the open windows.

Prissy thought of this, and long before she could finish her accustomed duties the children were reveling over this wonderful exhibit.

"Girls," exclaimed Mamie Hartwell after the first outbreak of surprise, "we must not touch them; I know that we must not, for I am sure that they belong to Prissy, and you know we are to do everything we can to please her and be watchful about offending her."

"I'm sure they're not Prissy's!" emphasized Nan, "Look at this dress. Prissy is as tall as a pine tree; do you think that she could wear this? It isn't very much too large for me," she added, as she held up a chintz dress to her slender form.

"We can settle the matter very easily," returned Mamie. Stepping to the stairway, she called to Miss Deborah, whom she heard in the hall below on her way to her room.

"Just look, Miss Deborah. Did you really intend them for us? We were not sure," was the chorus of voices which surprised Miss Deborah as she entered the large attic.

"Nan is sure you left them here for our charades," said Mamie, as Miss Deborah examined the different articles.

"No, I did not leave them here for you. I think Prissy left them here to air. These once belonged to an aunt of mine who lived in this house."

Lifting the lid of the chest, the children watched her as she took out ancient shawls, capes, different fashioned wraps and gowns. Next came a bundle of parasols, time

worn and faded. There were antiquated bonnets, boxes of ribbons, broad laces, muslin collars and cuffs.

Miss Deborah sighed as she lifted a large feather fan which was slightly moth-eaten. The memory picture was not pleasant—her aunt's stiff parlor, the mantel on which the tall candlesticks were placed with precision at each end, with this fan in the center and a glass bird of paradise near, which was an alluring object of interest to her; for which she received tingling, burning ears and was shut up in disgrace. And although a child, not quite seven years old, she could not forget the joy with which she climbed the arm of the sofa to stroke the pretty bird, and the terror which followed when she saw her aunt's stern face.

She looked on the bright, merry faces gathered about her, and thought of her lonely childhood and unknown mother love. "These dear children shall be happy. This home, so long a dismal abode, shall be consecrated to the Master who said, 'Suffer the little ones to come unto me'," she mentally resolved.

After selecting some of the articles from the wardrobe for the children, she left them to enjoy Patty Keekant's finery.

Si had been kept busy all the forenoon turning the grindstone for Jacob, who usually took a rainy day to sharpen the needed tools used about the place. Edna Curtice heard their voices in the shed near the tool house and hastened to tell Si that he was expected to go to the attic with hammer and nails and assist the girls in putting up curtains for their charades.

Immediately after dinner Si went up to the attic, where he made himself useful and surprised the girls

with his artistic skill in arranging the curtains and making important changes about their small stage.

When all was finished he consented to take the character of an old lady in the word "management," and they were amazed when he appeared to them as a little old lady. He was beyond recognition, clad in the ancient garments from the departed Patty Keekant's wardrobe. He amused them with his gestures, and the room echoed their shrieks and laughter over his comic speeches and improvised songs.

Prissy stopped her work to listen to the merry voices as the sound floated out from the windows to the back porch where she was arranging the luscious sweet apples in a large pan for baking. Her face wore a frown and she muttered as she worked.

The children had finished the last act when Jacob Rodder opened the door. He wanted the box of tools which Si had taken to the attic. With his hand on the box, Jacob was about to leave when Si appeared from behind the curtain.

"Jiminy whiz!" exclaimed Jacob, staring at the strange little old lady, "If you didn't give me a start. For a minute I thought old Miss Keekant's ghost was here. If you'd sung her song I'd dropped dead with fright, for you look exactly like her."

"Girls! Hide, every one of you!" exclaimed Nan, dropping behind a pile of chairs.

"What is it, Nan? What has happened!" cried several of the girls with frightened faces, as they hurriedly found hiding places behind trunks, chests and the old hair-cloth sofa.

Jacob and Si darted behind the curtain as the door slowly opened and Prissy entered. There was a sur-

prised expression on her stern face as she looked about the spacious room.

"My land! They have gone, 'n I'm glad of it. I might as well work in a hornet's nest as to have them igits around," she muttered.

From her pocket she took a key and proceeded to unlock a door which opened into a square room, on one side of which were shelves filled with old-fashioned bed quilts and homemade blankets. From their hiding places the children could see her bring forth a small earthen jug, also from the same place she procured a cup, and seating herself on an old footstool, she gave up to the pleasure of the moment.

"It's licker," whispered Si.

"Sh', sh'. It's hard cider," returned Jacob in a low whisper.

"Vinegar!" whispered Flossy Cameron to Nettie Hartwell, who was peeping through the cracks of a large dry goods box.

"Wal', I must go to work, or them tomboys will be back," murmured Prissy. Lifting the jug, she returned it to the cupboard and locked the door.

"H'm! I just feel ghostly, handling these things; 'n there ain't half of 'em here," she said, looking about for the missing articles. "My stars! It seems as if Patty was around; everything here looks just like her——"

Suddenly there came from behind the curtain a low quavering voice, with the familiar words which Prissy had known from her childhood. She covered her face with her hands in speechless terror as she listened to the voice, which she was sure was her mistress', risen from the dead:

"Sing me the songs that to me were so dear
Long, long ago, long ago.
Tell me the tales that I once loved to hear
Long, long ago, long ago."

This was all that Jacob could remember of the song he used to hear Patty Keekant sing, when he was a boy and occasionally did errands for her or assisted the hired man in the garden or lawn. He enjoyed Prissy's look of alarm, for he had not forgotten her recent stormy tongue lashing because of some slight neglect to do her bidding at the moment in which she required it; therefore, he was quite indifferent about rendering her good for evil, as the twelve were trying to do.

Prissy did not raise her head for several minutes after Jacob ceased singing. The rain beat violently against the windows and fell in a noisy pattering on the roof, and the girls, who were cramped in their hiding places, were getting restless, when suddenly they heard Prissy exclaim:

"I just orter be slapped for getting scared. It's just them tormented young ones. H'm! This rain 'n her clothes has given me the fidgets. Wal', I'd just like to know which of 'em it was that sung it. 'N I can't imagine how they learned it; I s'pose Miss Debry learned it to 'em."

There was a grim smile on her face when she turned again to the cedar chest and resumed her work.

Nan Mason vainly attempted to change her cramped position, between a pile of old chairs and a primitive desk which the girls called "Noah's Ark." Those chairs, piled loosely together, troubled Nan, for she feared the consequences if she attempted to rise.

The situation became serious when she realized that her limbs were numb and that she must make a desperate attempt to extricate herself from her uncomfortable hiding place. When she saw Prissy turn to the window for the garments she had hung on a nail near, Nan took the opportunity to give a spring, which sent the chairs falling in every direction, and the old spinning wheel—which was dangerously near—was set in motion and, with the help of Nan's mischievous hand, was whirling and buzzing, to the unspeakable amazement of Prissy and the suppressed laughter of the hidden spectators.

"My land! I do believe she's here," exclaimed Prissy. Staggering towards the chest, she dropped on a chair and moaned so pitifully that Si ran to her assistance.

"What's the matter? What can I do for you?" he said, bending over the frightened woman. He had forgotten his masquerade until she looked up and wildly gestured and found voice to exclaim:

"Go away, Miss Patty! I ain't strong enough to have a visit with you. Go—go—back to—to—where you came from," she pleaded, while rocking herself to and fro.

"Do you think I am a ghost?" laughed Si, looking down upon his peculiar costume.

"Oh! Miss Patty, don't talk that way. You know I was always afraid of spooks, 'n——"

"I ain't a spook; don't you be fooled. I'm——"

"No, no, I ain't fooled, Miss Patty. If you've come to tell me something say it quick or I'll die."

" 'N then you'll be a ghost too. You'd better not die; just make up your mind to live 'n be good to them girls what you call tomboys—that's what I want to say."

"I do try, Patty, but they are such torments. Miss Debry is squanderin' her money on 'em, 'n they don't

do nothin' but climb fences 'n trees 'n race around like a passel of wild horses.

From different parts of the attic Si could hear suppressed laughter.

"What is in that jug you were drinking from?" he asked in deep, stern tones.

"Nothin' but hard cider, for my rheumatiz. You used to take hard cider 'n saxafrax, but I read that whiskey was better."

"Is that barrel in the suller by the swing shelf hard cider?" he asked. Dropping his work bag, he hastened to recover it, as an excuse to conceal his merry face, which set far back in the ancient poke bonnet, for Prissy suddenly turned her head, surprised at this question.

"My land! Patty, do you follow me about all the time? I sh'd think angels'd be in better business 'n taggin' folks——"

"You're drunk, Prissy Underwood. Your face is as red as a beet. You've been drunk for years. 'F you don't stop drinkin' hard cider the devil will shake you every time you take a swaller. I know now why you are so mean——"

He did not finish, for Nan sent the spinning wheel flying and unable to suppress her merriment, she gave a prolonged shriek of laughter and with one spring over the spinning wheel she stood before the astonished Prissy.

"Who are you?" she exclaimed, her eyes on the laughing Nan, who held up the long calico gown with its conspicuous flounce of amazing fullness. The bobbing bonnet with its stiff bows and long feathers served to hide her saucy face.

The flush grew deeper on Prissy' face when she realized that strange, grotesque figures were rising from every

corner and from behind every box and piece of furniture. As they slowly approached her she gave a scream of fright and wildly ran from the room.

"I'm ha'nted," she cried, nearly falling in her haste down the crooked stairway. "I'm ha'nted. I'm the worst ha'nted woman as ever camfired dead folk's clothes," were the surprising words which caused Nora to drop her flatiron as Prissy came rushing into the kitchen with flushed face and dilated eyes.

"What's the matter of ye? What's the m'anin' of yer quare actions?" exclaimed Nora, curiously watching Prissy as she staggered about the kitchen crying and wringing her hands.

"It's mean in her to come back 'n scare me when I've remembered her better 'n her relation," she went on, her face wearing a deeper flush as she talked.

"Ach! Sur, ye've been takin' a drap too much. Go ter your room an' shlape it off," persuaded Norah. Taking her arm she gently urged her to rise. Prissy obstinately refused to leave the kitchen and stormily attacked Nora with her tongue, which seemed to have suddenly thickened her speech, causing Nora to go into the library to inform Miss Deborah of Prissy's condition.

When Miss Deborah entered the kitchen she was surprised to see the twelve girls appear from the attic doorway, and she could not conceal her merriment as the grotesque figures marched to the lawn in gowns, capes and bonnets which once belonged to the departed Patty Keekant. The rain was over, and parasols, silk and cotton, bobbed above their heads. They held up the long gowns as they airily promenaded through the broad damp walks, presenting a novel spectacle never before seen at the Greystone Home.

As the last one disappeared around the corner of the house, hurried footsteps were heard on the attic stairs; the door suddenly opened and Si bounded into the room.

Nora did not understand the meaning of Miss Deborah's exclamation or the pallor which overspread her face for a moment, followed by a rush of color and a hearty laugh when she recognized that the disguised figure was none other than the happy-go-lucky Si. The mystery of Prissy's terror and cries of alarm was explained when Si told her that she thought he was Miss Patty's ghost.

"I didn't mean to play ghost," he said when Miss Deborah questioned him. "I tol' her I wasn't Miss Patty 'n she wouldn't believe me; 'n then I wanted to know about that jug what she took out of the closet, for she drank a lot out of it; 'n you can see for yourself what it was"—turning towards Prissy with a nod— "She's drunk, 'n don'cher forget it. She owned up that it was hard cider 'n whiskey, 'n I made her tell me about the barrel in the suller," he added. "It's all the same; she tol' me so."

"It's a lie! It's a lie!" muttered Prissy thickly. "There was only a gallon of whiskey to a bar'l of cider, 'n you can't scare me," she went on.

Straightening herself in her chair, she tried to appear sober, until her eyes rested on Si; then her voice trembled with fear: "Go back! Go—go—back to—to your restin' place 'n let me alone."

With an effort she arose and staggered to her room.

CHAPTER XV.

OUT OF BONDAGE.

PRISSY was not in a peaceful state of mind when she entered the kitchen the following morning and observed that Si and Jacob were rolling the offending cider barrel up an inclined board from the outside cellar stairs. They were surprised at her silence, for they had expected a stormy reprimand for doing this which Miss Deborah had requested them to do before Prissy could have an opportunity to have an early drink.

Occasionally while at work Prissy cast furtive glances at Nora, hoping to read in her happy, ruddy face what she thought of her conduct on the previous day.

It had been Prissy's custom for many years to descend to the cellar the first thing in the morning and fortify herself with an early drink of cider. She missed this early dram and was conscious of a burning thirst, which water seemed to have no power to quench. She longed to be alone, although too miserable to go to her room, for she was sure Miss Deborah was waiting to find her there. If she could have fortified herself with a drink of her loved beverage she would not have dreaded to meet Miss Deborah or listen to the rebuke she was sure must come.

Rachel had been to the orchard for harvest apples and wanted Miss Deborah's permission to take them to Ralph, for Judge Hunter had none so early as those which grew in the Greystone orchard. Obeying Miss Deborah's command not to interrupt covnersation, she seated herself

on the lower step of the piazza to wait; for she heard the two ladies deeply interested in a subject where there seemed no pause for her to make her request. Partly hidden by the vines she munched a harvest apple and innocently listened to the conversation.

"Ah! that reminds me," she heard Miss Deborah say, "Nettie Walton told me that she saw Prissy drink vinegar from a tin cup the day she went to the cellar to ask Prissy's forgiveness; undoubtedly it was cider that she was drinking."

"It struck me," said Miss Louise, "as a very strange taste when you told me of Nettie's experience; but it did not occur to me that Prissy was intemperate."

"Jacob Rodder told me last evening that it was his opinion that Prissy had not been sober since I came to Greystone Home," returned Miss Deborah. "Three years of drunkenness, brought on by one's own persistent wilfulness; and I feel more like condemning myself for my stupid blindness to her fault."

"You must not sentence yourself, dear, for we thought her conduct was because of her natural obstinate and ungoverned temper. We believe Prissy an excellent housekeeper and cook, and you depended upon her along that line of work while your cares were for the children; therefore we were deceived," were Miss Louise's consoling words.

"I think I had come to the conclusion that Aunt Patty had stamped her personality on Prissy, having left an influence which can never be overcome, unless through the realization of the Master's love. But now that I know she has been living in a dream I do believe that through this truth we can easily help her," returned Miss Deborah earnestly.

Rachel, having learned that it was cider which Prissy drank from the barrel in the cellar instead of vinegar, had nearly forgotten her errand and was about to seek the girls and tell them the wonderful news that something had been wrong with Prissy for three years, when Collie, the shepherd dog, dashed from some unknown place, and, giving a spring of joy, leaped over to her and upset her basket of apples, sending them rolling over the lawn in every direction.

Having caught the basket in his mouth, he gave Rachel a fine race. Across the lawn, through the flower garden, over the pansy beds, he scampered on, to the kitchen door, just in time to meet Prissy, who was on her way to the orchard for pie apples. Collie was not fond of Prissy. He had learned by bitter experience that there was force in the toe of her heavy shoe, as well as in her stern voice. He dropped the basket at her feet and crept slyly away.

Having found the basket which Collie had dropped, Rachel returned to the lawn to pick up her apples, but Si had found them and taken them to the kitchen. When Miss Deborah learned the child's desire to take them to Ralph, she sent her in pursuit of Si to pick a basket of choice fruit from the tree.

Si could not be found. Therefore, disappointed in her efforts to secure his assistance, Rachel went on to the orchard.

"I'll knock 'em off my own self," she murmured, for she remembered seeing the girls knock them off with a long pole, which lay on the ground. The pole was heavy, and she turned away disappointed toward the rustic seat under the broad, spreading branches of a russet apple tree.

"Whyee! Prissy! I'm s'prised to see you out here,"

she exclaimed, climbing to the seat by the side of the stern woman. "Did you come out here to get cool?" she asked, vigorously fanning herself with her broad-brimmed sun-hat.

"Not exactly," Prissy said in an unusually low tone, "I came out here for pie-apples, but there's none on the ground, 'n I'll wait till Jacob comes to git some. He's gone to git Jim Rice to help him tear down the cider mill, 'n it's all a piece of nonsense." She muttered the last words to herself.

"Then you can't get any more cider, and you won't get 's 'greeable, and p'haps drunk. You'll get all good and won't be in the dark any more."

"What on earth do you mean?" Prissy exclaimed, nervously faaning herself with her sunbonnet.

"Why, don't you know that you have been down in a dark cellar drinking cider for three years?" Rachel innocently explained.

"What in creation has put such stuff inter your head?" ejaculated Prissy.

"My own Miss Deborah put it into my head," returned the child; swinging her feet from the rustic bench, she gazed up to Prissy's sober face.

"Did Miss Deborah say—I—I—what did Miss Deborah say?" inquired Prissy hesitatingly.

"Oh, I can't 'member what she said. It was something about your being in the dark an' drinking cider, an' the girls thought it was vinegar. But you ain't going to do so any more, are you, Prissy?" said the child earnestly; drawing closer to Prissy, she discovered that this stern woman was not in her usual mood.

"Wal', it depends on my rheumatiz. I drink hard cider

to keep it off so I can work. Mebby you'll have to drink it when you are old as I be," said Prissy bitterly.

"No, I will not!" emphasized the child, shaking her fluffy head, "Si said that cider made you cross an' 's 'greeable; b'sides God's child can't do wicked actions, an' I am God's child because I am trying to do right an' love everybody. I love you, Prissy," she went on, "an' all the girls are loving you more an' more, 'cause they want to help you to be good——"

Rachel did not finish her sentence, for she heard Si calling her.

"I'm going to take a basket of apples to Mrs. Andrews," Si explained, "'n Miss Debry tol' me to take you 'long, for all the girls hev gone up the brook fishin'."

Prissy gave a sigh of relief when Rachel left, for she wanted to be alone; while her thoughts were dwelling on Rachel's words, she seemed to have suddenly become conscious that she was not her old self.

"What a strange child," she murmured. "H'm! She said she was God's child. I sh'd like ter know where she got that idee. 'M, 'm, them girls helpin' me ter be good! I s'pose they think of—of—wal', I don't care what they think! I wa'n't outer my senses; it was Miss Patty's ghost. 'M, 'm, how it did scare me; an' I don't believe I'll ever git over it. I shall always feel as if she was taggin' me around."

Prissy's reveries was interrupted, for she observed Miss Deborah going through the lower part of the orchard. Prissy exclaimed when she watched her mistress open the large gate to the meadow beyond:

"My land! Where on earth is Miss Debry goin' in this hot sun, I sh'd like ter know. H'm! She's got that covered lunch basket on her arm. I'll bet she's goin' off

pickernicking with them girls. I s'pose I must stop callin' 'em nobodies, if they are tryin' to love me. Ha, ha! 'M, 'm—love me!" giving a low, derisive laugh, while she listened to her mistress call to the girls, who quickly responded in voices clear and sweet as the notes of a bugle.

"How strange I never thought of it before," Prissy told herself, "That brook has run through this orchard an' that medder ever since I kin remember, an' I never went a-fishin', an' I never da'st run er jump er climb the stun wall an' trees as them girls do. It was alers work, work. Miss Patty'd slapped me if I'd do what they do.

"My land! There comes Miss Debry aimin' straight fer me. She's seen me sittin' here, an' now she's goin' ter give me a piece of her mind. Wal', I alers have took care of my repertashun, an' I guess I can now."

"Ah! Prissy, I've been looking for you——"

" 'M, yes, I s'pose so," interrupted Prissy.

"I wanted you to put up a basket of food for the girls to take to the Vedder children."

"What's the matter of them?" snapped Prissy.

"They are in a most deplorable condition. I have just learned that Mrs. Vedder has broken her arm and can do no work, and the children have had no breakfast. Nora assisted me and I have sent Nan and Mamie with it——"

"That Jim Vedder is a drunken loafer, an' he'll be so's long 's folks'll feed his family. It's jest 'ncouragin' him ter continner on." Prissy abruptly ceased her remarks, for she remembered her own condition the day before and wondered if her mistress was thinking the same. She remained silent and gave her attention to the string of her sunbonnet, which she wound around her finger,

and waited with her lips firmly set for her mistress to speak.

Miss Deborah looked upon the stern face of her servant, while a beautiful expression of love and tenderness illumined her own. "If I can love this poor blinded one, how dear the assurance that Divine Love governs our plans for the good, and that through this love she will yet know the Truth and the Truth will set her free," were thoughts which caused the silence and prevented Miss Deborah from speaking.

"I suppose you've come out here to give me a piece of your mind," remarked Prissy sullenly. "You think I was —I was—well, I might 's well say it—you think I—I—was drunk yesterday. But I wasn't; I was scared of Miss Patty's ghost, an' it made me act like a fool. Miss Patty was sot on by them childern usin' her clothes, an' it made her mad, an' she had to rise an' scare me, as if I was to blame."

"Prissy, there are no ghosts save those we create for ourselves. This belief of my aunt's ghost, to which you have been listening, is not according to God's law. Your senses have been confused and you have been living in the darkness of illusion.

"Instead of lifting yourself up to a reasonable, self-controlled woman, you gave up to the bondage of slavery to a false belief in a beverage which shut you out from the light of God's love.

"The hard cider which you believed would cure your rheumatism served to deceive you and make you a coward. That which you believed to be the ghost of my aunt was Si dressed in her gown and bonnet."

