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SERENA.





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IN A

STRANGE LAND.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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THE EVENING PARTY.

SEE PAGE 52.

# LITTLE SERENA

IN A

STRANGE LAND.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "CHRISTIE REDFERN'S TROUBLES," ETC.



THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY:

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## CHAPTER I.

### LEAVING HOME.

**S**OMEWHERE in Canada, not far from the boundary line, there stands, partly in the valley of the Dunwater river, and partly on the hills on either side, the flourishing little town of Dunwater. It does not in the least matter, as far as the story of little Serena is concerned, whether it is near that part of the boundary which lies in the great lakes and river of the West, or near that part which passes through the villages, cornfields, and forests of the East. It was Serena's home for a few years, and that is nearly all that need be told about it.

Nor need much be said about the sorrowful

reason that made it necessary for Serena and her mother to leave the home in which they had always lived, to seek another among strangers. All that Serena knew about it was this:—

One night she and her mother went up to her uncle Turner's hill-farm, with her cousin Frank. They found them all in great trouble there, for it was the time of the war, and there had been bad news from the army, of disaster if not defeat; and now there was a call for more men to go and be soldiers; and the minute Serena saw her aunt Turner's face, she knew that *she* had made up her mind that it was right for her only son Frank to go away and be a soldier too. Frank was her only son now, for at the very first call the eldest, Ben, had gone away, never to return. Within the year, a letter had come to his home, telling that he was wounded and lying in the hospital with hundreds more. His father and mother had hurried away, but they had never seen their son—they had not even seen his dead face; but they brought him home to lie at peace in the village grave-yard, far from the noise of battle. These had been sorrowful days at the hill-farm; and now Frank was going away; and when was it all to end?

They were all sitting in the farmhouse kitchen, with no light but the firelight, when Serena and her mother went in. Everything seemed as usual; but when Serena's mother saw her sister's face, she asked, "What has happened?"

No one answered for a minute, then Mr. Turner said:

“Did you see Frank down in the village?”

“Yes, we came up with him. He has gone to turn Lightfoot into the pasture; he will be in soon.”

“He is bound to go—to the camp,” said Mr. Turner, hoarsely.

“He did not say so to me.”

“No, he has said nothing to anyone, because of his mother; but his heart has been away off there this long time, and his mother hasn’t seen her way clear to let him go till to-night, but to-night she is going to tell him—”

Then Serena saw her mother stoop down and kiss aunt Turner, and heard her say:

“Poor Mary! It is sad enough for you, but not so sad as it might be;” and then she added in a minute, “Ethan has gone to Canada.”

“To Canada!” repeated all her listeners, and then Mr. Turner added, “What is that for?”

Her mother’s whispered answer did not reach Serena’s ears. She could only see that sorrow and shame seemed to be struggling in the heart whose beatings hardly left her voice to speak at all.

“And will you follow him? You surely never will,” said her sister earnestly.

That was all Serena knew about it; for her cousin Sarah drew her out of the room with the rest of the little girls, and she did not hear her mother answer:

"I told him at first I would not. But I think differently now. I could never stay here and meet the cold looks of my neighbours."

"They would never fall on you," broke in her sister.

"I should seem to see them, and feel them too. I told him I should sell the place, and leave Serena with you, and go and offer myself as a nurse at the hospitals. But I cannot do it; my health is quite broken: and besides, he is not fit to be there alone."

All her forced quiet was gone away, and her last words were shrill and broken.

"It is you who are not fit to go," said her sister eagerly; "you shall stay here, till the winter is over, at least. It would be wrong to think of going in your state of health. If you were to be very ill, what would become of your little daughter?"

"I shall be no worse there than here. I feel that it is best to go. I shall be glad to go, I think; and the sooner the better. And if I never return, I know you will make a place among your little girls for Serena."

Her voice broke again, but nothing more could be said, for Frank Turner came in to bring the papers from the mail; and all the young girls of the family flocked in to hear the tidings from the seat of war. The tidings were sad enough, but they need not be written here. Mr. Turner sat listening with his eyes fixed on

his son, never speaking, but with a darker shadow falling on his face as time went on. As for the mother, though she was weary with the household work of a long day, her nervous trembling fingers could not be trusted to lie quietly on her lap; and through the reading and through the silence that followed, she busied herself in knitting a soldier's stocking. Serena's mother sat back in a corner, with her head upon her hand, saying nothing, but shivering now and then as some incident sadder or more terrible than the rest was read. By-and-by, the young girls of the family, sick with the details of a dark day of battle, crept quietly to bed. But Serena sat upon the floor, with her head upon her mother's lap, and did not stir; and her mother, thinking she was asleep, covered her with her shawl.

And so she was asleep for awhile; but afterwards she was awake, sometimes listening to what was said, sometimes thinking her own thoughts; and if Serena should live to be a hundred years old, she will never forget the picture that the farmhouse kitchen made that night. There was her uncle, with the firelight falling on his grave troubled face, for the first time looking like an old man in Serena's eyes. There were her aunt, and her mother, and her cousin Sarah, each bowed down by their separate sorrow; and there was her cousin Frank, saying little, but looking so good and brave and strong,



that it never came into her mind to be afraid for him, though he was going away to the war.

It would do no good to write down all the sorrowful words that were spoken there that night. It seemed to the father and mother of Frank Turner, that few had such an only son. He was not a man yet—only growing into manhood, as his father was going down to old age. It had comforted the old man, since Ben's death, more than all other things, to know that when he too must lie down in the grave, which did not seem very far off, he could leave his comparatively youthful wife, and her flock of little girls, to the loving care of such a son. And now Frank was going to where his brother had gone—to the same fate—who could say?

It was not an easy thing for the old man to give up to certain danger—to possible death—this son, on whom his eyes never rested without a sense of thankfulness and chastened pride. It had cost him silent days and sleepless nights, and long wrestlings with God in solitary places; it had been like the passing of the valley of the shadow of death.

As for the mother, when it came to her slowly and unwillingly, as it came to many others, that the time of her country's trial was to last, not months, but years, her heart misgave her that one son might not be enough to give up. As the days went on, the thought would not be put away from her, seeing, as she did, more

clearly every day the boy's eagerness to be gone. Not that he said it in words, or that she feared he might go away without her full consent and blessing. But her struggle was none the lighter, that it was not with him, but with herself; that she knew her own lips must speak the words of banishment.

There is no use in saying any more about this. They who saw such days and nights, know all their sorrow; and to those who did not, neither tongue nor pen could make such sorrow known.

That night, the mother gave to her son the consent and blessing he had so longed for; and the next day he went away, first to the camp and then to the battle-field. I am not going to tell how he suffered and fought and bled, and triumphed at last. It is the story of little Serena that I am going to tell.

It must not be thought, however, that all I have been saying has nothing to do with her story; for after that night the world seemed quite a different world to Serena. She had no brother or sister of her own; and she loved her cousin Frank as if he had been her brother; and his going away to the war, and his mother's grief, and the silence that fell on the house afterwards, seemed like the beginning of a new life to her,—so many new thoughts and feelings did all this waken within her. That night is quite a part of her story; for a great many things seemed quite changed to her after that.

Besides, she stayed in her uncle's house while her mother was making her preparations to follow her husband north, and lived with the rest through this time of trouble. She was one of them in that she shared their sorrow; and yet she was not quite one of them, in that she could place herself a little apart, to measure the great void left in the household by Frank's going, and to watch the slow unwilling taking up of the broken threads of their old quiet life; and a great many new thoughts came to her during those quiet days.

They were *very* quiet days. There was a hush among the merry little girls of the household; and when they talked together, as little girls must, whatever comes, or whoever goes, their confidences were all on the same absorbing theme; and Serena listened and talked and thought as she had never done before.

Frank's mother went about her household work as usual, only with her voice a little softer, her cheek a little paler, and a few more silver streaks showing in her dark hair. Sometimes the little girls missed her from her accustomed place in the kitchen or sitting-room, and then they knew that she had gone away to plead with Him who alone gives victory or averts defeat: and seeing her coming and going, so quietly yet so hopefully, it grew easy for them all to believe in the safe-keeping and happy home-coming of him who had gone away.

So the quiet days passed on, till Serena's mother came back, quieter and graver and more weary-looking than ever her little daughter had seen her before. Then she knew that the time was come, when they must follow her father north; and though she was not old enough, nor wise enough to understand all her mother's grief, she shed some very bitter tears, for she knew that a long time must pass before she should see her friends or her home again.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE NEW HOME AND A NEW FRIEND.

**T**HOUGH Serena kept a bright look out, quite expecting, in some way or other, to be made aware of the moment when she should first breathe the air of a foreign country, she had been in Canada a full hour before she knew it; and she would not have known it then, if she had not been told. There was no difference in the appearance of things, as far as she could see. She had still the odd feeling that they were passing at the back of things in general, which had come to her when they first left home. The autumn foliage was as bright as in the home country; and the hills and fields were no barer nor browner than those she had seen in the early part of the day; and she did not realize that she was "a stranger in a strange land," till she found herself in the railway station in the town of Dunwater. Not that she realized it then, standing with one hand in her father's and the other in her mother's; but that is what she wrote back to her cousin Sarah. It might have seemed strange to her when she came out of the station, and looked up the crooked

street. Everything in it was as different as different could be, from anything that she had ever seen before. The people looked different, and so did their houses; and it was as much as she could do to spell out the odd names on the signs, and more than she could do to understand the words she caught while they were waiting at a corner till her father could see about the luggage before taking them to the hotel. But her thoughts were busy with something else all that time.

She had not seen her father since that night they had gone to her uncle Turner's, nor had her mother. She was glad to see him, waiting for them here in this strange place; and she told him so, eagerly and joyfully. But she felt, rather than saw, that the meeting of her father and mother was not joyful; and an anxious unhappy feeling came over her, with which being in a strange place had nothing at all to do. It was not a new feeling; it had come upon her more than once at home;—but just now she did not like to acknowledge it; so she shivered and made believe to be cold, and uncomfortable, and homesick; and kept all the time firm hold of her father's hand as they went along the street.

Mr. Wilbur had taken rooms for them, he said, near the place where he had found employment; but it was late, and they were tired; and they did not go there that night, but to a hotel

close by. The next day they went to those rooms. They were in a great old house of many tenements, and one of these had "Saloon," in large letters over the door; and this, Mr. Wilbur called his place of business. There were different kinds of fruit in the windows for sale, and pipes and boxes of cigars, and printed papers telling of fresh oysters daily received; and there were sounds and odours coming from the back rooms, that made Mrs. Wilbur very firm in her refusal to set foot in the house as a home, or to have any connexion with the occupants of the place.

She did not say much; but her husband said a great deal, and some of his words were not good nor pleasant to hear; but her quiet firmness prevailed. To his repeated declarations that they would only be there for a little while, and it did not matter where they lived, or how, since they were strangers, she said nothing; but when he added he had already agreed with the saloon keeper for the use of the rooms, and that he would lose the amount out of his wages if he did not occupy them, she said he had better lose both place and wages, than expose himself to temptation, and his wife and child to shame.

Then the anxious unhappy feeling came back to Serena again; and this time it was not so vague as it had been before. She began to see that her mother did not trust her father as she used to do; and as her eyes fell on the faces, some red and bloated, some haggard and pale, of

the men who were loitering about the doors of the house, there came into her mind the reason of it all.

Mr. Wilbur did not say much after that ; and, by and by, they went to look at another house in a quiet street. It was a small and poor place in comparison with the home they had left ; but they could get no better ; and Mrs. Wilbur assured her husband that she could be content in a much poorer place, if things went well with them otherwise. So she went quickly and cheerfully to work, to arrange the few things that had been sent on before them, that as soon as possible they might begin to feel at home.

But to put a new home thoroughly in order, must be a work of time, as she well knew, both because there was much to be done, and because she had little strength to do it ; and it must be confessed that, desirous as she was to look cheerfully on all things, she did not find it easy to do so. After her husband went out, leaving her and Serena to do the best they could together, her spirits sank ; and for a little while, it almost seemed to her that he was right, that it did not matter how or where they lived, now that they were among strangers.

Of course this did not last long. Better thoughts came into her mind after the first few minutes ; for she had been taught by the Great Teacher, and she knew well that no disciple of His was ever yet put into the spot where



it was not worth while to do right. For her husband's sake, for her child's sake, above all for His sake who had loved her, and saved her, and who would be with her to the end, it was more than worth while to trust and strive. For her husband's sake !——

“I must not think of the past or future where he is concerned,” said she to herself. “I must only pray and trust.”

But, oh ! what a heavy weight sank down on her heart, as hour after hour passed and he did not return ! She had had much cause to fear for him in their old home ; and now that the restraints which had surrounded him there were removed, she knew there was double cause for fear. But she went about, doing the little that could be done, keeping up an appearance of cheerfulness for her little daughter's sake, till it grew dark and she could do no more. There was fire in the house, but no light ; and they sat down together on an unopened package to wait.

It was a dreary time of waiting. It grew quite dark, and they sat listening to the rush of the river till the rain began to fall, with that constant “drip, drip,” so wearisome to hear. By-and-by, the wind rose, and whistled drearily about the house ; and indeed came into the house, through broken panes and imperfect sashes ; chilling them, and making them shiver, partly with the cold, and partly with the dreariness of the sound. Serena sat on the floor, with her head on her



FIRST NIGHT IN THE NEW HOME.



mother's lap; and her mother covered her with her shawl, as she had done that night in her aunt Turner's kitchen, growing all the more sorrowful at the remembrance of the time.

Oh how solitary she felt herself and her child to be. How far from home, and from all who cared for them, and how much more than the distance divided them! They were alone—strangers in a strange land—with poverty and sickness, and a long bitter winter before them. But worse to bear than the thought of this, was the sense of shame that mingled with it all. For she could not help remembering that her husband's misconduct was the cause of his and their leaving their own country; and as she sat there in the darkness, the rain and the wind and the rushing river seemed to be repeating over and over, she should never, never, see it again. But God does not suffer His children to sit long in such darkness as fell on her in that hour. Juster thoughts about all that had been happening to them, soon came to her mind, and she said to herself:

“My first duty was to my husband; and I must put all other thoughts away, and think only of him. I will never give him up—never, never. God may keep me long waiting for the blessing that I ask for him; but it will come. He may see that I need to be purified in the fire of much suffering; but I know He will not forsake me utterly.

Slowly the time went on. She thought her little daughter was sleeping; but she was not, for in a little while she said,

Are you very tired, mother?"

"Very tired, dear," said her mother, trying to make it seem that it was all the cause she had for silence.

"And you are lonesome too, mother, I'm afraid."

"Yes, a little; or I should be if I had not you."

"I wonder why father does not come. He knows we have no light, nor anything."

"He will come soon," said her mother, gently; "you know his time is not his own now."

"But just this first night;—but he'll come soon, I guess, mother," said Serena.

Then she rose; and, putting her arms round her mother's neck, kissed her softly. Her mother drew her towards her, returning her caress; and she held her close to her, the child's head resting on her shoulder. In a little time Serena said:

"It's not so bad for me, mother; I have you."

And I have you, dear," said her mother.

"Yes, I know; but you are my mother,—and I feel so safe with your arms round me, and not very lonesome."

Her mother kissed her without speaking.

"And, mother—you are God's child. You are as safe in His care as I feel in yours. You know, mother, though we left aunt Mary and all

the rest, He came with us. Don't it make you feel safe, mother, thinking about it?"

"It ought, dear. It does. I know I have no cause for fear, He being mine and I being His—here, and now, and always."

In the silence that followed, though there was no sound, Serena knew that her mother was praying; and she lay quite still in her arms. By-and-by her mother said,

"And is not my little daughter God's child too?"

"I don't know, mother," answered Serena with a little burst of weeping; "I wish to be. Sometimes for a little—I almost hope I am."

Her mother clasped her closer.

"You must ask to become His child. I should feel so safe—so content about my little darling, if I knew that she were His own little child—for ever safe in His keeping."

"Mother, I *do* ask every day. I *think* I love Him. I know I take comfort in believing that He knows best; and that He won't let things really go wrong with us. I thought this when cousin Frank went away, and when we left aunt Mary and them all; and now—to-night—though it is dark and rainy, and we are all alone—"

She could not say any more without crying again; and she said to herself she must not do that, if she could help it. After a little while she added:

"Mother, all the time that we were coming

through, among the hills yesterday, cousin Sarah's anthem kept coming into my mind. Don't you remember," and she sang in a clear childish voice:

"'They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, that cannot be removed.'"

And again:

"'As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people, from henceforth even for ever.'"

"His people! That means every single one of those who trust in Him, does it not, mother? No matter whether we are there with them, or here alone. It's all the same to Him."

"All the same, dear, the very same. We are as near to Him, and as dear to Him, here as there."

Then she kissed her, and called her her little comforter; and then they knelt together in the darkness; and little Serena forgot the dull "plash, plash" of the rain, and the weary sighing of the wind without, as she joined with all her sorrowful heart in her mother's prayer.

They had not left the Lord behind them. He was there with them in that dark room; and her mother was speaking to Him face to face, as one speaks to a friend.

"And, somehow or other, He'll make all things come right; and I'll do all I can to help her—and father too."

She was saying this to herself as she stumbled toward the stove in which the fire had fallen low.

"I wish we had a light, mother," continued she. "I'm afraid father is going to be late, and I don't remember where the wood is, if there is any. But there is some of aunt Mary's lunch in the basket still; and if I had a light I would make you some tea. I might borrow one from the woman next door. She looks kind."

The wind was dashing the rain against the front door; but the back door opened into a little shed, and, just across this shed, another door opened into their neighbour's part of the house. Feeling her way to it through the darkness, Serena knocked. It was opened in a minute or two, not by Mrs. Quin, whom Serena had seen in the morning, but by a small pale woman who was leaning on a crutch. The child was a little startled, but in a moment she said,

"Will you be so kind as lend mother a light? We are strangers here, and father has gone out. We are going to be neighbours, you know."

It took a great deal more courage to say all this than one might think; and Serena needed to try hard to make her smile a cheerful one as she met the stranger's look. There must have been something in the little tear-stained face that touched the woman's heart, for before she answered her, she stooped forward and kissed her.

