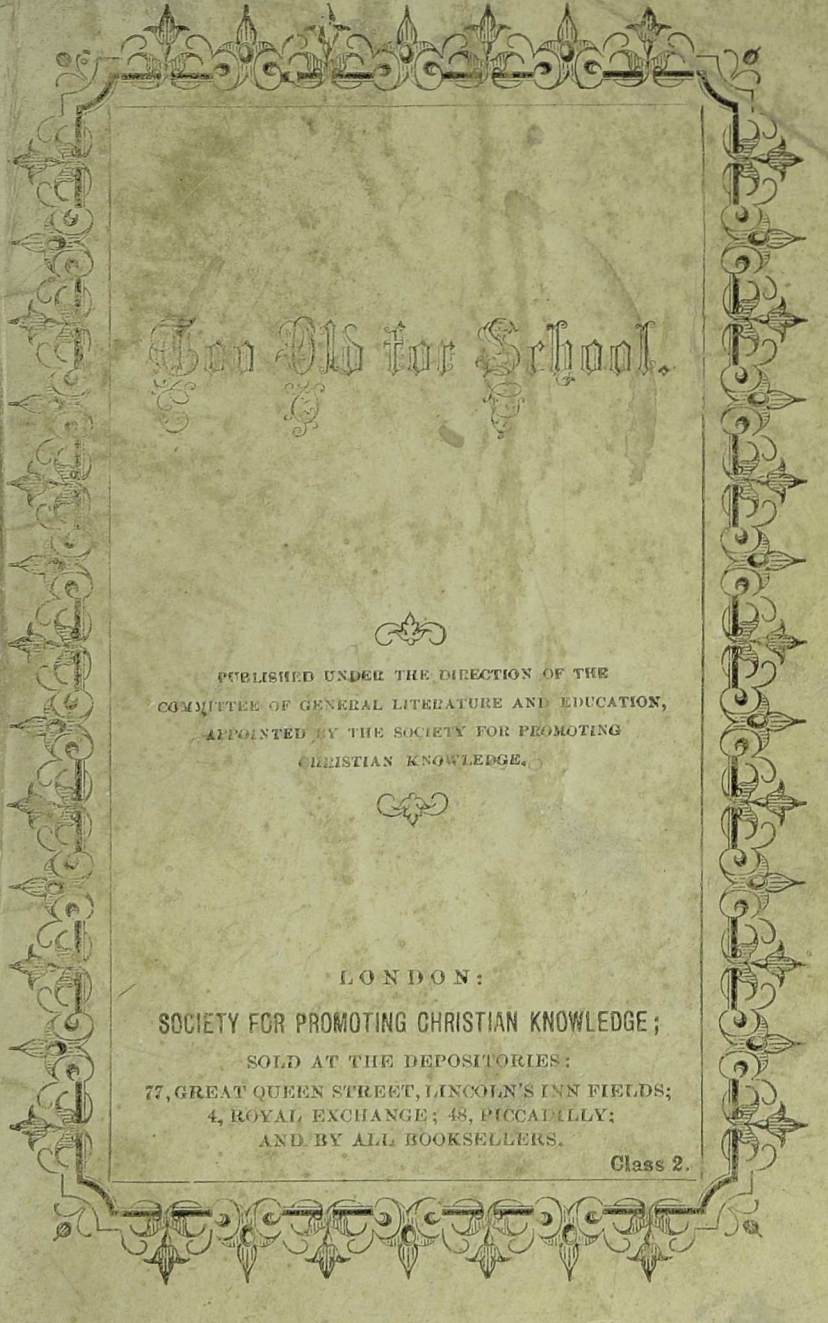




Too Old for School.

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE
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APPOINTED BY THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

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For Girls who have been Confirmed.

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TOO OLD FOR SCHOOL.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. SELWYN, the wife of the clergyman of Fairfield, was told one morning, when engaged with her children, that two of the school-girls wished to see her.

They proved to be Rachel and Lucy Ashford, the daughters of the gardener at the Hall.

"Well, my girls, what is it you want?" she asked kindly.

"If you please, ma'am," said Lucy, speaking first, "we are come to say, thank you for all favours."

"That means, I suppose, you are going into service. I think, Rachel, Mrs. Elton informed me you are going to be second kitchen-maid at the Hall."

"Yes, ma'am; the housekeeper was so good as to say she would take me on trial for the place."

"I hope you will give satisfaction. I know you have been used to help your mother, and are not afraid of work; and Mrs. Dawson is a kind and respectable woman, who will teach you

your duty well, and befriend you so long as you do your best. There is one thing I wish to speak about, Rachel. I know the under kitchen-maid has a holiday on Sunday afternoon ; I hope I shall see you at school."

" If you please, ma'am," replied Rachel, " I was going to ask if you would allow me to attend. Though I cannot be spared in the morning, I can come both to church and school in the afternoon."