Prissy was silent, her stern face bent over the cape of

her sunbonnet, the hem of which she slowly plaited between her fingers.

"Prissy, I love you and I want you to be happy. Will you let me help you? Would you not like to realize the joy and peace of the Kingdom of Heaven?"

"Wal', I don't know as I can. I don't take to religion, an' what's more, if the Lord wanted me to git to the Kingdom He'd made me right in the first place."

"He has made you right, dear; He has made you in His image and likeness. Do you see that lovely sunbeam between those trees?" Miss Deborah's voice was tender as she pointed to the ray of light which lay between the shadow of the trees.

"Wal, what of it!" was the impatient response.

"We reflect God just as that ray of light reflects the sun. We are a part of God's law and one with God. He is our life and He is everywhere present.

"It was through His love for His children that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to show us how to live and how to understand God's law and how to live in obedience to His law. Christ taught His students how to cure the lame, the sick, and the blind; He taught them that life is eternal and He demonstrated to them that there is no death."

Prissy gave a startled exclamation.

"Read your Bible, Prissy, and you will find it all there," said Miss Deborah, her face illumined as she looked into Prissy's unhappy face.

"And now, after many years, this truth is here once more; hundreds are being healed of all kinds of disease and sin. God's children are conscious of the Kingdom of Heaven which Christ explained as being with one. One

can have it if one obeys Christ's teaching. Love is the rock, faith and implicit trust the anchor.

"Do you not want the consciousness of this kingdom, when you can feel that blessed peace which passeth understanding?"

Miss Deborah grasped Prisy's hand and tenderly awaited her reply. After a long pause Miss Deborah said: "Prissy, are you happy?"

"No!" was the quick response, "I ain't, an' what's more nobody ain't in this world."

"Prissy, dear, you are mistaken. I am happy, and Miss Louise told me this morning that she was very happy, and there are a million of Christ's followers to-day who are happy in the consciousness of God's love. Only a few hundred miles from Rocktown, near the city of Boston, lives a dear lady who I sincerely believe has forgotten what it is to be unhappy. To all who know her she seems to constantly dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and she has realized for many years the joy of the Kingdom of Heaven. Although she has been persecuted with slander and merciless falsehood, with implicit trust and obedience in the God whom she loves, she rejoices and believes that the wisdom and understanding had been given her how to heal the sick and sinful. She had but a few followers at first, but now, Prissy, they are counted by hundreds of thousands.

"Mrs. Andrews and Mr. Bossford, also Judge Hunter and others have been awakened to this Truth through Ralph Hunter's and Bessie Andrews' restoration to health——"

"La! There wa'n't nothin' the matter of Bessie; she could hev walked if she'd been a mind to. An' Ralph

would hev got well, fer when they all thought him a dyin' it was the turning p'int of the fever."

"We will not discuss this now, for you will yet learn of thousands who were pronounced by our most skilful doctors to be past hope, who were healed and are living, through the wonderful realization of this Truth as taught by Mrs. Eddy."

At last Prissy was interested. She dropped her sunbonnet and calmly folded her hands in her lap.

"Do you believe all that, Miss Debry? You know, there's a lot of nonsense in the newspapers; I don't believe half I read."

"Of course I am sure," repeated Miss Deborah. "Louise has seen her and heard her speak. This dear lady has written a wonderful book. It is 'Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures,' and I have been told that hundreds of people have been cured by reading it——"

"I wonder if it would cure rheumatism," exclaimed Prissy. "If I thought it would I'd read it if I could get one——"

"You shall have one, Prissy!" exclaimed Miss Deborah joyously, "and I trust that you will begin at once to realize God's nearness. Bear in mind that He never leaves or forsakes His children; He is the life of your life, and you are always protected in His loving arms." As Miss Deborah arose to leave she pressed a kiss on Prissy's surprised cheek.

"Wal', I do believe she loves me, 'n I'll take back everything I've said 'n done," Prissy murmured, as she watched Miss Deborah cross the orchard until she disappeared around the corner of the large house.

Something new had come to Prissy. She could not ac-

count for the strange restfulness which had taken possession of her. The August sun seemed to invigorate her as she resolutely took up the long pole to knock off the apples, which fell in a shower about her. Her steps were free and firm as she hastened over the orchard grass with no thought of stiff, aching joints.

"I guess I'm too late for pies to-day," she said to Nora, who was taking a look at the roast in the oven.

"Sure, I've made a foine tapiocy puddin' with baked apples. I've had plinty of help, fer Si shelled the beans an' pared the petaties. I thought ye'd be afther ristin' somewhere an' I wouldn't call ye," returned Nora cheerily.

"Nora, you're a good girl, 'n I never realized it till now," returned Prissy as she hung her sunbonnet on a hook.

"May the howly saints bless me if I ever see the bate of her," muttered Nora. "Sure, sure, the sthars will be afther fallin'," she added, for Nora had reason to be surprised at the wonderful change in Prissy.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MISSION OF THE WILLOW WHISTLE.

WHEN Rachel returned from her drive with Si she hastened to find the girls, to tell them the surprising news that a circus was coming to Rocktown. She gave them a glowing description of the wonderful pictures on the bulletin boards, fences, and one or two barns, of horses and chariots, strange-looking men hanging by their heels to ropes, and a small wagon drawn by dogs with dogs sitting inside dressed as ladies, while a dog dressed as a coachman was driving.

The girls were interested and questioned Si, who was not inclined to talk on the subject. He silenced them by saying that it was no place for girls, for it was not a first-class circus.

Si was assured by the pictures that it was a part of the same old circus in which he had worked, although a new name had been pasted over that of the former proprietors. Knowing the tricks of circus management, he could not be mistaken.

For days he went about his work in a dazed manner quite unlike himself. He kept away from Ralph and Phil, fearing they would question him in regard to his opinion. His mind was absorbed in the one thought that perhaps Elmer Slippy would be there and command him to return to the old life.

Si's experience assured him that the circus which came to small villages travelled in wagons across the country and would arrive in Rocktown at midnight.

To his surprise his Aunt Prissy had changed in her manner toward him; she had heard of the circus and was sorely afraid that he would be tempted to run away with the desire to be a circus performer as in his old life. Instead of sternly demanding that he keep away from the place, she kindly told him that she would give him a dollar if he would remain at home.

Si refused the offer, for he had planned to rise early and reconnoiter about the grounds. And early on the morning of the arrival of the circus he stealthily left the house for the circus grounds.

The company was too absorbed in their work of putting up tents and other preparations to notice Si, who tossed crackers to the dogs and apples to the monkey, which was chained to a post and with squeals of delight begged for more. This drew the attention of the men, who quickly turned to learn the meaning of the noise.

"Hello, Bob Tumble! Where did you drop from with all them fine feathers? What gold mine have you been workin'?"

This salutation caused the others to stare at the boy, whom they soon recognized as the youthful giant whom Elmer Slippy used to abuse. It was evident that Si had been a favorite, for they gathered around him with warm expressions of interest, although given in a rough manner.

They were a strange looking company. Their trousers were stuffed in high leather boots, their coarse shirts were soiled and worn, and their slouched hats shaded their tawny bronzed faces, which bore signs of the too frequent use of stimulants. Further on, under a tent, the women were sleeping on beds of straw. The scene was not new to Si, and his heart beat with joy at the thought that his circus life was ended.

Although they pressed him to give an account of himself, he kept the secret of his new found home, assuring them that he was at work on a farm and being careful not to mention the fact that Blowser was the origin of his good luck.

"Where is the rest of the company?" Si inquired of Jake Legget, the dog trainer.

"Scattered," returned Jake, "The wild animals 'n leaders have gone to Californy; the other half of this company is travellin' on the other side of this mountain; we are booked to meet 'em to-morrow 'n have a big show in Ashtonville. Cutler is the manager here, 'n he's mean enough to starve his mother, if he had one," he said bitterly.

"Don't he pay well?" inquired Si.

"Oh, yes, he pays all right; but he gits two days work in one, 'n if he ever gits into a scrape he's sure to lay the blame onto someone else. Now, when little Fay was killed——"

"Fay! Fay killed!" exclaimed Si, the color leaving his face as he gazed with a frightened look at Jake.

"Yes, she was riding Flyin' Dan, the ring horse, 'n one day Cutler snapped his whip just as they was enterin' the ring, 'n Dan didn't like it. He give a leap 'n threw Fay. She struck on her head, 'n that was the end; she never breathed again. Cutler laid it to Jim Spunks, the clown, 'n they had a pitch battle over it. I thought there would be murder sure," was Jake's startling information.

"The mean old slump, to put her on to that scary horse. Why didn't she ride Blowser?" Si hazarded.

"Oh, he went last winter for nothin' but his hide. The animals all had the distemper, 'n some died. Blowser got

sick, 'n Slippy had a chance to sell him. I heard that he got cured 'n was sold to a rich feller for a pet."

"Blowser 'n Fay was the best part of the show, 'n Fay was a dandy rider, 'n Blowser had sense. There never was a horse like him," Si emphasized.

"I got a letter from Slippy last week. He tol' me he'd give me a thousand dollars if I'd find another kid Fay's age what he could train. Mebby you can help me; do you know of any around here——"

"You bet'cher life I don't," growled Si, "I always knowed you was a sneak, but I didn't know you was mean enough to steal kids." He turned as if he had been stung by a viper.

"I didn't mean to steal 'em——"

"Shut up! You're lyin', Jake Legget. You'd steal a kid 'f you thought you'd never git found out. You jest try it, 'n 'f it takes my last breath I'll—I'll pound you to a jelly fish. I'll—I'll hunt you to the end of the earth," were Si's parting words.

The afternoon of the circus, when the dinner dishes were washed, the kitchen put in order, and Prissy had gone to her room with her basket of mending, Nora with basket in hand started for the mountain path to gather blackberries.

At that moment the twelve girls joined her, with the happy assurance that Miss Deborah had given them permission to accompany her. It was a point of honor with these girls not to go without an older person beyond the fence which separated the wood path from the broad mountain side. However, this was their opportunity; the alluring forest of tall pines and hemlocks and the wealth of mosses, ferns, and wild flowers beyond were a rare treat, for Nora found the berries were thick and large

beyond the fence. She felt her responsibility and occasionally stopped her work to look about to see if her party was near.

"Ye must all kape close forninst the fince, or ye'll git lost," she repeated to them many times if she saw them wandering up the steep.

"A splendid grapevine swing, girls! Come and have a ride; there is room for us all," Sadie Roberts cried. She climbed the fence, with the help of an overhanging hemlock bough, and swung herself into a natural hammock of matted grapevine, a net both strong and curious.

The girls piled into the spacious cradle and rocked back and forth with screams and squeals of delight, alluring Nora from her work to examine the natural curiosity.

"Girls! Let us have it for a big boat," suggested Nan; "we are shipwrecked and are tossing on the ocean, trying to find land," she went on. "Nora, please hand me some of those long sticks for oars. Here we go!" she cried, plying her oars in the imaginary ocean.

Peals of laughter rang out from the rustling pines and hemlocks which supported the natural boat. They were too deeply interested in their new play to heed the muttering of distant thunder, and not until a bright flash of lightning dazzled their eyes did they realize that a heavy thunderstorm was approaching.

For a moment they were dazed; but Nora's alarmed voice and excited cries, while hurrying to their assistance, assured them of the necessity of haste. They struggled to the ground and speedily ran down the mountain path toward Greystone Home. The constant flashes and heavy thunder were appalling, and they reached the house in time to escape a severe drenching.

There was a general closing of windows and doors. A

wind and rain storm was something to be dreaded, and the children gathered in the sitting room, the younger ones too frightened to speak, clustered around Miss Deborah's chair, and listened to her soothing and assuring words that God was everywhere present and that there was nothing to fear.

The older girls with Miss Louise were in the bay window watching the storm, fascinated with the constant flashes of light which illumined the sheets of water that the wind swept across the lawn.

Although the clock was on the stroke of four, the room suddenly became dark, save the frequent flashes, when Miss Deborah strained her eyes to discern if possible which one of the faces so near her own was the youngest of her flock.

"Rachel, dear, where are you?" she called. Surprised that there was no response, she repeated the call.

"She may be in the kitchen with Nora, or possibly with Prissy," said Miss Deborah. The same thought occurred to Miss Louise, who volunteered to go in pursuit of her. Some time passed before she returned with the surprising assurance that Rachel was not found, although Si and Jacob had searched everywhere.

Hoping that she had fallen asleep somewhere, they searched the house and vainly called her name. In the meantime the storm passed and the sun came out for a while before setting behind the western hills.

Judge Hunter and Ralph were on the piazza lamenting the loss of a valuable tree which lay prone on the ground, the effect of the fierce storm. They were surprised to see Jacob Rodder wildly running toward the house, and knew at once that something unusual had happened. However, they were not prepared to learn the startling words ut-

tered brokenly when Jacob tried to tell them that Rachel was lost in the mountains.

Mr. Bossford hastened from the library when he heard Jacob's voice and listened to Judge Hunter's order.

"Go to the village and ring the church bell! Come back and listen to my order," cried the judge when he saw Jacob turn to leave. "Go to John Porter and tell him to arouse the village and get as many men as he can raise. Tell him there must be torches for every man!" he shouted, for Jacob was out of the lawn and wildly running down the country road.

Hastening to the stable, Judge Hunter ordered Pat to saddle his horse "Danchief."

During this time Richard Bossford had not been idle. He brought forth Judge Hunter's waterproof hunting suit, that no time would be lost. He ordered lights in the observatory, and, hurrying himself into a heavy hunting suit with strong, high boots, armed with torch and staff, he proceeded to Greystone Home, where he found the wildest excitement.

Nora was coming from the direction of the mountain path, a picture of frenzied grief and despair. Her calico dress was limp and wet from the rain soaked trees and grass; her dark hair had fallen upon her shoulders; and in a sobbing voice she told Mr. Bossford that she had been to the grape-vine where she had assisted the children as they hurriedly attempted to leave the network hammock. She remembered seeing Rachel turn to pick up her hat, and, supposing of course, that they were all together she never once thought of danger, for every child was familiar with that part of the wood.

"I'm sure, sir, she were wid us whin we r'ached the fince. There is a small break ferder up, an' a foine place

fer the loikes of sich little ones to crawl through; an' while we were l'aping the fince she must have gone too far an' lost herself. Ohone! Ohone! Me darlin' little lamb. Holy Mither protect her," she cried; wringing her hands, she ran wildly to the house.

Nora's statement convinced Mr. Bossford that the child, in her excitement, and blinded by the lightning, had turned in the wrong direction and possibly had wandered to the quarry.

During this time the evening was closing in dark and cloudy. He heard the distant tones of the alarm bell as it pealed out the sad news that a child was lost. It pierced his heart like a thorn and manly tears filled his eyes, for this child had entwined herself around his strong, generous heart. He had always thought it was because she resembled his niece, Lillian, that he had been so tenderly drawn to her.

As he turned toward the house to give words of encouragement he saw in the dim twilight a slight figure approaching from the direction of the orchard, whom he recognized to be Louise Joy.

"Oh! Mr. Bossford, have you come to our rescue? Can you suggest one helpful word?" she asked brokenly.

"God knows I would be glad to give you all the encouragement you need," he returned solemnly. "I have not been idle since the news first reached me, and I have just started for the house to assure all that Nora's evidence gives me hope that we shall find the child soon."

He had not proceeded far, after leaving her, when he turned at the sound of her voice. He stood for a moment and listened. In the dim light he could see her standing not far away. A white shawl enveloped her head and shoulders. Her soft white wool gown fell in

graceful folds about her silght figure, reminding him of a beautiful statue. With bowed head and lifted hat, Henry Bossford reverently listened to her words. Supposing that she was alone with her God, she lifted her heart in audible prayer:

"Heavenly Father, Divine Love, our strength and life, I know that Thou can help in this trying moment. I know that Thou wilt stay the storm and shelter the lamb with Thy protecting care. I know, dear Father, that Thou hast already given from Thy inexhaustible fountain of love, comfort and peace to our precious one. We need Thee now in this trying ordeal, for our faith and trust is being tried; and yet, and yet, we know Thy law is love and truth and life and that Thou art all. Therefore, there is no reason for fear."

That prayer of faith had its influence, for like an electric current it entered Richard Bossford's soul. He had been partly awakened by the experience of Ralph's healing, but here was another revelation; this sweet voiced woman with broken words seeking the Father's presence, not in eloquent pleading, but true, earnest dependence on Him and Him alone.

Shouts of men were heard coming up the road and the light of the torches gleamed through the trees. When Mr. Bossford reached the house he found a crowd of men, women, and children had entered the grounds, some of them having come to learn the particulars of the lost child, others to assist in the search.

After the first shock was over and the overwhelming wave of surprise had passed, Miss Deborah set herself to her duty to her little flock left to her care; she soothed them with hopeful words and allowed them to stand on the piazza and watch the gathering crowd.

Judge Hunter, in a soft felt hat and loose hunting coat, his silver bugle flashing in the torchlight, seated on his fine chestnut horse "Danchief," looked like a warrior ready for battle.

"Friends!" he cried, "a child is lost in the mountains, an orphan babe. Who will follow my directions and go to the rescue?"

"I," "I," "I," was the ready response from the excited crowd.

"Who of you are sober?" he questioned, "I want only those who are surefooted and with clear heads. Bossford!" he called with the voice of a general, "arrange these men in squads; see that all are sober and that each is provided with a torch.

"John Porter, where are you? Deacon Grant, Tom Hill, you and Green come out as leaders."

"Aye, aye, sir," was heard from these willing helpers, taking their positions, each provided with a horn and torch.

"Now we are ready," cried the judge, riding to the front.

Raising his bugle, he said: "When you hear this you will understand that I have found the child or an assuring clue, when I will expect a response from the leaders only; but under no conditions must you give a call unless you have found the child. Three strong notes must be the signal.

"Most of you are familiar with the mountain paths. We will first take the road to the quarry."

Few of the good people of Rocktown had any sleep that eventful night. Never had the little village been so shaken. Many prayers went out from mother hearts for

the orphan, whom they supposed to be a victim to that dense and dangerous steep.

When Si learned that Rachel could not be found he thought of Jake Legget's conversation, and that his desire to earn a thousand dollars might have tempted him to steal this beautiful child. However, after learning from Nora and the girls of their being together until they climbed the fence, he felt assured of Jake's innocence, for it was reasonable to suppose that, having tried to find the opening in the fence, the lightning bewildered her and she had taken the wrong path where she wandered up the mountain or might have fallen asleep from exhaustion.

With these thoughts in his mind, he hastened up the mountain path, where, with the aid of a lantern, he examined every spot where the children had been that afternoon, but all in vain. Not a trace of a footprint could be seen. He searched about the opening in the fence, hoping for a clue; the rain-soaked leaves, pine needles, and bits of bark could tell him nothing. Disappointed and anxious, he wandered on. With his lantern to the ground he eagerly examined every spot, and in soft, low, tender tones he called:

"Checkerberry! Ho, ho, little Checkerberry! I'm comin'. God is love, little one," he repeated brokenly, for he remembered Miss Louise's words and was realizing for the first time their full meaning.

"'F God is love He'll take care of her," murmured the boy, while he wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

Suddenly there seemed to rise up before him a rude hut. He had never been so far along this mountain

road, for it was quite a distance from the quarry. Curious to learn what it was used for, he stepped within.

It was a hut the woodmen had built for winter use. The rude stone fireplace was convenient to warm their benumbed hands and feet while eating their mid-day lunch.

It was a dreary looking place. The glare of his lantern sent out weird shadows and the close, damp air helped to send a chill over him as he looked about.

There was a rough bench near the fireplace, and Si was amazed to see footprints in the damp mould. Dropping on his knees, he made a startling discovery.

Jake Legget had a deformed foot, and there was the unmistakable print. Looking closely he expected to find a child's footprint; disappointed, he turned to leave, when he saw that which sent the blood rushing to his head while his heart seemed to cease beating.

He shook with alarm when he picked up a willow whistle, dried and shriveled, which he had seen—suspended by a cord on Rachel's neck—that day. Si's quick perception served him at once.

"I must go 'n tell Miss Debry," he reasoned, "'n then I'll start for that bloody ol' chump. He'll hide daytimes 'n travel for Calaforny by night. He'll hear that bugle call 'n see them torches comin' down the mountain, 'n before Judge Hunter can telegraph for detectives or git men ready to go after him he'll hide. Oh! You sneakin' ol' snake! I'll find you or I'll die." He clenched his teeth as he hurried down the path.

Suddenly he thought of Blowser. What if Jake had stolen him? With a bound he leaped the brook and hastened to the meadow and called. Hearing no response, he gave his circus whistle; not a sound could he

hear save the murmur of the brook and the rustle of the foliage. Springing over the fence, he went to the shed which had been built to shelter the pony from storms; with a low whistle he stepped within, hoping to find him resting. He was disappointed, for *Blowser was gone.*

There was no time to hesitate; he would start at once in pursuit of Jake. He was a keen-witted boy and had already formed a plan.