"Poor little one, come in," said she, and put out her hand to draw her towards her.

"No. I thank you. Mother is alone in the



dark. She is not very well; and I thought if I had a light to find the wood and things, I could make her some tea."

The light was put into her hand and she hastened away. Affairs did not look very cheerful, when the light was carried in. Only a part of their baggage had been brought from the station, and, as generally happens, it was that part which could have been best spared; and Serena was looking about her, rather doubtful as to the success of her tea-making, when some one said:

"I do not wish to intrude, but I would be glad to help you if I knew the way."

Before either Serena or her mother could answer, it came into their minds to wonder at the silvery sweetness of the voice. It was clear, like the tone of a tiny bell, but, at the same time, very grave and soft. It was the woman with the crutch who spoke.

"You will let me bring some wood and make your fire," said she again, before either Serena or her mother could answer. In a little time the crutch was laid on the floor, and she was kneeling before the stove. It was a plain, but good and trustworthy face that lifted itself up to Mrs. Wilbur at last. Sick and sorrowful and alone, as she was now,—she, who had all her life claimed as friend every dweller in her native village, must have been thankful for help and sympathy, even if they had been, ungraciously

offered; and when the stranger rising up, said in her voice so wonderfully sweet and gentle,—“My name is Melvil Brent. Will you let me offer you ‘the cup of cold water,’ for Jesus sake?” her heart went out to meet her as a sister beloved.

It would take too long to tell all that this new friend did for the comfort of Serena and her mother that night, and many a night and day after that. If Mrs. Wilbur had asked from God a sign that He would not forsake her in this land of strangers, she would have thought that He had given it in the friendship of Melvil Brent; and she thankfully accepted the token though she had not asked.

It was a happy thing for them all, that they had been left alone in the dark that night. They might have lived a long time in the same house with Miss Brent, without knowing more about her than that she was quiet and plain and lame, had it not been for the glimpse she got of Serena’s tear-stained face that night, looking up at her from the darkness. For, partly because it was her nature, and partly because her infirmity and other troubles had made her diffident, she shrank from making new acquaintances; and more than one tenant had come and gone from the other part of the little brown house, knowing no more about her, except that she earned her bread by doing plain needle-work, and seemed to like to do a neighbourly action when

it came in her way. There were old people, and sick people, and suffering little children in Dunwater, who had come to know a great deal more of her than this; and Serena and her mother knew her from the very first.

She never changed to them, except that she grew better and sweeter, and more beautiful every day. Yes, beautiful! Long before little Serena went away, she used to wonder at those who, knowing Miss Brent well, did not think her beautiful. She had a beautiful soul at any rate; and she will be beautiful some day, for she is one of those who "shall shine as the stars for ever and ever."

Melvil Brent's life would make a book by itself. It would be a sorrowful book, I am afraid; for she had more suffering in her life than usually falls to the lot of one person; but it would be a pleasant book, too, for out of her many sufferings sprung the "peaceable fruits of righteousness," to the perfecting of which all suffering is sent to God's people.

"Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

Just now there is only time to tell how these precious fruits of the Spirit availed, through her, to the help and comfort of Serena and her mother, many a day, when, but for her, their life would have been lonely and sad in the strange land where they had found a home.

## CHAPTER III.

### DUNWATER.



CTOBER was well begun when the strangers entered Canada; and before the gold and crimson glories of the autumn woods were scattered, sere and brown, in the hollows and on the hillsides, Serena had made up her mind about the town of Dunwater. She had been in the upper town, and the lower town, and over the long bridge to West Dunwater. She had been through the market, and had listened, amazed and amused, to the babel of tongues—three languages at least—which she heard there. And she came to the conclusion, arrived at by people generally, that Dunwater was “quite a town.”

As to its being a pretty town, that was another affair. There are few closely built streets in it. The first settlers in it seemed to have built their houses according to their separate fancies, and to have laid out their streets afterwards. So that there is a row of houses under a hill, a cluster of houses on one side of a hill, and then a regular street or

two; and this, repeated a good many times, makes the town of Dunwater.

It really is *a town*. It has a mayor and council; and the county jail is in it, and the Court House. There are a good many churches, of one kind or another; and any number of mills and workshops. There are a few large blocks of buildings, for stores and offices; and some handsome private residences; and a great many shabby wooden buildings scattered between. Or rather, it ought to be said, the handsome buildings are scattered, the shabby ones are continuous.

But if the beauty of the town itself was matter of doubt, there could be no doubt as to the beauty of the country round about it. The Dunwater river flows gently between meadows above the town, and between the hills below it. There are falls on the Merry river, which unites with the Dunwater—not merely the dams built for the mills and workshops, but natural falls and rapids running over great rocks, and between banks which are walls of stone. There are a great many pleasant walks among the hills, and down by the river; and Serena only wanted her mother's company to make her enjoyment of them complete.

But by the time the house was put in order, Mrs. Wilbur was past taking long walks. She was not ill, she said; but she could not exert herself much, even in the house; and it

needed a great effort on her part to keep from falling altogether into invalid habits. But she encouraged her little daughter to be much in the open air while the weather was fine; for she dreaded for her the confinement of the coming winter, believing, as she did, that a Canadian winter was little less to be dreaded than the long dark winter of Greenland.

So Serena went here and there, sometimes alone, sometimes with her father; and got the good of many a bracing sunshiny day, before the snow came. She got the good of something else too; for long before that time, she was on speaking terms with half the little children in the streets, and with many of the grown people as well. She used to get many a nod and smile, as she passed up and down, and many a pitying glance too; for those who saw her father, and knew how his days and many of his nights were employed, never could have imagined what sort of a mother Serena had at home.

The getting settled was a long and tedious business, for many reasons; but it was a very complete and satisfactory one in its way. They had not brought much of their household stuff with them, nor were they able to purchase much; but what they had brought with them, and what they purchased, proved quite enough to furnish comfortably, even prettily, the few rooms which they occupied; and their part of the little brown house was transformed into

something quite different from what it had been when they first saw it.

Indeed it was something very different in appearance from what it had ever been before, Miss Brent thought, as she noticed, with wonder and pleasure, the pretty and simple devices by which the most was made of many things which less skilful hands would have neglected,—less careful eyes might have overlooked.

For the former occupants of the house had been of the Mrs. Quin stamp; and *her* ideas of good housekeeping went no farther than the getting ready her husband's meal in reasonable time, and having a clean shirt for him, and clean suits for her children on Sunday. She was proud of the appearance her family made at church and on holidays; and she never doubted her skill and success as a housekeeper. She had her stated times for "redding up;"—that is, she had stated times for commencing the operation, but she was not always successful in getting through the process even to her own satisfaction. There was the regular washing-day discomfort, and the Saturday turmoil of scouring and scrubbing and overturning things in general, by which her own household were deeply impressed; and among such of her neighbours as did not often see her in her own house, she got the credit which she thought to be her due.

But Mrs. Quin's ideas of a tidy house and good housekeeping were a little disarranged by

a visit or two to "the other end," when the putting in order was completed. She was quite inclined to resent the general comfort and prettiness, as a reflection on her own bare floors, and rather battered specimens of furniture.

"Why, that fine little room might be in the doctor's house, or even in the judge's itself," said she to Miss Brent. "What in all the world have poor folks like them to do with a place like that?—with carpets on the very stairs, and not an inch of bare board to be seen."

Miss Brent smiled a little to herself, and said, "The carpets are for warmth, and to save work. They are afraid of the cold, coming, as they do, from another country; and Mrs. Wilbur is not strong. And except the books and nicknacks, which are pretty, there is very little in the room. The sofa and stools are mostly of their own making; and the table is not so good as yours, only it is so prettily covered.

"Well, maybe no," said Mrs. Quin, after a second thought; "I daresay the things, taken piece by piece, are poor enough; but the house is like a doll's house, so pretty and neat; and poor folks like them have no call to be so fine. It's sheer pride, and I'll keep my distance. I can understand how a single woman, like you, Miss Brent, should take pleasure in having a place like a little palace as yours is, to be sure, having little else to take pleasure in. But it is different with the like of these people."



"We don't know what they have been used to," said Miss Brent gently; "I fancy it may seem a poor place enough to them."

"Well, they're no better than their neighbours now, at any rate," returned Mrs. Quin. "Better! I'll not say that my Mike is all that he ought to be; but he's a better man, any day of the year, than yon sulky Wilbur."

"I have scarcely seen him," said Miss Brent; "I can say nothing for him; but *she* is as pleasant a spoken woman as one need wish to see; and the child—little Serena, as they call her—is a nice little thing. The mother has her own troubles, I daresay; and the little maid looks as if she shared them with her."

"I daresay. Most of us have our troubles, whether we speak about them or not," said Mrs. Quin coldly; "I have no desire to have fine neighbours myself. Only look at the flowers in their window, roses and such like, at this time of the year! Poor folks have no time for such things."

"Nay now, Mrs. Quin, I shall begin to think you mean that for me. The flowers cost nothing, I gave them to the little girl. I take great pleasure in mine, though the frost mostly kills them for me in the winter time. The mother is poorly, you know. Did she tell you? No, I suppose not, as you have seen so little of her; but she told me that she does not expect to step out of her own door till the winter is over—if

she does then, poor soul! No wonder if she wants to make the place as pleasant as may be. Did you mind how pale and thin her face is?"

"It's the way with the most of these Yankee women. They're useless folks, I'm thinking," said Mrs. Quin, with an air that she tried to make indifferent; but relenting, she added gently, "I did notice it. She looks mortal ill. What could that softie of a man be thinking of, to bring her and that child so far from all belonging to them? He had his own reasons for coming—at least for leaving there away; but he should never have brought them from their home."

"I suppose his wife would not let him come away by himself," said Miss Brent.

"I suppose not. But if ever two people were mismated it's them; and I've seen the same thing before with the folks that have come from yon side of late. Why, she's a lady, if ever I saw one, and he's—well, I'll say nothing about him. But I will say this: When a bad man gets his uncanny fingers twisted among the heartstrings of a wise and good woman, there are none more to be pitied than she. Poor soul! she thought she could save him, I daresay; and left all to come with him to this strange country, with her failing health and her sick heart. She'll never save him—*never*, he's not of the kind to be helped. He's sly and sullen, and a—"

Miss Brent laid her hand on the woman's arm. It was not at all like her to talk over her

neighbours in this way ; but she had a purpose in it. She knew well that the strangers would need kind and neighbourly help before the winter was over ; and she wanted to interest Mrs. Quin's kind heart in their behalf. But she was startled at the warmth with which she spoke.

“ It is not so bad as that I hope. You must not judge him hardly, Mrs. Quin.”

“ Hardly ! But what should you know, Miss Brent dear—you that have had as little to do with mankind as most folks, I fancy. Yon man's a weak creature ; and in the hands that have got hold of him, to be weak is to be wicked. Oh ! dear heart ! what do you know ?”

“ You may be right. But she's not a person of that kind, and she is all the more to be pitied.”

“ No, poor soul ! Times like these try the stuff a man is made of ; and when a true woman finds her gold turn to dross on her hands, why, it's her's all the same ;—and the truer and better she is herself, the less she can bear to throw it away to loss. God help the poor creatures all ! I have my own troubles with my Mike, I wont deny ; but when he's not in drink, he's a man every inch, and I give him respect, but yon poor creature—”

Mrs. Quin's gesture was something to be wondered at, for contemptuous scorn.

“ But I think you are a little hard on him,”

said Miss Brent. "I have seen them together, and they seem quite friendly like; and don't you notice how the little girl always takes his hand when they are going through the town? If he were altogether bad, that innocent little thing would not trust him as she does. She is a wise child for her years, and knows the difference between right and wrong."

"You may say that,—she's just a little darlin'. But she is his own child, you know; and, indeed, sometimes I think she holds by him, and comes and goes with him, because she is pitiful of him and his weakness. Not that she quite understands that, the dear; but I have seen it in her sorrowful eyes many a time."

Ah! well. I wish we could help them in their trouble," said Miss Brent, rising to go. She knew she need not say more to Mrs. Quin. Her own heart was warm with kindly interest for the strangers, and she knew that her friend would be ready to help them if they needed help. But Mrs. Quin shook her head gravely, as she rose to go with her to the door.

"It's little we can do. We may give a kind word, and maybe a helping hand at a time; but we can't touch the sore spot, Miss Brent dear. It's ill coming between a wife and her husband. It's neither for you nor me to do that. If she's a religious woman, *you* might help her. It's likely she's your sort. They say that there's only one right kind of religion. I

don't know, I'm sure: but if the poor woman has none at all, there is naught else can do her much good."

Miss Brent had taken two or three steps toward her room, but she came back at that.

"There *is* but one right kind of religion," she said: "and this is what it teaches;—do you mind this, dear? 'And this is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another.' That is what we are taught in the Bible, and we cannot be very far wrong if we keep to that. And as for our neighbour, from some things I know, I think her best comfort is the trust she has in Him, and He can touch the sore spot, and heal it too; and we'll ask Him to do it, you and I."

"I'll ask Him sure; and maybe I am too hard on that poor weak creature, Wilbur. Maybe he's not so bad a man as I think him; and the Lord's stronger than the devil any way; there's comfort in that to come and go upon.

She *was* rather hard upon him,—good Mrs. Quin; and yet her judgment was right in the main. For weakness soon becomes wickedness when the tempter is strong; and poor Wilbur was in bad hands. There had never been "much to him" in the opinion of those who had known him all his life; and everybody wondered when the good and pretty Esther Ashton trusted her happiness and the safe-keeping of her little patrimony in his hands. But though they

wondered, they did not fear very much for her, seeing that she loved him. She was the wiser and better of the two; and though she might never have the true woman's best happiness of leaning on some one stronger, and looking up to some one higher, than herself, she might still have a sort of happiness in striving to lead him to higher and better things.

And in their quiet, untempted country life, and in common times, this might have been. But circumstances arose unexpectedly and severely to try the stuff men are made of, as Nora Quin said; and poor Esther Wilbur found that temptation had been too strong for her weak-minded husband.

It would not add to the interest of this story to those for whom it is intended, if I were to linger over this part of it. It need only be said here, that Esther Wilbur strove, as a noble woman will strive, long and hard, to shut her eyes to her husband's unworthiness, and, so doing, did what might be done to shut the eyes of the world. But there came a time when she ceased so to strive, and only braced herself to endure what was shame to her, only because it was shame to him.

For of late he had sadly changed for the worse. He had fallen into evil ways. He had sought pleasure in places and in company where, sooner or later, pleasure plays into the hands of Death; and, left to himself, he had few chances

of escape. Knowing this, she had no choice, after his flight from home, but to follow him with their child. She spoke no farewells, except to her sister and her family; and when she looked her last on her home and her native village, it seemed to her that she was never to see them more.

In the strange land to which they came, some things were better, and some were worse, than they expected. At first, Serena and her mother were home-sick and heart-sick too; but gentle Miss Brent was a blessing from God to them, and kindly Nora Quin was scarcely less a blessing in her way; and they used to feel that if they had had their choice of friends from among the people of all Dunwater, they could not have chosen any two kinder or dearer.

And besides, nothing can go very far wrong with those who trust in God; and amid the very thickest of the darkness that overshadowed them for a time, His face was never long hidden from the mother's waiting eyes; and little Serena could not be very sorrowful when her mother was content.

So November passed, and December; and the snow came with Christmas, and afterwards the bitter cold. Oh! what a long winter it was! It sometimes seemed to Serena and her mother as if it would never come to an end; as if they should never see the flowers, or the green earth, or feel the soft summer air again. They did

not say this to each other. Each strove, for the other's sake, to be patient and cheerful; and almost always they succeeded. But sometimes, in the quiet time "between sundown and dark," when Serena would lay her head down on her mother's lap if she were sitting up, or on her pillow if she were lying down, the silence that would fall on them told more of loneliness and home-sickness than many murmuring words would have done.

Not that the winter was very much longer or colder than the winters in their old home had been. But when people fall to counting the days that come in sadly, and pass over slowly, the time seems long, though it be the prime of summer; and there was very little to make any day bright to them.

Mr. Wilbur kept his place in the saloon, and went and came, sometimes early, and sometimes late; but too often his coming brought little pleasure to his home. His late home-comings were the saddest, but these Serena did not often see. Many a long hour did her mother wait for him alone. But oftener than her mother knew, she heard her father stumbling in, muttering sharp or sullen words; and then she would cover her head and cry as if her heart would break in the darkness, wondering why God had ever let anything so terrible come upon them as this. Then she would creep to the door, and listen till her father's mutterings and her



mother's gentle expostulations would cease, and then go shivering to her bed again.

Sometimes, when in his drunken unreasonableness he was more violent than usual, the mother would come softly in to listen; and then Serena, with rare sense and delicacy, would close her eyes and seem to sleep; for she knew that the exposure of her father's shame would hurt her mother's sore heart more than her loving sympathy could help her to endure the pain. So she would lie still, breathing softly while her mother waited, to break into bitter weeping when she went away. But one time, coming suddenly, her mother found her listening at the door, trembling with terror and the bitter cold.

"Oh! mother, mother!" gasped she, as she clasped her close. The mother could only hold her in silence, chafing her numbed hands, and covering her from the cold; but when she went away she whispered:

"My darling, we must have patience, and think gently of him, and pray for him. Oh! Serena, my child, give God no rest for your father's sake."

There were some nights of that winter, whose misery could not be told, when they waited, longing for, yet fearing, his return; when the first sound of his step sent Serena upstairs, out of the way to listen and weep in the darkness, fearing she knew not what; when after such hours of suffering and weariness, as I have no

heart to write about, the mother would steal up to her child, trembling and exhausted, to wait for a dreary morning. The strength and courage of many a poor soul has failed in such a trial as this. Mrs. Wilbur waited and hoped, and strove against despair as, in old times, the wife of one possessed of a devil must have waited for the passing by of Jesus. "Lord, if Thou wilt." It was all her trust, and it never quite failed her, or she must have died.

Her gold had, indeed, turned to dross on her hands. Through these long winter nights of watching, and waiting, and wrestling with God, this knowledge would not be put from her; but she watched and waited all the same, and wrestled with God none the less earnestly in her husband's behalf.