" I am pleased to hear you say so, my dear," said Mrs. Selwyn, smiling kindly. " I shall always be glad to see you in my class, where you can go on pleasantly and quietly, learning your duty to God and man. I am glad you are not like some foolish young girls, who think it is childish to go to school. Those people whose good opinion is best worth having, will respect you for trying to improve yourself whilst you can, and whilst God gives you time and opportunity. You will look back with pleasure in after-life on your Sunday afternoons at school. And you, Lucy, where are you going ? "

" I am going to learn dressmaking of Jane White."

" Dressmaking ! " said Mrs. Selwyn, looking rather surprised. " You will not get much employment at Fairfield ; I think half our young girls take in dressmaking."

" I think I might get a little work, ma'am," said Lucy ; " or I might get a situation as young lady's-maid, or parlour-maid, and to wait on a lady. I should not like a very hard place," added Lucy, standing all on one leg.

“Why not? You are as strong as your sister, and you never had an illness in your life. But, however,” said Mrs. Selwyn, seeing she was not prepared with an answer, “of course needlework of every kind is useful, though such dressmaking as you will learn from Jane White will scarcely get you a situation as lady’s-maid. As your Sundays will be quite disengaged, you can attend school as usual, twice a day.”

Lucy coloured, and hung down her head. “I scarcely thought of coming to school any more,” she said. “I shall be kept to my needle six days in the week, and it would be hard to be shut up on Sunday.”

“I have known you take many a good long walk after school is over, Lucy.”

The girl looked abashed, and muttered something about having attended school eight years.

“Perhaps you think you know as much as Mr. Selwyn and I can teach you? But I cannot stop to argue with you now: my own little children are waiting;” and bidding them both good morning, Mrs. Selwyn left the room.

“O Lucy! how foolish to leave the school!” said Rachel, as the girls went home.

“What do I want with any more school? I’m turned fifteen and a half, and I’m sure I’ve had enough of it by this time. I shall go to church, of course, sometimes, and sit in our own pew; but I can’t go and sit with the teacher and the children, as if I were a child, and couldn’t be trusted alone.”

“I am a year older than you are,” replied her sister, “and I shall sit with the first class still;

so I shall be there to keep you in countenance if you like to come on Sunday."

"Well, you will get finely laughed at if you go and sit with teacher. What will the under housemaid say, and the upper kitchen-maid, and the nurse-girl, and the footmen, and the groom, and helper?"

"I dare say," said Rachel quietly, "they will scarcely know whether I am at church or not. Besides, you know very well I don't go to pray to them."

Lucy was her mother's favourite child, and was seldom thwarted at home. Mrs. Ashford was an indolent, weak sort of woman, who would always rather give up her point than be resolute and firm with her children; and Lucy had never been accustomed to give up her wishes and designs.

When Mr. Selwyn came home to his early dinner, his wife told him all that had passed.

"It is what might be expected," he replied. "Rachel Ashford is a sensible, steady girl, who gives her whole heart to what she is taught, though she is not so quick as her sister. Lucy learns faster than most girls; but she cares more to show off what she knows than to be taught what she does not know. I am going to collect names for my night-school, which will begin as usual next week; but I fear that most of our youths and boys are too like Lucy Ashford. They are too self-satisfied with what they know, and are careless and unwilling to improve."

When Mr. Selwyn went out that afternoon, he met Charles and Joseph Miller, the sons of a

respectable wheelwright. "Am I to put down your names for the night-school?" he inquired.

"If you please, sir," said Joseph, touching his hat. "I should be sorry to miss the pleasant evenings at school, and the books you are so kind as to lend us."

"And you, too, Charles?" said Mr. Selwyn.

"Not at present, sir," said Charles, drawing his hat over his brows; and almost before Mr. Selwyn could answer, he passed on.

Joseph looked extremely sorry, and muttered something in excuse for his brother. "I hope he will come by-and-by, sir," he said; "but just now he has got a few weeks' work in Mr. Elton's stable, and the helper there is a foolish lad, who laughs at Charles for going to school now he lives in gentlemen's service."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Mr. Selwyn; "I thought Charles had more sense. And whom do you work for, Joseph?"

"I am working at home with my father, sir. I have pretty well made up my mind to the trade, and we find enough to employ us both. There is one thing I wanted to ask you, sir. I know it is not usual for boys who are confirmed to attend the Sunday-school; but if I could be of any use as a teacher, I should be very glad to come. I could only teach the little class, but I might be of some use there; and I have been taught so much in the school myself, I seem bound to help in return."

Mr. Selwyn had not expected this; it was one of those pleasant fruits of labour that happen now and then to requite a minister for much that is

discouraging and thankless. "The teachers will welcome you among them," he said, "and I am glad to find you feel so rightly. It is a blessed task to lead poor children in the paths where we have been brought ourselves ; and if you undertake it in the fear of God, his blessing will be with your endeavours. You shall come to the parsonage on Saturday night, and I will show you what books you are to use."

Joseph thanked Mr. Selwyn, and promised to come, and they parted with mutual esteem.

CHAPTER II.

THE Sunday after Rachel went to her place, she appeared at church in the afternoon in the same neat bonnet and warm brown shawl she had worn when she lived at home. She went straight up the middle aisle to her usual seat in the chancel, on the bench which belonged to the upper class, near Mrs. Selwyn's pew.