He found the sitting-room outside door open, and the light from the lamp assured him that Miss Deborah had not retired, although it was past midnight. As he stood within the open door he observed Miss Deborah sitting in an arm chair near. He was about to approach her, when he became aware that she had closed her eyes and with clasped hands she murmured in low, sweet tones:

"Dear Father, Mother God, I thank Thee that Thou art helping me to feel that Thou, in Thy love and mercy, art shielding this lamb of my flock. I know that Thou art ever present and that this lambkin can have no fear, wherever she may be, for Thou art with her. I thank Thee for the consciousness that she is safe and resting under Thy holy wings."

Si was deeply touched, and drew his hands across his eyes, when at that moment Miss Louise entered the room and exclaimed: "Deborah, dear, I am feeling so uplifted and strangely assured that we will get news of our darling. I realize so forcibly that God is our refuge and our strength and that all things are possible with Him, and that our lamb cannot be lost; in His everlasting and ever-present arms, of course she is safe."

"Ah, yes, dear, I, too, have the assurance that all is well with the child, and that the Father will restore her to us. And during this waiting time He will send the

comforter to her, for she has been taught God's abiding love and care; all of which assures me that her child faith will sustain her."

It was hard for Si to keep back the sob which seemed to choke him as he listened to their conversation. He took advantage of the pause which followed and stepped within the room.

"Si, have you news for us!" exclaimed Miss Deborah as he approached them.

"Miss Debry, perhaps you will blame me, 'n think I orter tol' you before, that I went to the cirkis grounds early this mornin'. I went to see if it was the old cirkis I was in, 'n who was there; that's all I went for——"

He hesitated, dropped his head, was silent, and seemed confused.

"And is that all you did? Simply going on the grounds to find your old comrades could do no harm. However, if you have done anything wrong it is more manly to confess."

"My aunt is down on cirkises, 'n that's the reason I didn't tell."

"Had it anything to do with Rachel?" inquired Miss Deborah.

He did not reply. He seemed to have lost his usual spirit which these ladies had admired in him. Although he appeared strange, they could not believe him to be guilty of any wrong to Rachel.

"Si, dear, do not hesitate to tell me at once what you know of Rachel——"

"Oh, Miss Debry!" Si exclaimed, "I know I act queer, as if I'd been stealin', but I don't wanter tell for fear it will make you feel orful as I do."

His voice was broken and he tried to swallow back the

sobs that would rise, while he bravely told his reason for not suspecting Jake Legget. Having finished his story, he handed her the toy whistle.

"Yes," she said, "this is her favorite plaything, which Phil Andrews gave her last spring. Si, you dear boy, you have been brave to trace this clue alone. I will send Jacob at once to inform the men of their mistake——"

"You can do what you please, Miss Debry, but I'm goin' right away to hunt fer Checkerberry," was Si's surprising announcement.

"Si, what do you mean?" exclaimed Miss Deborah. "Surely, you can do nothing alone. Wait and consult Judge Hunter; he may suggest a better way."

Si obstinately refused to wait, for every moment was priceless. He told Miss Deborah of his plan. If he waited for the men to return from their search it would be too late for him to take the 1.30 express, which would arrive at Ashtonville the following morning.

He learned from Jake Legget that this circus was to meet another at Ashtonville, where they expected to combine in a more formidable show; he also learned that this company would travel all night, to be in time for the street parade. Si's object in going to Ashtonville would be to take the country road back to Rocktown and meet the circus, when he would once more engage as a circus boy until he could learn of Rachel.

Long before Judge Hunter and his men had reached Greystone Home Si was on his way to Ashtonville.

The speeding train was restful to Si; his weary eyes refused to remain open, and after several attempts to keep awake he dropped his head on the cushioned seat and forgot his anxiety in a deep sleep.

Judge Hunter did not approve of Si's going in search

of Rachel and sent telegrams to every station that could be reached; he also sent for detectives to come at once. Miss Deborah believed that Si had a better knowledge of these travelling shows; for, having been with them most of his young life, he could understand their schemes and management far better than those who were working with less of that kind of experience.

The stirring town of Ashtonville was thoroughly awake when Si stepped into the depot the following morning. A boy was engaged in sweeping out the waiting room. He nodded sleepily to Si and flourished his broom to a lean, hungry looking dog who persisted in finding a resting place near one of the wooden seats. Si's love for animals caused him to feel a secret pity for the little brown stranger, as he tenderly patted and stroked his shaggy side.

"Your dog?"

"No, I never saw him before. I'd feel sneakin' to own such a lean feller as that."

"He's been lying around all night. I guess he's lost his master," said the boy, resuming his work.

"I'm going to find some breakfast; 'n I'll give the poor feller some, 'f I'm lucky 'nough to git one." Calling to the dog, Si stepped across the street, where a large lettered sign bore the conspicuous words:

"RAILROAD HOUSE.

MEALS AT ALL HOURS."

Having fortified himself with a hearty breakfast, he inquired the direct road to Rocktown and was surprised to learn that there were two roads, both of which were

direct. One led over the mountain, and another around it to an opening five miles beyond known as the mountain gap. Si also received the information that the mountain gap road would be the easiest one for the circus company to take; although a few miles longer, it was the main road to the hamlets and country villages, which the farmers preferred to the rough and steep mountain road.

Si had not proceeded far when he learned that the grateful dog was following him.

Passing through the pleasant town, shaded with broad spreading elms, he turned as directed into a side street and soon found himself on a country road, bordered with ferns, low bushes, and tall grasses. Blackberry vines trailed over bush and shrub until they reached the rustic fence, where they wound about the rails, with fruit hanging in clusters from under their green leaves. Si stopped to gather a few to quench his thirst.

At that moment the dog became uneasy. His short, nervous barks, as he ran to and fro, assured Si that something was wrong. After watching him for a short time he turned to gather more berries, while the dog sniffed the ground and gave an occasional bark as he looked wistfully into Si's face.

"What is it, you little tramp? Whatcher want to tell me?" exclaimed Si, when he found the dog could not be quieted.

Knowing the dog's sensitive ear had heard something unusual, Si climbed a tree to get a view of the surrounding country.

"Ha! You did smell that circus, you young tramp," laughed Si, while he hurried down the tree; for not far away he had seen in a field a flag floating from one of the tents.

He had not gone far on the country road when he observed a procession of wagons and animals coming from another direction. Approaching the circus grounds he was surprised to learn that a large number were already unloading their wagons and preparing to raise their tents.

The dog ran ahead with all speed and disappeared in the field of tents. Si was not sorry, for he wanted no intruders; his desire was to obtain, if possible, information of Jake Legget. Cautiously climbing a tree near the fence, he listened to the conversation of the men while they watered and fed the weary animals that were tied to the fence and tree underneath him.

He trembled with excitement while he eagerly listened; for he learned that he must not join the circus. Jake Legget was not with them, nor did they know anything of him, save that he had stolen the money received at Rocktown and had mysteriously departed.

Si was not prepared to receive the astonishing information from the company which last arrived. They had also been traveling all night, and near morning they met Jake. His six dogs were harnessed to a cart; he was leading Blowser, the trick pony; the cart held a sleeping child. Jake told the company that he had obeyed Slippy's orders, having found a child to take Fay's place; also, that he had purchased Blowser of an old farmer who knew nothing of the pony's accomplishments. Jake also told them that he was on his way to the railroad, where he would start at once for California.

Si was assured that Jake would hide during the day, and he also learned that it was near the adjoining town where the company met him. Si listened breathlessly to learn from which direction they came. He also heard

them call the little tramp who followed him; for he was a valuable trick dog, and belonged to Jake Legget.

When the men went in to breakfast Si descended from the tree and once more started on his journey and soon found that the road led him into a thick wood. He had not proceeded far when he heard a quick bark, followed by a low, glad cry of recognition. It was the tramp dog.

CHAPTER XVII.

SI AS A DETECTIVE.

NORA spoke the truth when she told Mr. Bossford that the last she could remember of having seen Rachel was when the child turned to pick up her hat; the appalling flashes and heavy thunder caused them to hasten home. In her anxiety for their safety it did not occur to Nora that one could be lost, for the path was familiar and safe.

Rachel never attempted to climb the fence, for it was easier to creep through the opening farther down. The constant lightning and thunder confused her, and in her haste she stepped on a stone, which slipped; she fell with a moan, for her ankle was dislocated.

Out from behind a mass of rock Jake Legget appeared. "Don't cry, little gal," he said, lifting her in his arms.

"I've hurted my foot, an' it aches awful," she moaned, as Jake hurried on, for the rain was falling in torrents.

He was not familiar with the mountain paths and ignorant of the hut. His ambition was to get as far away from Greystone Home and the little town as possible, for he had found a thousand dollar prize and must hide in the mountains or among the many wide crevices and rest by day.

When he reached the hut he looked within and decided that they would not be found if the search began at once. Rachel had fainted: he laid her on the bench and unbuttoned her shoe. At that moment he was relieved to see her eyelids move and other signs of returning conscious-

ness, for he knew there was no time to be lost; as soon as she was missed the search would begin.

He had not expected this, which he called good luck, for having started out to find a herb which he knew to be an excellent remedy for dog distemper, to his surprise and joy he saw Blowser in the field, which he observed was quite a distance from the house. He wandered on up the mountain, where he saw the children swinging in the grapevine. He had no thought of kidnapping until he saw Rachel fall and saw her companions hurrying away from her. It was a great risk, but he decided to take it, for the storm favored his plans.

Leaving Rachel on the bench in the hut, he told her that he was going to get some dry clothing for her to wear home; for his purpose was to take advantage of the storm and lead Blowser away. The angry elements were in his favor, knowing that no one would venture out at such a time. Pat had taken in the circus and was on his way to the free lunch room, when the rain began to pour; therefore there was nothing to prevent his leading Blowser away.

Rachel watched the lightning flash through the small window and half-open door. She heard the rain falling on the roof and listened to the wind, also to the rain which poured from the clouds and rushed in torrents from the edge of the roof. Miss Deborah had always told her that God was with her during a thunder storm, just the same as on a clear day; therefore she fearlessly watched the lightning. She remembered Miss Deborah's words when she was startled by an appalling flash, together with a crashing peal of thunder, and she murmured:

"I am God's own child, an' God is my life. Thunder

cannot frighten me an' lightning cannot hurt me, for God, you are right here, if I can't see you. God is love, an' God loves me."

Her faith brought the comforter and she fell asleep.

Jake Legget hurriedly lifted her in his arms and left the hut, for he knew that by this time Rachel was missed.

For two hours Jake was not idle. He found a cave, where he concealed Blowser until he could go back to the circus grounds and get his dogs and cart. He took advantage of the confusion, for the men were taking down the wet canvas preparatory to leaving. In a covered wagon he found Delhi Cutler in a drunken sleep. Jake eagerly cut the leather strap which held a bag containing the day's receipts, which was fastened over Delhi Cutler's shoulder.

With the sleeping child in the cart, which was drawn by six mastiffs, and leading Blowser, he was on his way over the mountain, when the bell from the little grey church tower rang out the alarm. At that moment when Judge Hunter and his men were summoned to return Jake Legget was speeding down the opposite slope of the mountain.

It was a shorter road over the mountain to Ashtonville; although ignorant of the fact, Jake was surprised to find himself at an early hour on a level road leading to town. Hoping to avoid the company that he had so abruptly left, he turned into a secluded road. While anxious to reach Elmer Slippy with his prize, he was unwilling to expose himself during the day, and his anxiety at that moment was to find a safe hiding place.

It was nearly dawn when Rachel awoke. Her injured ankle caused her to cry out, surprising Jake when he discovered that her voice was hoarse, and she gave a rasping

cough. He was alarmed, for he had not thought of the danger that her wet clothing might do, and he realized that the child was ill.

"Where are you going? I don't know you," she cried, staring with wide open eyes, expressing surprise and alarm.

"Lie down, little girl. I'm taking you home." He tried to speak in soothing tones, for he did not forget that she was a thousand dollar prize.

"Where is Miss Deborah?" she hoarsely inquired.

"I'm takin' you to her. She sent you some medicine; take it for your cold." Dropping from a vial a peculiar, dark-looking fluid on a piece of loaf sugar, he gave it to Rachel and bade her put it in her mouth.

Too ill to refuse, Rachel ate the sugar and sank back on the rude cushions and fell into a heavy sleep. Jake always carried the elixir of opium with him in case his whiskey flask failed before he could reach a saloon, for he believed it was both a tonic and a narcotic. Therefore he was relieved to see the child sleeping, for he feared if she aroused he might have trouble with her. There was danger of meeting an early riser from the farms scattered among the hills and mountain slopes.

The fast approaching dawn warned him to seek a hiding place. With a severe cut from his leather whip he hurried the weary mastiffs on and was surprised to find himself on the highway. He heard the sound of many wheels and the tread of horses, mingled with the shouts of men. He hesitated, for he had arrived at a point where two roads met, and was not surprised to see that the other part of the travelling circus was upon him. To escape was impossible; therefore he met the procession and with

consummate skill and coolness he framed the story which Si heard repeated later.

Jake Legget drew a breath of reilef when he saw the procession winding on to the town and lost no time in turning his course up a steep, wooded hill, where he found as he ascended there was danger of upsetting the cart, for great rocks and stones impeded the way. Realizing the danger, he took the sleeping child in his arms and hurried Blowser and the dogs up the rugged cart road to a dense wood.

Jake placed Rachel in the cart and released the dogs from the harness. They heard the murmur of a brook and bounded forward for a refreshing drink, after which they were glad to lay down in the shade and stretch their weary limbs. Jake gave them the last of a corn bread loaf, while Blowser found food from tender grass and herbs. For himself Jake was willing to subsist on the berries which grew in abundance all about him.

Although he had never been in this spot, he had heard of the caves and deep caverns along this rocky slope. Looking about for a resting place, he dropped on a bank of ferns and to his surprise found that it concealed an opening to a large cave. He lost no time in dragging the cart within and driving Blowser ahead, he called the dogs, who reluctantly obeyed.

"This is great," he murmured. "I'll be dead to the world for a time," he went on, "if I can get enough to eat."

After closing the entrance by bending the ferns and vines into their former position, he chuckled over his success in finding so secure a place of concealment. If the company that he met should inform the others they might search in this locality; and unless they sent out blood-

hounds, which was not probable, he was as secure as if buried in a mine.

He thought of Si; perhaps he might tell someone of their conversation in regard to his seeking another child in place of Fay. However, Si could convince no one, for he was a tramp; and, judging from his own dishonesty, Jake believed that Si had stolen the clothes which he was wearing when they met.

Satisfied that he was safe, he took another look at Rachel as she slept; the elixir had done its work, he thought. After taking a forceful drink from his whiskey flask he dropped on the damp mould and slept.

Si's first thought was to send the tramp dog back to the circus ground. But when he found that Tramp obstinately refused to leave Si decided to keep him. If Jake was hiding in the woods possibly the tramp might scent his tracks and lead the way to where Jake was concealed.

Although Si had taken up a tramp life once more, he realized that it was under different circumstances than when he set out, ragged and penniless, to hunt for his relatives. Miss Deborah had supplied him with money for expenses. He was well clothed and strong, and would be happy if it were not for the heavy weight of sorrow which pierced his heart when he thought of Rachel. He clenched his hands and set his teeth when he thought of the beautiful child at the mercy of that desperate man Jake and later to fall into the hands of Elmer Slippy.

At times Tramp became uneasy; he sniffed the ground and ran ahead, as if he heard something unusual, after which he bounded back to walk quietly by the side of his new friend. Thus the forenoon went on without a clue of the kidnapper.

Suddenly Tramp started ahead. He began to creep in and out among the trees which bordered the road as if hunting for a squirrel, which Si had seen hurrying through the wood or over a rail fence. Tramp's bark meant success over something, for he would not leave the object which he was evidently holding until Si reached him. However, before Si could get to the spot the dog caught it in his mouth and playfully laid a child's shoe at Si's feet.

"Great Scott! It's Checkerberry's," he cried, hugging the dusty, soiled shoe. "Tramp, you're a beaut'."

He patted the happy animal, as he barked his joy over having found something to please his new friend.

"It must have been dark when they passed here, about an hour before light," he reasoned, " 'n this wood is where he is hidin', 'n don'cher fergit it," he said to Tramp, who gave a quick, responsive bark.

"By jinks! I see a trail. It's his cart track!" He closely examined the ground, and gave another exclamation: "I'll be jiggered 'f that ain't a print of Blowser's shoe. Come on, Tramp, we'll find 'em as sure as guns. But you mustn't bark any more, you little rascal; you'll give us dead away. Now be quiet."

Tramp understood and walked with quiet dignity as they followed the tracks, which led them through a short farm road to the highway where the two roads met and the trail was lost amid the numerous tracks which had been made since early dawn.

Again Tramp showed signs of uneasiness and eagerly ran about with his nose to the ground. He suddenly gave a spring and disappeared up the stony, wooded hill.

"He is on the trail, 'n that's dead smooth," Si mentally decided while he followed the dog to where he found him

barking furiously before the vine covered entrance to the deep cavern. Si could hear responsive barks, but he could not decide from whence they came, for he was ignorant of the caverns and rocks in that locality.

Although his heart beat with the wildest excitement, he realized the need of precaution. If Jake Legget was near with his strong mastiffs he was well protected against a boy like Si. He hoped to learn where Jake was hiding and then go at once for help. With this plan in his young brain he climbed a tree. To his surprise and joy he heard a distant whinny, which he was sure could be none other than Blowser.

He searched about with strained eyes to find a clue. The dogs had ceased their barking and Si was amazed when he realized that Tramp had mysteriously diasppeared. Again he heard the familiar whinny, to which he listened with rapt attention, hoping to locate the sound. Descending from the tree, he discovered that the sound was smothered as if underground. Cautiously he proceeded in the direction from which he heard the call and soon reached the end of the cave opposite that which Jake had entered.

Si's discovery was overwhelming. He trembled with excitement as he pulled the low bushes and thorny blackberry vines away from the small opening. Blowser's glad call assured the boy that he was close at hand, and with indomitable courage and perseverance he tore away the earth and rocks which were imbedded in the once large opening, where the blackberry vines had rooted and trailed, making it a seeming impossibility to get within.

Were it not for Blowser's constant whinny, Si would have been discouraged. With bleeding hands and face, he lifted one large rock and discovered a small opening.

Thrusting his hand within he felt Blowser's breath, while he sent forth another joyous whinny of recognition. Unmindful of self or the consequences which might follow, he diligently worked until he made an opening large enough through which to crowd himself.

Trembling with excitement and rage, he found Jake Legget lying in a deep sleep. Si's heart leaped to his throat when he looked upon Rachel's pallid face and half-closed eyes, as she lay unconscious on the coarse cushions.

The dogs wagged their tails and Tramp gave a low whine. They recognized the boy who had tossed crackers to them, and wistfully looked for more.

It was but a few moments work to cut the ropes from the rude harness used for the dogs and firmly bind Jake's hands and feet, after which he placed a stick between his teeth, thereby causing the kidnapper to be helpless if he awakened from his drunken sleep.

Si discovered the large vine-covored opening to the cave, through which he lost no time in leading Blowser. Returning, he tenderly lifted Rachel and placed her unconscious form on the back of the pony, who had knelt at Si's command. After waiting for Si to mount and take the precious burden in his arms, the intelligent animal slowly arose and carefully descended the rough hill.

When they reached the main road Si gave Blowser the word to go.

"Zip!" he cried, holding fast to the child, for Blowser understood, and with the speed of his circus training his feet seemed to fly. Turning neither to the right nor left, passing through a small grove, he leaped the brook. Small bushes brushed Si's face and low pines struck his bruised cheeks; he cared for nothing save the safety of Rachel.

As he left the wood he crossed a bridge in time to see a pony carriage in the distance. "Zip! Zip! Blowser," was all that he could utter.

Miss Gertrude Crawford was leisurely returning from an afternoon drive. She heard his call and looked from her carriage as Si appeared.

"Please, ma'am, will you help me? This kid is awful sick. She's been stole, 'n I've just found her." Si's pleading eyes and tremulous voice attracted her at once.

"I do not understand you," reining her horse close to Si. "Did you say the child was stolen?" She looked upon Rachel's beautiful white face. "Oh! Oh!" she exclaimed, "Hand her to me at once."

With open arms she took the unconscious child. After directing Si to take his pony to the barn, she turned her horse and drove through an open archway to the broad piazza which extended across one side of the house.

Her loud and excited call brought her aunt, Eunice Crawford.

Although Si watched her as she drove to the door, and listened to her call, he was ignorant of the fact that he had been led to the home of Jack Lester's foster aunt, with whom he lived during his boyhood.

"Gertrude, what does this mean?" exclaimed Miss Eunice. Tenderly taking Rachel in her arms, she listened to Gertrude's explanation of how she found the child, while she entered the large bedroom off from the sitting room and laid the little stranger on the comfortable bed.

Gertrude, having telephoned for Dr. Lester, entered the room and bent over the unconscious child. A quick, hoarse cough startled them.

"Gertrude, dear, go and tell Miranda to bring me the

children's bath tub that hangs in the shed. Tell her to nearly fill it with warm water. Then you go to the green chest in the linen room and bring me one of those little night gowns you wore when a child. You will find them in the right hand corner——"

"Another whatsoever, Aunt Eunice?" It was Dr. Lester's voice.

"Indeed it is, Jack, and must be done with our might and to the glory of God if we save this little one. I trust that Christian Science and common sense will save her——"

"She is already saved," returned the doctor, as Rachel opened her eyes and looked inquiringly at the three who stood over her.