There were others who watched and waited for Mr. Wilbur's late home-comings, with many anxious doubts, as to how it all was to end. For weeks, as the winter wore on, Miss Brent never put out her light till all was quiet below. Nora Quin forgot her own troubles in anxious doubts as to how her neighbour might be getting through hers; and many a night she crossed the little shed in the darkness, to listen at their door.

One night, in the beginning of February, Michael Quin had a cold, and, as was not very often his habit, stayed at home a whole long evening, and was "as kind, and good, and dear,

as a man need be," his wife told Miss Brent; and, listening to the bursts of childish laughter that came now and then up the stairs, she had no difficulty in believing it. For Mike was a fond father, and a kind husband, "when he was himself;" and to-night though his head ached, and his voice was hoarse with the cold, he played with his little lads merrily, while his wife sat watching him with eyes that smiled as lovingly and trustingly upon him as if he had never caused them to shed a tear.

By-and-by, the children, baby and all, were put to bed, and Mike sat watching Nora's gruel-making operations with interest, when a sound, strange to him, but familiar enough to her, was heard. It was the stumbling steps and muttering voice of their neighbour, just come home.

"It's early for him," said Nora to herself. "It's like he's less a beast than usual." But she went to the door from time to time to listen, while Mike, wondering, watched her curiously. She was not listening for nothing, it seemed, though Mike heard nothing. In a little time she set down her light, giving her husband only a glimpse of her scared white face, and rushed out into the darkness. Her husband followed her in time to see her rapping at their neighbour's door; and then to his utter astonishment he heard her say:

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Mrs. Wilbur, ma'am, but if you would kindly give me a few of the

little pills that frightened the croup from the baby the other night. They did him a power of good, I'm thinking. I'm sorry to trouble you, indeed, ma'am, if you'll excuse my boldness. No, I'll not go in, thank you kindly. My Mike is waiting for me, and I must go."

There was a pause, and then the door opened again, and a tiny folded paper was placed on Nora's palm; and then Mike caught a glimpse of a face so worn and white and sorrowful, that it gave him a turn," as he afterwards declared.

"And are you as well as usual yourself, ma'am?" asked Nora, with forced cheerfulness, and then she went a little nearer and said something that Mike could not hear, and then turned and ran across the shed to her own door. That is, she meant to do so; but, stumbling in the dark against her big husband, she was held fast; and, in her surprise, she gave him a few sharp words for his pains.

"You great blundering ——" she exclaimed; "and look at the sense of the man! Out in the cold in his stockings, with never a coat on his back, and him down with the influenza, if ever a man was."

"But, Nora, my woman—what are you up to? Sure the child's sleeping sweetly, with small need of pills or any other nonsense. What has come to you?"

But Nora answered not a word. Sitting down she threw her apron over her face, and burst

into tears. Mike, being "himself," was tender-hearted; and he stood looking on with great concern.

"Sure, Nora dear, the baby's all right. What is it? Was it the woman's white face, poor thing?"

Nora let her apron fall.

"Did you see it, Mike dear? And to think of that drunken brute making the poor creature afraid!"

"But, Nora dear—he would never strike her?" said Mike, horrified.

"A man that's not himself will do many a thing," said Nora sadly; "and that's so like a man, too; as though a blow was the worst a woman could have to bear! Oh! Mike lad! did you see her white working face and her trembling hands? and she speaking so gently, and making believe that all was as it should be within."

Nora's voice broke, and she betook herself to her gruel-making again; and her husband watched her "mighty unaisy." If Nora was so cut up about the misdeeds of another woman's husband, what must she be about the misdeeds of her own? It wasn't a pleasant thing to think about; but there was nothing said for a while. The gruel was made, seasoned, and presented; the warm water was brought for his feet, and the liniment was applied to his throat before a word was spoken; then Nora said:

"Sure I asked for the wee pills for the child, but I daresay they'll do as well for you. Open your mouth, Mike dear. They're just like the sweeties we used to get at home."

"Oh yes, I'll take them by the score,—but what did you ask them for? Sure the child had no need of them."

"I had to ask for something, and the pills came first to my mind, can't you see," said Nora impatiently. "Was I going to let her know that I thought she might be needing help? The little sense that men have!"

Mike opened his mouth and received the globules on his tongue, then, putting his arms round his wife, held her fast.

"Nora dear,—sure my hand's not very heavy now, is it?"

"The first one has yet to hear me complain, Mike lad."

Mike groaned.

"Sure dear, you never touched me except when you was not yourself; and in general I can keep out of your way. You have no call to vex yourself."

Mike looked ruefully at the little woman on his knee. The occasions when he was "not himself" were pretty frequent.

"Nora, dear, look at my big hand. I could fell a little creature like you with a blow."

He said it with a shocked simplicity that almost made her smile.

“Yes, dear, but I’m more afraid for wee Nora and the lads, than for myself; and they’re mostly in bed at such times, you know.”

He put her from him, and rose to his feet with an exclamation; but she clung to him, and would not be put away.

“Mike dear, you’re not to think I mind it. I used to fret about it, but I don’t now. And I fretted you too, I daresay. Many a woman has more to bear from her husband than I have. You have no cause to grieve more than usual. Sure I never rise nor lie down, but I pray God to hinder you from doing anything to grieve your kind heart afterwards. And, Mike dear, your least word, the very sound of your foot, is music to me when you are yourself.”

He was a strong man, not very bright, certainly, not very easily moved; but as he looked down on the little creature clinging to him, entreating him, and smiling through her tears, a great sob shook him, and his tears fell on her hands. She cried a little, too. He spoke in a minute or two.

“Nora dear, while you are about it, don’t you think you might as well ask the Lord to keep me from the cursed stuff altogether? That might mend the matter quicker.”

A look, as if she thought that was quite beyond her faith or hope, passed over her face; but she said eagerly:

“So I might, dear, and so I will.”

Mike's perseverance has little to do with my story, but it must be recorded that, from this time, he became very much altered in his habits. Perhaps he saw, in the conduct of his neighbour, a reflection of his own, which shocked him. Perhaps, too, he, as well as his wife, sought help superior to his own strength of purpose. Perhaps it was partly owing to his taking the temperance pledge on the very next day. But, whatever the cause, it is fair to Mike to report that he became from that time a sober man, as well as a good workman.



## CHAPTER IV.

SERENA GOES TO A PARTY.—A LITTLE STRANGER  
COMES.—HER FATHER LOSES HIS SITUATION.

**T**HE winter was very long. The monotony of some days was broken by the kindly words and deeds of neighbours; and now and then there came a letter from aunt Mary, or one of her girls, giving items of village news, and bits from the journal of the young soldier. But only twice, while the snow was on the ground, did Mrs. Wilbur venture out; once for a sleigh drive with her husband, and once to church with Serena; so no wonder that the time seemed long to her.

Serena was out almost every day. The cold was bitter enough sometimes, but it was bracing too; and though the winter wind blew her about, and tired her often, she was all the stronger for the buffeting it gave her, and she grew tall and rosy; and she might have grown merry too, even in this "strange land," except for the trouble which could not always be hidden in her mother's heart, but which showed itself in her pale face, and in her sorrowful sighs many a time. They were content and busy when together; it was

when she was away from her, that Serena thought most sadly of her mother. Sometimes, when watching the coasting and skating of the merry Dunwater children, sometimes even when sharing their sports, the remembrance of her mother sitting anxious and solitary at home, would bring tears to her eyes. For, once or twice, when she had gone home sooner than she was expected, it was to find her mother leaning back in her chair, with closed eyes and listless folded hands, and with such a troubled look upon her face, that Serena's first thought was that bad news must have come from Maybrook, or that something dreadful must have happened to her father. But nothing had happened. The mother's smile, patient always, if not always cheerful, came back at the sound of her little daughter's voice, and she was just as usual. But Serena could not forget it, and she would have given up all her walks and out of doors amusements, if it had been permitted; and often her little face looked wistful and grave among the merry young people whose sports she shared.

About New Year's time, Mrs. Wilbur became more unwell than usual; and she yielded to Miss Brent's entreaties, and permitted her to bring a doctor to visit her; and as soon as ever she saw his face, she wished she had sent for him before. For if ever a face gave token of a strong, tender, loving Christian heart, that face was Doctor Gilmour's. He was a true disciple of the

great Physician, and, like Him, he went about doing good. Help was needed in the little brown house, he could see at a glance. He had learned something about the Wilburs from Miss Brent; and a quick eye, and a long experience among all sorts of people, helped him to understand at once their peculiar circumstances; and he was a friend, as well as physician, to Serena and her mother while they remained in Dunwater. He gave Serena a great pleasure on his very first visit.

"Is this the little Yankee girl I hear my Katie speaking about?" asked he, as the child came quietly into the room. "I think you and I have met somewhere before, have we not?"

"I took little Charlie home one day, when he was crying with the cold. I saw you then," said Serena. "Kate is the one with the scarlet cloak, you know," she added in explanation to her mother.

"Oh! she has been here, has she? And have you returned her visit?" asked the doctor.

"I only went when I took little Charlie home that day," said Serena.

"Well, you must come again. There are to be gay doings among us soon. There is a birthday party before us; and I hope you will give my little girl and me the pleasure of seeing you there."

"Oh! I should like it, if mother is willing, and well enough to spare me," said Serena, eagerly.

The pleasure which the invitation gave was almost as great as the pleasure of the party. It was at least unmingled; and that is more than can be said for the pleasure of the party. That was pleasant, too, almost all the time, Serena told her mother; and she was glad she went, but she did not care about going to another very soon. Just for a few minutes, she acknowledged, she had wished herself at home; but she did not tell her mother that, during those few minutes, she had shed some of the bitterest and angriest tears that had ever wet her eyes.

It was very pleasant at first. There were a great many young people there, some of them younger, but most of them older, than Serena; and there were some grown-up people too, who had been invited to help to amuse the rest. There were several rooms thrown open; and at first Serena stayed where the little children were, and joined so nicely in their play, and led some of the games so successfully, that they were very much pleased; and she had a very good time.

By-and-by, she was called into the room where little Katie was, whose birthday they were celebrating. Here the larger children were; and here she had "a good time" too. She moved about among the other girls, so quietly and modestly, and yet with such sweet self-possession, that Katie and her father exchanged triumphant glances, and Katie's mamma nodded and smiled in a way that said a great deal more plainly than

words could have done, that she had been quite mistaken.

For, indeed, mamma had been surprised, and not well pleased, when she heard that the doctor had invited the daughter of "that disreputable person, Wilbur of Crane's Saloon," to little Katie's party. But the doctor only laughed, and said he had invited the daughter of as true and sweet a gentlewoman as it had ever been his fortune to meet on either side of the sea. Her mamma's doubt made Katie unhappy for a minute; but she took comfort in the thought that her papa was almost always right about things, and so it proved this time. For though there were many prettier girls there, and nearly all were more nicely dressed, there was not, even in Mrs. Gilmour's opinion, one more gentle or well-bred—more like a little lady than she.

By-and-by they began to dance. Serena could not dance; but she stood by the piano, and listened, and watched the pretty white fingers of the other Katie flitting about over the keys, with great delight. The other Katie was little Katie's cousin, Miss Gilmour of "The Mount;" and there was no young lady in all Dunwater that the children thought so nice as she. She played to them, while they danced and skipped about to the music, as bright and cheerful as lambs in a meadow.

Then Miss Gilmour sang to them, and the children sang too, Serena with the rest. She

knew a good many of the little songs and hymns that Miss Gilmour played for them, and she could sing a nice second to some of them; and she had then the very best time of all.

At last, the elder boys and girls got tired of the children's songs; and Randal, Miss Katie's brother, put a sheet of music on the stand, and said she was to sing that song, and that all the rest were to join in the chorus. So, in order that they might do so, Miss Gilmour played it over and over, and the children were delighted, and did their best to learn it and to sing it well—all but little Serena. She shut her lips tight, and would have shut her ears too, only, as she was but one little girl among so many, she thought the best way was to keep quiet; taking no notice, and saying nothing at all just then.

It was a song about the war they were singing; and Serena was not the only one who was displeased and shocked at the light way in which the terrible war in which her cousin was engaged was treated of in the song, and would not sing it. There was a tall, fair girl, almost as old as Miss Gilmour, who shook her head at Randal, and begged his sister not to play for him. But Miss Gilmour only laughed and played on, and the boys joined so loudly in the chorus, that there was more noise than music; and then, some clapped their hands, and "encored" as they do at concerts; and some hissed,

and pretended to be very indignant; and some were indignant without any pretence at all.

Then Randal and the tall young lady began a discussion, half in fun, half in earnest, about the war, and many other matters connected with it. That is, it began in fun; but it became so much in earnest at last, that Miss Gilmour would certainly have put an end to it at once, had she not been so occupied in watching little Serena; for the little girl's face was changing constantly, from red to pale, and from pale to red, as she turned from one speaker to another.

Of course I am not going to tell you all that was said. That would be too foolish, for they knew very little of what they were discussing. But that did not matter to them the least in the world. They talked all the same, and asserted the most contradictory things; and the others who put in a word now and then, did it sometimes so sharply, and sometimes so funnily, that there was a great deal of noise and laughter, and a few angry looks and words. And, all the time, Serena stood dumb with amazement and anger, that anything so real and terrible as war should be treated with such levity.

At last, even the merry Randal began to think they had had enough of it, and wondered a little that his sister had not put an end to it before. Turning to appeal to her, his eye followed hers, till it fell on Serena's face.

"Ah ah! that's it, is it?" thought he; and

then he said aloud, "Be quiet, all of you. Here is little Serena, who has not spoken yet; and she knows all about it. Now, little one, you must tell us what you have been thinking about all this time. Be quiet, children, and let us hear what little Serena thinks."

"What would be the good?" said Serena, indignantly. "I will tell you one thing that came into my mind, though, while you were talking, if you care to hear it. You made me think of what the Bible says about the people who scatter firebrands, arrows, and death, and say, Am I not in sport?"

Randal whistled.

"That can't mean me, for I was not in sport; and I fancied Miss Carrie was not either."

"It is for both," said Serena, with a quiet that covered great excitement, or she never would have added, "Neither of you know much of what you were talking about; but you know less than she."

Randal joined heartily in the laugh which followed.

"Suppose you tell us something about it?" said he.

"No, it isn't worth while. I don't know much about it—at least I can't talk about it to people who don't care. What do any of you know or care?"

She did not know very much about it, truly; but the knowledge she had was very real and



sorrowful. She had been at her uncle's house when the news of Ben's death came; and had seen how much they all suffered when Frank went away. She had helped to make soldiers' shirts, and had knitted soldiers' stockings. She knew by name and surname scores of young men who had gone to the war, and some who would never return. She knew of widows and orphans bereaved by the war; and mothers and sisters who were alone, who might always be alone, because of it; and the light words of these foolish young people seemed very wrong and cruel to her.

It really was *not* worth while to talk to these people about it; but she was very much in earnest, and not very wise, and before she knew it, she had suffered herself to be coaxed and bantered into answering Randal's questions, made gentle and earnest for the occasion. She did not speak angrily after the very first. She kept her voice down, and spoke slowly and softly, as she had always seen her mother try to do, if she were vexed or troubled. She showed no wish to vex or wound anyone; she spoke so modestly and gently, that Randal quite repented of his foolish wish to have some fun at her expense; and Miss Gilmour waited for a good opportunity to put an end pleasantly to it all. It might all have ended well; but just as Serena began to pause and falter in the silence that had fallen on the rest, as they listened, a shrill boy's voice said:

“ Why didn't you stay there, then, and fight— and your father too? It would have been better than mixing sling, and cheating folks with bad cigars, at Crane's saloon.”

Before his tongue stopped, his ears were tingling from a sharp and sudden blow dealt by the hand of Randal Gilmour. In the dead silence that followed, Serena's eyes sent one appealing glance round the circle, and then they were hidden in her hands. Then some laughed, and the greater number cried shame; but Serena would have neither aid nor sympathy from one of them. She could only find voice to say:

“ Play something loud, Miss Gilmour, and never mind.” She spoke with a gasp, and could only just hinder herself from clinging to the kind hand laid on her shoulder. Miss Gilmour played; there was nothing better that she could do, she thought; and then Serena slipped out of the room, and darted upstairs into the dressing-room. Here, in a little while, the two Katies found her, shedding grieved and angry tears, while she searched among the multitude of garments for her own hood and cloak.

“ You are not going home, surely?” said Miss Gilmour.

“ Papa will be so grieved,” said little Katie.

“ It's pretty late, isn't it?” said Serena, keeping her face turned away. “ Mother isn't very well, and I had better go.”

“ It's not late,” said Miss Katie. “ I am sorry

that you should have been vexed. I hope you will not be angry with us all."

"I am not angry—at least, I don't think I am very angry. I shan't be angry long. I am not angry with you, Miss Gilmour, nor with Katie. I am so sorry I talked so much. I might have known they would not care to understand. I am sorry I spoiled the pleasure.

"You need not be sorry for anything you said. You spoke very gently, and you are a dear little girl," said Miss Gilmour, kissing her.

"And papa will be so sorry," put in little Katie again.

"But he need not know it," said Serena.

"Oh! yes, he will, because he asked you himself. You are his visitor as well as mine. And he'll miss you from the supper-table."

"I was so pleased when he asked me—and mother too," and Serena paused in her search for her hood. "I think I had better go. I am such a foolish little thing—it would be just like me to cry before them all—and I would not for all the world."

"I don't think you need cry any more now," said Miss Gilmour, kindly; "you shall bathe your eyes and brush your hair; and Katie shall stay with you a little, and then you can come down, I think."

"To please papa and me," said little Katie.

"Well," said Serena, with a long breath; "but you need not wait. They will miss you, and I

don't mind being here alone. I would rather, for a little, please, Miss Gilmour; and then I'll come."

Some of my young readers may be inclined to laugh at Serena's troubles; and perhaps they may laugh, too, when I tell them why she wanted to linger after the others went down. It was no laughing matter to her, however. Her heart was full of love for her aunt and her cousin Frank, and a great many other people who had gone to the war, or suffered from it; and her feelings were sadly hurt, first by the discussion, and then by the boy's thoughtless words about her father. So she rose and went into the darkest corner of the room, and laid her head down on her hands for a moment.