She had asked and obtained Mrs. Dawson's leave to sit in her usual place ; and as the other servants noticed her but little at first, there was no difficulty at all in the case. After service was over, the first class remained and sang a few psalms with Mrs. Selwyn, and then they followed her to the Sunday-school room, and formed a circle round her. It was usually her custom on Sunday afternoons, when the lessons and reading were over, to explain to them some part of the Catechism ; she had lately explained to them their duty towards their neighbour, and

she chose this Sunday the closing words, "to do my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me."

"Young though you are," said Mrs. Selwyn, "you have all of you some duty to perform. Some of you come still to daily school; it is your duty to be obedient and attentive. Some of you live at home to help your parents; it is your part to honour and succour them, as I explained to you some time ago. One or two of you are already in service; it is your duty to serve faithfully your masters and mistresses, 'not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but with singleness of heart, fearing God.' Do not think that it is only whilst you are praying, or reading the Scriptures, that you are actually serving God; you serve Him when you honestly strive to do the work which He has given you. Be it house-work, needle-work, or field-work, do it heartily, and do it well, and you will serve Him then, in that state of life to which He has been pleased to call you."

"It is my duty to be a good kitchen-maid," thought Rachel Ashford that evening as she took off her bonnet and put on her apron, and prepared the servants' tea. "It is a pleasant duty too, in its way, though the work is a little hard. Well, I've learned a lesson in school to-day, that will keep me in practice for the present; and if I am to do the best I can, the sooner I get my hand in the better."

To get her hand in, as Rachel styled it, was easier said than done; she had the roughest, and almost the hardest work of all that large

establishment. She was the first to rise in the morning, and lit the kitchen-fire before the rest came down ; she had to clean all the servants' premises, which in that house was no light task ; and the plates and dishes she had to wash up seemed endless altogether. Then she had to fetch and wash the vegetables, and prepare the servants' meals ; and when the time for the late dinner drew near, she was kept running about for so many things that she almost lost her head. After a little while, when she got used to her place, she liked that work the best. If Mrs. Dawson trusted her to beat up an egg, or Martha told her to watch a joint, she was as eager and anxious to turn it out nicely, as if she were to eat it herself. Sometimes, when the house was filled with guests, she was told to cook the dinner for the servants' hall, and a proud girl was Rachel then. How carefully she brought her meat near to the fire little by little, that the outside might not be burnt and black before the inside was cooked ; or if the meat were boiled, how slowly she boiled it, that it might not be hard and tough. Her vegetables were cooked by the clock, that they might be tender and thoroughly done ; and everything was sent up looking as nice on its dish, as if it were to be set before Mrs. Elton. But though she thought cooking such pleasant work, she did not make a trouble of her harder duties ; she knew she ought to work for her mistress, as if her eye were always upon her ; and then she would not only please her earthly employers, but her heavenly Master too.

She clattered about betimes in her pattens, mopping away at the broad stone flags, or scrubbing the dressers till they were nearly as white as the table-cloth spread in the dining-room. Or you might hear her in an evening, as she washed up the plates, all alone in the dark back-kitchen, singing her favourite Evening Hymn, or a verse from the "Happy Land." And how she looked forward from Sunday to Sunday; that brightest day in the week, when she was sure of some hours of rest and peace, when she might lay aside her working dress, and go to church, and then to her kind friend Mrs. Selwyn.

Martha, the upper kitchen-maid, who was the servant immediately above her, was a hasty-tempered woman, and often spoke sharply to Rachel. Every state of life has its own temptations, as well as its particular duties; and the temptations of a cook are trials of temper, as Rachel soon found out. Martha did the principal part of the cooking under the housekeeper's directions; and once, when Mrs. Dawson was ill, she did it for some weeks without help, except such as Rachel could give her. One day during the housekeeper's illness, some company was invited to the house, and Martha had prepared the dinner so nicely that everything was cooked to a turn; but the guests did not arrive at the time appointed, and the dinner was kept waiting so long, that when it was rung for, the meat was overdone, and one dish almost entirely spoiled. Poor Martha was so vexed that she flew into a passion, and scolded everyone who came into the kitchen;

till everyone kept out of her way except Rachel, who was forced to stay and bear it as she could. "Well," thought Rachel, "if such a dinner were cooked for me, I shouldn't keep it waiting long; but it's no use being angry with me now, for I'm sure it's no fault of mine. It is a little strange of the gentlefolks, to be sure, as if they cared nothing about it; no wonder poor Martha is a little vexed. I mustn't mind what she says just now."

"Rachel," cried Martha, "why haven't you warmed more plates? You are the slowest girl I ever knew; I wonder Mrs. Dawson can keep you." Rachel ran to fetch the plates as she was ordered, when she heard a great noise and clatter in the kitchen.

In lifting something from a shelf, Martha's foot had slipped, and in saving herself from falling she had sprained her wrist; she sat down, and burst into tears.

"Oh dear! I am so sorry," said Rachel; "is the pain so very bad?"

"It's not the pain," replied Martha; "it's not the pain, it's the second course."

"I'll do the best I can to help you, indeed I will," said Rachel; "don't cry so, Martha—please don't; just tell me what to do."