"You poor little darling," murmured Gertrude Crawford, while she drew off the damp stocking from her swelled ankle.

Another hoarse cough, followed by a moan from Rachel. Dr. Lester bent his head in silence, while Gertrude continued her work with Miss Eunice, who insisted on giving the warm bath, after which Rachel, in a clean night gown, was placed in the restful bed. Jack looked into the pale face, which had changed since she left Greystone Home.

"There is something strangely familiar about this child, and yet I cannot recall where I have seen her," he said. "Tell me how she happened to drift here. Tony was too excited to give a clear account of the matter. He insisted that a boy had stolen a child and left it here. What did he mean?" inquired Jack Lester.

Gertrude explained how she found them near the house and the circumstances as far as she knew.

"Did you say there was a boy? Where is he? We

must look into this; he may have left in guilty haste," exclaimed the doctor.

"Indeed, that is true, Jack. We have been so engaged over the child that we have forgotten him. Gertrude, dear, go and tell Tony to find the boy," returned Miss Eunice, gathering the soiled clothing from chairs and floor where they had hastily been thrown.

"I will go, Aunt Eunice," exclaimed Jack, "I must know the truth of this strange occurrence."

This had been one of Dr. Lester's crowded days. His numerous patients, both absent and in town, with the piles of letters to be answered, had prevented him from opening the daily papers, wherein was the story of the sorrow at Greystone Home.

Si was so hidden by the pony that he did not see Dr. Lester when he appeared in the barn.

"Blowser! Most assuredly it is," exclaimed Jack, stepping around to where Si was standing. "Si, my boy, what does this mean?" exclaimed the doctor, while he gazed with astonishment on the boy, who did not speak, but sank on the barn floor and covered his eyes with his soiled and blood-stained hands, while he wept aloud.

"Get up, Si, and tell me why you are here," repeated the doctor kindly. "Why are you here with Blowser, and who is the child? Tell me the truth; be a man and explain like the honest boy I believe you to be," he added in tender, low tones.

Si gave no response, but continued to sob.

"The boy has been most beat out. He rolled off that 'ere pony 'n fainted dead away when he first came in," remarked Jason Martin, Miss Eunice's farm hand.

The doctor silently looked upon the weeping boy. His heart went out to him in tender love and sympathy, for

he could not distrust him; and yet, what could have brought him so far from home with this valuable pony and the child, who he was sure was one of the Greystone Home children. He would not allow himself to believe that Si had been tempted to run away; when suddenly, in response to the thought that Si had been brought up in a circus, he exclaimed:

"Si! I hope that I am not going to be disappointed in you——"

"Oh! Doctor," exclaimed Si, springing to his feet, "I ain't so mean as you think I be. I'm square, 'n don'cher fergit it. Miss Debry knows all about my goin' ter find Checkerberry." Si could say no more. His voice was broken with violent weeping.

"I knew it would be all right, my boy. When you get rested I want to learn all about it." The doctor's arm was about the boy and he tenderly wiped the scratched and blood-stained face with his own soft linen handkerchief.

It was a strange story, told in Si's peculiar manner, which caused a moisture to dim the eyes of his listeners. When they learned that the culprit was gagged and bound in a cave three miles away they were amazed and overwhelmed with intense excitement.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A HERO AT CRAWFORD FARM.

"AUNT EUNICE, Gertrude, I've brought you a hero! One of the bravest boys the sun ever smiled upon," cried Doctor Lester as he entered the room leading Si, who lost no time in repeating his adventure, to which they listened with surprise and the deepest interest.

"You dear, noble boy, you need food and rest," exclaimed Miss Eunice; leading Si to the couch, she tenderly tucked the cushions under his head, while she sent Gertrude to the kitchen for food.

It was late in the afternoon when Dr. Lester hurried to town to telegraph Miss Deborah Lee of Rachel's safety.

Miss Deborah received the glad news at that moment when the officers were leading Jake Legget from the cave. He was too stupid from his late debauch to realize the meaning of the handcuffs on his coarse wrists.

The story was well known. The telegraph and telephone wires had taken the news of the kidnapper's work, Jake Legget had been well portrayed, and Crawfordville was thrilled with excitement when it was assured that the villain was locked in the town jail.

"A telegram!" cried Phil Andrews, as he ran down the street, "Checkerberry is found!"

There was a glad ring in his voice as he repeated the news to Mr. Bossford, who exclaimed: "Thank God, our little Blossom is safe."

Phil ran with speed to the village, shouting the glad news. Having reached the little grey church, he grasped the bell rope and sent out tones of rejoicing from the stone tower, where only the evening before it had tolled the sad news of her loss.

At this exciting moment, Miss Deborah, with a grateful heart and a prayer on her lips, set about her preparation for the journey, and as the 6:10 express rolled out from Rocktown Junction it bore the mistress of Greystone Home toward the child who had crept into her heart, and to whom she had given the love and tender devotion of a mother.

Strengthened by his supper and the tender ministrations of Dr. Lester and Miss Eunice, Si arose and softly stole into the room where Rachel lay. He was startled when he looked upon her white face. He placed his hand on her forehead. Tears gathered in his eyes and with trembling lips he asked Miss Eunice if she was dying.

"No, indeed! She is well and sleeping sweetly. We have been asking God to spare her life ever since she came to us, and He has given her this sweet sleep, from which she will awaken refreshed and strengthened," said Miss Eunice cheerfully. "Now, my boy," she added, "I would advise you to lie down and rest until Miss Deborah arrives. Do not distress yourself about the child; she will have the best of care."

Once more nestled among the comfortable cushions, Si watched Tony build a fire on the hearth, for the day was closing in cool and the patter of rain was heard on the piazza roof. The ruddy glow from the fireplace changed and Si watched the rollicking flames as they went roaring up the wide chimney. He felt a sense of comfort while he listened to the increasing storm, as the rain poured

from the roof and beat against the windows; his weary eyes closed and soon he was sound asleep.

Miranda yawned over her work as she sat by the kitchen table and looked up to the clock, which was striking nine. She gave a troubled look at the covered dishes on the range and murmured: "The br'iled chicken won't be fit to eat 'f that train don't hurry along."

Miss Eunice Crawford was aroused from a light nap in her easy chair. She heard the sound of wheels coming up the driveway, announcing Miss Deborah Lee's arrival. The strong light from the room, when Miss Eunice opened the door, revealed her fine cut features and her tall form distinct in a plain gown. With outstretched arms she embraced her guest.

"We are not strangers. Louise has told me so much of her friend Deborah, and Jack has given me such vivid pictures of Greystone Home and its mistress, that we need no formal introduction," she heard Miss Eunice say, with her arms still about her.

"You have struck a responsive chord in my heart, dear Miss Eunice, and I find it hard for me to realize that we have not always been friends; particularly so when I know that my lambkin is within your tender fold," returned Miss Deborah in low, earnest tones.

"Ah! Here is my brave Si," she exclaimed; bending over the sleeping boy she pressed her lips on his forehead. The gentle touch awakened him and he opened his round, blue eyes and looked upon her face, which rested so close to his own. With a cry of joy he threw his arms about her neck and wept upon her shoulder.

"God has been good to us," she murmured. "We will never lose our faith in Him after this wonderful demonstration of love. He heard us when we called Him and

His guiding led you to our darling. Always remember to thank Him, Si."

"I will, I will, 'n don'cher forgit it," sobbed the boy.

Soon Miss Deborah was bending over Rachel. She listened to the regular breathing, with no sign of hoarseness, and mentally thanked the Father of All for His watchful, tender care over this child of her adoption.

Si stood near and looked upon Rachel's sweet face as she calmly slept. Not one of those who had ministered to her could know as he did what she had suffered. He could not forget the damp cave and her rain-soaked garments, as she lay on the soiled cushions in the cart, breathing heavily with an occasional hoarse cough. He was surprised at the change; her eyes were no longer sunken and partly closed, her face had lost its ashen hue, and she lay a beautiful reality of a healthy, sleeping child.

Early the following morning Miss Deborah awakened and looked into Rachel's inquiring eyes.

"How you did s'prise me," said the child, a sweet smile illumining her face.

"You have surprised me, darling," murmured Miss Deborah, drawing the child close to her heart.

"I thought you was my own bu'ful mamma come down from heaven," returned the child, with a thoughtful expression in her violet eyes.

"Did you, darling? I hope I can be to you all that your dear mamma would have been had she lived. I am sure that I could not love you more than I now love my little girl." Lifting the small hand, Miss Deborah pressed it to her lips.

As the grey dawn disappeared in the first flush of sunrise, Rachel gazed with surprise about the room.

"Is this our own home? I don't know that lady,"

she murmured, her eyes on Grandma Crawford's portrait, looking out from a gilt frame, her cap as soft and white as the puffs of snowy hair at her temples, and her dark grey eyes seemed to be looking earnestly at Rachel, who was attracted by the loving, kind face.

"No, dear, we are visiting friends," Miss Deborah explained; although Rachel was not satisfied until having asked a number of questions, to which Miss Deborah replied by giving a light detail of the less important facts.

The two weeks that kept Jake Legget in the county jail waiting for his trial also kept Miss Deborah Lee, with Si and Rachel; for it was expected that they would be needed as witnesses, therefore she yielded to Miss Eunice Crawford's earnest request to remain her guest until the trial was over.

It was one of those bright, warm days which September never forgets to leave before departing, too delightful to remain indoors. Gertrude Crawford and Rachel were allured to the vine-covered piazza, while Miss Deborah with Dr. Lester, Miss Eunice, and Si attended Jake Leggett's trial.

Seated in a child's rocker, conspicuous for its age, and with a history that counted back to Miss Eunice Crawford's childhood, Rachel softly sang to an ancient dóll which Gertrude had resurrected from the depths of a wooden box which she found in the attic.

The pale tint of Rachel's blue dress was well suited to her fair complexion. Her fluffy golden hair fell in rings on her small shoulders. The light in her bright eyes was softened by the long lashes, which touched her cheeks as she looked upon the doll her small arms so tenderly held.

Gertrude occasionally dropped her work to watch the

beautiful child and listen to her quaint answers when she questioned her about her home life.

"I have a bu'ful dolly to my own home; her name is Rose Emma. An' once she could go to sleep an' wake up, but she can't do it any more; one of her eyes is losted an' Edna stuffed some cotton in the hole where her eye was an' now the other eye is wide awake all of the——"

She did not finish; voices were heard coming up the walk. Si appeared, followed by Miss Deborah, Miss Eunice, and Dr. Lester.

"Hi! Kee-e-e-e," Si squealed, "Jake Legget has got it in the neck this time, 'n don' cher fergit it. I tol' him I'd chase him to blazes 'f he ever stole a kid, 'n I've done it. He'll have a fine time hating himself before he gits out of his new cirkis." Turning a succession of somersaults, to the amusement of his spectators, he ran across the road to the barn to tell Jason Martin the news.

Everyone who had listened to Si's testimony, which he gave in his peculiar, characteristic manner, was drawn to this unattractive looking boy, who for a moment would cause the court room to be filled with laughing applause, while he told the story in his own original words to express his meaning. Strong hearts were touched as they listened to the cross-examination, for honesty shone in every line of his freckled face. His large round eyes were earnest in their expression as he looked fearlessly upon the stern face of the lawyer, not once deviating from his first testimony.

* * * * * * * *

It was a beautiful autumn evening. The sun was sending a parting gleam from old Greytop when Miss Deborah with Si and Rachel reached Rocktown Junction.

Her heart was full of joy to be home again; home with

this child, who, were it not for Si's persistent haste in seeking her, might have been under Elmer Slippy's stern control.

The shrill whistle of the engine had been heard from the village and the grey church bell rang out a welcome. The platform was crowded with the good people of Rocktown, who eagerly pressed forward to get a glimpse of Rachel. Mr. Bossford took her in his strong arms and held her high above the crowd, while she laughed her joy as she threw kisses from her small hand to the eager crowd who cheered and murmured, "God bless her! May she live long to remember this day."

Si was surprised and for a moment disconcerted when he found himself lifted to John Porter's shoulder and carried through the crowd, who cried, "Long live brave Si Underwood. Three cheers for the boy hero who dared alone to face a villain."

Soon the three were at Greystone Home. They saw the children's radiant faces awaiting them as they stood on the piazza.

Prissy surprised them all by rushing to Si; she folded him in her long arms and came near suffocating him with caresses, as the tears rushed from her eyes and fell upon his shoulder. Prayers had been answered; Si had broken down the barrier and found the tender heart of his stern relative.

Miss Louise, with her usual self-forgetfulness, had been sending her sweet influence about the home. Every room received a touch from her thoughtful care. They were bathed in the glory of her superior skill. Autumn flowers and evergreens were everywhere. The fire sent out its warmth and glow from the hearth. And the

dining-room table wore its welcome in rich damask and china.

It was a delightful home-coming. There was a glow of happiness radiating this home which only a fortnight before breathed an atmosphere of sorrow, where every room echoed a sigh and every breath of the soft wind whispered of the vacant chair and the small vacant bed.

When the clock struck the children's hour for retiring, Miss Deborah called her household to the library, where all could unite and return thanks for this precious assurance of God's abiding care over the lambkin of her flock.

Seated before the piano, she softly played an accompaniment while they sang:

"Give thanks unto the Lord,
For His goodness and His mercy
Endureth forever."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CROW'S NEST SOLVES A MYSTERY.

It was during one of the days of Si's absence that Phil, with fish pole and line, went up the brook for trout. When he reached the woods at the foot of the mountain he was surprised to hear the voices of Jacob Rodder and Ralph in earnest conversation.

"Hello, Phil!" Ralph exclaimed, as he saw Phil approach. "Hurry up, and see this big find. We've got a prize, and no mistake."

Jacob explained that during the recent storm one of the limbs from the old pine tree had been broken, to which a crow's nest had been securely fastened; it was woven in a mass of vines and branches.

"It ain't no good," he added, "I found the old crow lyin' over by that stump. I suppose he was killed by that big wind and rain storm. And this nest is one he used to have when his mate was living."

"There is something in it," exclaimed Phil, dropping on his knees before the bowl-shaped nest. "It's fastened so tight in these branches and vines I can't get at it. Jacob, give it a whack with your ax."

"There ain't nothin' in it but moss," Jacob remarked, as he gave a few strokes to the dead branches.

"It's loaded with something besides moss," exclaimed Phil, pulling out from the moss a piece of lace, "Gee, there is something shiny in here, Ralph. Help me get at the old curiosity."

"I don't know how valuable this lace is," observed Jacob, "but I'm sure the crow stole it——"

"Of course he stole it, and he has stolen something more. Look at that!" Phil's eyes and hands had been busy over the object which was shining in the mass of moss, and he drew forth a child's necklace.

"Say! This won't do," exclaimed Jacob, "I ain't going to be responsible for this business. We must take it to Judge Hunter and let him examine it, for crows are big thieves, and we may find more valuables."

With a little effort Jacob raised the old nest to his shoulder and the three started for the Hunter mansion and deposited the curiosity in the woodshed. Judge Hunter and Richard Bossford, having been informed by Ralph of their wonderful discovery were not long in reaching the shed.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Blodget, who came out to see the great nest, "Mrs. Hunter lost that lace before she went away, and we hunted everywhere for it, and she was obliged to send to New York for more, before the dressmaker could finish the tea-gown.

While surprises had been coming to them during the last two days, they were not prepared for the next startling discovery, when Jacob picked out from the rubbish Mrs. Hunter's gold thimble, which she believed her maid, Janet Tubbs, had stolen.

It was an exciting moment when they bent over the nest, anxious to learn if there were more evidences of Jim Crow's pilfering.

Judge Hunter suppressed a groan, his face paled, and his eyes dilated while he watched Jacob pick the sticks and bits of moss, thread and clay, which held something brilliantly shining from within the rough exterior.

"Hand it to me." There was a tremor in Judge Hunter's voice. His hand was unsteady when Jacob handed him a diamond ring. "Now look for the pin," he groaned, for he was stricken with sorrow when he realized that an innocent girl had suffered a criminal's fate by reason of circumstantial evidence which had pointed against her.

"Here it is, as good as new," Jacob remarked, while he lifted a brilliant diamond pin from a lump of clay where it had been safely imbedded.

"Jim Crow, you are dead, and I am glad of it. You black thief, you deserved to die," said Ralph, his voice rising in his excitement.

"Why Jim did not do it to be mean," returned Phil in a reproving tone.

"That is true, Phil. Poor Jim's natural instinct for pilfering has caused an innocent girl to be imprisoned. While the bird knew no difference between right and wrong, we are glad to know that he is past making any more trouble," were Mr. Bossford's startling words.

"How did it happen?" whispered Phil, as the two gentlemen left the shed.

"I do not remember the circumstances very well, for I was only six years old. Mrs. Blodget knows all about it; I'm sure that she will be willing to tell us."

They found Mrs. Blodget interested in the piece of lace, from which she was picking bits of mud, sticks, and moss. She was quite willing to relate the circumstances which led to Janet Tubb's disgrace.

"It happened when Ralph was a little fellow," said Mrs. Blodget, "and the maid Mrs. Hunter brought with her from New York was taken ill and left very suddenly. Mr. Mark Hunter advertised for a maid and Janet Tubbs

answered the advertisement at once. She had never worked out, but she was anxious to leave home and help support an invalid mother. Mrs. Hunter was interested in the girl and engaged her with no recommend, for she seemed so young and innocent.

"Janet was very civil and obliging; she was also kind and attentive to Ralph, and no one thought of her as dishonest until Mrs. Hunter lost so many valuable things. I remember the day she came to me greatly troubled because she had lost her gold thimble. After vainly searching for it, she suspected the chambermaid who was discharged.

"Several days after the house was thrown in confusion to hunt for her diamond pin, which she was sure she had put in her velvet jewel case the night before. Janet insisted that her mistress must be mistaken, for she had seen it on the toilet cushion that same morning and remembered of having heard Mrs. Hunter remark her carelessness. She had become so, because she trusted the servants, who had been for years in the Hunter service.

"When they learned that the pin was gone and could not be found, Judge Hunter became convinced that a thief was in the house and sent for a woman detective, who came disguised as a housemaid. She watched us all, without the slightest clue.

"It was during her service in the house that the ring was missing; she heard the conversation among the servants and myself during the excitement and decided that we were not guilty.

"Determined to fathom the mystery, she advised Mrs. Hunter to leave a piece of cheap jewelry on her dresser and watch for results. Acting on the detective's advice, she left a child's necklace on the dresser. Although the

necklace was valuable, Mrs. Hunter thought it would not be lost, for the detective was there to watch.

"Concealing herself behind a screen in the hall, the detective watched the housemaid as she put the room in order. After her departure she entered the room and, assured that the necklace was safe, returned to her place of concealment. She had seated herself and drawn the screen a little closer, when she heard Janet Tubbs coming up the stairs; Mrs. Hunter had sent her for her scissors. Janet entered the room, looked about for the work-basket, then turned and went to the window, where she stood for some minutes, after which she left the room.

"The detective clasped her hand in amazement and sorrow, for she had never suspected the innocent-looking Janet. The necklace was gone. I will never forget that poor, innocent white face," said Mrs. Blodget, wiping her eyes.

"Was she frightened, or angry?" inquired Phil, drawing his chair nearer Mrs. Blodget.

"The poor child was crushed with grief and despair. She never will be whiter when she is dead. I can never forget her agonized face when she begged Judge Hunter to believe her.

"Although they could not find the necklace about her, they believed that she went to the window and dropped it into the hands of an accomplice. She explained that she went to the window to watch a bird who was in the maple tree. She did not mention that it was a crow; if she had done so it might have caused us to think of the crow's thieving propensity.

"After her trial and sentence to prison, her old grandmother came to see the judge. She was a terror in her

wrath. She cursed him and the family and vowed that she would have her revenge.

"You were six years old, Ralph, when Janet came to look after you; do you remember her?"

"Not very well. I can remember the excitement of her arrest, and that is all."

Judge Hunter, stricken with sorrow over the fate of the innocent girl whom he had so unmercifully wronged, set out at once to search for her and if possible to make restitution for the stigma which was disgracing her.

He went to her old home, hoping to find her there, but all in vain. He only learned that she had never returned after her release from prison.

He advertised to learn of her abode, while he published the story of her innocence in all of the leading papers, hoping thereby to receive information of her; but all in vain. It seemed impossible to reach her.

CHAPTER XX.

BEFORE THEY CALL I WILL ANSWER.

THE beautiful autumn days had changed the appearance of both the Greystone and the Hunter homes. The autumn tints were perfect in color as the sunlight touched shrubs and trees. Showers of red, yellow, and orange leaves fell from the large maples and scattered over the close-cut lawns.

These glorious days seemed brighter to Ralph than he had ever known, for, while he had learned the peace and harmony which all experience who are governed by Divine Love, he also was rejoicing over the good news from his parents, who had arrived in New York and would soon be with him.

One morning, as he sat on the east piazza waiting for Phil and Si, with whom he had made an engagement to go on a nutting expedition, his uncle appeared before him with a letter.

"My boy, I wanted to surprise, you, but I find it is not best; this letter will explain all."

Ralph lost no time in reading the letter, which proved to be from his father. Having finished, he rushed to the library with flushed face radiant with joy.