Nothing can be surer than this—that in the eyes of Him to whom she appealed, nothing is trifling which grieves or vexes one of His little ones. What Serena asked of Him was help—that very minute—so that she might go downstairs, and be like the rest, and have no more trouble made about her—and who shall say it was not granted? At any rate, when Doctor Gilmour afterwards noticed her, showing pictures to a little boy who was getting sleepy and cross, he never guessed that the bright eager smile that greeted him, was in danger of becoming a tearful one.

Not much happened after that. Randal, prompted by his sister, would have gone home

with Serena, to get a chance to ask her pardon on the way. But she wanted no one to go home with her, she said; so, after shaking hands with the doctor and Mrs. Gilmour, and kissing the two Katies, she ran away, and was at her own door before Master Randal knew that she was gone.

If Serena had found her mother alone, the chances are that all her trouble would have been poured forth at the very first moment. But her father was there, when she went in, more like himself than he had been at that hour for a good many nights; and so she said not a word of all of which her heart was so full. She put the bright side of her experience uppermost, and told how merry she had been with the little ones and how they had sung, and some of them had danced, and what a nice supper they had had, and how kindly Katie's father and mother had spoken to her.

And, oh! mother, I think Miss Katie, little Katie's cousin, is just the nicest and best young lady I ever saw. She is pure gold, I'm sure."

"She's one of 'The Mount' Gilmour's, I suppose. A proud set, everybody says they are," said her father.

"Are they, father? Well, Miss Gilmour did not seem proud to me. I asked her to come and see you, mother; and I am so sorry, she is going away in the early train, for ever so long. She only staid for little Katie's party. And she was sorry too, for she said she knew my mother

must be nice because—because I was a nice little girl. I didn't care for myself, but I was so glad she said that about mother."

Her father had nothing to say to that.

"It was pleasant almost all the time," went on the little girl; "but I don't think I care about going to any more parties for a good while."

"Better not," said her father roughly; "going among such folks won't make you any better contented at home, I guess."

"Perhaps not; but I wasn't thinking about that. I know I am best at home with mother. But you were glad to have me go this time, weren't you, mother?"

"Yes dear, very glad; and I'm glad you were pleased to-night;—but I could not spare you often."

When Serena woke in the morning, she had changed her mind about telling her troubles to her mother.

"It would do no good. It would only worry her about—about father. And I really did have a good time at first. But I don't care to go, again."

Slowly the winter wore on, till they began to know the days a little longer,—then something very wonderful happened. There came a little brother to Serena.

He was a strong and beautiful child from the very first; with his sister's eyes, and, fortunately,

with his sister's obliging temper, or the little girl must many times have been too tired for her good.

March and April were anxious months for them all; for Mrs. Wilbur did not grow strong, and for a long time she never expected to be well again. But she did not grieve and alarm her little daughter by telling her this. She made with Miss Brent the arrangements which, had it not been for this kind friend, she must have made with Serena. But happily, as the cold weather went away, and May came in warm and bright, she began to grow better; and from that time her health gradually improved, till she was almost as well and strong as she used to be in the old happy days at home.

In the beginning of the summer, Mr. Wilbur lost his situation in Crane's Saloon. It was, about this time, brought to the notice of those whose duty it was to see to these matters, that there were many unlicensed places in Dunwater where intoxicating liquors were sold, and in which practices were permitted which brought the town into disrepute, by exposing many foolish people to danger and loss. The result of their consideration was, that the persons whose duty it was, were instructed to proceed against such places as the law directed.

They began at Crane's Saloon, either because it was the most disreputable place, or because proof was more easily obtained against that than

against any other ; and Crane, being neither able to defend himself, nor to pay the fine imposed, ran away. The stock that remained was seized for rent,—the door was shut,—and Mr. Wilbur found himself without employment.

All this was matter for rejoicing to Serena and her mother, but it was matter for anxiety too. They were glad he was no longer engaged in such a shameful business ; and they hoped that being less tempted, he would sin less, and suffer less, and perhaps, after a time, gain a better name in the town. But they had cause for anxiety too ; for such a situation as he could fill, did not seem to be easily found, and they had nothing laid up against a time of need. Their property at Maybrook could not be sold just now, and Mrs. Wilbur could not bring herself to apply to her sister for help. With her little child and her delicate health she could do little with her needle, even had she known where to look for work ; and though her faith never quite failed her, she had many an anxious thought as to how they were to get through the summer.

Her husband got a day's employment now and then, but no settled occupation. He worked on the bit of land adjoining the house, which had at some former time been cultivated as a garden, and he showed more industry, and had better success, than the neighbours supposed possible. He stayed quietly at home too, most of the time, and rarely indulged to excess in drinking ; but



he was moody and hopeless, as a man is likely to become who knows that he has forfeited the respect and confidence of those who once relied on him; and, added to all her other cares, his wife suffered constantly from anxiety on his account.

At length, in answer to an entreaty sent to their friends at home, that money might be raised in some way on their house, now standing empty in Maybrook, there came an enclosure from Mr. Turner. Mrs. Wilbur felt by no means sure that it was theirs by right, but they were too near utter want to permit her to hesitate about receiving it. It was not a large sum, and it could be repaid at some future time, she thought. So half was taken by Mr. Wilbur, who hoped to find employment by going to the city, and the other half was put aside to be used as carefully as might be; and, small as it was, they had little hope of more for a good while to come.

“But it’s always darkest just before day, you know, mother,” said Serena; “and I feel just as if something was going to happen, something pleasant, I mean. At any rate, the milk for baby is always sure, while Mrs. Quin wants so much tating and edging, and things that I can do. There is always something to be glad of.”

It is possible that Mrs. Wilbur had a clearer idea than Serena had, as to the origin of Mrs. Quin’s newly-developed taste for the child’s

pretty fancy work; but she quite agreed with her that it was something to be glad of; and she knew that, in the end, their kind friend would be no poorer for bestowing freely what was so needful for the child. The doing of a kind action goes far to repay the doer when the heart is tender, as was Nora Quin's. To say nothing of Serena's work, the pleasure she took in seeing the baby grow in strength and beauty was payment enough.

They were very quiet for a time, after Mr. Wilbur went away. Through Miss Brent, Mrs. Wilbur got some plain sewing to do; but she was not strong yet, and the little she could do was sometimes done with much difficulty. Still it must be done, for they were scantily supplied with many things that they had hitherto considered among the necessaries of life. They were quite content, however; content with hard work and humble fare, and with such simple pleasures as came in their way.

"It is wonderful how little people really need," Serena used to say. She ate dry bread and drank cold water for at least two meals every day; and though it cannot be said that she never wished for something better for herself, as well as for her mother, she certainly never complained.

"Baby makes such a difference in the house," she used to say; meaning, "How sweet and bright he is!" and "What a darling he is!"

“There never was a baby, so sweet, so good, so beautiful as ours !”

If it had meant “What a care he is both night and day !” or “How very tired I am sometimes,” it would have been quite true ; but it never meant that on Serena’s lips. Her undisguised pride in her little brother, in his beauty, his strength, his winning baby ways, was a very pretty thing to see. She had plenty to do, during these spring days, what with one thing, and what with another ; but she was never too weary to take pleasure in her little brother. It was rest and play to watch him and talk with him ; and even before he knew his mother, he would stretch out his arms and smile at the voice of his little sister.

## CHAPTER V.

### FRESH TRIALS AND NEW FRIENDSHIPS.

**I**T was the end of May when Mr. Wilbur went away. The first days of June were very quiet and pleasant days, broken by no event of greater importance than a visit from Miss Brent or little Katie Gilmour. Serena began her lessons again, which had been quite left off since the coming of baby; and she was very busy indeed, helping her mother about the house, and making pleasures out of her cares for her little brother.

“If I keep strong and well, and can get work to do, I shall not be afraid,” said Mrs. Wilbur to Miss Brent, as they sat together one pleasant June morning. Miss Brent often brought her work down stairs for the pleasure of both.

“My dear,” said Miss Brent, smiling, “I don’t think you need be afraid, whether you get work or not.”

“I know it; you are right. But I mean I see my way clear till autumn, if I have work enough and strength to do it. I have two months’ rent secure, even if I have no good news from my husband; and I will not look so far forward as

winter, when wood and warm clothing will be needed."

"Better not," said Miss Brent, gravely; "there will be a way found for you, no doubt."

They had come to be like sisters, these two. They *were* sisters in better than natural bonds. All who can truly claim relationship to the great Elder Brother, are related to each other because of their relationship to Him; and they who are nearest to Him, are nearest to each other. Though they were both, as a general rule, slow to make new friends, they had never seemed strangers to each other, because of their mutual Friend. If Mrs. Wilbur kept anything back, as to the straits to which she and her children might, at no distant day, be reduced, it was from no want of confidence in the sympathy of her friend; but rather from a fear of giving her pain by telling her of troubles which she could not help.

But her friend did not need to be told. Though not quite dependent on the work of her own hands, she knew enough of the labour of plain needlework to feel assured that this delicate woman could not long stand between her children and want, with no other resource. She had thought about this anxiously and long; and as she sat that day in her friend's parlour, she was wondering within herself whether this would be the best time to speak of a plan which seemed to promise well for them both.

It was a simple plan enough, and Miss Brent's difficulty did not lie in proposing it, but in so proposing it, that she might seem to do so chiefly for her own sake. It was only that they might put their means together, and make but one family during the summer, or during the time that Mr. Wilbur stayed away. It would be a very great benefit to her for many reasons, she said; but chiefly for this one. Often when the day was warm, and she was busy with her work, she grudged the time that it took to make regular meals, and so she often put herself off with a bit of bread, or with no meal at all.

"Which is indeed poor economy of time and means," confessed she; "and yet, as you get more and more engaged in your work, you will be in danger of doing the same; though perhaps in less danger, because you are not quite alone as I am. I think we might easier manage these things if we were together. I should have my own rooms still, you know, and need not be here so much as to be in your way; and it would be a great favour and help to me."

She hesitated. Mrs. Wilbur had listened in silence, and did not speak for a moment, when Miss Brent ceased. Then she said:

"I quite believe you, dear friend. Anybody does you a great favour, who gives you an opportunity of doing a kind deed in secret. If it would be a favour to you, what would it be to us?"

"It would be a mutual benefit, I know."

Mrs. Wilbur shook her head.

"I hardly think you can imagine how little covers our weekly expenses—how little must be made to cover them, unless we put ourselves in debt. A single day's illness, or a few days without work, would make a difference to us."

"Yes, I know it must be so. It would be the same with me; and we can help one another, I am quite sure."

"But has it never occurred to you, that you ought to be laying up something for the future; something against the time that you grow old?" asked Mrs. Wilbur.

Miss Brent smiled.

"It would be so very little I could lay up. It would hardly be worth while. I may never live to grow old."

There was a pause, and then Mrs. Wilbur said,

"Are you quite alone? I thought you had a brother."

"Yes, I have a brother; but we are quite separated. Nothing sad happened to separate us. He married into a large and very happy family. He did not need me any more. He was very dear to me; but I am only his half sister, and a great deal older than he. He is very happy in his new relations, and prosperous, I think. He does not need me. There is no one else who is very near to me. No one who cares so much for me as you do, you and Serena."

So after more words than it is necessary to repeat, it was arranged, to their mutual satisfaction, that they should live together for the present; and the arrangement was well for both."

"I accept all this kindness from you, dear, just as I would accept it from my sister Mary," said Mrs. Wilbur; "I know that you are glad to help us, and I am glad to be helped by you, and I will not speak of obligation. There can be no talk of obligation between sisters, you know."

Miss Brent rose and went across the room to where Mrs. Wilbur was sitting, and kissing her softly, without speaking went back to her seat again. Serena had been listening all the time with baby on her lap. She followed her movements with astonished eyes.

"Miss Brent, do you know that you walked without your crutch?"

Miss Brent laughed.

"Did I? I did not mean to do it. But, indeed, I seldom use it in my room."

"I never saw you without it before. It is strange you should use it if you do not need it," said Serena. Mrs. Wilbur's eyes said the same.

"But I do need it often. I feel more safe with it always. But it is partly habit, I suppose. Dr. Gilmour once told me, I could soon do well enough without it, if I would take pains to try. I did not believe him then; and I am not quite sure that I believe him yet."

"But why should you not believe him; and



why should you not, at least, try to do without it?" asked Mrs. Wilbur.

"What does it matter? Who is there to care? Serena and baby don't like me the less because of my crutch. Do you, little one?"

The astonishment had not all passed out of Serena's eyes.

"I think it would be very nice if you could walk without it, and it seems as though you ought to try. Everybody would care, I am sure. And then if you would only let me do your hair like Miss Gilmour's. Ah! do, Miss Brent."

Miss Brent laughed, and so did Mrs. Wilbur.

"What possible connection is there between my hair and my crutch?"

"Oh! I don't know; but I think people ought to try to look nice to please their friends. And Miss Brent does not make the most of her beautiful hair, does she, mother?"

Whether she made more of her beautiful hair after that, need not be told; but she certainly was not permitted to make so much of her crutch. This good thing came to Miss Brent of her coming down stairs. To please little Serena, she rarely brought her crutch with her. Even when she would have liked to have it, for swiftness or security, she considered the little girl's anxious wish in the matter; till by-and-by she ceased to need it, and walked about, not only in the house, but in the garden, and down the lane, and even all the way to church at last.

The experiment of living together was a successful one. They were very peaceful and content in their new mode of life. The details would seem of little interest were they written down; but it was a beautiful life for all that. A few months ago, these women had been strangers to each other; but for one thing they must have been strangers still. That is, but for one thing they could hardly have got beyond the interchange of kind words and neighbourly deeds in this short time. They loved the same Lord. They served the same Master. So, having in common all that makes life peaceful, and heaven secure, it was but a small thing that they should share their daily labour and their daily bread. They were friends now, and were to be friends for ever. It might be that, only for a few weeks or months, the gentle current of their daily life might mingle now; but afterward, in the land where no sad changes come, where there shall be no more going out, they would meet and flow on together for ever.

No very good news came from Mr. Wilbur. He was hopeful enough at first, and something was said about his family joining him. But the city, in the hot summer weather, was no place either for the mother or the children; and he did not insist. He found a situation on one of the steamboats that pass between the city and the country places near, and they heard from him now and then; but he did not write fully

nor cheerfully, and though he did not say so, Mrs. Wilbur thought he would be back again in Dunwater before winter set in.

August was more than usually hot and sultry that summer. There were several cases of fever in the lower part of the town; lingering, tedious cases, which made Doctor Gilmour look anxious, and which made him watchful, too, of the very first symptoms of illness in any patient of his.

One sultry morning, Serena met him as he was coming out of a house, where a little child lay ill. She was taking little Frank, her brother, out for a walk—not carrying him—he was beyond that by this time. He was sitting in state in a little carriage, and very well and happy he looked, and so did Serena. A shadow came over her face as she saw the doctor.

“Is little Martin better?” she ventured to ask, as the doctor paused a moment beside them.

“Not much, I’m afraid,” said the doctor, gravely. “But why are you here? It is close and hot, and not half so pleasant as in the upper end of the street.”

“No, but it is level and safer for baby. I must keep him out a long time to-day, because Miss Brent is not well. She was to have watched with little Martin again last night; but she had a headache, and she did not sleep; and I must keep baby out, that the house may be quiet. I hope it will not rain.

“It looks like it; see that you don’t get wet.

And if Miss Brent's head is not better by to-night, be sure and let me know. If the sun should come out bright, keep in the shade of the trees." And the doctor hastened away.

Serena followed slowly up the hill. It was very warm and close, though the sun was hidden by clouds; and when she got quite to the other end of the street, past all the village houses, she began to look out for a shady place where she might sit down to rest. As she passed the gate that led to The Mount, a familiar voice called her.

"Serena, Serena, come here, I want you. Come and let me see baby;" and little Katie Gilmour sprang out upon them. Her raptures over the baby were very real and pretty, and he behaved passably well under her kissing and fondling. The cloud passed away from the sun, and his rays came hotly down upon them.

"There!" exclaimed Katie, "I knew it was not going to rain. But how hot it is! Come in through the gate and sit down under the trees, and I will tell you all about it. Did you know that cousin Katie has come home again? She has brought some visitors with her, and they are going to the lake to-day. The Grahams are going, and I am going too, though I am only a little girl. But cousin Katie invited me. I was so afraid it would rain. I am not sure yet," added she, disconsolately, as the sun was obscured again; "but there is quite enough of blue sky to

make Bidy an apron, and she says that is a sure sign of a fair day."

"But mother said she hoped it might rain," said Serena. A shower would cool the air; and it would be dry before you got to the lake, and all the pleasanter."

"You are pleasant anyway, and always have something comforting to say," said Katie, kissing her. "I wish you were going with us. I do believe cousin Katie could find room for two little girls."

"Oh, no, I could not think of such a thing. And besides, Miss Brent is sick, and I must keep baby out till it is time for him to go to sleep. I would a great deal rather have you tell me about it. I would like to go with Miss Gilmour and you, but not with the strange visitors. There! I felt a drop of rain on my face."

A drop! Twenty of them, and soon there would be a flood.

"Come up to the house—come quick. You never could get home;" and before Serena could decide what it was best to do, they were half way up the broad gravel walk; and were soon laughing and breathless, safe from the rain, on the wide gallery, under cover of a verandah.

Serena had never been at The Mount before, and she looked round about her with wonder and delight. She did not think much about the house, except that it seemed large and strong; but the vines, that twined round the pillars of

the galleries, were beautiful; and the lawn, though it lay up so high, was fresh and green, and as smooth as velvet, except where the grey rocks of the Mount peeped through. There were flowers—not many, but they were very lovely ones, not growing in large beds, but in tiny circles and squares and ovals cut out in the sod. There were trees, too; but between them she could look over the top of some of the village houses, away down the beautiful river valley, and over to the hills beyond.

“I never saw anything so pretty, never,” said Serena, rather to herself than Katie, who was indeed too busy with baby to listen.

It was early yet, and there was no one in sight; and when Serena had time to think about it, she did not at all like the idea of being found there by any of the visitors, or even by Miss Gilmour, as she had not been asked to come. She looked anxiously at the sky, and then at her feet.