"Take the tart out of the oven," said Martha, wiping her eyes, and speaking as cross as ever; "get the white of an egg (I can beat that up with my left hand), and some white sifted sugar to ice it; and there's the blanc-mange in the dairy, on the second shelf, that wants to come out of the mould, and the trifle wants beating

up, and the grouse is ready to be dished, and there's the sauce to pour over the pudding."

Rachel could only do one thing at once, but she did one thing after another as fast as possible ; and she had watched Mrs. Dawson so often, and had remembered so well what she had seen, that she got on better than Martha expected. When the footman appeared with the tray, the dishes were all ready to send up ; and the cooking being finished for that night, she returned to her usual task, the washing up of dishes and plates.

As Martha's hand was a good deal sprained, Rachel had more to do than ever ; for though a charwoman did most of the cooking, she was not much used to the work, and required a great deal of help. Poor Martha, too, was cross at times, and seemed to think nothing could be properly done but what she did herself ; and Rachel felt weary and dispirited, and thought Sunday would never come.

It came, however, at last, and proved a beautiful frosty day ; the sun shone in at the kitchen window, and the fire burnt bright and clear. As Martha stood warming her hands after church, she said : " Rachel, I have asked Mrs. Dawson, and she gives you leave to drink tea at home."

" Oh ! thank you, Martha," cried Rachel, looking up ; " I have been wishing for it so many weeks ; how came you to think of such a thing?"

Martha laughed. " You are a good girl at work," she said : " it is fair you should have a treat sometimes."

"By the bye," said Charles Miller, who had come in with a message, "have they taught you to read at school yet, Rachel?"

"Yes, thank you," she replied, going on with her work; "they taught me that some years ago."

"Then I hope you will give up going to school, and come out with me and Lucy; I wouldn't go, if I were you, to learn my task like a little baby."

"I had rather go to school, thank you," said Rachel; she did not care to say more to him, though her face grew a little hot.

Charles burst into a loud-horse laugh, when Martha turned quickly round: "Leave her alone, Charles," she said; "she has a right to go to school. She is a good girl, and I won't have her meddled with."

Though Martha was a hot-tempered woman, she had a kind and grateful heart. She never forgot how Rachel had helped her, the night that she sprained her hand; and though she often spoke sharply when put out, she liked no one to find fault with her but herself, and as long as they lived in service together, she continued her steady friend.

CHAPTER III.

ON the Sunday after Lucy Ashford became apprentice to Jane White, she came in late to church. She would have stayed away altogether had she dared, to show that she was no longer

a school-girl, and need not go to church unless she liked ; but her father, though he seldom interfered with his daughters, would have been seriously displeased had she stopped at home ; and Lucy was afraid of her father.

She seemed to think the congregation would all have time to look at her, as well as to say their prayers, that morning ; and that everybody would take notice what clothes she had on, and how she behaved during service. So she had borrowed eighteen-pence of Jane White, which, together with a shilling which she had of her own, she had spent in a cherry-coloured bonnet ribbon ; and she borrowed her mother's best blue shawl, which she hung off her shoulders in a jaunty sort of way, and which swept up the dirt as she walked.

"No one can take me for a school-girl now," thought she, as she trailed into church, and walked past the benches where the children sat, into a pew occupied by her father and the Millers.

She sat as far as she could from her father, and looked about her to see who was there ; and sometimes she sat when she ought to have knelt, and never once joined in the singing, that everybody might see neither Mrs. Selwyn nor the teacher had power to punish her now. Whether God had the power to punish her, never once entered Lucy's head.

Both Joseph and Charles were struck with Lucy, as well they might be, that Sunday.

"If she had never been taught better," said Joseph to his father, "there would be some excuse for such conduct. She shall never put

her foot within our doors, if I can help it, whilst Susan and Jane live at home."

"Did you see Lucy Ashford?" said Charles to the helper, as they walked from church together; "I'll have some fun with her some day. A girl like that I call fair game; for if she don't respect herself, how does she think that we shall respect her?"

Accordingly, that afternoon, when Rachel and Joseph were at school, Charles followed Lucy home, and persuaded her to go with him for a walk. He admired her bonnet and shawl, laughed at his brother for turning teacher, made a jest upon the sermon, and said many irreverent things, which would have frightened a right-minded girl.

But Lucy only thought in her heart—"This comes of giving up Mrs. Selwyn's class, and of going to church dressed like a woman. I wonder how Rachel can like going to school; if I were in her place, I would have more spirit."

Lucy was a merry, good-tempered girl, like Rachel; but having no steady principle to guide and control her, even her pleasing disposition proved a snare.

Charles was so much amused with her that day, that frequently afterwards, when he had nothing else to do, and no better companion to amuse him, he would call for Lucy to walk with him on Sunday afternoons; and if he joined a party of pleasure instead, or went with a friend to the ale-house, he would buy her a ribbon, or some piece of cheap finery, to make it up with her next time he wanted a walk.

Every situation has its peculiar temptations, and the love of finery is a dressmaker's snare.