"Oh! Uncle Richard, I am sure it was your influence. No one but you could have persuaded papa to consent to mamma's receiving this kind of—of help."

"I simply wrote your father of your own and Bessie Andrews' case. Divine love did the rest——"

At that moment Ralph heard Phil and Si call.

"Si! Phil! I've good news," exclaimed Ralph, as he rushed to meet them, "My parents are in New York and mamma is healed through this same Truth which set me free. It seems almost too good to be true."

"No, not too good, Ralph," returned Phil, "Nothing is too good for God to do. Oh, I am so glad for you——"

"Oh boys! Phil, Si, what can I do to show my gratitude. God has been so good to me—my own health and mamma's——"

"And my sister Bessie," interrupted Phil. "We have much to be grateful for, and all we can do is to love more and study to learn more of this One Power——"

"Yer bet-cher life I've got a corner in this Truth, as ye call it. I've got a corker of a aunt now; she's mild as a tame bear, 'n smooth 'n sweet ez honey, 'n she tol' me the other day I must love everybody 'f I want ter be happy.

"That ain't all I've gotter be thankful fer, nuther. When I went after Checkerberry I jest called fer this friend what I can't see, but is always on hand and never leaves a feller, 'n I kept sayin', 'God is love,' 'n you'll bet I felt just ez if I had Him, 'n I knowed I'd find Checkerberry——"

"Well, all we can do is to live this Truth by doing as near right as we can. Mamma said that our daily lives in good work must be our sermons," remarked Phil, as they turned to leave the lawn.

That same morning Judge Hunter was surprised to receive a letter from a New York hospital nurse, with the information that a patient under her care desired to see him on a serious business matter regarding Janet Tubbs. Assured in his own mind that this patient was Janet

Tubbs, for whom he had been searching, he lost no time in making preparation for his journey.

The speed of the express train seemed too slow for Judge Hunter as he rushed along on the wings of steam to New York, where on the day following his arrival he found himself by the cot where lay his granddaughter's old nurse, Mollie.

"Although I recognized you at once, Judge Hunter, I am sure that you could not trace one feature of the girl Mollie who nursed your granddaughter and who brought that awful sorrow to your home——"

"No, Mollie, you are beyond recognition as the bright, cheery young woman who came to us in those days——"

"I have much to relate if my strength will allow. I have but a short time to live and, knowing this, I sent for you, that I may confess my guilt, in which I was made an unwilling accomplice and my life threatened if I exposed my husband and his mother, who were the means of making your home and children so wretched."

"Woman! Woman! What do you mean?" exclaimed Judge Hunter, springing from his chair.

"Wait, sir, and listen. You shall know all! I was a young widow with one little girl two years old when I married Eric Rowland, who owned a small circus. When my child was six years old he took her into the circus ring to ride a pony and dance. This made my life a double burden, for I had learned by bitter experience of his cruelty; therefore, for my child's sake, I joined the circus. Janet Tubbs was his niece, and when he learned through his mother of Janet's arrest and imprisonment he vowed to avenge the act.

"He was constantly on your track and learned every

move you made. When Lillian was born he found the opportunity to pierce your heart.

"It was about this time that my child was killed in the circus, when I firmly refused to remain as an actor. He then threatened my life if I did not obey him and apply to Mrs. Hunter as nurse girl. I had been with them six months when the awful thing happened. My mother-in-law hired a small cottage and took in washing for the guests at the hotel, where Mr. Mark Hunter and family were spending the summer.

"The day following their departure on their yacht I took Lillian in her carriage to call at my mother-in-law's for some dresses she had been doing up for baby.

"It was a windy afternoon when I started, and when I reached the cottage I found the wind was increasing with indications of a storm. My husband was there and insisted on my remaining longer than I intended and promised to return and assist in pushing the carriage. As he seemed unusually kind, I consented.

You may remember the foot-path under the great rock, where the guests took advantage as the near way to town when the tide was out. The wind was furious and my husband took this path.

"When we were nearly at the end of it, my husband lifted the child from the carriage, as I supposed to carry her on account of the wind. Instead, he gave the carriage a toss out to the ocean; the canopy top acted as a sail and floated out to sea——"

"My God! Woman, and the child? What was done with our baby?" groaned Judge Hunter.

"Eric ran from me and took the child to his mother, who had a conveyance all ready to take them to the evening train. They travelled all night, until they found

refuge in an old cottage in a desolate place where few people ever come.

"My wild shrieks brought several fishermen, to whom I told the cruel lie that the carriage blew away from me and sailed out into the ocean. Everybody supposed the baby was in the carriage and that is the news you received on your return."

"And the child! The child! What became of her?" groaned Judge Hunter.

"After you discharged me, in your wrath over my carelessness, I joined my mother-in-law in her desolate country home. There I remained until Lillian was two years old, when my husband wrote me to go at once to him with the child, as he wanted to train her in the circus. It was about this time that my mother-in-law died, and I felt free to write my husband that the child was dead, for I could not endure the thought of her being subject to his cruel training.

"The cottage we occupied belonged to a German who lived five miles beyond us. He or his wife came every month for the rent. Although the man spoke broken English, his wife could speak but a few words of our language. After my mother-in-law's death I took up my abode with these people, who proved to be very kind, and when I told them that the child was only adopted by me, and of my husband's designs, the woman begged of me to leave the child with her, until I could find a home for her or restore her to you, which I dared not do, owing to the fear that in your wrath you would publish the story and Eric would learn that I had deceived him——"

"But tell me at once! Woman, is my child living? I cannot endure this suspense——"

"Yes, Judge Hunter, I suppose that she is living.

When I found that it would be impossible for me to have the child with me, and having learned that the German family could not keep the child owing to their own poor circumstances, I wrote her to take the child to the Ashtonville Orphanage; I sent her the money for the journey.

"Several weeks after her husband wrote me that, owing to her ignorance of the English language, she left the train before she arrived at Ashtonville. Owing to a severe rain and wind storm, she lost her way and, guided by a large lighted house, she supposed it to be the home she was seeking. She could not make the people understand her, but managed by gestures and a few broken words to let them know that the orphan needed a home, and the lady took the child——"

"Well, go on! Who was the lady? Why do you hesitate?" insisted the judge.

"Oh! Judge Hunter, I do not know. I never could learn where she was left or who has the care of her, and this is what is killing me," she cried. With an effort she continued: "Fear—fear and terror has kept me silent all of this time. Although I have searched for her in strange cities and villages, but could gain nothing—of course they changed the child's name, the same as we did. We called her Rachel Berry——"

"What! What are you saying?" he cried, his voice ringing out in a clear, joyous tone.

"That is the name Eric gave her, but I have never been able to find a family where there was a child of that name."

She sent for the nurse and directed her to bring a certain box from her trunk. "This is all the proof I have

—her clothes she had on when I took her away, and this coral necklace."

For a moment Judge Hunter could not speak. He buried his face in his hands and wept.

"God knows I pity you," he heard her say.

"My God, I thank thee!" came from his white lips.

After the first shock of surprise had passed, in a broken voice he told her of Rachel Berry, the loved child of Greystone Home.

"Oh, sir! Until this moment I have never believed in a God, but I now do believe a greater Power is behind this, who in mercy to the child has kept her from my cruel husband——"

"Although I cannot believe a loving Father could permit this cruel blow," exclaimed the judge as he paced to and fro in his excitement, "I do realize that through this Divine Love I was led to you, and from this hour I will consecrate my life to Him. Indeed, I can now fully understand the meaning of those words in Isaiah, "Before they call I will answer."

CHAPTER XXI.

MISS DEBORAH'S SACRIFICE.

THE days had hurried on and were filled with busy October. The fruit ripening was over ready for gathering. The frost had opened the chestnut burrs on the mountain side and the walnut trees were dropping their treasures, which had been so long hidden within their thick green shells.

It was Saturday afternoon, and Miss Deborah stood on her western piazza and watched the girls as they started for the mountain path with baskets and bags on their annual nutting expedition. Phil and Si were with them to assist in shaking the trees and enjoy the general fun.

Long after the merry party disappeared among the pines and low bushes, Miss Deborah listened to their happy voices.

Ralph, who was expecting his parents and his grandfather on the 2:30 New York express, was not of the party. Therefore, hoping to pass away the waiting moments, he set himself to practice on a new piece of music which he had just received.

Rachel, having watched the girls and boys out of sight, wandered down to the open gateway. She heard the rich tones of the piano and, crossing the lawn, she entered the front door and was soon standing by Ralph's side.

At that moment the sound of carriage wheels was heard, which Ralph was assured announced the arrival of his parents. Oblivious of everything save the fact that his parents were home again, Ralph took no notice of the

little girl who followed. However, Judge Hunter lifted her in his strong arms and, having pressed his lips on her broad white forehead, he murmured caressing words of love. Then turning to Mark Hunter and his wife he placed the astonished child in her father's arms.

"Here is your daughter, my children. The ocean did not take our darling from us; God in His loving care gave her an affectionate protector beneath Miss Deborah's sheltering fold."

Who can describe the tremulous joy which vibrated the hearts of Mark and Marian Hunter as they looked upon the lovely face of their child, for whom they had mourned as lying beneath the cruel ocean? Who could portray the scene of such a meeting? It was a wonderful scene upon which Miss Deborah gazed as she silently stood within the library door of Judge Hunter's home.

Rachel was sitting on the sofa between Mark and Marian Hunter, while Ralph sat on a low stool at their feet. Judge Hunter and Richard Bossford were sitting near, their eyes fixed on the surprised face of the little girl, who was shyly gazing about from one to the other of the group while Mrs. Hunter's delicate hand lifted the child's fluffy curls.

"Are you Ralph's bu'ful mamma?"

"I am also your mamma, dear, and you are Ralph's sister Lillian," were the surprising words which caused Miss Deborah to enter the room exclaiming, "What does all this mean? Why am I so hastily summoned?"

Richard Bossford was the first to reach her, and after greeting her old friends, Mark and Marian Hunter, she begged to know the truth.

After hearing the particulars of this strange story, Deborah Lee hid her face in her hands, while her frame

shook with emotion; for well she knew that her faith must again be sorely tried. This child, to whom she had given a mother's care, whom she had nurtured and loved as her own, must be taken from her. She knew that she was sobbing and that an arm was about her and that someone was speaking to her in sweet, tender tones.

"Dear Deborah, my old classmate and friend, words are inadequate to express to you my obligation and gratitude." It was Marian Hunter's voice. "Do not give yourself an anxious thought of parting from her. While she is ours by the ties of blood, she has bound us all with an endless chain of love and friendship."

"Deborah!" It was Mark Hunter who took her hand and pressed it to his lips, and in a broken voice he said: "There is no service too great to render for this loving care you have given our child, neither is there anything we can possibly do for you in return for the obligation we feel towards you——"

"Do not, I beg of you, mention either gratitude or obligation," she found voice to say. "Work for the Master brings its own sweet reward, and day by day He has given it a hundred fold in the dear child sent to me in that fearful storm three years ago. Her sunny nature has been my joy and help to lighten the dark corners of my heart. Her childish faith has given me many a lesson from the pages of her white life. And now, now —while I need her, oh, so much,—I thank God that I can give back to you your own."

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Great was the astonishment of the Rocktown folk when it became known that Rachel Berry was Mark Hunter's daughter who was supposed to have been drowned.

As for Rachel, her young brain was in a strange confusion of ideas. Although shy at first when she heard herself called Lillian in caressing tones from her relatives, her intuitive nature went out to these loved ones, bound by the ties of blood. She had known no other love like Miss Deborah's, to whom she clung with a child's devotion, daily spending many hours at Greystone Home among familiar scenes and happy mates, who lavished their affection upon her with unselfish joy over her restored parents.

That first night to Miss Deborah was passed in sleepless sorrow. All night she called to the Father to stay the fierce storm within and send the comforter to her struggling heart. She remembered Miss Louise Joy's words, three years before, when she so desired to know why she had been sent to Rocktown: "You have started for the altar with your faggots. Now leave the rest for God to find the lamb."

For three years she had been journeying toward the altar. Would her faith be strong enough to make the sacrifice?

As the grey dawn appeared, a strange peace stole over her. Something seemed to be speaking to her true self: "Thou hast made no sacrifice of this lamb which has found its own fold. Your journey to the altar is over; the faggots have consumed jealousy, envy, and selfishness, which have been burning in your heart. Wisdom will guide you and peace and harmony will forever dwell within you. Go on with thy mission of love, and God will be thy refuge and fortress."

To have seen the mistress of Greystone Home the following morning, no one would have thought that she had ever known a sorrow; her patient, sweet face, the light

in her beautiful eyes, bore no evidence of her struggle. Taking up her duties as of old, she generously gave out the best of her sunny nature with her cups of service, which returned in full measure and running over with love and devotion from her children and friends.

It was early in November that Judge Hunter surprised Mrs. Andrews with a call. His errand was told in a few words. Ralph must return to his school, and could not endure the thought of going without Phil.

"I am greatly indebted to you and your son," he hastened to explain, when he observed the rush of color to her face. "There are things for which money can never repay. I consider the patient, cheerful devotion of your son during Ralph's painful imprisoment in a darkened room something beyond price. Therefore, I beg of you, my dear madam, to consider well Phil's interest and accept a three years' course with Ralph at G—— Institute.

"Si Underwood also accompanies them, and we will not think our arrangements complete until we have your consent. They go the day after Thanksgiving. This will give you time to consider the question," were words which called Mrs. Andrews to herself, for this surprise had given rise to many conflicting thoughts. What would the long winter be without her man of the house?

"Yes, thank you; I would be glad to have a little time to think of this surprise, which has seemed to stupefy me as if having received an electric shock. I fully appreciate your kind approach to this subject, clothed in the humane mantle of your obligation. I will consider the matter and give you an early reply."

"I trust it will be an encouraging one, for Phil's interest, as well as your own," were Judge Hunter's parting words.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHANGES IN THE GREYSTONE AND HUNTER HOMES.

WHEN Deborah Lee learned of Judge Hunter's generous offer to Phil, her first thought had been of his mother and sister who depended upon him for the daily help about the little home. The winters were usually severe in Rocktown, the snow storms frequent and generous, piling drifts high above the sidewalks and often reaching the roofs of the cottages. She thought of this and the long, cold winter, with its needed fuel and fire, that Phil's ready hand had helped to provide.

A surprising thought held Miss Deborah for a moment. It came suddenly, which caused her to order her carriage, and soon she was at Mrs. Andrews' cottage. Mrs. Andrews, whom she found in the midst of preparation for Phil's departure, greeted her with a sad smile as she drew the large rocker nearer the stove for her guest.

"Do you know the new minister is to be here with his bride next week?" remarked Miss Deborah, throwing back her cloak.

"Yes, I know it, although I have been so absorbed with preparation for my son's departure that I have not given it the thought I should."

"Do you also know that there is no home for them to begin their first housekeeping?"

"I supposed that it was decided they were to take the Ashley house," returned Mrs. Andrews, cutting away the edges of a seam.

"The Ashley house is too far from the church; besides,

it is much larger than they need." Miss Deborah hesitated for a moment, then she continued: "I was forcibly struck with an idea, and here I am to tell you my plans.

"I want a music teacher and the minister wants a house. If I can prevail upon you and Bessie to come to Greystone Home, the minister can have this house and you shall have a home; besides, I will make your salary an object. I need someone in the house like yourself. I have a suite of rooms just suited for you and Bessie, where the voices of my merry noisy girls cannot reach you when you are too weary to be with us. Prissy has become so amiable that I am going to venture more help in the kitchen——"

"Dear friend!" exclaimed Mrs. Andrews, surprised at the happiness which had taken possession of her, "To give up my home is something I have often thought I never could do. However, my common sense assures me that it is for the best, and I know of no place in this world where we could be any happier than at Greystone Home."

There was snow in the air when Miss Deborah stepped into the carriage; it whirled and danced in her face, lighting on her fur cloak, and touched the tips of feathers on her hat. However, there was joy in her heart, for she was conscious that she had lifted a burden from the widow and lightened the heart of Phil, whose only anxiety was for the two whom he would leave alone.

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It was a merry party that met at Judge Hunter's on Thanksgiving day.

Lillian Hunter's face was radiant as she received each of her guests and presented them to her mamma, whose delicate beauty attracted them, while they gazed upon her in silent admiration as she approached them. Her

blue velvet gown, with rare lace and elaborate oraments, set off the hue of her luxuriant golden hair and lit up the large blue eyes that met theirs as she welcomed them in a low sweet voice.

The large dining room was a blaze of beauty and elegance with its silver, cut glass, china, rare flowers, and plants.

The girls from Greystone Home were living pictures of health and happiness, who added to the scene as they chirped and chatted around the artistic table at one end of the dining room, while their elders at the opposite table occasionally paused in their conversation to listen to Phil's wit and Si's quaint response.

Later they returned to the drawing room. The light from the chandelier lit up the rich carpet and furniture and a bright fire from the shining grate added to the cheerfulness of the room.

The older ones joined in the games and story telling, to the delight of the children, ending with an impromptu impersonation of "Red Riding Hood and the Wolf." Phil, in Mr. Bossford's fur overcoat and cap, made a ferocious-looking wolf; and Flossy, enveloped in a scarlet opera cloak, its hood partly concealing her flaxen hair, appeared before her interested spectators with a market basket on her arm, singing, "I'm Little Buttercup," as she wandered about on her way to the grandmother, who lay on a couch behind the portieres covered with an elaborate slumber robe, his freckled face framed in a night-cap conspicuous for its frill that waved at the slightest suggestion was the unmistakable Si, who patiently awaited the wolf's approach. The rooms were filled with laughter at his remarks and gestures, having departed from the original to improvise something to suit himself.

Too soon the hours flew, and the time for parting was drawing near, when Richard Bossford requested the attention of the company.

Slipping from her papa's knee, Lillian Hunter approached Si Underwood, who stood by the piano near Ralph and Phil. Every eye was attracted toward the dainty figure clothed in delicate white, her beautiful hair falling in golden waves to her shoulders, her innocent face upturned to the awkward, uneasy boy, who was too surprised to appear in his usual happy-go-lucky manner while he listened to what she was saying.

"Si, this bu'ful present is from my own self, and I want you to keep it to 'member me by when you are 'way off to school and don't know what time it is or anything. 'Sides, it's to 'member how God took care of you and me when I was stole and carried off in the thunder storm and you came and got me. You'll 'member, won't you, Si?" handing him a morocco case, which enclosed a gold watch and chain.

Si took it without speaking for a moment. He was too dazed to do otherwise, until Phil's voice sounded in his ear, suggesting a response, that brought him to himself. Forgetting there were others present, he fell upon his knees; with his arms about Lillian, he found words to express his gratitude.

"I don't need watches or nothin' to make me remember yer perty face and shiny eyes. Yer the nicest little gal I ever knowed, an' don'cher fergit it, an' I sha'n't fergit what ye tol' me about God an' His Son an' will speak to 'em every day. I wish I knowed how to thank yer fer this nice gift, but I can't fer I don'o how to talk perlite," rubbing his eyes with his knuckles.

Every one was smiling through their tears at the touching scene and Si's last remark.

Mark Hunter stepped to Si and, placing his hand on the boy's shoulder, said:

"Si, do you know that everyone present owes to you the happiness and joy of this evening? Had it not been for your persistent effort to hurriedly search for our daughter, we would still be mourning. By restoring to us this precious gift you have lifted the anguish from loving parents and dear ones and filled our hearts with unspeakable happiness, as well as the hearts of these loved teachers and schoolmates. We can never repay you, my boy, in words or gifts, but bear in mind so long as you live you have friends in the Hunter family."

Si was beginning to feel very uncomfortable and looked appealingly to Miss Deborah, who responded in fitting words to Mark Hunter's sincere and earnest expression of gratitude.

Si's face, that beamed a few minutes before, was filled with sadness when he realized that he must say good-by to these people who had taken him into their hearts. Tears gathered in his eyes when Lillian threw her arms about his neck and imprinted a kiss upon his cheek. Long after he felt the impression of those full sweet lips, it sank deep into his heart and fastened to the memory tablet this scene that long years after remained to keep him steadfast and true.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ROMANCE IN A BLIZZARD.

It was a dark and stormy afternoon in March. The wind was blowing fiercely and the snow had drifted about the lawns and orchards, heaping high mounds between Greystone and the Hunter home. The roads were filled with drifts leading to Rocktown, burying the fences and stone walls beneath the great white mantle.

In the library at Greystone Home a glowing fire on the hearth assisted the heaters in the cellar to warm every nook and corner of the large room, for the wind was cutting as it whistled about the corners of the house and vainly tried to find an opening for admittance.

The ruddy firelight fell on the lady's kind face as she soberly watched from the window the increasing storm, for Louise Joy, who had been on a visit to Crawfordville, was expected to return on the 2:30 train. It was past three o'clock, and Miss Deborah thought of the long cold ride in the tedious storm, while she breathed a prayer that all would be well with her friend.

At that moment she heard the sound of bells, which announced Jacob's return. She hastened to the door and eagerly looked out to the approaching sleigh. The furious wind beat against her grey gown, tossing feathery flakes in her face, lighting on her brown hair, and flying far into the room.