“My boots are too thin, even if the rain stopped this minute. Don’t you think we might go round and find Bridget? I am sure she would like to see baby,” added she, hoping to get away before anyone came out.

“Yes, but cousin Katie must see him first, and Sabina,” said little Katie; “Bridget can see him any time. Do you think he looks prettiest with his hat or without it? Oh, nonsense! He is a beauty anyway, and I’m going to carry him in;” and she passed through one of the windows that

opened on the gallery. Serena followed her across the pretty room, and into the wide hall. She was not sure how baby might behave among strangers, but she did not go into the room with them.

“Oh, mamma, what a lovely baby!” she heard some one cry; and looking in at the door, she saw her little brother taken from Katie’s arms, by a young lady whom she did not know. It would have showed very bad taste in baby to be frightened, looking into that lovely face, and he was not. He laughed and caught at her pretty hair, and then the lady let her face fall so that the child hid it; and then she went quickly out at another door, taking baby with her; and though she looked so young and girlish, Serena knew that it must be Miss Gilmour’s sister who was married, and who was wearing a black dress for a little dead baby of her own. Some one followed her, Serena did not see who, and then she heard little Katie say:

“That is Francis George Washington—little Serena’s brother. And this is little Serena,” and she drew her friend into the room.

“George Washington,” exclaimed a voice that she knew, “and little Serena! Little Tempest you should call her. Little charge of cavalry. I am not sure that I have felt like myself since she came down upon me last winter, like a whole battalion. Do you remember, little Serena?”

“I think *you* don’t remember very well your-

self," said Serena, laughing. She was shy, and fain would have avoided the company if it had been possible; but being in the midst of them, she answered modestly, and not at all awkwardly, the greetings of those whom she knew.

"I hope you are going to the lake with us," continued Randal; "and we'll renew the combat. Dr. James, this is the wing of the American army that brought me to grief at little Katie's party; and I don't believe she's done with me yet."

"She does not look very warlike," said Dr. James.

"Cousin Randal," said little Katie, "I think you don't remember very well. It was only with Carrie Armstrong that you had the battle; and Serena said neither of you knew anything of what you were talking about."

Dr. James laughed, and so did the rest.

"Ah! but I have got up the subject since then," said Randal; "I feel quite equal to meeting Miss Carrie, and you too, little Serena."

Serena shook her head.

"I am not going to the lake, and I am not going to fight any battles."

'Ah! you have lost faith in your cause.'

"No, but mother says it isn't best. Of course we can't expect other people to feel as we do. We only get our feelings hurt, and say wrong and foolish things."

"You say foolish things! That could never happen, I am sure," said Randal, gravely.



"I am not going to say anything at all," said Serena.

"Prudent little creature! I shall begin to think Dr. James was right, and that you are a real little grandmamma. You may well look indignant, little Katie. He really did say so that morning we met you in the village."

"Is this the little girl with the quaker bonnet we met the other day?" asked Dr. James.

"Yes; the one you said was playing grandmamma to little Katie's Red Riding Hood. 'What big eyes you've got, grandmamma!' 'The better to see you, my dear,'" said Randal, imitating so funnily the shrill tones of a child, and the cracked voice of an old woman, that they all laughed. But little Katie was indignant, too; and as Miss Gilmour came into the room, she said:

"Cousin Katie, Randal is not to tease Serena and me, is he?"

"Tease Serena and you! No, indeed," and she stooped to kiss the bright little face. Then she kissed Serena too; and told her that her little brother had fallen asleep in Miss Graham's arms, and that she had laid him on the bed.

"Your mother will not be anxious about you, will she?"

"No; she will think we have gone in somewhere from the rain, I suppose."

"But, little Katie," interrupted Randal, not willing to lose an opportunity to amuse himself,

"what are you going to say to James? Of course you cannot overlook his impoliteness to your friend."

"Cousin James did not mean to be impolite, I am sure," said Katie, gravely.

"Oh! but he was, I assure you. I am not sure that it was even grandmamma. I think it was grannie that he called her."

"Katie dear, never mind him. I meant it for a compliment to your friend. I meant that she looked good, and kind, and sweet, like grandmamma Seaton," said James.

"I understand," said Katie, turning triumphant eyes on Randal; "Cousin Katie, is she up? Serena, she is the loveliest old lady. She is James and Katie's grandmamma; but she lets me call her grandmamma, too. Oh! I hope we shall see her."

"Go and find her. She is in the other room. No, no, Randal, you are not to follow. Go and see what prospect there is of going to the lake to-day. It is raining still, I see."

It was raining still, but it was brightening too; and the young people went out to the gallery to discuss the chances of getting to the lake. Serena and little Katie went into the other room; and there, sitting by the open window, they found grandmamma Seaton. Serena thought little Katie was right when she called her the loveliest old lady that ever was seen. Her hair was white as snow; and, of course, she could

not have lived seventy-six years without having wrinkles; but they were not the kind of wrinkles that spoil the face,—they did not make her look troubled, or weary, or discontented, as wrinkles are so apt to do. Her smile was sweet, and her brown eyes were kind and bright, and there was a faint tinge of lovely colour on her cheeks, such as Serena had never seen in an old face before. Her voice, too, when she spoke to the children, and her gentle ways, charmed the little girl greatly; and she listened as if she were hearing some strange, pleasant music.

She was like a picture, sitting there in her rich old-fashioned dress. Serena liked pretty things well enough to appreciate the effect of the lace cap partly covering the snowy hair, and of the cashmere shawl lying lightly over the soft dark dress, though she did not know that together they cost as much as would have seemed to her a little fortune.

“So you see you need not be vexed, though cousin James did say you were like grand-mamma,” said little Katie in a whisper.

“I would not have been vexed anyway,” said Serena; “he doesn’t look as though he liked to say unkind things. But where is Frankie? Should I not go to him?”

Little Katie went to inquire; but baby was asleep in Mrs. Graham’s room, and she was dressing; so the little girls might stay where they were for a while. Katie was full of her

proposed trip, and danced about, and went hither and thither ; but Serena sat down in the corner, behind grandmamma Seaton's chair, and took up a book. After that, she heard nothing of it till little Katie called her. The rain was over, and the carriages were coming round.

"Never mind the book. Cousin Katie will lend it to you. Is it grandmamma's hymn book ? I am afraid she could not lend that."

"No, no ; don't ask her," said Serena ; " but, oh ! it's lovely ! I want to repeat this one to mother." And she began :

" He sitteth o'er the waterfloods,  
And He is strong to save.  
He sitteth o'er the waterfloods,  
And guides each drifting wave."

She went on for a verse or two very promptly, but not to the end. The hymn is so sweet and comforting that I must write it all down for the sake of those who cannot have a chance to read it in "Grandmamma's Hymn-book."

" He sitteth o'er the waterfloods,  
And He is strong to save.  
He sitteth o'er the waterfloods,  
And guides each drifting wave.  
Though loud around the vessel's prow,  
The waves may toss and break,  
Yet at His word they sink to rest,  
As on a tranquil lake.

He sitteth o'er the waterfloods,  
When waves of sorrow rise ;  
And while He holds the bitter cup,  
He wipes the tearful eyes.

He knows how long the wilful heart,  
 Requires the chastening grief,  
 And soon as sorrow's work is done,  
 'Tis He who sends relief.

He sitteth o'er the waterfloods,  
 As in the days of old,  
 When o'er the Saviour's sinless head,  
 The waves and billows rolled.  
 Yes, all the billows passed o'er Him,  
 Our sins—they bore Him down,  
 For as He met the crushing storm,  
 He met the Almighty's frown.

He sitteth o'er the waterfloods,  
 Then doubt and fear no more.  
 For He who passed through all the storms,  
 Has reached the heavenly shore.  
 And, every tempest driven back,  
 With Jesus for thy guide,  
 Thou'lt soon be moored in harbour calm,  
 In glory to abide."

Of course Serena did not repeat all this without hesitating, and being prompted by little Katie, who heard her very patiently, though she longed to be gone.

"I am afraid I don't know it yet," said she, sorrowfully. And I shall forget it before I get home. Never mind me."

The children were quite alone; but the folding doors were partly open, and two persons had watched the little scene—grandmamma Seaton, and Katie's cousin James. So when Katie came into the parlour, grandmamma said,

"What is it, Katie? you look grave."

"It is your hymn-book, grandmamma, and

Serena is learning a hymn without being told. She wants to say it to her mother. It is about 'water-floods;' and she hasn't half time, I know."

"You might copy it for her," suggested Dr. James.

"To be sure I might. I never thought of that. I'll tell her not to bother learning it," and she darted back to Serena's side. The book was laid down, and the little girls went out; not through the parlours where the people were, but through the hall to the gallery. Serena watched the party as they got into the carriages, and set off. She would have liked well to share little Katie's seat in the carriage; but she was quite content, when she went up-stairs, to watch beside her little brother till he awoke.

She did not see grandmamma Seaton again; but just before she went away, Bridget Quin, who was housemaid at 'The Mount,' gave her a folded paper which she said Mrs. Seaton had sent her; and when she opened it, she found it was the hymn about the "Water-floods." It was copied in pointed handwriting, very strange and unlike any writing Serena had ever seen before; but very even and beautiful; and the child could find no words that seemed good enough to thank her with.

"Sure it was no trouble to her," said Bridget; "the old lady writes a deal."

"But I am only a little girl, and she is an old lady; and she hardly knows me at all."

“But you are little Katie’s friend, and Miss Katie’s too. And it was to please them partly, I daresay, that she did it,” said Bridget.

“Yes, I suppose so ; and she looks as though she took pleasure in doing kind things for Jesus sake,” said Serena softly. “Bridget, I think there are a great many kind people here. You know I came here quite a stranger, and you can’t think how many friends I have now. Everybody is just as kind to me as can be.”

And why shouldn’t they be?” said Bridget : “sure your being a stranger would be a good reason, though there were no other. I’m going to carry baby down to the gate, because it is steep, and must be slippery with the rain, where the rock comes through. Kindness ! It is not kindness at all, it’s just a pleasure to myself to carry the beautiful child.”

“Kindness indeed !” repeated Bridget, as she stood at the gate and watched the little carriage passing slowly down the street. “I wonder who wouldn’t be kind to a little gentle creature like you ? She’s just as pretty-spoken to me or Mike’s wife, and even to the little lads, as she could be to the finest of the folk here. It’s just her nature, and she knows no other way.”

## CHAPTER VI.

### AT "THE MOUNT."



WHEN Serena reached home, she found Miss Brent no better; nor did she grow better as the day wore on. She slept a great deal; but when she woke she seemed to have forgotten where she was, and asked if the lads were come in, and said there was sure to be a storm, for the wind was sounding so wildly down the glen. She came to herself as soon as Serena spoke to her, and smiled; but she could not say she was better, as she would have been so glad to do.

Nor was she better next day, but rather worse. Her thoughts seemed to wander away beyond her control; and she mentioned names that they had never heard her speak before; and murmured broken words about the children, and the lake shore; and all the time she seemed to fancy herself watching and waiting for some one's coming home. It only needed a word to bring her back; but as soon as ever the room was quiet she lost herself again.

After this, Serena's mother would not let her go



into Miss Brent's room, lest the illness should be infectious ; and the doctor quite agreed with her that the children should both be kept quite away. Miss Brent was in her own room in the other part of the house ; so they stayed down stairs, and their mother came and went, and did what she could for them all. But the time seemed very long to Serena ; and, after a day or two, her mother began to look very tired and ill ; and, only that it did not seem possible that anything so sad should happen to them, she would have been afraid that her mother was going to be ill too.

‘And we were just beginning to settle down so quietly and happily,’ she said, regretfully, one night.

Her mother was lying down, not to sleep, but to rest a little, and Serena sat down beside her.

“Perhaps that is the very reason that this trouble has come upon us,” said the mother, putting away all thoughts of her own weariness, that she might help her little daughter to bear her light burden of care. For it helped Serena through any trouble she might have, or fancy, to tell it to her mother, and hear her gentle words of counsel and encouragement. Indeed, these talks which they often had together, helped the mother too. Their troubles were mostly the same, except for the greater weight with which they pressed upon the mother, because of her

longer and more sorrowful experience. The child's light cloud of care would often quite vanish away while they were looking at it; and not unfrequently the mother caught a brighter gleam of sunshine at such times.

"I don't understand you, mother. I don't see how *that* can be a very good reason," said Serena, after a little silent pondering.

"The world was never meant to be a place to settle down quietly in," said her mother. "Don't you remember what we read the other day? 'We have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.' And in another place: 'For he hath prepared for them a city.' And you know, love, 'the rest,' that God has promised to His people, 'remaineth,' that is, it is to come afterwards."

"Yes, mother, I remember." Serena thought awhile in silence, and then she added, "But does it mean that Christians must never settle down and be at rest in this world?"

"I suppose that depends on what you mean by settling down and being at rest."

"Yes, mother. Well?"

"Well, dear, it is like this, I think. You know we came here, and 'settled down,' in a sense, in this little brown house; and we have taken pleasure in arranging it, and in Miss Brent's society, and in Mrs. Quin's kindness, and in the garden, and even in the river and the beautiful hills and valleys about us. But we have never taken such pleasure in any of these things as to

make us forget our home ; and a happier day than any that can come to us before, will be the day when we can return to it again."

"Oh yes, mother, the thought of it makes me long to go."

"And," continued the mother, smiling at her little girl's earnestness, "you remember when we came here, it didn't seem to matter much that the house was little and inconvenient, because it was only to be our home for a little while ; and it was the same with other things. Then, when we came to know Miss Brent well, and the doctor was so kind, and little Katie came and grew fond of you, we took pleasure in them all ; but we could never think of staying here always, even for their sake."

"No, because our home is *there*. Well, mother."

"Well, dear, I think it is meant that Christians should live in the world, just as we are living here. We should value the pleasant things that God sends, and take comfort in them, as He means us to do, without forgetting that there are better things and a better place awaiting us ; and when troubles come and disappointments, and things change to us, and our plans are set aside by circumstances, we should not allow ourselves to fret and be unhappy, because all these things are only for a little while."

"I think I understand you, mother. It does not seem to matter that the world is a sad place

to Christians, I suppose." But Serena looked as though it really did matter to her.

"But it need not be a sad place to them, of all people," said her mother, cheerfully. "Trials must come; but He who said, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation,' said also, 'In Me ye shall have peace.' Think of this, love! The peace of God that passeth understanding!' and 'that can never be taken from us!' *Never*. We get weary and anxious sometimes, and we forget, and so grow discouraged; but we can have no real cause to be sad, or anxious, or afraid, my precious little daughter."

Serena knelt down, and laid her face on her mother's pillow; and, though her mother did not see them, there were tears on her cheeks, as she whispered: "I'm afraid I've been cross, mother dear, these last few days."

"Have you, dear? Well, I had not discovered it. You are tired with baby, dear fellow. He is so heavy, and so restless now."

"Baby is as good as can be, and I don't think I have been really cross with him: that would be too bad. But I have felt cross all the same. I haven't taken pleasure in things as I might. Something very pleasant happened the other day; but you have been busy most of the time, and when you were not busy it did not seem worth while to speak about it."

"But I am not busy now, and you are not cross. Tell me about it, dear."

So Serena told her about trying to learn the hymn, behind the door at The Mount, and repeated it every word. And then she told her how the beautiful old lady copied it for her, because she was little Katie's friend.

"I liked that one, because you had told me about it the other day, when we were reading the Psalm. It puts your thoughts into such nice words;" and she repeated:—

"Though loud around the vessel's prow,  
The waves may toss and break,  
Yet at His word they sink to rest,  
As in a tranquil lake."

"Yes, it is very sweet; and it was very kind of the lady to copy it for you," said her mother.

"Most people are kind to me; I don't know why, I am sure. The doctor is kind because of Katie, and because I am your little girl; but Miss Gilmour is kind, though she does not know you; and so are a good many others."

The mother thought it was not surprising that people should be kind to a child like her little Serena; but she did not say so.

"It is one of the pleasant things we shall have to think about afterwards, that all these people have been kind to you, dear. It is very pleasant to be loved. And even the painful things that have come to us—this sickness of Miss Brent's, and the breaking up of our quiet time—will be something to think about when we get home."

"And is Miss Brent getting better, mother?"

You look very tired. I wish I could help you more."

"My dear, you help me greatly,—taking care of baby, and going errands for me. I don't know what I should do without your help."

"I don't think I should be afraid of anything, if you keep well, mother; but—" Serena paused and kissed the cheek against which her own was laid.

"You need not fear, even if I should be ill, dear. I have been ill many times, and we have always been cared for. My little daughter must learn to trust at all times. Remember, 'The floods, they shall not overflow thee.'"

They had more pleasant talk, and then a silence as pleasant; and when little Frank began to coo and murmur in his cot, Serena rose, rested and happy, trustful and not afraid; and if it came into the mother's mind, as she pressed her fingers over her aching eyes, that sickness, or even death, might be near, she felt that her baby would be safely and sweetly cherished by a sister's love; and that, in the best and tenderest of all loving care, her little daughter was safe for evermore.

Miss Brent's long illness was sad enough for them all; but one pleasant thing came out of it for Serena. She saw grandmamma Seaton again; and it would not be easy to say which had the greatest pleasure in the companionship, the lovely old lady, or the admiring child.

It happened in this way: Serena went again

with little Katie to The Mount, not to the house, but to the garden. Instead of keeping up the rather steep gravel walk to the house, they kept the carriage way, till it, too, began to ascend, and then they turned through a little gate into the flower-garden beyond.

It was a very beautiful garden—more beautiful than anything Serena had ever seen. It was laid out in broad terraces, which sloped towards the west and south. Only the upper terrace could be seen plainly from the house; and on the next, where the summer-house was, the little girls could amuse themselves, with no danger of coming in the way of the gay visitors always loitering through the fine summer mornings on the lawn or galleries of The Mount. The summer-house was the favourite resort of grandmamma Seaton, and here the little girls found her reading the first time they came.

“We won’t disturb you, grandmamma,” said little Katie. “We met cousin Katie in the village, and she said we were to bring baby into the garden, because it is cool and pleasant here; and Mr. Crawthorn says we may come whenever we like, because he knows we are to be trusted.”