Had Lucy attended her kind friend's class, she would have been warned against this trial, and would not have been suffered to appear in any but a suitable dress. But she had turned away from the voice of warning; and when her appointed temptation came, she fell an easy prey. Dress soon became the uppermost thought and care in Lucy's mind; and as she was not earning money as an apprentice, she would borrow it wherever she could, to indulge her favourite taste.

Before the year of her apprenticeship was over, she owed as much altogether as sixteen shillings, which she promised most faithfully to repay when she should work on her own account. In the meantime, she appeared every Sunday in smart-coloured ribbons and handkerchiefs; equally unsuitable to her station in life, and to the character of a modest young girl.

One day, after Charles Miller had neglected her for several Sundays, he appeared with a smart sham coral necklace, which he had bought at a neighbouring fair.

Lucy had secretly fretted a good deal at his having been absent so long; but she could not resist the gay necklace, and consented to walk with him as usual. When she returned, she went to take off her bonnet and shawl, and put on the necklace for supper. Her father was not generally an observer of dress; but the large scarlet beads caught his eye.

"What is that you have got on?" he inquired. She made no answer, and was leaving the room;

but Ashford called, "Come here," and she dared not disobey. He held up the candle to her face. "Who gave you those beads?" he asked. She trembled, but did not reply. "Take that thing off your neck," said he. She unclasped it, and held it in her hand; he took it from her, threw it down on the floor, set his foot on it, and crushed it to pieces. Lucy burst into a passion of tears, and turned to go up-stairs, but her father called her back,—he had something more to say. "I have observed for some time past, that you dress very differently from Rachel, yet she is earning money, and you are not. How do you come by such smart things?" Lucy trembled, and cried, and prevaricated, but was forced to confess part of the truth, and to own she had borrowed money.

Ashford was very much shocked and displeased, and insisted upon her leaving Jane White; and told her she might take in work at home, where she would be under her mother's eye.

Had Lucy gone to school with Rachel on that eventful Sunday, the year before, she would have heard Mrs. Selwyn's lesson on doing her duty in that state of life where God had been pleased to place her; and as the duty she had chosen was needlework, Mrs. Selwyn would have taught her, that to work as well as possible would be one way of serving God. But, as we know, instead of going to school, she had listened to idle jesting; and the thought of any particular duty never entered Lucy's head. So instead of learning her appointed trade with all her heart and mind, she had worked in a careless, indifferent

sort of way, and only cared to get her work out of hand, that her time might be her own. The consequence was, when she left Jane White, and turned dressmaker on her own account, she never could give satisfaction, and soon lost all her work; even Rachel, who gave her a dress to make and paid her half-a-crown, having been sharply reproved by Mrs. Dawson for appearing in so slovenly a gown. Far from being able to pay her debts, she could not even earn money enough to buy herself necessary clothes.

Ashford had many younger children, and could not afford to keep Lucy idle; so when he met Mrs. Selwyn one day, he asked if she could recommend her to a place.

"If it had been Rachel," said Mrs. Selwyn, "it would have been a pleasure to me to find her a situation; but I cannot recommend your daughter Lucy, I have no good opinion of her. I have seen her behave with irreverence in church, and her dress is too smart to be respectable. I am sorry to speak thus, Ashford; but I know that Mrs. Elton thinks the same."

When Ashford returned to his home that night, he was dreadfully angry with Lucy; and from that time forth, whilst she lived at home, he was stern with her, and sometimes harsh.

Lucy often thought, in those sad days, of a verse she had learned at school, and wished she had profited by it better, and minded her teacher more.

"'Tis easy to squander our years
In idleness, folly, and strife;
But oh! no repentance or tears
Can bring back one moment of life."

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Rachel had lived about eighteen months with Mrs. Elton, Martha took a cook's situation ; and Mrs. Dawson advised her mistress to take Rachel in Martha's place. "Though young, she is active and steady," she said, "and has taken great pains to improve. I would rather have her under me than any girl I know."

As upper kitchen-maid, Rachel's Sunday afternoons were now no longer her own, but she was allowed to go to church in the morning, and to spend the evening as she chose, when the dinner was once sent in. When she called on Mrs. Selwyn to inform her of the arrangement, that lady spoke very kindly.

"I shall always think of you with pleasure," she said, "as one of my most attentive scholars ; and whenever you are in any sort of difficulty or trouble, I hope you will come to me as a friend. You will find even this little change of situation will bring fresh duties with it. You will now have a young girl in some measure under you, instead of being lowest of all. Remember all your own little difficulties and trials when you were in her situation, and it will often check an angry word when you are provoked to be hasty with her. You will now have a certain amount of stores under your care. Do not think that because your master and mistress are rich, you have a right to waste their property ; waste is almost dishonesty in a

servant, and I know that you wish to be a faithful servant, and to do your duty well. Do you still wish to borrow books from the lending library?"

"Yes, certainly, if you please, ma'am," said Rachel; "I can often read a little in an evening, or on a Sunday afternoon."

"I am glad you still wish to improve yourself; the little you have been taught at school will show you how much you have yet to learn."