"What has happened, that you did not bring Miss Louise?" cried Miss Deborah, for she observed at once that he was alone. The horses plunged through the deep

drifts to the piazza. Jacob, muffled in a conspicuous black and red scarf, the storm collar of his overcoat high above his ears, looked out to her from under the visor of his fur cap and exclaimed:

"There ain't a train in from the east since noon and none from the west since the 8:10 express this morning. It's an awful storm, and all I could do to get through."

The horses would wait no longer. Impatient to find their comfortable shelter, they plunged through the heaps of snow, which buried them to their bodies, while Miss Deborah hastened to close the door against the fierce storm, comforting herself with the thought that Miss Louise had not started on the journey.

When Miss Louise stepped from the carriage which conveyed her to the Crawfordville Station there were feathery flakes of snow on her cloak and muff, which she shook off as she entered the waiting room.

To her surprise, the train was a dingy accommodation. Although she did not object to the faded cushions, her sensitive nature would not allow her to take the only vacant seat; for it was evident that the former occupant had enjoyed the luxury of a feast, having left the remnants on seat and floor, leaving her to choose between this disreputable seat or stand until someone should leave. For a moment she looked about, hoping the conductor would appear.

"Miss Joy, will you share my seat? I'm sure that you will not enjoy that one, for a family of three have just left it, with an odor of meat and pickles which is not in the least refreshing."

The familiar voice brought a flush of surprise to her cheeks as she turned to thank Richard Bossford, who stood smiling at her side.

"How am I to account for your timely appearance and rescue from that demoralized seat?" she remarked, as he lifted his fur overcoat from the corner to give her its place by the window.

"I struck this train thirty miles east of here. I have been out to the iron district and was glad to learn that I could have this train by signaling at the station," he replied, settling back in his seat. "And now may I ask what brought you so far from Greystone Home in such weather as this?" he added.

She explained that she had been visiting friends and that she found that she must choose between this train and the evening express, which had changed time and would not get her home until a late hour.

Her quiet cultured manner and the soft light in her hazel eyes had often impressed this gentleman, who only a few moments before was wondering how he was to endure the long tedious journey. He was thrilled with intense admiration as he gazed at her beautiful spiritual face and congratulated himself over this pleasing companion.

Her quick perception told her at once that she was an object of study, which sent a pink flush to her cheeks as she turned to the frosty window to look out; rubbing a small spot with her handkerchief, she was surprised at the increasing storm.

The train in the meantime lumbered on, with its monotonous rattle and rumble, making conversation an effort. Two hours flew by before there were signs of stopping.

"We are near Ashtonville," he said, looking over her shoulder through the window, which she had kept clear of frost. When the train stopped he informed her that he would telegraph Judge Hunter to send a sleigh to the

Junction. He arose, buttoned his ulster about his throat, and was gone.

Miss Louise was surprised when she looked at her watch to find the train an hour late. She wondered at the long delay and a certain undefined feeling caused her to hope that the train would move on. She listened to the shrill signal and watched the beating snow against the window.

"This is a furious storm, and I fear we have not seen the worst of it," she heard Mr. Bossford say as he shook the snow from his ulster.

"Mr. Bossford, do you think the train will pull through the storm?" she asked.

"The conductor says there is not a doubt of it; the road is clear as far as Rocktown. Beyond there he expects trouble," returned Mr. Bossford.

"If I thought there was danger of not getting through I would remain in Ashtonville," she said thoughtfully "But I telegraphed Deborah I would be there this afternoon on the 2.10 train, and I am sure she will expect me."

"We'll get there, all right," he said cheerily, placing a hand basket in the rack above her head.

The afternoon wore away as the slow-moving train wound in and out through the valley, around the mountain, and down the river bank, stopping now and then at a desolate looking station to drop off a weary farmer.

At last the cheering words from the conductor, "Rocktown Junction!" and the cry to change for certain points north and south, etc.

Mr. Bossford assisted Miss Louise to the long shed piled high with snow. A narrow path had been tunneled through to the little box office, where the happy-go-lucky ticket agent was seated in the only chair the room afford-

ed, enjoying a clay pipe, the room filled with the effects of his bliss.

"Is Judge Hunter's sleigh here?" Mr. Bossford inquired, as he entered the fumigated room.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the man, rising to give his chair to the lady. "There ain't a man or beast that could get through these drifts now. Jacob Rodder was here about three o'clock for a lady he was expecting; I sent your telegram by him. But it is impossible for anyone to get here as long as this storm continues."

"Oh! Mr. Bossford, how unfortunate that I did not remain in Ashtonville," exclaimed Miss Louise.

"I never dreamed that it was so bad. The conductor assured me we could get to Rocktown Junction, and that was all I thought was needed to get home," said Mr. Bossford dubiously.

"This is the worst storm I ever experienced," said the ticket agent, emptying the ashes from his pipe on the stove hearth.

Louise Joy looked from the window to the great mantle of snow and watched the flakes falling on every side. It was growing dark, with no possible way of getting home.

"What do you think of the situation?" she heard Mr. Bossford ask from over her shoulder, who had been studying her quiet face.

"It certainly is a trying one. However, I have made up my mind to the inevitable," she responded cheerfully. "And there is no situation that one can experience without finding something for which to give thanks, and I am truly grateful that we have a shelter from this storm."

"I must confess it relieves me to have you take such a philosophical view of the situation, and yet I feel stricken

with remorse that I did not advise you to remain in Ashtonville," he said, looking down to her delicate form and simple travelling gown, for the heated, close room had forced her to lay aside the heavy wraps.

"Do not distress yourself on my account," she replied. "It was my own fault that I did not remain in Ashtonville; however, like yourself, I was sure if I reached this junction there would be nothing to fear."

They were interrupted by shouts and voices of men and a sudden crowd in the doorway. They were workmen employed to shovel the snow from the track, the agent explained.

"Hello, Patsy, how's the weather?" cried the agent good-naturedly to a stalwart man, who hastened to the stove to warm his benumbed hands and feet.

"Begorra, it's a big breath from the North Pole with all its attachments; it's a blizzard they're callin' it, and as likely a name as it could have," said the workman, stamping the snow from his feet. "It's a quare storm. It goes 'n frakes loike. Now, there's nary a drift across that flat; the storm is from the west and the wind blows everything before it until it reaches the Keekant quarry. My boy Dennis has just been afther bringin' me a bite, and he said he niver wint over his shoe tops."

"Mr. Bossford!" exclaimed Miss Louise, "Let us make an effort to go home that way. I'm sure I could walk that distance."

"No, Miss Joy, a thousand times no. You would perish in this storm," returned Mr. Bossford.

"If you would thry to get to my house I will make you more comfortable. I'll be afther going soon and will help ye."

"I would, my good man, and will make the effort

when you call me," was what Mr. Bossford heard her say, astonished at her courage.

"The craving for food reminds me that it is past supper time, and I am sorry I cannot offer you something more substantial than fruit," said Mr. Bossford, handing the open basket filled with luscious oranges.

"They are very acceptable," she said, helping herself, "I think my hunger was one motive when I proposed going home," she added, looking hopefully out of the dingy window, only to be disappointed, for it was still snowing.

Too nervous to remain indoors, Mr. Bossford went out to watch the storm. The long platform had been cleared by busy workmen, which gave him freedom to pace up and down the length of the long walk and watch the fast falling flakes that seemed to be turning the earth into one immense snowball. He was anxious and nervous; the situation was a new and trying one. He had met emergencies before, and his experience and judgment should stand in good stead now; yet how helpless he seemed to be, shipwrecked as it were on a sea of snow.

For a moment he stood on the edge of the platform leading down to the track. The world looked so strange around him, the dim light from the lantern above gave out no kindly warmth, the fields opposite seemed coldly and intensely white; and yet, with all his disappointment and waiting, with all this ghostly, solitary surrounding, something new had come to Richard Bossford.

He could scarcely define this strange desire within his heart. He was hungering for a treasure that something was telling him he must own.

It had been coming for a long time. The memory of an earnest face and the pleading voice for the lost child

on that eventful evening was ever before him. He also realized for the first time that she had influenced him for the good whenever he had been thrown in her company; he always parted from her with the same desire to do some good in the world and be of use to someone, although his thought had not taken the practical form of how or where his philanthropy should go.

He turned to resume his walk up and down the long platform. "Can it be possible——" he murmured, then silently held the remainder of the sentence as if too sacred even to whisper. "I can now understand the meaning of my joy when I offered her a seat by my side in that dingy car and the pleasure of seeing and talking to her all to myself," he mentally acknowledged.

Once more he ceased walking and turned dreamily to the edge of the platform, his brain haunted with a low musical voice and his heart vibrating with new hopes and seeming possibilities. He turned and observed her standing opposite him looking out into the darkness.

"Were you driven out from that stuffy box?" he asked lightly.

"I am watching that lantern; it looks like a firefly in the distance. How do you account for it?" she replied.

They watched the swinging lantern and soon discovered it to be Patsy and his son.

"The storm is incracing ivery minute, an ye'll have to be courageous, ma'm," he said, as he handed Mr. Bossford a lantern.

The wind and sonw met them as they sank into the soft white billows. There was no opportunity for conversation as they silently plodded on until a ghostly mountain rose before them.

"Be jabbers, and this drift has come up like a toad

stool since I left," exclaimed Patsy, plunging his shovel into the cold white heap.

Mr. Bossford and Dennis followed his example, while Miss Louise looked on as she stood with the lantern to light the way. It was a tedious task, the snow drifting about them and the wind blowing furiously from every direction. They felt the need of haste as they silently worked.

Miss Louise watched their flying shovels, shifting her muff from one hand to the other to keep her fingers from freezing. She made an attempt to exercise her feet, that were imbedded in the deep snow. An indescribable languor was creeping upon her; her teeth no longer chattered, her jaws seemed stiffened. Suddenly the lantern fell and went out and the men turned to see through the falling flakes the form of Miss Louise lying in a bed of snow.

Dennis found the lantern; with matches from his pocket he restored the light.

Mr. Bossford hastened to dispose of his fur overcoat; wrapping her in its warm folds he proceeded to chafe her face and hands with snow.

"My God! Mister, I'm afraid the little woman's frozen to death," cried Patsy; dropping his shovel, he lifted her and stood her on her feet. "Shake her and keep her as warm as ye can in this murtherin' storm, for I dare not I've me work; she'll die fer sure if I do," said Patsy, as Mr. Bossford held her in his arms and tried to shake the delicate form that remained a dead weight.

"Father of all, spare her," he groaned, while he continued chafing her stiff fingers.

He then thought of her belief and wondered what she would have done had it been her experience to minister

to such a case. "Ah," he exclaimed, "God is all—there is no other power, is the thought she once gave me, and I will hold this thought for you, dear Louise."

Helpless, he looked about, holding firmly to the thought of God's omnipotence. He gazed across the flat to the dim light from the office window and groaned when he thought how unwise this perilous undertaking, chiding himself for consenting to her facing such a storm.

At that moment he heard voices. In the distance he saw lanterns and forms of men plodding through the storm. They were not coming toward him.

"Help! Help!" he shouted, "For God's sake come to our rescue."

The weary workmen were on their way to a warm fireside and the wind carried his voice away from them.

Patsy heard the cry and, lifting the lantern that he had taken pains to fasten to the handle of the idle snow shovel standing in the snow, he waved it, hoping to attract their attention.

"Thank God, they are coming," cried Mr. Bossford, once more shaking the inanimate form.

"And how is she?" inquired Patsy, approaching the gentleman, who was vainly attempting to keep her from being frozen.

"Oh, she is alive, I'm sure," said Mr. Bossford, "but too chilled to speak. Thank God, someone is coming to our rescue. They will help you to get through the drifts, I hope, and hasten our release from this desolation."

As he spoke he heard the shout from the approaching men who, armed with snow shovels, made speedy work through the partly shoveled drift. There were plenty of lanterns to light the way. While Dennis assisted Mr. Bossford to envelop Miss Louise in the warm fur cloak,

with the aid of the men he hoped to carry her to Patsy's dwelling.

"Do not attempt to carry me. I think I can walk." The words seemed frozen on Miss Louise's lips and brought a quick response from Mr. Bossford, who was bending over her, while the lights from the lanterns the men held opposite him shone upon his anxious face.

"Take courage, Miss Louise," he said, "we will soon be in a comfortable shelter."

She closed her eyes and languidly turned her head, which fell upon his arm.

"She is going! Oh, dear heart, you must not give up. God is your life." Forgetting the presence of the men in his anxiety, he bent over her and allowed his warm breath to touch her cheek.

Although too weak and chilled to open her eyes, she was conscious of his words of endearment and felt the warmth of his breath on her cheek.

At that moment something slid from the inside pocket of her cloak and fell against Mr. Bossford's hand. To his joy he found it to be a Japanese pocket stove, which he hastily opened and lighted and, having returned it to its place in her pocket, he was sure the warmth would permeate her delicate form.

She soon opened her eyes and smiled as she gazed into the brown eyes above her.

"Are you better, Miss Louise?" he asked tenderly.

"Yes indeed," she replied, "although the pocket stove was not the remedy," she added, "for it did not burn."

"Now, ma'm!" exclaimed Patsy, "Ye'll excuse me if I carry ye in me arms to me home. Ye'll niver be able to walk it, an' I know the way bether than anyone, so I'll go ahead."

To her surprise he lifted her in his strong arms and with vigorous plodding amid wind and snow they reached Patsy's cottage, where they found warmth and comfort and the cheery hospitable voice of his wife as she industriously attended to Miss Louise.

In the large kitchen the table stood laden with a warm supper, to which Bridget sent the men, excusing herself to care for Miss Louise, having brought a pan of ice water to bathe her chilled limbs.

"Pardon me, my dear good woman, for refusing the ice water; there is no need for it. I can assure you that I am perfectly well and comfortable," were words which caused Bridget to gaze with wonder on the lovely face looking up to her from the large rocker.

"Indade, ma'm, ye'll be sick, for its afther bein' froze most to death ye were——"

"No, I was not frozen. When I found myself so chilled that I could not speak or stand I took my remedy. I tried to realize the truth that God was life. And while it took me some time to get the consciousness of God as my life, then I began to improve and found myself free from the chill——"

"Ach yes, I remimber now that Norah O'Conner towld me that ye has a quare belief an' will take not even a sup of docthor's stuff, but gits well by prayin'. But I d'no, I d'no." Bridget shook her head and soberly went on: "I think I'd be afther frazin' before I'd git me sinses to pray at all, at all."

"You could, my good woman if you would learn this truth, how Christ healed by His perfect knowledge of God as the only power, who is life and the life of our life——"

"Indade, ye talks foine, but I'll not be afther under-

standin' ye." She abruptly left the room and soon returned with a tray filled with a warm supper, which Miss Louise accepted and ate heartily.

It was long after midnight when Louise Joy found herself in a billowy feather bed in the large square room which Bridget prided herself on calling her spare room.

The adventure had filled her busy brain with many thoughts as the strange incidents of the day came surging up and crowding her mind. A pair of kind brown eyes haunted her and the echo of his tender voice, and the warm breath upon her cheek thrilled her, for she had awakened to the fact that her soul had found its mate in this friend of her cousin, Jack Lester.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PICNIC UP THE MOUNTAIN.

THE busy hum of school life ceased when June, in a glory of blossoms and budding flowers, with balmy air and bird notes, whispered that the long vacation had begun.

The blue and white tent again occupied a place near the south wall under the large elm.

The boys were home for their long vacation, their joyous natures knowing no restraint while they roamed over hills and mountain-side or fished in the brook or rowed on Hunter Creek.

Bessie Andrews, having long since forgotten her shut-in life, skipped away with the others into the glad sunshine which had restored the color to cheeks and lips and made her beautiful.

Although odd as it may seem, Si exhibited greater improvement than either of the other boys. He had lost his circus slang, frequent bathing had improved his complexion, and his wiry locks, which constant exposure had bleached, had turned a soft golden brown. His appearance showed surprising culture and his genial manner and marked respect to all was surprising—particularly to his aunt Prissy, whose demeanor was no longer fierce; she met her nephew with a glad welcome and a wholesome kiss on his cheek that gave Si the assurance of her love.

"You'll grow up to be somebody in particular if you

keep on behavin' well. I ain't sot on prankin' boys and I guess you've got over that spell," she remarked as she proudly looked him over from crown to toe.

For days the children had been anticipating a picnic to Wahatchet Lake, which was located on the summit of Greytop. When Miss Deborah heard of the children's plans, who begged of her consent to allow Jacob to accompany them, she conceived the idea of giving a general picnic inviting the Hunter family to accompany, Miss Louise and herself with Prissy, Nora, and David Rodder to assist.

"Won't it be scrumptious," exclaimed Nan Mason when the children came to the brook where she was sketching to tell her the news.

"Just imagine, girls,—Prissy going to an out and outer outing with us nobodies——"

"Hush-sh-sh, Nan," warned Mamie, "You know we must guard our tongues——"

"Oh, goodness! I truly did forget," exclaimed the impetuous Nan, while she closed her easel, and having placed her tubes of paint in the case she was ready to go with the others for water cresses in the brook.

There could not have been a more perfect day than the one on which the merry party started for the mountain drive. The soft atmospheric haze from the golden-tinted clouds which floated in the azure sky threw a warm light over trees and shrubs. The wild flowers were abundant along the roadside, wild lilies nodded in the shadow of the rocks on which beds of mosses grew like great velvet cushions, and above all glad voices from happy children rang out on the clear air.

Prissy's straight prim figure, conspicuous under her cotton parasol, sat with Nora in Miss Deborah's market

wagon, which had been fitted for their comfort and convenience, who with David Green and Pat had started ahead to build fires and take care of the provisions before the arrival of the party.

Long before they reached the summit David Green had been enduring unutterable torment from the intrusive fringe of Prissy's parasol, which fluttered with playful presumption about David's nervous head, occasionally touching the rim of his small ears like the subtle tread of a spider. Nora could hardly conceal her laughing face as she watched the bobbing frame while they were being jolted over the rough rocks and down the ruts of the mountain road.

As the road grew steeper and the ruts deeper David Green became more uncomfortable and irritable, particularly when another jab from Prissy's parasol sent him with a bound out of the high wagon. Unable to resist the impetus, his feet skipped and bounded like a rubber ball for a moment and, not being able to regain his equilibrium, he reeled and finally fell and rolled down the steep mountain side until he struck a pine tree, that held him until he could collect his scattered senses and gather himself up.

Pat stopped the horses and called back to the unhappy David: "Air ye hurt, Misther Grane?"

"It's none of your blasted business whether I'm hurt or not. Can't a man get out and walk if he chooses without your yellin' in that way?" exclaimed the indignant little man as he limped about to find his hat.

"It depends on the manner in which ye gits out," laughed Pat, as he started his horses.

In the meantime the rest of the party leisurely followed, occasionally stopping to get a view of new scenes,

which were constantly presenting picturesque waterfalls, distant lanscapes, or surprising beds of moss, ferns, and lichens.

As they approached the summit the road became too steep to ride with comfort, and the gentlemen proposed that they walk the rest of the way. There were winding paths which they followed with ease, the children keeping close to the side of their elders, and long before noon they were shouting and laughing on the summit of their loved old Greytop.

Richard Bossford, after having assisted Miss Louise up the steep banks and over huge rocks, observed that by going a little further they would reach a natural stairway which would bring them to the summit in a less fatiguing climb.

"I should have proposed it to the party," he observed, "had I known just where to find it. However, I think it will not be very much out of our way.

"It seems an old Indian hunter lived on this mountain for years. Many of the old Rocktown people knew him, and John Porter tells me that he can remember when a small lad of seeing the old weather-beaten hunter who frequently came to town to sell baskets, doormats, and other articles."

"Yes indeed!" exclaimed Miss Louise. "The children have often entertained me with stories of old Wahatchet which Huldah Rodder told them, and Jacob told me this morning that his hut is still standing——"

"Here is the stairway," interrupted Richard Bossford. "Is it not a wonderful curiosity?"

"It looks as if Wahatchet tried to cheat nature by using a chisel and hammer," suggested Miss Louise. "Can it be possible that this is a natural stairway?"

"There are certain seasons of the year when the little lake above overflows, and that is supposed to be the secret of their smooth appearance. You will observe that the rocks are damp," he remarked as they began their ascent up the winding steps.

Miss Louise was speechless with surprise as they stood upon the great flat rock above. The world seemed below them in the mysterious hazy light. The scattered farms, the green fields in which the cattle were grazing, the distant river, and the little village of Rocktown stretched like a picture below them.

"I had no idea of anything so beautiful, so sublime as this," she murmured, tears filling her eyes. She was impressed with wonderful consciousness of nearness and tender love toward the great Father of all, exalting and awakening her soul with emotions heretofore unknown to her.

"My field glass will give you a better view," remarked Richard Bossford, after having silently studied her face, which had become illumined as she gazed on the wondrous scene.

"How distinctly you can see those twin elms on the knoll in Judge Hunter's field," she remarked after a few moments silence.

"I have a particular interest in those elms," he replied.

"Indeed, in what way?" Seating herself on the flat rock, she added, "I have always admired those trees and the view from that point is very fine."

"My interest in those elms is a natural one." Dropping on the stair below her, he went on: "Because they belong to me. I purchased that field of Judge Hunter last week, and I am thinking of building a house on that

knoll—" he hesitated—"and yet it depends wholly upon one condition, and that is for you to settle whether to build or not, for most assuredly I cannot live alone. Louise, Louise dear, cannot you understand me—that I love you, that I want you to be my wife, the mistress of my home?"