Mr. Crawthorn was The Mount gardener. Mr. Gilmour himself would hardly have ventured to give anyone the liberty of the gardens, without Mr. Crawthorn’s consent. Like all enthusiastic gardeners, he was jealous of interference with his

treasures ; and to be trusted by him among his fruits and flowers was high honour indeed. Little Katie was one of his favourites ; and Miss Gilmour's invitation was sufficient to give admittance to Serena and her little brother ; but it was the little girl's delight when she found herself among the flowers, that won her permission to come again, whenever she liked. It was like fairy land to her ; and though little Katie had seen it all many times before, she seemed to see it to-day through Serena's eyes ; and they wandered up and down the walks as happy as children could be, till baby fell asleep. Then they went to the summer-house.

"But we won't disturb you, grandmamma," said little Katie.

"You won't disturb me, love. I am glad to see you and your little friend," said Mrs. Seaton.

So the carriage was placed where neither sun nor wind could reach it ; and the two children seated themselves on the steps. Little Katie was good for almost anything that Serena desired in a friend, except to sit still ; and, in a little while, she thought of something she wanted to say to cousin Katie, and so away she went to the house.

Grandmamma Seaton read, or seemed to read, and Serena sat quite still, gazing down over the village to the river, and the lovely valley, and the hills beyond, a little tired, and perhaps, in her heart, a little sad and anxious, but enjoying



to the utmost of a child's power, the beauty of the scene spread out before her. Mrs. Seaton's eyes wandered from her book to the fair landscape too; then, in coming back, they fell on little Serena, and rested there.

At the first glance there did not seem much to attract. She was a child in a grey gingham frock, a little scant for her, with a white sun-bonnet lying on her lap. "Not at all pretty," thought she; but as she watched the face so fair, and pure, and peaceful, changing unconsciously as her thought changed, she added, "But very lovely and sweet."

"What are you thinking about, child?" asked she suddenly. Serena turned slowly.

"Just this minute, I was wishing I had brought my knitting. Baby is so good," answered Serena.

"It was never a thought of knitting that I saw in your eyes. I do not mean just this minute, as you say, but ever since little Katie went away."

Serena drew a long breath.

"I was thinking a great many things,—how beautiful it is here in the garden, and as far as we can see. And I was watching these little clouds—not the clouds, but their shadows on the fields; and I was wondering whether the flowers down there were afraid that the sun might not come back again."

"The flowers afraid! What can you mean?"

"I don't mean that quite; but I was thinking of the troubles that come to us, and how we fret and are unhappy, as though God had forgotten us, and would never remember us again, and so we grow afraid."

"Little child, come here, and sit by me," said Mrs. Seaton.

Serena rose and came, and stood near her, with just a little pleased surprise in her eyes.

"So this is little Serena—little Katie's friend?" said the lady, softly. "Surely you can have no troubles to vex you—such a child as you?"

"No, except mother's troubles, and—the war;" and her face flushed, and the tears rose in her eyes. "My cousin Frank is a soldier," she added, to account for her feeling, and showing a painful interest in the subject.

"Ah, well! dear,—look. The sunlight lies on all the meadows now. The flowers smile again; and we will hope that the sad war will not last for ever."

There was a pause; and then Serena's face changed, and brightened suddenly, as she said:

"I wanted to thank you for the hymn. Mother likes it so much, and so do I."

"It is one of my favourites," said the lady. "There are more in my hymn-book that I would like you to read, some time. You are fond of hymns, are you not?"

"Yes, I like *some* hymns very much. Mother says it is well to learn hymns when one is young.

When she is tired of thinking of sad things, and not quite well, so that she cannot easily turn her thoughts away from them, it rests her to think of some hymn or chapter that she learned when a child. The words come easily to the mind, she says, and put away sad thoughts."

"Yes, they are very sweet and comforting sometimes,—one of the means by which the Lord speaks to the hearts of His people. Are you one of these, dear child—one of His little ones,—a lamb of His fold?"

"I hope so, ma'am. I wish to be, more than anything else in the world."

"And what reason have you to hope that you are His? for it is a blessed and wondrous thing to be His."

"I love Him dearly. I desire to be like Him," said Serena. She could not well say more, because of her rising tears.

"Oh! most blessed token," said the lady, drawing down the little face, and kissing it softly. "There is no better—and it is His gift."

And from that time they loved each other dearly. They were friends in the best sense, though different from each other in all that common eyes could see. With one, life was nearly ended. She looked back over a long and varied experience, as one recalls a dream. She had viewed the world in many aspects; she had been rich and honoured, admired and flattered; she had loved and enjoyed and suffered, by

turns, as is the common lot ; and now she had nearly done with it all. The other was a child, humble, poor, unknown, just beginning to cast vague, uncertain glances into a future, that seemed stretching out indefinitely before her,—yet they were friends.

They knew nothing of each other's past. Serena could have imagined no such life as that which the lady had lived ; and it is doubtful whether, with her wider experience and greater knowledge of the world, the lady could have formed any just idea of what the manner of the child's life had been, or the discipline it had exercised over her. In this respect they were strangers, but in a higher sense they were friends, united by the only tie which time and change have no power to break. The one was about to lay down the armour, the other had it yet to prove ; but the same banner was over both. The one had almost reached that resting-place, from which she could look back through light and shadow, over all the way by which she had been led ; the other had advanced but a few timid and uncertain steps ;—but the way was the same, and so was the ending.

After this, few days passed for a long time in which Serena did not visit the garden, coming usually at the little gate, quite out of the sight of the house. Mr. Crawthorn's words were made good : "The bonny little old-fashioned lassie" was quite to be trusted among his treasures ; and

many a long lecture did he give her about leaf, and flower, and seed, and many a flower did he give her as well. It is to be supposed that the flowers were more fully appreciated than the lectures; but Serena was grateful for both.

Sometimes she saw only Mr. Crawthorn, but almost always, if the day was warm and fair, she saw the lady too; and many happy hours they enjoyed together. Mrs. Seaton had been a soldier's wife, who had found a home in far countries; and the tales she told of her life in those lands, were like fairy tales to Serena. Many a wise and holy lesson was unconsciously given, and almost as unconsciously received. For through every tale,—whether of noble deeds performed by heroes, the echo of whose fame had reached even Serena's ears, or of the frolics of little children in their homes,—there ran a golden thread of principle, pure and high, showing how those deeds were most nobly done, which were done for God and humanity; how those most worthy of being remembered, are those who forget themselves in what they do; and how things are great or small in the eyes of God and good men, according as they are done from pure motives, and for lofty ends.

She had had much sorrow, and much happiness in her life; but the sorrow was all past, and the happiness remained. They say, that when we get to Heaven, we shall thank God joyfully for all the sorrow that He sent to us while



A LECTURE ON BOTANY.



on earth ; but it seemed as though Mrs. Seaton had come to that even here. She spoke joyfully now of the little children over whose graves she had shed bitter tears, and even of her husband, who had fallen on an Indian battle-field ; and of her son, who had perished through Indian treachery. She could say, with smiling lips, "I shall go to them, but they shall not return to me."

No happier influence could have fallen on Serena's life just at this time, than that which came to her through her intercourse with Mrs. Seaton. She had grown older than her years, during those months of trouble and anxiety ; and, as is apt to be the case with those who are startled out of childish unconsciousness, by other than childish cares, she was in danger of losing some brightness from her life, of becoming patient to bear, rather than hopeful to enjoy. But out of this lovely evidence that even in this life, "all things work together for good to them that love God," there grew something better than the natural hopefulness of youth, something better even than the patience to bear, or the strength to do, which must have been wrought in her as a Christian child, by the experiences of this time.

"I know in whom I have believed." "I will not fear, though the earth be removed," was the lesson taught by all that her friend had seen and suffered in a long and varied life. It was



the lesson taught by her cheerful, hopeful, happy old age; and the child's love and trust were strengthened, as she looked and listened day by day. These hours in the garden, at the lovely old lady's side, will always be remembered by Serena, as among the sweetest and best of her life.

It is possible that all the profit of the intercourse fell to Serena, but certainly all the pleasure did not. Much as Mrs. Seaton loved her grandchildren, and pleasant as her intercourse with them and their young friends might be, it was with this little stranger child that the sweetest hours of those summer days were passed. One was old, the other was young; one looked back safe and secure, within sight of the haven of rest; the other looked forward, afraid, yet not afraid; hopeful, yet needing the assurance which the last happy days of a life of faith can give. And so both were happy; one in helping, the other in being helped. With their hymns, and their reading, and their sweet quiet talk, the time passed happily away; and let no one smile when it is said, that, in this meeting of the two extremes of the Christian life, the true blessedness of "the communion of saints" was enjoyed.

They were not always alone. Sometimes little Katie came with Serena, and sometimes Miss Gilmour and her brother sat with Mrs. Seaton. Sometimes the visitors at The Mount wandered into the summer-house; but they did not often

stay long, for it was understood that the lady came there to enjoy quietness, amid the beauty of the garden. When there were others there, Serena never approached unless she was called. This often happened when the young people of the house were there, for Serena and her pretty baby brother were favourites with them all; and much amusement, and sometimes something besides, did the childish, yet womanly talk and ways of the little girl give them.

It is possible that, with all her good sense, Serena might, in answer to adroit questioning, have revealed more of their family history than her mother might have thought wise; but they were discreet young people, these, upon the whole; and took no advantage of the little girl's inexperience. And, indeed, her modest and unobtrusive behaviour would have claimed gentle consideration from any one. But her little unconscious revelations of herself, and her mother, their old life, and their present regrets, amused and interested them greatly, and Mrs. Seaton most of all.

And it must be confessed, that these puzzled the lady a little as well. Judging from the child's manners and conversation, and from doctor Gilmour's report, she knew that the mother must be a superior woman; and though, in her own mind, she had assigned to her no particular station in life, she was surprised to hear from Serena that in their own home, before

they came to Canada, her father had only been a mechanic, working in the employment of others, at such times as he could spare from the cultivation of their own little farm.

That the wife of a man, half-farmer, half-mechanic, might possibly be a superior person, was to be admitted; that she should be well educated in that land of free schools, and general intelligence, was also not difficult to be understood. But that she should have so long lived in the contented and conscientious performance of the duties of her station, and yet, as was evidently the case, continue to interest herself in far other things,—in new books and new discoveries, and in the new discussion of old questions,—in that she could sympathise intelligently with all the great movements of the day, the English lady, most of whose life had been passed in India, could not understand.

It quite disarranged all her ideas, as to what was to be expected from people “in their station of life.” Little Serena was intelligent and well-bred. She had been taught, not only those things which Christian mothers, in every station of life, wish their children to know; but pains had evidently been taken with regard to those nameless, but very visible matters, which, more than matters of greater importance, make difference of station apparent.

The child was modest and retiring always, shy even, when she was not sure of the good-

will of those with whom she came in contact ; but she never withdrew herself from these in a way that implied a sense of inferiority on her part. Without presuming, in the slightest degree, on the kindness with which she was always treated at The Mount, she evidently felt herself to be just like the other young visitors ; and was so unconscious of patronage and condescension, assumed by some of them toward her, as to excite the amusement of Mrs. Seaton and her other special friends, many a time. She was quite what a child of good abilities and sweet temper would naturally become, when well-taught, well-governed, and dearly loved ; in short, in the eyes of her partial old friend, she was just what a little girl, in any station, ought to be.

It puzzled her a little, how it should have come about ; but, fortunately, she was not in the habit of troubling herself with social questions, or questions of any kind ; and she accepted little Serena just as she was, taking pleasure in all her pretty ways and gentle talk, letting all thought of nation and station pass out of her mind after a very little while.

Even the young people, Miss Gilmour and her brother, who knew a great deal more of New England life, and manners, and society, than Mrs. Seaton did, were inclined to think that the case of little Serena and her mother must be exceptional. But nothing could be plainer than

that the child had no such thought. She prattled on about her home and her companions, and her work and pleasures among them, as though she had been quite one of them; and as though her life had only to flow back into the old channels, to be, if not perfect, at least all that could be desired. And though she never failed to say how much happier they had been in Canada than they had ever expected to be, she made no secret as to the joy that would be felt by her mother and herself, when the time should come that they might go back to their old home.

"And do you mean to tell me that all the little Yankee girls are like you," said Dr. James one day, when he had been sitting in the summer-house, professing to read, but really listening to the conversation that was going on. Little Katie was there that day, and Serena had been telling her about their life in Maybrook, and especially about her visits to the hill farm. She looked up a little puzzled at the question, for she was never quite sure when Dr. James wanted a serious answer, and when he "was just in fun," as little Katie used to say. He looked serious now, but yet not too serious, so she answered after a little hesitation:

"Why, yes, I guess so. If I understand you, that is."

"I suppose they are as much like you as the old ladies in Maybrook are like grand-mamma Seaton."

Serena shook her head.

"I never saw anyone like Mrs. Seaton, except ——"

"Well," said Dr. James, "except whom?"

"I was going to say, except my Aunt Mary; but I don't suppose you would think them alike. The first time I saw Mrs. Seaton, she made me think of Aunt Mary, and she makes me think of her every day."

"Tell me why," persisted Dr. James.

"Do they look alike?" suggested Miss Gilmour.

"No," said Serena slowly, "I don't think it is that they look alike. Aunt Mary has black eyes, and her hair is only a little gray. She is not so old. And she is always very plainly dressed, and has a great deal to do. She has never been away from Maybrook more than a few weeks at a time, all her life. When I come to think about it, almost everything about them is different."

Dr. James laughed.

"And is that the way in which all the little girls are like you?"

But Serena was too intent to notice what he said.

"Aunt Mary is good and kind, and everybody loves her. I suppose that must be the reason."

"But that is true of little Katie here, and the other Katie, 'good and kind, and everybody loves them.' Do they remind you of your aunt Mary too?"

"I think it is because she is a Christian," said Serena, gravely.

"But it is to be hoped she is not the only Christian of your acquaintance. There must be many of them here, and in Maybrook also," said Dr. James.

"Oh, yes! a great many here and there too."

"Well, then, a great many people here, ought to remind you of a great many people there."

"Yes, I know. But I suppose they are only common Christians," said Serena, emphasizing the words. There was something in the child's earnest face, that checked the laugh that rose to Dr. James' lips.

"Well?" said he.

"I can't say it very well, but I know what I mean," said Serena. "You know, when you first see strangers, you make up your mind about them in some way. You think that they are nice, or handsome, or well dressed, or something else. I think when anyone first sees my aunt Mary, they think first of all that she is a Christian. It don't seem to matter so much about other things. And that is just what I think one would see about Mrs. Seaton. Christians are different from each other in some things, you know; but those who are most like Christ are most like each other. I know what I mean, though I cannot make it plain to you."

"I think I understand what you mean," said Miss Gilmour, stooping to kiss softly the child's upturned face.

"And here is grandmamma Seaton herself," said little Katie, as the lady came slowly up the path, leaning on Mr. Gilmour's arm.

As Serena looked at the lovely old lady in her quaint, rich dress, and then called up to her mind the face and figure of her aunt Mary, weary with the many cares of kitchen and dairy, she said to herself:

They are just as different as can be, and yet they are the same too. I wonder why it is." And then she said, gravely, to Miss Gilmour, "They are just as different as can be, and yet they are like, too, in some things."

"Yes, I think you gave the right reason," said Miss Gilmour.

"They shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads," said Serena to herself, as she went down the garden path with her little brother in her arms. "I know now how it is they are alike, though I could not say it to them."



## CHAPTER VII.

### A SICK ROOM.—SUNSHINE AND FRESH AIR.

**S**o the time passed pleasantly on; but as August wore away, the visits of Serena to the garden became less frequent, and shorter. For that came upon them which she had feared. As Miss Brent grew well, her mother grew ill,—not with the fever which had kept Miss Brent helpless so long, but with an illness more trying, and more difficult to deal with—complete nervous prostration.

It was worse than the illness of last winter, in this way; she lost courage, and became utterly despondent; not merely with regard to her own health, but with regard to everything. Home sickness, unreasoning and unreasonable, took possession of her. She longed, with an intensity which no words could express, for a sight of the known faces that were far away. She turned in utter weariness from all that the day brought,—from the very light of day; and tossed and moaned through many a wakeful night, as helpless as a child.

This was a new and terrible experience to Serena. She had had troubles before, some of

them hard to bear; but between her and every one of them, her mother had always stood. It was to her like the breaking up of the very foundation, to see her mother thus cast down. If her mother's faith and hope failed, what else could stand.

It comforted her to be told that her mother was ill; that her fears and doubts and miseries were quite beyond her power to control; that, by-and-bye, when she grew strong again, she would be as cheerful as she had always been. But would she grow strong and well again? Serena asked herself the question with a pang of fear. The doctor had good hopes. Certainly, nothing would help her more, than that her little daughter should keep strong and cheerful, and able to give help when help was needed. And Serena said bravely: "I shall keep well, and cheerful. I am not afraid."

And so she did. She had her times of "giving up," as she called them, when she tried to cry and pity herself a little; but her mother never saw a shadow on her face, or heard a quiver in her voice.

It was one of the peculiarities of Mrs. Wilbur's illness, that she could not bear to have strangers about her. Even Miss Brent could not repay, in kind, her tender care of her in her illness; for she felt that the invalid liked no one so well to attend her, as her little daughter; and Serena gave herself to the work of nursing, with

a zeal that soon must have exhausted her strength, but for the watchful care of her friend. She was not permitted often to neglect her daily walk. But for Miss Brent, the housekeeping would have been confined to the making of nice things, to tempt her mother's uncertain appetite; and to the making of food for baby. But, guided by her, everything in the house went on just as usual; except that baby, for two or three hours every day, was given over to the rough, but kindly guardianship of the little Quins. This was the only one of Miss Brent's plans, of which Serena could not see the wisdom; but baby enjoyed it well, and thrived, and was content, and so, of course, after a while, was she.

But oh! how long the days were? How slowly time went on! Serena went weary to bed every night, and often rose weary in the morning too; and longed, almost as much as her mother, for the sight of some dear, friendly face. She sometimes thought it would be best to send for her father, and her mother sometimes thought so too; but neither spoke of it, for they felt what they did not like to acknowledge, that the chances were not in favour of his being much comfort to them in a time like this. They had heard from him, once or twice; and once he sent them some money, which was needed by this time; but he said nothing about coming home, even after Serena had written that her mother was not well.