Mrs. Selwyn here took leave of Rachel, and gave her a nice little book as a keepsake, in the fly-leaf of which she wrote these words:—

"What sorrows may my steps attend,
I cannot now foretell;
But if the Lord will be my Friend,
I know that all is well."

Rachel often had occasion to remember Mrs. Selwyn's words; for Ellen, the new kitchen-maid, was an idle girl, who would often lie in bed of a morning, and do her work in a slovenly way. Rachel was obliged to insist upon her keeping the kitchen and cooking utensils clean; but she was very gentle and patient with her, and never complained to Mrs. Dawson unless she was actually compelled. She was rewarded for all her forbearance, for Ellen grew exceedingly fond of her; and, in taking pains to please her, broke through many of her idle habits.

Rachel's work was much more pleasant now, for she had little to do besides cooking, in which she began to improve very nicely, and always took great delight. She could soon do all the plainer cooking as well as Mrs. Dawson; and

Mrs. Dawson was very partial to her, and would often teach her to make some dish which required greater skill. As for grumbling at having so much to do, it never entered Rachel's head, kneading, mixing, roasting, boiling, chopping, salting, or preserving—she did each in turn with right good will, and made her work her pleasure.

Her Sundays were still very pleasant; it was a great delight to join once more in the beautiful morning service, and she generally got a little quiet reading, when everybody was out, in the afternoon. How trifling did all the little trials of the week appear then in Rachel's eyes, as she sat with her Bible in the bright warm kitchen, in which she took such pride; as beautifully tidy and clean in its way as the drawing-room upstairs. Though the bread had been a little over-burnt in the baking, or some favourite dish had been spoilt, those troubles seemed all to be over then, and Rachel was free to rest. She would read those beautiful passages which had been explained to her at school, and then turn to some nice interesting book she had borrowed of Mrs. Selwyn. In the evening, when dinner was sent in, Rachel generally went to her mother's house, and spent an hour or two there. She often found Joseph Miller there; for being teacher at the Sunday-school, he had undertaken to change her books for her, when she could not do so herself. Joseph had been very much struck with Rachel; and the more he knew her, the better he liked her. He plainly told her parents so, but said he did not wish to marry till he had a comfortable home to offer her, and was well

established in trade ; and as Rachel was getting on nicely in service, she determined not to be unsettled, but to bide her time with patience, and save a little money whilst she could.

When she was about twenty years of age, another change took place. She was busy in the kitchen-garden one day, gathering strawberries for preserving, when Mrs. Elton's little boy came running up, and said his mamma wanted to see her in the summer-house.

Mrs. Elton was quite a young lady, and managed almost everything through Mrs. Dawson ; and though Rachel had lived so many years in her service, she had scarcely ever spoken to her before ; but she had always admired her, as a sweet-looking young lady, who seemed as if she never could speak harshly to any one.

She was seated on a low stool in the summer-house, playing with her baby, when Rachel appeared.

"Rachel Ashford," she said, "my sister is going to be married to a gentleman who lives in London. She is very young, and I wish her to have a servant on whom she can entirely depend ; I believe that you are such a one, and I should like to engage you to be her cook." Rachel curtsied, and coloured all over, but scarcely knew what to reply. "The place will be a quiet one," continued Mrs. Elton ; "and such plain cooking as you can do, is all that will be required. I need not say you will be expected to send up everything nicely, and to be careful to avoid expense ; and, in short, to look after my sister's interests as if they were your own."

Rachel faithfully promised all that Mrs. Elton required, and resolved in her heart that she would keep her promise, and prove worthy of such kindness and confidence. She was sorry to leave the household where she had been so happy and learned so much, and the parish which had always been her home, and her father and mother, and Mrs. Selwyn, and Joseph most of all. But as far as the change of situation was concerned, it was all for her advantage; her wages were much beyond what she had ever received, and she was able to lay by a good deal yearly to be useful in after-life. Instead of being called Rachel, she was now called Ashford; and from being the lowest in a large establishment, she had risen to be at the head of a small one.

The name of her new mistress was Mrs. Morton; she was younger than Rachel, and knew nothing of housekeeping, and trusted her with the keys of all stores, and the management of the other servants. There are many ways by which a servant in London may cheat a careless mistress; but Rachel had the fear of God before her eyes, and wished for his blessing on all she did. She suffered not the slightest waste in the kitchen, nor improper conduct in the others; and she was very strict with all the tradesmen, that her mistress should be fairly served. She now found the benefit of having been taught at school to cipher and keep accounts; and she accounted to Mrs. Morton every week for the money that passed through her hands.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Morton soon found her

value, and grew very fond of Rachel ; and some years later, when their income increased, they raised her wages, and made her their house-keeper, and treated her very kindly.

As I may not have occasion to mention Rachel during the remainder of my story, I will only add that she lived with Mrs. Morton till she married Joseph Miller. He then had a comfortably furnished house, and she had some money in the bank, and they both had many kind and generous friends, whom they had gained by their own good conduct.

They did not look forward to a life of perpetual prosperity, for that is not the appointed lot of man ; but they knew that in whatever trials the Almighty should think fit to send, their friends would always be ready to comfort and help them in time of need.