A bright flush arose to her cheeks; her eyes were radiating with joy as she looked into his earnest face, although she could not reply.

"Do not disappoint me; I could not bear it." Clasping her hands in his own, he went on: "I know that I am unworthy, dear. While I cannot come to you with a record of good works and good deeds as your ideal cousin Jack Lester, believe me, dearest, my soul awakened to a consciousness of God's inexhaustible love through loving you. It inspired me with faith and sent me on my knees in prayer. Your love has saved my soul, dear one, but your refusal I fear will break my heart."

She did not reply, but looked into his fine eyes, her own bright with the happiness which had come to her.

"Why are you silent, Louise? Can you not give me courage to build our pretty home on that knoll. Just one word from you, dearest——"

"Yes, Richard, you can build the house, and while you have made me very happy in acknowledging your love I can assure you it adds to my joy to know that through me you were led to know the Father's love."

At that moment they heard voices and the trampling of feet on the dry pine-strewn ground.

"Here they are!" exclaimed Nan Mason, her saucy flushed face appearing from behind a tall tree. "Luncheon is all ready and we are starved. Come and see our lovely table," leading the way to a picturesque spot where

David Green was placing a large pan of deliciously browned fish which he had been frying.

"Well, truants, give an account of yourselves," exclaimed Miss Deborah, approaching them. Their bright happy faces revealed to her their secret as she added: "How bright you both are looking. Have you been in search of happiness?"

"Yes indeed, and found it, Miss Deborah. Allow me to present to you my affianced wife," returned Richard Bossford proudly.

"You have my congratulations and good wishes. And yet, Mr. Bossford, you have robbed me. How can I forgive you?" Smiling through her tears, Miss Deborah clasped their hands in her own. They were joined by Judge Hunter and family, who added their congratulations, while Marion Hunter kissed both of them and exclaimed, "I am so glad to know that you, dear Louise, are to be my sister.

Later, the luncheon over, the party once more scattered. The boys and girls started for the lake, while the rest of the party accepted Judge Hunter's invitation to ascend the highest point of the mountain for a view of Rocktown and the surrounding villages, having brought a strong telescope for the purpose.

It was a fatiguing climb. However, the rare sight that met their view on every side richly repaid them for their pains. The stillness was broken by the voices of children from the picturesque lake below, where the two boats were gently gliding over the placid water.

"What are you going to do with those girls when they have reached womanhood?" Judge Hunter asked, approaching Miss Deborah, who was eagerly watching the gliding boats.

"I am fitting them for their life work. Undoubtedly Nan Mason will be an artist, while Flossie Cameron shows a marked passion for music. Mamie is a typical teacher and is a help even now to the younger ones. Of course, it will take time to learn their tastes, although it develops early in some of them. Perhaps, although I am not sure, one of my girls may be a writer." She hesitated. "Edna Curtis has a wonderful imagination and her stories are both amusing and original——"

They were interrupted by voices below and were amused to see the unmistakable form of Prissy Underwood and David Green, who was gallantly assisting her over the stones and jagged rocks, his face flushed with exercise as he pulled her tall angular figure up the steep.

"My stars! I'm all tuckered out an' can't go a step farther, not for all the tallscopes on airth. What is it, anyway?" cried Prissy in exhausted tones that reached the amused spectators above them.

"A telescope is an instrument used to look through to get a view of distant objects," returned David, proud to air his knowledge.

"Oh my land! I've seen 'em. Miss Debry has one; she calls it a sturrycope, and she has it to view picters."

"Wal, it ain't the same thing," returned David. "It's on a different plan; one is for pictures, the other for views."

"I never was took to views," said Prissy as she dropped upon a flat rock.

"It's a dreadful fine view up on that air p'int, but if you'd ruther set here it's all the same to me," returned David, seating himself by her side.

"I fear we are intruding upon an exclusive party; and

yet, how can we get down without interrupting them?" laughed Judge Hunter.

"I left word with David to come up in half an hour to take down this instrument, and I presume he has invited Prissy to accompany him," said his son.

"If that is the case we can go on and leave word for him to bring it when he comes," returned the judge, turning to assist Miss Deborah.

Prissy, rising as she saw the party descending, murmured: "I feel as if I sh'd hev' a fit 'way up here alone with a—a—man. I'm dreadful 'shamed of it. What on airth will they think?" looking about for a convenient place to conceal her tall form. "You air littler 'n I be; s'pose you crawl under that 'ere jab of rocks, an' then it won't look so surprisin' to 'em. I hain't any objection tew bein' with yew, fur I know yew air well meanin', but my land how it looks," she said. Once more seating herself, she spread her skirts over his protruding feet to conceal them from the party, who had been silent witnesses of the ludicrous scene.

"Well, Prissy, I hope you are enjoying yourself," said Miss Deborah, with a merry look in her eyes as she drew near the prim figure seated upon the narrow ledge of rock.

"Wal, yes, I'm tryin' to git a leetle fun outer this ja'nt. I was tuckered out climbing up here, so I sot down to take a view of these strange lookin' stuns and rocks. I started tew go up tew view through that 'ere tollyscope, but I guess I won't risk my neck to go any farther," said Prissy demurely.

The party were not fairly out of sight when David Green, unable to remain in the cramped position longer, sprang to his feet.

"By gum! There ain't a woman on earth will git me into such a scrape again. I declare it's the sneakinist thing I ever did in my ilfe, and I'll be blest if I know what it's for." His face was smeared with dust and grime, his hat bent beyond recognition, his disheveled hair and his clothes in a disreputable plight from close contact of blue mould under the ancient rocks.

"My stars! David Green, anybody'd think you had been on a spree by the way you look and talk."

"How'd you s'pose I can help my looks, crampin' myself into that durn place? What you wanted me to sneak in there for I can't see," stormed David, trying to brush the mould and cobwebs from his coat.

"Wal, don't git fidgety; I'll help you git it off," she said soothingly, while she rubbed and dusted his soiled suit.

"I s'pose my face is as black as smut from the dirt in that infernal hole," he murmured bitterly, while straightening his grey locks with his pocket comb.

"Why yes, it looks a leetle mite smutty, but I've got some camphire in my pocket and you can rub it off with my pocket hankercher," said the practical woman. Taking a small vial from her pocket, she saturated her handkerchief with the contents and the innocent man rubbed it vigorously over his face.

"What in the name of the seven furies have you given me?" he gasped, his eyes protruding and his face blazing with indignation and burning heat from the effects of strong camphor.

"It's nothin' but camphire; it won't hurt nothin', and it's cleaned yer face beautifully," she said, in strangely tender tones for her, while he was dancing on one foot, his fingers stretched out to their widest capacity and his arms stiffened with rage, fright, and the burning pain.

"Wal, I ain't no corpse, I want you to understand, and I don't need camphire to keep me," said the very much alive David, skipping about, his cheeks inflated and eyes bulging. "They ain't air enough here. Oh! I want air—air. I'm burning up. I'll go on the top of that 'ere rock and cool off and git the telescope," he cried. Pulling himself up as well as his bloodshot eyes would allow, he left her to pick her way alone, muttering as she went:

"My land! What a helpless set men be; they can't do nothin' fer theirselves.",

The higher David went the cooler he became, and when at last seated comfortably on the high rock he told himself that she was quite a practical woman after all. "It's that sneakin' that made me mad. But wimmen are such timid creatures; I suppose it's natural for 'em."

The following morning, immediately after breakfast, Nan shouldered her portable easel and with her case of paints started for the mountain path to sketch a group of birches, which she had on her mind to do for days, although she had been unable to do so owing to the constant call for her company on fishing expeditions, rides, berrying, and last the mountain picnic.

"Oh hum!" she sighed, adjusting her easel, "every blessed peg gone but one. I am in a charming plight." Having planted the easel near a fallen pine, she found a stick to supply the place of the lost peg, after which she stripped a pine branch and succeeded in fitting a substitute for the picture rest and proceeded to open her case of paints.

"Oh bother!" Down went the canvas, which called forth the exclamation.

"It's of no use in trying to work this way," she told

herself. Hastily rising, she started in search of better material to mend her broken easel.

Si Underwood had been out since breakfast fishing with poor luck and, catching a glimpse of her blue gown as she flitted in and out among the bushes, he rowed to shore and went in pursuit of her. To his surprise he found a demoralized easel, a vacant seat, and a case of paints and brushes. After restoring the necessary pegs and rest, he took the largest brush and, having given it a generous supply of paint, proceeded to flourish it over the new canvas.

"For a variety I will have a yellow sky," he murmured. "H'm! That's too yellow to be artistic," knitting his brow in perplexity. "Ah! Here is blue paint. I'll have a blue sky instead." Dipping his brush in the blue pigment on the palette, he once more made an attempt to carry the brush over the canvas.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, his blue eyes dilating in surprise, "it's as green as the Emerald Isle. But I can remedy that; I'll just turn the canvas upside down. Ha! That's fine." Taking a clean brush, he added, "Now I'll surprise the canvas by giving it a pink and blue sky." Dipping his brush in the permanent blue, he daubed the uncovered part. "Now for a dash of pink floating through my cerulean sky——

"Wha-a-t in creation ails the dastardly stuff? It's a royal purple!" he laughed, sitting back to view his work.

Nan, having heard the voices of the boys and girls calling, went to meet them. They had found a spruce log and were hard at work picking out dainty bits of gum. After finishing their work they found a shady spot where they lounged on the grass and planned for the next gypsy excursion. Suddenly Nan thought of her

paints and abruptly left her friends, who had not finished their plans.

Hearing approaching footsteps, Si dropped brush and palette and hurriedly hid behind a fallen pine.

"What in the name of my five senses has happened?" cried Nan; gazing with astonishment on the canvas, she burst into a hearty laugh. A severely black cow, with legs and tail in the air, was being chased by an orange-colored dog, under a purple sky, amid a forest of green. This was the picture Nan gazed upon and which caused the hearty laugh.

"Si! Si Underwood, no one but your wicked self would have dared to intrude upon my private studio and display your wretched skill upon my beautiful clean canvas! Come forth, you coward, or I will call the police. Ah! I see you skulking behind that pine——"

"Isn't it a beaut', Nan? Who can say after this that I am not an artist?"

"Si, you rascal, you have spoilt my work for to-day. But I'll forgive you if you'll help me gather up these things and carry my easel for me."

Si consented to this arrangement, thankful for her leniency and pleased to be in her congenial society. They took the winding path home.

"Only one more week of vacation, and then no more until the holidays," sighed Nan as they picked their way over the wooded path.

"Four months passes like the dew when one is hard at work, and I've a lot to do this year, for I've made up my mind to get into some business. I was talking with Mr. Mark Hunter and Mr. Bossford last evening, and they have promised me a position as soon as I finish the next two years course, for I shall not enter college—"

"Oh Si! You don't mean it."

"Yes, indeed I do. I want to be a business man; and you know, Mr. Bossford and Mr. Mark Hunter have leased the quarries; they want me to help and as they said 'to grow up with the business', and I hope to do it."

At that moment they were joined by the rest of the party, who announced that the dinner bell had rung.

CHAPTER XXV.

NEW YEARS AT GREYSTONE HOME.

THE winter was in no hurry that year and the bland Indian summer lingered for weeks, encouraging the busy workmen engaged on the new house that was growing on the knoll near the twin elms.

The girls at Greystone Home were in a flutter of excitement over the surprising news of Miss Louise's wedding, which was to take place during the holidays. While there were many private interviews with Mrs. Andrews and Bessie, in their sunny south tower room, over the important wedding gift for their loved teacher, there was also a strange atmosphere of secrecy pervading the house and a hurried mysterious look on each of the girl's faces. While all seemed to evade each other, slying away to some remote corner with locked doors they secretly enjoyed their own solitary company, happy over the beautiful effects which grew from their busy fingers for the annual Christmas tree.

Nan was the last to come out from her retreat, a suspicious dab of blue paint on her saucy nose and strange, mysterious streaks of green and yellow down her school gown, while her hair was in a very disheveled condition, arousing the curiosity of her mates, who begged her to tell them of her hiding place; and not until they each received the pretty china cup and saucer from the Christmas tree did she tell them of her retreat to the lower regions in the furnace room, where she worked daily on

each dainty piece, stricken with mortal fear that she could not get them finished in time for the firing.

The boys came home the week before Christmas, and the silence which had prevailed during those busy weeks was broken by peals of laughter, happy songs, and cheery chatter.

The day before New Year's great excitement pervaded Greystone Home. Presents from Miss Louise's old schoolmates and friends came pouring in. Pretty new dresses for the girls came from the dressmakers to be tried on and talked over. David Green bustled in and out arranging plants and ferns from Judge Hunter's greenhouse. Cut flowers bloomed everywhere and sent forth a generous fragrance from their beds of moss in dainty baskets and vases.

The house, having been put in company order, was in no condition for the New Year's Eve frolic, until Nan suggested the school-room, and soon a glowing fire was roaring up the chimney from the capacious fireplace, before which Peter Keekant used to sit and dream his evenings away with no thought that the presence of laughing happy children would radiate that room and mingle their voices in joyous song with the roar and crackle of the cheery fire as it rose to the chimney out on to the frosty air. Although a philanthropic man, he never dreamed out anything so beautiful, in all his visions of "good will to men," as this living picture of happy innocent young faces grouped about the fireplace in his old office.

"We did not have one bit of fun Hallowe'en night," said Nan, watching intently the shaking corn popper that Si held by the long handle, as the small kernels

snapped, popped, and swelled into large white flakes of delicious delicacy.

"What's the difference! We can have all the fun tonight," exclaimed Phil.

"Oh, no, indeed, we cannot expect to keep New Year's Eve as we would have kept Hallowe'en," returned Bessie, who was holding the pan for Si to drop the contents from his corn popper, which fell in a white heap beneath her glowing face.

"Oh, that's all nonsense!" exclaimed Nan, springing to her feet. "What do you suppose St. Sylvester cares whether we have a bit of superstitious fun on New Year's Eve or All Saints' Eve? We'll roast some chestnuts, and name them, too, if someone will go with me to the attic and keep the mice away while I get them."

Si dropped his corn popper and was on his feet at once; striking an attitude, in tragic tones he exclaimed:

"Call upon me, fair maid, that I may light you to that dangerous height where dwells the subtle mice. Their silent realm alone thou shalt not enter,

For I will scale the dizzy height
And burst upon them with my might.
And right before their winking eyes,
While listening to their angry cries,
'Neath cobweb beams of dust and grime,
I'll sacrifice my garments fine.
For thy dear sake, with this tin pan
I'll capture all the nuts I can."

"Wheresoever thou wilt lead I will follow, brave warrior, for danger lurks on every side from this vile foe," mocked Nan as they disappeared passing through

the dimly lighted dining room. They paused in the narrow entry to the kitchen.

"Whist! What do my eyes behold?" whispered Si.

"An innocent little man and a powerful woman," echoed Nan. "What shall we do now?" she murmured.

"We will halt and learn whether the party is hostile or friendly," returned Si in an undertone.

A bright kerosene lamp was burning on the kitchen table, revealing Prissy Underwood, sitting prim and straight in a high-backed chair, which partly concealed her figure from the two in the dim entry. Suspiciously near sat David Green, with a very serious expression on his countenance, which changed occasionally about the mouth in a convulsive pucker, as if about to send forth a prolonged whistle. His hands were clasped and his thumbs nervously twirling. They both seemed to be engaged in silent thought as they gazed on the large range, which threw out a cheery warmth.

Prissy at last broke the silence. As if arousing from a dream, she said: "I'm dreadful tired; I've been up since before daylight, and it don't seem ez if I'd had time tew ketch my breath until this minit."

"Of course, of course, weddings make work. It kept me on the go pretty nigh all day getting them plants from the greenhouse without freezing, then getting them arranged around them north windows. Miss Debry says they are air-tight. To-morrow will tell the story, for the wind will creep in, no matter how air-tight they are, and my opinion is I shall lose some of my choice plants," returned David, puckering his mouth.

"Land sakes! It do seem as if they have made tew

much over this weddin'. What on airth is the sense of all these plants stuck under foot every step yew take? If I upsot that tall geranicum onct I did twenty times," said Prissy with a yawn.

"Which one!" exclaimed David, alarmed.

"Why, that round oval one that's got the little briers all around it and the long leaves."

"Oh! Ho, that ain't a geranium, Prissy; that is a 'papunka posipon', a choice South American palm," said David, convulsively drawing up his mouth.

"Wal, I don't care what it is, Dutch—or French—I think it's humbly enough to be a plain United States mullen, and I don't see no sense in hevin' 'em around," she remarked decidedly.

"This weddin' is dreadful sudden," she went on, "and why on airth they couldn't hev waited till spring or summer I can't see; then they could go right out intew the garden and got married under the climbin' rose bush and save all this muss."

"Wal, I kinder like sudding weddings. I've been thinking since that camphire accident that I didn't treat you fust rate after you took so much pains to wash my face, and I hain't had time to come over before to apologize," said David, turning his eyes toward her.

"Oh, that wa'n't nothin'—"

"I'm glad to hear you say so," drawing his chair nearer her. "I've been thinkin' for some time that you have to work pretty hard here; how would you like to have a nice little cottage to live in, and be your own mistress—hey—?" hitting her arm with his elbow.

"Why, I'd like it well enough, if it had a fresh coat of paint on it, and some green blinds—your house looks like fury without 'em—and I sh'd want a piazzer in

front, and a stun walk up ter the door, and plenty of paint and fresh paper inside, and good new carpets, and a good kitchen stove, and not one of them old black chairs like them in your kitchen."

"Wal, that's what I call plain speech, and it's correct to come to a perfect understanding. I s'pose you wouldn't want a hired girl or nothin'," said David, drawing his chair nearer.

"Why, no, I ain't sot up in my idees of work; I guess I kin manage three in a family."

"*Three in the family!* Why, I am slightly—hem—surprised—hem," puckering his mouth,—"hem—that you had a family, Prissy."

"Haven't I got a nephew, David Green, my brother's son—"

"Oh! Ah! Yes—but I did not think you'd care to—to—support him. I like mannerly, well-behaved boys like Phil Andrews, but you know that 'ere Si is full of the old Harry."

"I ain't sot on perfect children," said Prissy, significantly drawing back her chair, "'n I shall take care of him till I git tew old, then I s'pose he'll take care of me."

"Right you are, Aunt Prissy," murmured Si from the entry, his mouth stuffed with his handkerchief to keep back the laughter, while Nan was shaking and giggling behind her white apron that she had bunched into a ball to hold before her mouth.

"About how old be yew, Prissy?" inquired David, turning his eyes toward her.

"Wal, that's what I call my bizness. I don't think it makes a mite of difference tew yew or ennybody how old I be," was the short reply.

"Oh, no, not a mite. I only wanted to know whether yew was *very* much younger than I, and so I thought I'd kinder know about how many years yew'd hev to look after that boy before he'd turn about to look after you. I don't object to a mannerly, stidy boy that would work and not be full of the old—"

"My land! David Green, tain't nothin' tew yew. He ain't yewr relashin, and I kalkerlate tew look after him, and you can't help yourself," snapped Prissy.

"No, I s'pose not; only I wanted to jest argue a little," said David humbly. "You see," he continued, "if you and I should conclude to git married I should want that boy Si to be brought up to work and learn a good trade, instead of gitting so much book learning. My wife was a dreadful hand to read, and she died with water on the brain, and so I thought we'd argue the p'int of that question before we come to final conclusions. You know it's dangerous for such—hem—I mean such mischievous little fellows to over read or study, as it might bring on disease—that's all, Prissy," he said, drawing his chair nearer her.

"Wal, I sh'd think you'd said enough. I'm a dreadful sot woman, and I don't want anyone to argy with me the question agin that boy or his edication," she said raspingly.

"Prissy, I'll agree that it's wimmen's nature the world over; they will stick to their ideas and never give in tew the men."

"They hev' to be sot; if they wasn't, men would boss 'em as they dew their horses," said Prissy.

"Not all men, not all. I am dreadful respectful tew wimmen, Prissy," he said, vetnuring his chair still nearer. "A widerer gits dreadful lonesome, Prissy."

"I don't know nothin' about it; I never was one," said Prissy demurely.

"Wal, no, I s'pose not, and I thought if you didn't think yourself too young, we'd git—"

They were startled by a prolonged shout from Nan and Si, who could not longer suppress their laughter.

"She's no spring chicken, David Green; and if you want to marry my aunt I will not stand in your way, for I shall support myself as soon as I leave school, and I assure you all the book knowledge I receive will not turn my head into a watermelon," said Si, lighting a small hand lamp.

David started to go. "I think we had better postpone this question," he murmured, his mouth close to Prissy's ear.

"I don't see eny need on't. Silas is dreadful frolicsome; he don't mean nothin'," returned Prissy, following him to the door.

"We'd never git along. He's too full of the—eh—the old Harry—to make anything of him. Mind what I tell you, Prissy, that boy will come to a bad end. I never could put up with his sassy ways, never," said David firmly, his hand on the door.

"Them is his frisky little ways. It took me quite a spell to git used to 'em, but his prankin' days is 'most over, so don't mind him; I don't a mite."

"Wal, I'll consider it. Good-night," and the little man disappeared in the darkness.