THE YOUNG NURSE.



The first days of September passed slowly and heavily. Serena cheered her mother in all possible ways. She read to her, and talked with her; she repeated her sweetest hymns, and sang to her when she was able to bear it; and every night knelt to pray her short and simple prayers at her bedside, as in her time of health her mother used to do at hers. She was courageous, and patient, and wise, far beyond her years—"a little angel upon earth, if ever there was one," said Nora Quin, with moist eyes. "A quiet little lamb, of Jesus' fold," Miss Brent said, which was, indeed, true.

She was a tender little one, however; and her troubles had come, as people's troubles for the most part do, in just the way that was hardest to bear; and as day after day passed over, leaving her mother no better, but rather worse, she had much ado to keep a bright face for the sick-room; and she sometimes rose and ran away, as fast as she could, lest her mother should guess how hard it was for her to keep back her tears.

Doctor Gilmour came every day; and if his medicines did not do much good, his kindness did. His heart grew tender many a time, as he watched the little girl's gentle, untiring care of her mother; and it was not always easy for him to meet, cheerfully, the look that followed him, so wistfully, as he left the sick-room. For it was becoming very hard for the child to be hopeful now; indeed, the doctor could say little

to encourage her, for the mother's case did not seem to grow more hopeful as the days went on.

"She will never be better, till we can go home—to Maybrook, I mean. Oh! if we only could go."

"Your mother is not strong enough for the journey," said the doctor, gravely. "You must be patient a little while."

"Will she ever be strong again?" asked Serena, striving with the sobs that had been all the morning rising in her throat. They burst forth at the sight of the doctor's grave face. She was utterly dismayed at her own foolishness, and so was Dr. James, who had come in with his uncle. He was not a doctor, though his brothers and sisters called him so; but he hoped to be one in time, and even now he sometimes went to visit his uncle's patients with him. He had always seen Serena sitting quietly with Mrs. Seaton, or playing merrily with little Katie and the baby. For a quiet little mouse, or a merry little kitten, to be shaken with such a storm of sobs and weeping might well surprise him. Doctor Gilmour was not surprised. He had taken notice of the little working face on the other side of the mother's bed; and he only wondered that the burst of sobs had not come sooner. Besides, he knew it would not hurt her to cry, so he said nothing for a time.

"You are tired. You did not go out yesterday, nor the day before, nor for ever so long. I

thought you were wiser. It may do for Miss Brent to keep herself shut up within doors, but it will not do for you."

Serena made a movement of impatience. "My being tired has nothing to do with it. I am not crying for that, but because my mother is ill."

"I know; but you have been sitting watching the shadows in her darkened room so long, that you have forgotten there is anything else in the world—out of her room, I mean."

"There really is not much else, for baby and me," said Serena; and she looked very much as though her sobs were going to break out again, though she tried to smile.

"Well, it is time you saw the sunshine, and felt the wind again; and you are not going into your mother's room for three hours, at least. She ought to sleep, and Miss Brent will do very well to take care of her sleeping. But I must go. Dr. James, you shall prescribe for this child. I don't want you where I am going. She is your patient. If you were to consult me, I would advise a run in the garden, and a visit to Mrs. Seaton, among other things."

"I quite agree," said Dr. James, as his uncle went away. Serena shook her head.

"I have to iron this afternoon."

"Iron," repeated Dr. James, with the air of one considering gravely. "No, I don't think that would suit your case at all. That might do for Miss Brent."



“Or Mrs. Quin,” said Miss Brent, laughing.

“Very good. I will write a prescription,” and after a minute he read from a card in his hand:

A run in the garden with little Katie; a bouquet of seventeen different flowers, plucked by the patient’s own hand; a hymn, and a kiss from grandmamma Seaton. To be taken immediately, and repeated daily while the weather is fine.”

Miss Brent laughed, and approved highly. Serena’s laugh was a little tremulous.

“You are very kind, Dr. James; but it spoils all the good of a pleasant time to come home and find mother no better. I am just as well at home. I wish you could prescribe for mother.”

“She is not my patient. It is you for whom I am to prescribe. Come, get your sun-bonnet.”

“I can’t go just now, baby is asleep; and I am not going to wake him for my pleasure. I must take him with me. Miss Brent can’t attend to him, and mother too.”

“She will be a refractory patient, I’m afraid,” said Dr. James aside to Miss Brent; and he put on a look so grave and perplexed that Serena laughed.

“Oh! no, I shan’t. I’ll be very good. Only I must take baby. And I shall have a better time if I do, besides.”

She followed him to the door; and when he turned at the little gate to say good-bye, he

saw that the shadow had fallen on her face again. It was a very sweet, childish face, and he could not bear to see her troubled.

“Is there no one at home,—over the border, I mean, that you could send for? It would be almost as good for your mother as going there, to see a friend’s face. Her mother, or sister, or some one; and I am sure it would be good for you. Is there no one?”

“Aunt Mary,” said Serena, taking a step toward him.

“The lady who reminds one of grandmamma Seaton. Or is it the other way? Well, why don’t you write that your mother is ill, and that she must come and take care of her.”

“Is she so ill?” asked Serena, growing pale.

“She is ill enough to need her badly, and so are you.”

Serena looked grave. “They have a farm, and a great deal to do at this time of the year. Uncle Turner is an old man, and Frank is away; and I am afraid it would not be right to send for aunt Mary unless—unless mother is never going to be well again.”

“You foolish little thing! What put that nonsense into your head? It is of a great deal more importance that your aunt should come to make your mother well, than anything else. Write to her; and if she cannot come, she’ll tell you so. She’ll do your mother more good than all the bottles in the doctor’s surgery;

though I must not speak disrespectfully of them either."

"Had I better write?" asked Serena, turning to Miss Brent.

"I think it would do your mother good, to see some of her friends. One of your cousins might come, if your aunt could not."

Serena looked excitedly from one to the other. "Shall I ask mother? Ought I not to ask her?"

"Well, as a general thing, I think mothers ought to be asked," said Dr. James, gravely. "But in this case—just for once—I think you might act on your own responsibility, or mine."

"It would excite her to be expecting some one," said Miss Brent; "and then she might be disappointed after all."

Serena was too much astonished to reply. But it did not seem so impossible as at the first moment, to believe in anything so pleasant as the coming of aunt Mary; and to write at once seemed really the best thing to be done. That Dr. James must not be kept waiting was certain; so she sat down to write.

"You need not cross your letter this time," said he.

"No, indeed; I never do."

In a shorter time than the young man thought possible, the letter was written. He did not expect to be permitted to see it; but it seemed quite natural and proper to Serena to lay it

before him, and ask if it would do. It was a very nicely-written letter, as far as penmanship, spelling, and neatness were concerned. As for the rest, here it is :

“MY DEAR AUNT MARY,—I cannot write a very long letter this time. I want to tell you that mother is very ill, and Dr. James says it will do her more good than medicine to see you. Father is away. Do come, dear aunt Mary, and make mother well again. If you cannot come, send cousin Sarah. I have not told mother I am writing. Do come, dear aunt Mary, or let Sarah come. You will see our baby too.

“Your loving niece, SERENA.”

“So I am to be made responsible,” said Dr. James to himself. Aloud, he said it was a very nice letter, and aunt Mary would be sure to come.

“And I won’t be impatient, if I can help it,” said Serena. “I guess they will send a letter first to let us know; and I won’t even begin to expect the letter for three days. I shall try and be as patient as Miss Brent. I hope I shall not say anything to mother about it, but I really am afraid I shall.”

Whether Serena’s patience would have outlasted the three days will never be known now. For just at the time when she was beginning to permit herself to expect a letter, the door opened, and her cousin Sarah walked in.

"Does Mrs. Wilbur live here? Oh! you are Miss Brent, I know. I am Sarah Turner. Mother could not come, and so she sent me. How is aunt Esther?"

Miss Brent had risen when the door opened, putting out her hand for her crutch, as she always did when a little startled. Her embarrassment did not last long, however.

"Oh! I am so glad you are come," said she.

It seemed the most natural thing in the world to lift her face to kiss the smiling lips of the stranger, and the young girl bent down frankly to meet her caress.

"What could they have done without you?" she said, seeing in Miss Brent's face a token of what her friendship must have been to them all these months.

"What should I have done without them? you should rather ask," said Miss Brent, laughing softly, and surprising Sarah, as people were always surprised by the silvery sweetness of her voice. "You are to come upstairs to my room, to wash and refresh yourself. You will have plenty of time. They are asleep, baby and all."

"Oh, that wonderful baby! But I suppose I must wait till he is awake before I see him."

Mrs. Wilbur was surprised and pleased, indeed, when in a little while the door opened, and Sarah walked into the room; but her surprise and pleasure were nothing to Serena's. When she woke to find her cousin's face bend-

ing over her, smiling and tearful,—she thought she was asleep still, and dreaming, and did not dare to stir. But when she caught a glimpse of her mother's face, smiling and tearful too, she knew what had happened; and clasped her arms round her cousin, and held her fast in a silence that told her joy better than words could do. Then, before she spoke a word to Sarah, she said softly to her mother:

“You will be well now, mother. You are better already;” and with another embrace she added, “Oh, cousin Sarah! I was beginning to think that nothing joyful was ever going to happen to us again, and now you are come. I am so glad.”

They had all reason to be glad at the coming of Sarah. It is possible that Mrs. Wilbur's illness had taken a turn before she came; but it seemed to Serena as though it was her cousin Sarah who was making her well, for she gradually improved in health from the first day of her coming.

And what happy days these were to Serena, and, indeed, to them all! There was so much to hear and to tell, it seemed as though there never would be time enough for it all. Serena questioned her cousin, and listened and exclaimed, and longed so eagerly to be at home once more, that Miss Brent made believe to resent it; telling her she was afraid she did not care for little Katie and her, or any of the

friends she had found in her new home, so eager was she to get back to the old. Serena did not care to defend herself, except to say :

“ You know better than that, Miss Brent. And, besides, you are going with us when we go back. I am sure I shall remember Mrs. Seaton and Miss Gilmour, and Dr. James, and little Katie, longer than they will remember me. I am only a little girl that they have been kind to, and they will find more such when I am away ; but I shall never forget them—*never*. Our life here would have been very different, if it had not been for you and them. Wouldn't it, mother ? ”

Mrs. Wilbur smiled.

“ I could never try to tell Miss Brent all that she has been to us since we came here. I don't need to tell her. God sent her to us in our great need.”

“ God sent us to each other,” said Miss Brent softly. “ And now He has sent Miss Sarah to be sunshine and fresh air among us, I think, after all these dull days. We shall all be strong and bright again presently, under her influence.”

“ Oh ! yes, it is so good to see her and to hear her. You can't think how different it seems to wake up in the morning now,” said Serena. “ I always used to think that Sarah was the prettiest of my cousins—and she looks perfectly beautiful to me now.”

This was said with great gravity to Miss Brent. She laughed, and so did Sarah.

"Yes, she is very nice," said Miss Brent; but she could not improve on her former compliment, "like sunshine and fresh air." It exactly indicated the influence of Sarah's bright presence in the household. It would not be easy to describe all the changes wrought by sunshine and fresh air, flooding the earth after a time of mist and clouds, and close sultry weather; and to tell all the good wrought by Sarah's sunny temper, and by her hands, so skilful and so willing, would take more space than can well be given to it here.

Sarah was "sunshine and fresh air" in her father's house, as well as in her aunt's. It is possible that the efficiency in the household might not have been proved so soon, if they had all this time been moving on in the old quiet way. For Mrs. Turner, as some good mothers are rather apt to do, assumed too exclusively the care and responsibility of household matters, to the sparing of the young girls of the family. But the going away of her sons to the war, added years to the mother's life, and indeed, to Sarah's too, as far as gentleness and thoughtfulness and care for all at home were concerned; and in a little while the daughter, rather than the mother, took the guidance of the household, and bore the burden of its cares and duties.




There is in all the world no more beautiful sight to see, than an eldest daughter and sister performing cheerfully and well the duties that fall to her in a large family. This eldest daughter's cheerful, self-forgetting life at this time, her quiet and efficient assuming of household care, and her firm and faithful, yet gentle oversight of her younger sisters, was more than anything—more than all things put together—the means of comforting her mother in her time of trouble. She did no great thing, but she did the little things that were to be done cheerfully and well.

It is hardly true to say she did no great thing. It will seem no small thing to those who understand such matters, that the work of the dairy, and the work of the house, should, every day of the week, be done by her hands, or under her immediate superintendence. To me it seems quite wonderful that this should have been the case, and that she should still find time and strength and inclination for quite other matters; for books, and visitors, and pretty fancy work, even for those little personal adornments in which young girls take innocent delight. She was only a young girl, looking forward to a year or two of busy school life, when the good and peaceful days of the old time should return, when she could leave her mother; but for the present she was doing, cheerfully and well, a woman's work in the world.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### SUNNY INFLUENCES.

“UNSHINE and fresh air” having entered the little brown house, a happy change came to all. Sensible and considerate, as well as cheerful, Sarah seemed to know just how much of their light, merry talk her aunt could bear, without becoming weary; and she seemed to know a great many things besides, as to what was good for her, things which even Serena hardly thought of; and, in a little while, Mrs. Wilbur began to hope that she would soon be strong and well again; and her little daughter only needed this to make her quite happy.

There were other things that were very pleasant about this time too. It was pleasant to have all care and trouble about household matters taken out of her hands; to let all responsibility slip from her, to be taken up by her cousin. Serena was a good and patient little housekeeper, after her own fashion; but what had been hard work to her weary little hands and head, was only play to Sarah, after her busy time at home; and every thing moved on

smoothly. Sarah seemed to have time for everything, and time to look nice always for the pleasure of them all.

Many little adornments, both as to the house and the people in it, that had been neglected of late, were revived. Baby was made fine with a new hat and cloak; and Serena's wardrobe was overlooked, to its very decided advantage. The parlour was re-papered, and the giving place of dingy brown and blue, to the bunches of grapes, and delicate green leaves and tendrils on a white ground, made a pleasant change indeed. The curtains were refreshed, and tied back with new cords and tassels; and various other improvements were made. A touch from Sarah's hand seemed to make old things new, and to give an air of niceness and grace to very common things; till her aunt and Miss Brent were surprised and delighted at her skill, and Mrs. Quin could find no words in which to express her wonder.

All this was work, though they made pleasure of it too; but the cousins had a great deal of pleasure, which was pleasure indeed. They went together to all the pretty parts of the town and neighbourhood; and Sarah was as charmed with all she saw, as Serena thought she ought to be, which was saying a good deal.

The kind people who used to smile pityingly on Serena when she first came to Dunwater, smiled on her still, and on her cousin too. The

child's pride and delight could never be told in words, as she would say to her friends, when they met them, "This is my cousin Sarah," her happy eyes thanking them all the time for the admiration which she saw in theirs. Indeed, many pleased glances followed them as they went down the street together, for it was a pretty sight to see the little girl, who was so well known to them all by this time, clinging so fondly to the bright-faced stranger; and Sarah was an object of interest for Serena's sake.

"There is one place, and one person, that I want you to see more than all the rest," said Serena one day. "I have been waiting for a good time ever since you came; but we have been so busy, and it has been raining. But the very first fine day I must take you to The Mount garden to see Mrs. Seaton."

Of course Sarah had not been there for ten days, without having heard of Mrs. Seaton. Indeed she had heard of her a great many times before she came. But she did not seem, by any means, so eager to avail herself of Serena's invitation to visit her, as seemed proper for the occasion. She said nothing, however, till the subject had been mentioned several times. Then she said:

"I should like to see the garden very much; and the view that you say is so fine, if we could go in by the little gate that you told me about. But I don't care about seeing any of the people

of The Mount. They are what Mrs. Quin calls 'grand folk,' aren't they?"

Serena opened her eyes, and considered.

"I don't know. Yes, I guess Mr. Gilmour is one of them, and Mrs. Gilmour too. And I daresay so are Miss Gilmour and Dr. James, and the rest, though I never thought about it. But Mrs. Seaton is just as sweet and kind as can be, and not the least grand."

"But Mrs. Quin says she is the very grandest of them all—the grandest lady she ever saw in this country;—she says, 'with her lace shawls, and her silk gowns, every day in the week,'" added Sarah, laughing.

"Does she?" said Serena. "Well, her lace shawl *is* beautiful, and so are her dresses; but they just suit her, and I never thought about her being grand. And besides, why should you care about these things, Sarah? And I want you to see all my friends."

"Well now, Serena dear, how much do you suppose they really care about you—these proud English people?"

"Cousin Sarah," said Serena, severely, "Miss Brent is an Englishwoman." Sarah laughed.

"I know it. She can't help it, poor dear."

Miss Brent laughed as merrily as Sarah, but Serena looked very grave and troubled.

"She wouldn't help it if she could. And it's not the least bit like you, cousin Sarah, to wish to make me uncomfortable about my friends."

"Well, I won't any more. And I didn't mean that they didn't care about *you*, but that they wouldn't care about *me*—and I don't care about them. So you must forgive me."

Serena was silent a moment, pondering deeply.

"Cousin Sarah, I know you will love Mrs. Seaton. You can't help it, because she is so good a Christian. That is the reason I want you to see her."

"And that is a very good reason, dear," said Sarah, gently.

"I am sure you will admire her," said Serena. "I don't suppose she is really better than a great many people you know. But she is different from our people, and I want you to see her. And I want her to see you too."

"Well, dear, I hope we shall see her then."

But Serena was not satisfied yet.

"Don't you remember what you said to me the other day about Miss Brent—how glad you were that you had seen her? Not only because she is good and kind, but because she is different from our people. You said it was like reading a new book, to be with her an afternoon. Well, it will be like a new and beautiful book for you to see Mrs. Seaton. I don't mind so much about the rest of them. They are more like other people."

But Sarah was to see "the rest of them" first. Doctor Gilmour she had often seen, and little

Katie. The doctor's visits to the cottage had ceased now; but not until he had had time and opportunity to appreciate the wonderful powers of "sunshine and fresh air," as he told Serena, much to her delight. But up to this time she had seen none of The Mount people. However, before the visit to the garden was made, Miss Gilmour called, and her brother came with her.