They had made good use of their early days, and looked forward to a busy and cheerful life, and, if spared, a peaceful old age.

As Rachel would sometime repeat to herself, in the words of her favourite hymn,—

“And when all the minutes are past
Which God for our portion has given,
We shall cheerfully welcome the last,
If it safely conduct us to heaven.”

CHAPTER V.

"JOSEPH," said Charles Miller to his brother one day, "I have got a situation in the livery-stables at C——bury."

"I am glad to hear it," replied Joseph, who knew that his brother had been discharged by Mr. Elton for repeated unsteadiness and neglect.

"I am going to-morrow," continued Charles; "I wish you would give my love to Lucy Ashford, and tell her I am going away."

"Why cannot you tell her yourself?"

"She would want me to write to her, or some such thing, and I've dangled after her long enough—I want to break it off."

Joseph looked up from the plank he was sawing with a countenance of dismay. "I thought you meant to marry her when you can afford it," he said; "you've been hanging about these two years. You can't mean what you say."

"I marry her!" replied Charles, taking his pipe out of his mouth—"I marry a slut like that, with her nasty soiled curl-papers in the morning, and her ribbons in the afternoon! She is never out of bed, they say, till her mother has boiled the kettle, and she don't even know her trade."

"It is all very true," replied Joseph; "but you should have thought of that before. The poor girl thinks you are in earnest, and you have encouraged her silly ways."

"If she believes me, it's no fault of mine; if

I've laughed at you and Rachel once, I've done it twenty times ; and I've joked about the sermon, and the school, and Mr. Selwyn, and everything else she was taught to put faith in ; and she has heard me tell lies to other people, and if she trusts me in the face of that, the fault's her own."

"You must tell her yourself," said Joseph, "I can't ; I could as soon run a knife into her. Besides, she is Rachel's sister, and I shouldn't like to have her ill-will."

"Well, I thought you were a nice, good-natured fellow, who would help me through a scrape ; but if you won't," said Charles, walking off, "I'll go to George the helper."

Accordingly, the following evening, as Lucy sat at work, she saw George coming up the street ; he stopped at the open door.

"Good evening, Lucy. Charles sends you his *love*, and a nice pink necktie for Sundays ; he couldn't come to say good-bye himself, he was obliged to start so early."

"Where is he gone ?" she asked, beginning to tremble.

"Oh, he is gone to live a long way off, and not coming back any more." And George gave a hard sort of look at Lucy, whose lips began to twitch.

"Won't you come in and sit down ?" she said, trying to look as if nothing were amiss.

"No, thank you ; we are busy at the stables this evening. Good night ;" and George walked off.

At that moment Ashford came in from work,

and desired Lucy to fetch his supper ; so she did not venture to go up-stairs, though she longed to be alone. Then the younger children were sent to bed, and her mother gave her some work to finish, and the shutters were closed, and the candles lit, for the long October evening. Lucy sat at her work without saying a word, and sewed as well as she could, though the tears kept rising now and then, and made her nearly blind.

The clock kept ticking just behind her, and she thought it would never strike nine ; but it struck at length, and Ashford called for his Bible, and read a chapter, and they went up-stairs. Lucy's younger sisters were fast asleep, as she silently crept to bed ; and when everything was quiet and dark around her, she could cry as much as she chose.

This was Lucy's first real grief ; she had been very wilful and foolish, but her heart was not yet hardened, and conscience spoke to her that long, quiet night, and showed her how she had sinned. One thing she firmly resolved, she would not stay at Fairfield ; she would go into service, be it ever so hard, rather than stay at home, now Charles had left her, and live an idle life. This resolution was partly the effect of pride, and partly because she thought she could really do better, if she got a good, fair start.

Mrs. Ashford had a cousin who kept a shop in the neighbouring town of Merton ; this cousin, Mrs. Smith, had once asked Lucy to come and pay her a visit ; and she resolved to pay this visit now, and try to obtain a place.

Having asked her mother's permission, Lucy

wrote to Mrs. Smith, and then prepared, with a heavy heart, for her expedition to Merton.

It was long since she had earned any money to buy herself new clothes ; and her father, now that she had learned a trade, expected her to clothe herself. Her bonnet, which had turned out so smart in the spring, was sunburnt now and soiled, the bright green ribbon looked faded and yellow, and her boots were shabby and worn. Mrs. Ashford gave her daughter a petticoat, which she ill could spare herself, and Rachel gave her two stout aprons, to wear when she got a place. She wore the shawl she had despised so much when she first left Sunday-school ; but it was thinner now, with two years' wear, and was darned in many places.

The wind blew cold through the carrier's cart as Lucy travelled to Merton ; and as she walked from the inn where the carrier stopped, she felt the damp through her boots.

Mrs. Smith looked at her from head to foot, when she appeared at the kitchen-door, but made no remark, and gave her some tea to warm her shivering frame.

In the evening, as they were sitting over the fire, Lucy spoke about her wish for a place. "I don't care how hard I work," she said, "if I can only get away from home."