"Prissy will be mad and report us, I know, but I could not help laughing if she had chased me with a red hot poker. Just imagine it, Si,—those two old fossils courting," laughed Nan, seating herself on the top stairs.

"And talking about housekeeping like two turtle doves in a band box. Why it was enough to make an ancient mummy roll over in a fit of hysterics," replied Si, brimming over with laughter.

"And to think how impolitely you spoke to your future uncle. Why, Si, you should not have been so rude; Prissy will not forgive you if you spoil their prospects."

"I was not rude. I wanted to make things easy for that old herb and relieve his mind in regard to myself, so that nothing would come between him and his sweetheart. I was boiling to tell 'em they were natural born fools. Where are the chestnuts, Nan?" he said raising the lampwick, for they had reached the attic.

"They are in that corner, if the mice haven't stolen them," said Nan; climbing over the spinning wheel, she peered into the corner where the treasures were spread.

"Great Scott! What a lot you girls have gathered," exclaimed Si. "What are you going to do with 'em? You certainly can't eat them this winter."

"We are going to sell them. Of course, you know our apples, eggs, and nuts are our spending money for our society," returned Nan.

"Do you manage to sell enough to amount to anything?" inquired Si, snapping a chestnut between his teeth.

"Most assuredly we do. John Porter has engaged a bushel, and wants more if we can spare them, and nearly all of our walnuts are sold except the few in our bank. Come and see it; we named it our walnut bank because we had such heaps of 'em," said Nan, tumbling over some boxes to the store of walnuts near the south window.

"Great Caesar! Do you pretend to say you have these left from your sales?" exclaimed Si.

"Why, of course, and Ezra Crump sent word that he wants more, and Mrs. Clyning called this morning to engage some," said Nan proudly.

"Who is Mrs. Clyning?" inquired Si.

"Oh, she is a rich lady who has built a lovely summer house down in the village. She has no children and has taken a great fancy to Flossie and wants to adopt her."

"What's that you're telling me? Adopt Flossie?" he repeated.

"Why, yes, that's what I said. But Miss Deborah has not decided yet," said Nan soberly.

"Does Flossie want to go?" inquired Si, very much interested.

"I don't know how she would feel if she really thought she was going to leave us, but she seems very fond of the lady."

"Great cats! I should think she would hate to leave this home, and I don't believe she will."

"Why, Si, we can't live here forever, you know," returned Nan in a quiet tone. "We will remain here until we can earn our own living, and then we must go," she sighed.

"Oh, that time is a long way ahead, so don't let us worry over it," he laughed, as the lamp between them revealed her unusually sad face.

"I can't help thinking of it, and when I do it worries me, for I'm sure it will be a hard thing for me to plod and dig to get enough to eat and wear, for I just hate to do the things one would be obliged to do to earn a living. I could not take in plain sewing, for I hate it and sew my fingers

right into the work and the end looks as if it had been chewed."

"There are other things one can do without spending their time jabbing their fingers with a needle," said Si, sympathetically.

"Oh, my yes! Cooks are always in great demand; Mamie and Flossie would make a fortune with their elegant cake and puddings, and Edna Curtis has made delicious pies and biscuits. But I'm not a cook, only to blister my fingers. Besides, I never get anything right. Once in my heedless stupidity I proudly made a cake that no one could eat; I put in it two cups of salt instead of sugar. And if I hadn't made that mistake, it would have been something else," she said dubiously.

"Don't worry over it, Nan. Don't you know that God is love, and that God's child will never come to want for any good thing? It's been a big help to me to know this fact—truth is a better word——"

"Oh, Si! It is good of you to try to encourage me. Miss Louise is the only one to whom I go with my anxious forebodings, and she talks to me just as you do. Really my anxiety is on account of Miss Deborah; I fear she is already discouraged over my careless ways, as she calls them. If I did not love her dear sweet self so well I would not be so anxious about leaving her; and yet it is not in me to be orderly and able to do the nice things the other girls do."

There was a sob in her voice quite unusual to the lively Nan, and the boy, who was nearly a head taller, looked into her sad eyes which suggested tears.

There had always been a chord of sympathy between these two, although this was a part of her nature unknown to him; the rollicking, laughing Nan to be chiding herself

for her own faults as if they were another's, to allow herself anxiety over self-support and leaving Greystone Home, caused him to awaken to the fact that she was an orphan and that some time she must join the army who toil and struggle for their daily bread. His early experience of self-support had been through unfortunate circumstances until he reached Greystone Home, and well he knew the meaning of that word orphanhood.

And Nan, having awakened to her faults, had seemed to have forgotten the care and tenderness of her good foster-mother and was anxious over her future when, having outgrown the home nest, she would be sent forth to learn to fly with weak wings to seek her daily bread, with no helpful song of encouragement from the mother bird.

"Nan!" It was Si's voice, earnest and sympathetic, for he had noticed in their silence that there were tears in her eyes.

She looked up to his serious face and smiled through her tears.

"I'm horrid to cry, I know, but I've been full of tears all day. I suppose it is because darling Miss Louise is to leave us. I'm sure I never can get along with that new teacher; besides, it makes me think of when we will all be parted from this dear home. Lillian has gone, and Miss Louise and Flossie will soon go. Si, please don't laugh at me, for I must cry." She buried her face in her apron and, leaning on a dusty pile of boxes, sobbed aloud.

Down went the pan of chestnuts, with a noise which sent the mice scampering to their holes. The small lamp in his hands came near upsetting. His arm was around her waist and his mouth close to her ear.

"Nan, don't—don't cry; I hate tears. Don't you know what the ninety-first Psalm tells us? I know every word

of it, and when anything worries me I go for it: 'He shall call upon me and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble. I will deliver him and honor him.' Now, Nan, you are imagining trouble, for there is no trouble. When the time comes for you to leave this home God will open another door just as good as this and He will give His angels charge over you, just as He is doing now. I'll never forget what Miss Louise once told me; she said Christ was my invisible companion. And I believe it; He helps me every way, when at school or anywhere I happen to be, at work or with my studies, and now I never feel anxious over anything."

"Oh, Si! Is it possible that you can talk like this? I am ashamed of myself. I'll never worry any more. I've had my cry, and I feel better, but it's the last. I will trust more and take that same companion for my refuge and fortress. I know that Psalm by heart, and hereafter I'll not forget the promise, 'There shall no evil befall thee'——"

"But I'd just like to know why you took this time for your season of tears. You look as if you had the pink eye," he laughed, brushing a cobweb from her sleeve.

"I seldom cry, but when the fountain of tears opens you may be assured I am generous with them——"

They heard voices in the hall. The children were calling.

"We have come to your rescue," exclaimed Phil, "for we feared the rats and mice had carried you off."

"We had a little difficulty passing the lines, for we did not have the password," laughed Si, which brought a wild ring of laughter from Nan, whose suspiciously red eyes kept her in the shadow.

"You should have called upon Nan to squeal," said Flossy, munching a chestnut.

"That's just what I did do," laughed Nan, "and it carried us through right into the face of the enemy."

"Do tell us all about it," said Ralph, resting his foot on a broken chair.

"Not until we go to the school-room," said Nan. Taking up the lamp, she ran ahead while the rest followed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CHANGES AT GREYSTONE HOME.

THE pretty house between the twin elms on the knoll was a year old and the velvet lawn as luxuriant as its neighbors. The garden was radiant with flowers. Its wealth of roses filled the air with fragrance, mingled with the honeysuckles that twined in and about the piazza lattice, which struck Miss Deborah Lee with a sense of delicious profusion of sweet odors as she approached the house, stopping for a moment to admire the varied coloring blending softly in the morning sunlight, shading away to a background of pines and hemlocks in the grove beyond. She went on to the garden, where she found her friend among the roses, who radiant with smiles turned to greet her.

"Your home is lovely, Louise. It is fit for a queen, and not too good for my dear friend," said Miss Deborah, clasping Mrs. Bossford's hand.

"It is kind of you to express yourself in this way, Deborah. While I quite appreciate your pretty compliment, I can assure you I cannot understand why I should be worthy of so much happiness when others, who have done a thousand times more in heart-wrung service for the Master than I, are desolate and worn."

There was a moment of silence before Miss Deborah replied.

"He knows better than we who can endure the gladness of this life, counting Him first; just as He knows the

glory of the harvest when the sheaves are ready," she said in a low voice, suggestive of a sob, burying her face in the bunch of roses that Mrs. Bossford had placed in her hand.

"Come into the house out of this sun, dear, and tell me what has given you that expression in your eyes," returned Mrs. Bossford. Leading the way to the piazza, she seated her friend in an easy willow rocker.

"Now, dear, confess. For your face is a tale bearer, and I am sure you are anxious over something. What is perplexing you and drawing your dear face down like this?" said Mrs. Bossford, seating herself on a stool at her friend's feet.

Miss Deborah rocked back and forth, separating the buds from the full-blown roses in her lap, arranging and re-arranging with surprising silence, trying to command her voice in order to speak clearly. She said at last:

"Louise, I feel very much like repeating that old, worn-out story:

> '"'Twas ever thus from childhood's hour;
> I've seen my fondest hopes decay.
> I never loved a tree or flower
> But it was first to fade away.'"

"Who is going to leave you, dear? Not Prissy?" laughed Mrs. Bossford, hoping her cheeriness would become contagious.

"No, Prissy is not going, although she caused me to feel just a little suspicious a year ago; I have decided she is a fixture at Greystone Home," returned Miss Deborah, with a faint smile.

"Do not keep me in suspense, Deborah, but tell me who

is going to leave Greystone Home," said Mrs. Bossford impatiently, as she looked up to her friend's sad face.

"First allow me to admit that my common sense is overwhelmed with foolish sorrow, and while I should rejoice I am full of tears at the thought of parting with one of my flock. First Lillian left me, then your dear self, both causing my stubborn heart the need of severe discipline. And now I am under the rod again, for Flossy is to leave me: she goes to New York with Mrs. Clyning. If she is happy with the lady she will remain as her adopted daughter," said Miss Deborah, trying to appear cheerful.

"I can understand how you feel, dear," said Mrs. Bossford, "and yet it is an excellent opportunity for Flossie. Mrs. Clyning has wealth and can give Flossy advantages of society, and she will have a glimpse of the world in the right way, for I understand Mrs. Clyning is an excellent woman. Your life lessons have been of such a deepening and strengthening nature to these girls, dear Deborah, that I am sure not one of them will go from your fold without a halo of your influence about them," returned Mrs. Bossford feelingly.

"While you are kind to comfort me in that way, dear Louise, I do not forget that you deserve equal credit in training their young minds, and whatever good comes from their life work you must have your share," said Miss Deborah earnestly.

"I will not ask for the credit; you and you only must have that. I want the reward. While you have had a year to think of Flossy's leaving you, I am going to pierce your heart by giving you short notice that I want one of your girls; and you must not refuse me, dear," said Mrs. Bossford, eagerly clasping her friend's hand.

"Why, Louise! How you surprised me!" exclaimed

Miss Deborah. "Which one of them is to be made happy over such blissful prospects?"

"Richard and I have been talking and planning over this matter for some time, although we delayed asking for her, fearing your refusal," said Mrs. Bossford seriously.

"Why, Louise, dear, have you so little faith in me?" returned Miss Deborah reproachfully. "Do you not know that you have a right to any one of those dear girls? Although I greatly fear it will occasion jealousy among the others."

"Ah! No indeed! Deborah, you do not realize the love of those girls for you," said Mrs. Bossford. "This one that I have chosen has been fretting for two years over the parting from Greystone Home, and I have yet to learn if she will come to me willingly. It is Nan Mason I want. Do you think she will.come to me?" she asked, her cheeks flushed with earnest desire.

"Nan! You do not mean that you want my happy-go-lucky, careless Nan, to litter your pretty house and daub your new carpets with her corrupt paints. Why, your household will tremble on the verge of a cyclone if Nan gets here with her bluster and muss," exclaimed Miss Deborah breathlessly.

"I will answer for all that," laughed Mrs. Bossford "I think I understand Nan better than anyone, and all I need to make myself happy in the matter is your free consent and that of Nan's. I have my doubts, however, that she will care to come."

And so Miss Deborah returned to Greystone Home with a strange sense of sadness, mingled with that of gratitude; for, while each of these orphan girls had wound herself about her heart, she felt the necessity of their leaving her

for happy permanent homes. She crushed her sorrow and rejoiced that three of her flock had found them.

Two weeks passed when, one deliciously cool morning in July, Nan Mason stood upon the threshold of a pretty room, in the new house, and eagerly looked within. Her soul was filled with a mysterious awe as she realized that for the first time in her life she had a room which was all her own. She looked down to the carpet of the softest coloring of grey, over which the weaver had strewn with artistic skill crimson and yellow roses; and as her bright eyes scanned each article she was happy over the sense of a restful harmony of coloring that pervaded all.

"It is too beautiful for use," she murmured, stepping within. She clasped her hands with silent admiration and looked about the crimson and gold room. Opposite, half concealed by a dainty portiere, she caught a glimpse of another room; timidly she stepped within as if intruding upon forbidden grounds.

For a moment she stood spellbound in this room, fitted up as a small studio. An easel stood in a corner by the window, on which was a canvas for painting; near on a dainty stool were brushes and a case of paints, ready for use. The oaken floor was covered with an Oriental rug. A deep oak wainscoting ran around the room, above which the hard finished ceiling was painted in the softest of grey coloring, on which her own paintings were hung with artistic effect.

"It is like a beautiful dream," she murmured, too absorbed in her joy to hear the approaching footsteps of Mrs. Bossford.

"Are you happy, Nan?" were the words that aroused her.

"Oh, my dear, dear friend, how good you are to me,"

cried Nan, impulsively throwing her arms about Mrs. Bossford, her face radiant with happiness.

"And you are good, Nan, to come to me. I want you to be happy, dear, in this home, for it is yours as long as you live; or, I will add, until some good man comes to steal you away from us to make you his wife," said Mrs. Bossford tenderly.

"I do not think that day will come," returned Nan. "Indeed, I feel quite sure I can never leave you. I am called a happy-go-lucky, careless girl, yet I can assure you not one of the girls at Greystone was as anxious over her future as myself. I have often heard Miss Deborah say she was preparing us for our life work in whatever capacity we were competent. Imagine my sorrow and lamentations when I realized that I was not capable of being anything, not even a poor servant."

"Had you forgotten your art when recounting your lack of capabilities?" Mrs. Bossford inquired, with her arm around Nan's slender waist.

"Oh, Mrs. Bossford, it was my painting that made me so hopelessly slow over everything, so dreamy and forgetful over my lessons. Miss Deborah could not understand my rapture when I bounded from the school-room, upsetting books and slates, eager to hurry off to the woods or anywhere, that I could be out under the glorious sky with its ever-changing clouds; tearing my dresses climbing the wall or trees to peep at a bird's nest, wetting my feet in the brook to get a glimpse of sunlight on a dashing waterfall, or burning my face to paint my downy chickens. Oh, no, dear friend, my love of art has ruined me for anything useful in life," said Nan seriously.

A curious glow of satisfaction illumined Mrs. Bossford's face as she replied.

"I can appreciate your feelings in a measure, although I have not that divine love for art that you have, Nan; for mine is cultivated, and yours is natural. Do you realize, dear, that you paint better than I, your first teacher?"

"Oh, Mrs. Bossford, is it possible you think so?" interrupted Nan.

"Yes, dear, I am sincere in what I tell you. My pictures have not the depth that you give to your work. Nan, *you* are an artist; your whole soul is poured out in your painting; it has grown within a year. Nan, my child, you have great power and capabilities. Do not be discouraged. Miss Deborah could not appreciate art as you do; she tells me she has no taste for it. And while I knew this, I could appreciate her patient love for you."

"Ah, dear, dear Miss Deborah! How I love her. I asked her forgiveness and confessed every fault to her before I left," sighed Nan, "and now I am going to try and keep so good and clean that there will be no need of confessing to thee, dear darling friend," impulsively kissing the hands she held in her own.

They stepped to the pretty bedroom as she spoke. "My love and gratitude to you, dear Mrs. Bossford, is more than I can express for this beautiful room," she went on, her face radiant as she patted the dainty cushion on the dresser and tenderly touched the lace curtains that hung in graceful folds before the large windows.

"It gratifies me to know it pleases your artist eye, although I was quite sure I knew your favorite colors," said Mrs. Bossford, straightening the cushion Nan had patted out of place.

"Oh, yes, indeed! You know, I never can endure those doll pinks and blues that Flossy and Mamie rave over, and Nettie tells me is a mark of refined taste," laughed Nan.

"I am like Prissy; I want good strong colors that will wash."

"And so do I," cried Mr. Bossford, appearing in the door.

"Particularly if it is a good healthy color," returned his wife, pinching Nan's cheek.

"Yes, just as nature painted it," he said, approaching them. He smoothed back the hair from Nan's forehead and looked into her bright, happy face. "You have come to live with us, Nan; are you going to be happy here?" he tenderly asked.

"If you will keep me I will live with you. And, oh, I am indeed happy." The last words were lost in a sob. Mrs. Bossford's arm was around her. While his hand still rested on her head, she heard his voice in low, tender, affectionate tones, as he said:

"Blessings on thee, daughter of our adoption. May your life be as happy with us as your sunny nature deserves."

For a moment Nan hesitated before replying. She could not tell why she felt like weeping. Everything had brought her joy; certainly she was happy.

"If years of devotion can cancel this debt of love, your daughter Nan will certainly strive to pay it," she replied 'mid smiles and tears.

As the days went on, all who loved Nan realized that a new era had dawned upon her; childhood like magic had departed, and like magic the flush of youth touched her cheeks and gave light to her bright eyes, while there was an intense expression of earnestness in her face unlike the thoughtless Nan of old.

Therefore, when vacation days were over and school duties once more began at Greystone Home, the new teacher missed the absent faces and sighed as she looked

at the lonely vacant seats, and Miss Deborah Lee for the first time realized her mission to Greystone Home when three of her eldest girls grouped about her and asked for their life work. She looked with surprise into their faces, glowing with youthful ardor mingled with a touch of womanly gravity, and knew their butterfly days had slipped away.

"I cannot part with you, dear girls," she said. "Your life work must be here at Greystone Home with me. Miss Helen needs an assistant, for we have decided she needs more time for the drawing and painting class; and so, Mamie, your dream of a teacher's life will be realized, while Edna and Nettie can relieve me of the care of the younger class, giving me an opportunity to take a trip to Europe if all goes well; for I will lay my burden of care upon your youthful shoulders. Will you take it, dear children, and allow your foster mother a few months rest?"

"Gladly, gladly, dearest Miss Deborah," they exclaimed, eager to show their devotion, caressing her hands and softly stroking her brown hair. They were interrupted by the appearance of Phil Andrews and Ralph Hunter, who came to invite them to a farewell picnic up the mountain that afternoon before leaving to take up their college life.

"How my boys and girls are slipping away from me," said Miss Deborah, looking into Phil's glowing face, that had lost none of its merry smiles or brightness, to his kind grey eyes, that beamed above the budding moustache, contrasting with Ralph's smooth face and large blue eyes, so like Lillian's, with the earnest expression of his mother's. She was impressed as she gazed at their tall forms and the dignity and ease with which they moved and noted that with all their youthful ardor there mingled

an unmistakable touch of mature manliness on each of their young faces.

"Yes, we are made aware of the fact that we are growing, for you only echo mamma's words," said Phil, "and yet I think we have not reached the extraordinary height of a giant," he laughed, slapping Ralph upon the shoulder, and interrupting a pleasant tete-a-tete he was having with the girls.

"Come, old fellow; we have no time to spare. The morning is speeding away, and we have yet to call at Mrs. Bossford's and get Nan's consent to go out on our outing expedition," said Phil merrily.

"If you wish to see Nan you will find her up in the mountain path," said Miss Deborah. "I saw her going over the rustic bridge equipped for painting about half an hour ago."

"Oh, that will be jolly. Come, girls, go with us, please, for we may need your assistance to find her," exclaimed Ralph.

And so they left. Their happy voices and ringing laughter floated back to Miss Deborah as she watched them cross the rustic bridge.

"Happy youth," she murmured. Turning, she met Mrs. Andrews with Lillian Hunter, who had taken her first music lesson on the piano that morning.

"She will make an apt little music scholar," said Mrs. Andrews, as she softly caressed the child's white hand.

Miss Deborah looked down upon the lovely bright face, in its frame of golden hair which fell in waves to her shoulders.

"You are growing fast, darling," she said. "Soon I shall have no little girls. Ah! Can I realize that you are ten years old? My birdie, my baby, that led me to my

life work," she murmured, pressing her lips to the youthful brow.

"What an idle, listless, useless life mine would have been had not this child been sent to me. From her advent upon us that stormy night, seven years ago, sprang this home for my orphan girls. Do you wonder, Mrs. Andrews, that I love her?"

"Indeed, Miss Deborah, I am not as surprised over your tender love for this child as I am for your wonderful and patient self-denial, giving up the better part of your life to this orphan home. Believe me, dear, few would have done it," said Mrs. Andrews feelingly.

" 'Even as ye did it unto the least of these ye did it unto me,' and in doing for the Master I have brought the blessing to myself. Cups of service are returned in full measure pressed down and running over," Miss Deborah replied.