Mrs. Smith wiped her spectacles, and rubbed her nose, and looked a little puzzled. "It's a pity you didn't begin a little earlier, if you with to live in service. I suppose you could get the gentlefolks to say a word, if you heard of a nursemaid's place?"

"I would rather not trouble them," said Lucy, colouring, as she thought of Mrs. Selwyn.

"Well, just as you please, my dear ; only the lady I know of is very particular, and would not take you without some one's good word ; and the long and the short of the matter is, she won't hire you in those smart clothes."

When Mrs. Smith found they were all that Lucy had, she began to shake her head. "As for getting into gentlefolks' service," she said, "it was right down out of the question. But she would do her best to hear of something, if Lucy would stay awhile."

So Lucy stopped some weeks at Merton, and worked for Mrs. Smith. She applied for several respectable places, but lost them through her tawdry dress ; and at length, in despair, she engaged herself as errand-girl to a milliner, called Miss Prigg.

Miss Prigg lived in a street full of drapers' shops, that led to the market-place at Merton. She employed several workwomen, who all had their meals there, and only went home to sleep ; but Lucy was her only servant, and lived there as maid-of-all-work. She was expected to clean the knives and shoes, and the house from top to bottom, and to wash and cook, and take up the meals, the scraps of which she was allowed to eat when Miss Prigg and the workwomen had finished. In the afternoon, when dinner was over, Lucy's hardest time began. She was sent all over the town with work, be the weather what it might. Her poor old boots were soon worn through, and scarcely hung on her feet, and

her bonnet-ribbon lost every remnant of colour it retained when she came to Merton. Day after day, in dripping clothes, she tramped through the rain and fog, and came home late to a small damp kitchen, where the fire was always left to go out as soon as tea was over. Miss Prigg was not a kind-hearted mistress, nor, indeed, a religious woman. She never kept her servants long, nor cared how they suffered in her service, so long as her work was done. She would not advance poor Lucy a shilling to buy herself good strong boots ; and she was forced to get some on credit at length, and run into debt afresh. She would thankfully have returned to Fairfield now, but she feared her father's anger. She began to suffer much from cold, and feared her health would fail.

One day in the early part of January, when the snow had begun to fall, Lucy came home, tired and bitterly cold, from taking some work to a customer. She stirred the fire, and warmed her hands, and was about to prepare the tea, when Miss Prigg gave her a band-box, to take out immediately to a lady at the Lion Hotel. "The caps are only sent on approval," she said, "and the lady goes home to-night : so you must wait there for orders, and bring back the band-box ; and make haste, for I want my tea."

Lucy took up the box with a heavy sigh, and went up the area steps. The lamps were lit in the streets, and a cold north wind was blowing, which pierced through Lucy's flimsy clothing, and penetrated her very bones. When she got to the kitchen of the Lion Hotel she felt almost

ready to drop, and, sitting down in a nice warm corner, she gave her handbox to a waiter to take up-stairs.

"Mrs. Selwyn, of Fairfield," said the man, after glancing at the direction.

Lucy started to her feet in amazement, for she had never even looked at the card. "She will not give me the directions herself," she thought; "she will only send a message;" and, resting her arms on a table near, she laid her head down, and almost dropped asleep.

"The young person from Miss Priggs is to go up-stairs," said the waiter, coming back to the kitchen.

Lucy raised her head, and followed the servant, and shook from head to foot.

Mrs. Selwyn was sitting by a blazing fire, with a tea-tray on the table. "I am sorry to bring you out to-night, young woman," she said, as Lucy appeared; "I thought Miss Prigg would have sent a boy. Good gracious! Lucy Ashford, is that you? My poor girl, how ill you are looking!"

Lucy curtsied, and tried to smile, and to answer Mrs. Selwyn; but her voice broke, and she burst into tears—it was so long since she had heard a familiar voice, or listened to words of kindness. Mrs. Selwyn bade her sit down, and gave her some tea, and spoke to her very gently; and then Lucy told her how unhappy she was, and how she dared not leave her place.

"Some time ago," said Mrs. Selwyn, "your father asked me to give you a character; I was sorry to be obliged to refuse him, but I had

reason to be displeased with you then. But you are young enough to break off foolish habits, and to strive for better things; and if in sincerity you wish to improve, I shall be the first to lend you a helping hand. I will speak to your father and ask his leave for you to come home, when you have given proper notice to Miss Prigg; and whenever I hear of a suitable place, I will ask for you to be taken on trial."

Some days after Mrs. Selwyn had returned to Fairfield, Lucy was taken very ill, and Miss Prigg turned her off without any pity, and scarcely paid her what was due. For many months after Lucy went home, she was too ill to take a place, and could only earn a trifle by taking in plain work, or nursing a neighbour's child. Mrs. Selwyn often came to see her, and employed her now and then; and finding she was in earnest in her wish to do well, she obtained for her in time a quiet place with a lady who lived alone. This lady was an invalid, and cross, and Lucy led a sad, dull life; but after all the hardships she had undergone, she was thankful for a comfortable home.

Those of my readers who are interested about Lucy, will be glad to hear she continued to improve; and although she never obtained such high wages as Rachel, she became almost equally liked and respected, and as steady in all her ways.

THE END.