They found Sarah busy ironing in the kitchen, and Serena reading aloud to her and Miss Brent. Mrs. Wilbur was lying down to rest in the parlour, so there was no help for it; the visitors must be asked to sit down beside the ironing-board. There was no great hardship in that, however, as the day was cool, and their kitchen was as bright and neat, Dr. James thought, as were most people's parlours. Sarah was busy on some clear muslin article, which would have been quite spoiled to be put aside; so begging to be permitted to finish it, she ironed away with as much ease of manner, as if ironing had been the latest method chosen by young ladies of leisure for the pleasant passing of time. As for any sign of annoyance or embarrassment, none was visible to the eyes of the visitors. Indeed there was none, as why should there be?

Sarah was a little perverse, however, Serena thought. She would not seem to take the visit to herself; and even after she sat down, she spoke very little, except in answer to some direct

question. But this was only at first. It would not have been easy for any one long to withstand Miss Gilmour's gentle manner, when she wished to please, as she evidently did on this occasion; and in a little while they were quite at ease with one another. There was none of the condescension in Miss Gilmour's manner of speaking, which Mrs. Quin's description of the "grand folk" of The Mount might have been calculated to suggest; and as for Sarah, she might have been receiving visits in a fine city parlour, so unconscious did she appear of ironing-board or apron. They were quite on equal terms; and before the visit was over, Serena, who had set her heart on these two liking one another, was altogether content.

"You seem to have given us up altogether," said Dr. James, at last; calling her attention from the girl's talk about the river, and the views, and so on.

"We have been very busy, Sarah and I. But we are going to the garden soon. I want Sarah to see it."

"You must make your visit soon then, for the frost will make a sad change there. It is very pretty as yet, however."

"And, besides, grandmamma is going away soon, and you must come and say good-bye to her," said his sister.

"Yes," said Serena, with a sigh. "The summer is almost over now."



"Is that sigh for the summer, or for grand-mamma?" asked Miss Gilmour, smiling.

"I don't know. For both, I guess. I am very glad I have known Mrs. Seaton. I shall never forget her, never. I should be glad that I came to Canada just to have seen her, if there were nothing else to be glad for."

"Grandmamma ought to feel highly flattered," said Dr. James. "But you speak as though you never expected to see her again. One would think you were tired of us, and that you had made up your mind to go back with your cousin to that wonderful Maybrook."

"No, I am not tired of anyone; and I am not going home with Sarah. I hope we shall go some time. But I shall never forget Mrs. Seaton, nor any one here, *never*. Everybody has been kind to us."

"That is the beginning and end of Serena's experiences," said Sarah, smiling. "She seems to have had a great many things to make her happy since she came here. I am afraid she will be disappointed in Maybrook people when she goes back again."

Serena shook her head.

"I haven't been disappointed in you, Sarah."

"I don't see the point," said Dr. James.

"Your cousin came at the right time to be appreciated," said Miss Brent.

"All the people in Maybrook are not like your cousin, I fancy," said Miss Gilmour.

"No, indeed; there is nobody like Sarah. And Miss Brent is right too. We needed some one just then. Oh! it was good to see her."

"Sunshine and fresh air," said Miss Brent, "have all brightened wonderfully since then;" and so they chatted on till the visitors left.

With more self-restraint than Miss Brent gave her credit for, Serena refrained from expressing her delight in the visit, or again urging the going to the garden. When Sarah said Miss Gilmour was very nice, and not at all like her idea of "grand folk," she did not say, "I told you so," at least she only said it with her eyes. She was very much pleased that Sarah should admire Miss Gilmour, whom she had liked so much from the very first; and she did not need to be told that Miss Gilmour admired her cousin Sarah as well. Everybody must do that. So she said nothing; but well pleased, looked forward to the garden visit still.

They intended to go in the morning, but something prevented; so, for fear of autumn frosts and threatened rains, they thought best to go later on the same day, rather than wait for another; though Serena said, disconsolately, there was little hopes of seeing Mrs. Seaton in the garden at that hour. It was three o'clock, and the dinner hour at The Mount was approaching; and as they went in at the little gate from the carriage drive, they saw no one.

They sat in the summer-house awhile to rest,

and admire the view ; and Serena told Sarah some things about Mrs. Seaton, and her kindness, and her hymn-book ; what she had said to her that interested her very much ; for they proved that the lady had not taken notice of the child merely to amuse herself, but that she had found real pleasure in giving pleasure to the little stranger ; who was yet not a stranger, being one of Christ's little ones.

It seemed easier for Serena, sitting there in the place where so many sweet and tender words had been spoken to her, to say to her cousin all that was in her heart, about a love more precious to her now than the love of any earthly friend. Not that she was able to use many words, or needed to use many to make Sarah understand. They had both known all along that a dearer bond than had united them in the old time, united them now, because they were "one in Christ Jesus." It was a very quiet and happy hour to them both.

Life had brought some care and sorrow to both of them. All their thoughtful years had been darkened by the cloud that overshadowed their country ; for even to Sarah the old peaceful days seemed very far away. They had had their own troubles too ; troubles that had come near to them or their friends, growing out of the war and other things. But they were young, and the war was nearly over ; and they were hopeful, and life looked bright to them both that day.

To be sitting in that quiet garden, so far away from home, seemed to Sarah like a pleasant dream. Her heart was sweetly and deeply stirred by the conversation with her little cousin; and as she looked out over the fair scene before her, it seemed to her like a picture of life—not life as it comes to the world in general, but life as it lay before her. There were bright flowers, numberless, around her; and flowers in the distance, though she could not see them. There were rough places, doubtless, in the landscape; “sloughs of despond,” and “hills of difficulty;” but how fair the whole scene, and how fair the sky above it!—not cloudless; but the very clouds, lit up by the descending sun, made the heaven and the earth more beautiful.

It was only a momentary fancy, for she was not an imaginative young person. She shut her eyes, and it all vanished; and she smiled at her own thoughts. Then she started, as Serena said softly:

“I wonder if we’ll ever go back to Maybrook again?”

“Of course you will, and very soon, too. Why should you not go back?”

“Father said once he would never go back.”

“Oh! but he’ll change his mind about it, you’ll see. Every thing will be just as it was in the old times, I hope.”

“Except that Ben will never come back again,” said Serena, gravely.

"No, nor a great many others. It will never seem quite the same again without them."

"But uncle Turner said, at the very first, it was all right about Ben, and he is dead. It will all be right with us too. Mother says it will. Only we can't help being troubled sometimes, you know."

There were few things about their life since they left home, that Sarah did not know by this time; but in all Serena's long talks she had never said much about her father. Sarah knew that she was thinking of him now, and for answer she stooped down and kissed the little face looking up at her so wistfully.

"I am not really afraid for him, cousin Sarah; and I don't think mother is; but we worry about him sometimes, and don't take the comfort of the promise as we go along, mother says, which is wrong and foolish too."

If she had said a word or two more, she must have broken into weeping, and then all the sad story of the last winter's trouble might have been told. But she quieted herself by a great effort, and in a little she knew that nothing more could be said, for on the terrace below she caught a glimpse of the gardener. Whether he saw them or not made no difference, they could no longer feel themselves alone.

"We have not been round the garden yet, and it will soon be growing dark. There is Mr. Crawthorn; let us go down."

Serena's formula of introduction was not pronounced quite so brightly as usual; but Mr. Crawthorn bowed over Sarah's frankly offered hand, like a true gentleman as he was, in all essential particulars, though he wore the dress of a working-man, and for the time went and came at the bidding of another. They would have enjoyed their walk quite as well without his company, and without the pointed little lectures he gave them; but as he appropriately ended all by an unlimited promise as to seeds, and even as to roots and slips, Sarah forgave him all his hard words, and thanked him gratefully. He kept his promise too; and there are a good many gardens in Maybrook all the brighter this summer day for Sarah's visit to The Mount. But of course that has nothing to do with my story.

The garden was very brilliant still, with dahlias and asters, and other autumn flowers, though the summer flowers were mostly gone. But if there had been never a flower at all, Sarah would have been delighted with all she saw. Her taste, her love of order, her sense of propriety, and of the fitness of things, were gratified by the perfect arrangement and neatness of the whole. Even Serena was satisfied with the degree of interest and admiration which her cousin's lips and eyes expressed. They lingered a little while in the summer-house again, and then it was time to go.

When they came round to the little gate, they made up their minds that it was too late to go and see Mrs. Seaton, and that they must come again another day. There was a glancing of light dresses among the vines round the galleries of the house, which suggested the idea of company; and they hastened down the avenue that they might not be seen. Before they had gone far, however, they met Miss Gilmour.

“We had quite given you up for to-day. Have you been in the garden already?”

Then she introduced them to the friend who was with her, and seemed quite to take it for granted that they were on their way to the house; so exchanging amused glances, the girls went with her.

The visit to Mrs. Seaton was not quite so successful as it would have been had they met her in the garden, or as if there had been no strangers there. But Sarah was as charmed as Serena had foretold, with the lovely kind old face, and gentle voice and manner of her friend, and with the quaint rich dress, so different from anything she was accustomed to see.

Serena did not need to be told that Mrs. Seaton was pleased with Sarah. She was certainly pleased, and a little surprised, too. It came into her mind to wonder, whether this was really the farmer's daughter of whom little Serena had spoken so many times, as busy with

the making of butter and bread, and with the numberless things implied in the keeping of her father's house. Standing there in her pretty, simple dress, fair and sweet and self-possessed, she seemed as little like one accustomed to the burden of household care, as any of the gay young girls flitting about the room. She was not too self-possessed either, the lady thought, as she watched the wavering colour which the consciousness of observation called up to Sarah's cheeks. She was very nice and ladylike, she thought; and though, of course, she did not say this to Serena, the little girl knew that her cousin was regarded with approving eyes.

Of course there could not be much conversation; but Serena hoped they might see her again, and would not let her disappointment prevent her from taking the good of the rest. There were many people there, some of whom Serena did not know. Little Katie was not there, nor any other child; so she placed herself in a corner not far from Mrs. Seaton's chair, to watch her cousin Sarah, and to see all that was to be seen. She had known all along that her cousin could not appear otherwise than just as she ought to do, in whatever circumstances she found herself; but to see her own thoughts, showing in pleased surprise on the faces of the Judge and Mrs. Gilmour when their daughter introduced her to them, was very pleasant. There were others, too, who lingered talking with her;



and though Serena could not hear a word that was spoken, she knew that Sarah was doing her part naturally and well.

Once it gave her quite a little start of pleasure to hear her cousin's laugh mingling with the rest, when some witty remark was made. It made her sure that Sarah was quite at her ease, and not merely trying to appear so, as was sometimes the way with herself. She knew that she was enjoying all, and using all her faculties in observing, and in judging and comparing the manners and opinions of the people about her, with a standard of her own; and Serena said to herself, "It will be nice to hear her telling it all to mother and Miss Brent to-morrow."

There were married people there; and soon Miss Gilmour opened the piano, and her very first touch called Sarah's eyes and ears in that direction; and in a little while she was standing near her, watching her glancing fingers with a delight that recalled to Serena her own on the night she first heard her play at little Katie's party.

Then Randal came in; and that was not so nice, for Serena was a little afraid of him. Dr. James teased her sometimes,—but then he knew when to stop, and Randal did not; and Serena thought him rough, and did her best to keep out of his way as a general thing.

"And I do believe he is looking for that very song for Sarah. Miss Gilmour won't sing

it, I know," said she to herself, with a vivid remembrance of her own discomfiture. But if it was so, his sister very quietly put him aside; and then, in a little time, the measure of Serena's content was filled, as Sarah's voice, mingling with those of Miss Gilmour and her brother, fell on her ear.

It is very possible that some of the fine people there thought that Sarah's singing wanted "style;" but in Serena's opinion not a voice in the room could compare with it; and as it died away, she leaned back in her seat with a sigh of satisfaction so deep that Mrs. Seaton heard, and turned round to smile at her. Then Dr. James drew near.

"What have you done, that you should be put in a corner like this?" asked he; "and what has happened to you?"

"I'm a little tired for one thing; and it is nice to sit here, and watch all the people."

"Tired, I should think so," said Dr. James. "Why, your face is like—like a rainbow."

"A rainbow," said she, in dismay.

"Yes, or a new moon, or something very bright and serene. Tell me what it is. What were you thinking about, when I came up?"

"I don't know, exactly. Just that minute, I believe I was thinking how glad I was that Sarah wore her muslin with the pink spots."

Dr. James turned astonished eyes on grand-mamma Seaton, who nodded and smiled to Serena.

"The muslin with the pink spots! That's it, is it?" said Dr. James, considering. "What do you suppose you will do when your cousin goes away?"

Serena's face fell. "We shall be very lonesome, I'm afraid." But in a minute she added, "We shall do very well, though. I am not afraid of that."

"I am sure you need not be, love," said Mrs. Seaton, softly. The two smiled at each other.

"What is it, grandmamma?" said Dr. James. "What secret is there between you and little Serena?"

"There is no secret, James, love," said Mrs. Seaton, gently. "Serena knows she has One for her friend who will never go away and leave her. That is all."

Mrs. Seaton's attention was claimed by some one else at the moment; but Serena rose, and drawing a little nearer, laid her hand caressingly on her friend's small fingers, holding them fondly in hers. There was not the slightest appearance of forwardness or affectation in the act. She was quite out of sight of all but Dr. James, and she seemed to have forgotten him.

"I wonder what makes grandmamma and you such friends?" he said presently.

Serena smiled, but did not answer for a moment. "We shall always be friends," she said by-and-bye.

"When we come back next summer, you mean."

"Yes, if I am here. And I mean afterwards, too—always—in heaven."

She did not meet his eyes as she spoke; but stopped suddenly, as though she were not sure of her voice; and sitting down again, let her face fall on the small wrinkled hand she held in hers.

"Queer little thing," said James to himself. Aloud he said, "And I too. I hope you and I may be friends always—as you call it."

"I don't know. I hope so," said she, gravely, lifting her face. Her look disconcerted the young man more than he was willing to confess. It said so plainly:

"Do *you* think we shall be friends always—in heaven?"

It came back to him again when he sat with that small wrinkled hand in his, cold in death, saying as plainly then as now, "Do you think we shall be friends in heaven?"

For I may as well tell it here as elsewhere. After that night Serena never saw her dear old friend again. The tidings of her death came to her at a time when the world seemed little worth, and heaven very near; and she dwelt less on the thought that they should never meet here, than on the thought that they should meet there—never to part more.

## CHAPTER IX.

### NOT ALL SUNSHINE.

**T**HE rest of Sarah's visit passed quickly away. Mrs. Wilbur did not expect her husband home till much later in the season, when the ice should prevent the running of the boats; but just before Sarah went away there came a letter from him, saying he expected to be home in a few days; and then Mrs. Wilbur asked her to stay till he came. But as soon as ever she saw his face, she wished she had not done so; for the summer had wrought in him no change for the better, but rather for the worse.

As for Sarah, she would have gone home with a far more cheerful heart, if she had gone before he came. Her aunt never spoke of her trouble, nor did Serena after that night in the garden. But Sarah did not need anyone to tell her that poor Mr. Wilbur had fallen far since he left Maybrook. She saw in his unsteady hands, and in the restless wandering eye, that never willingly met hers, tokens of weakness and degradation, which her aunt's silence could do nothing to conceal. There were tones in his voice now

and then, and sudden angry movements when he was displeased, that made her afraid for the delicate mother and her children. He spoke of Maybrook, and of his determination never to return to it, with a scornful indifference, which was none the more pleasant to see that it was not real; but assumed to hide the angry shame which in moments, when all that was not lost of his better nature would be heard, he could not but feel.

So Sarah went away with a heavy heart; thinking, dear simple girl, that she knew something of the sorrow and suffering that must come upon her aunt, and her little cousin, during the long winter that lay before them; and questioning with herself whether she ought to sadden her mother's heart by telling her all she knew and all she feared.

She went away; and the mother and child were left to begin their old life again—the watching and waiting, the trembling and dread, during one night of which more must be endured than the innocent, ignorant Sarah could comprehend; and for a time the courage of both failed them. The heart of the mother sank, as it had done that first night, when sitting in the darkness; she had heard in the wind, and the rain, and the rush of the river, a prophecy of coming evil. It seemed to her that they were more helpless and forsaken now than they had been then, with less cause for hope and more to

fear, and with fainter prospects that they would ever be able to return to their home.

And worse than all, she told herself the hope that had sustained her in the worst time, that her husband might be saved through her, was failing her. His downward course had not even been arrested. Day by day the enslaving vice had fastened more firmly upon him, and how could she hope any longer? These were very dark days to her.

As for Serena, she woke out of her grief for Sarah's departure, to see how much her mother was troubled; and she set herself to the task of cheering her, with an earnestness that brought comfort to herself at least. She was only a child, but love taught her wisdom; and the mother, listening rather for the child's sake than for her own, was comforted unawares.

"It is just a year to-day since we came to Dunwater. Did you remember it, mother? I never thought about it till Miss Brent told me to-night."

It was a very different night from the one that had fallen upon them so drearily a year ago; but Mrs. Wilbur's heart was as heavy as it had been then. She was sitting, gazing away over the river to the hills, bare and grey, and crowned with brilliant autumn foliage, as they had been when her eyes first rested on them. She did not seem to hear till Serena spoke again.

"Did you think of it, mother? We have been here a year to-day."

"No, dear; I did not remember that it was to-day we came." But she did not withdraw her eyes from the far-away hills, nor notice the touch of her little daughter's hand.

"It has been better than we thought, mother, in some things; though it seemed so dismal that night. We have baby now;" and she lifted her little brother, and placed him on her mother's knee.

"Yes, we have baby," said the mother, caressing her beautiful boy, as he laid his head on her breast to sleep, weary and content. Truly, there must be hope in the life of one who owned such a treasure. Serena knew the thought was in her mother's mind, as well as if she had spoken it; so she said no more for a little while. By-and-bye a step was heard coming through the little shed outside.

"That is Miss Brent," said Serena. "She has been at Mrs. Greer's, to see little Lucy. Mother, do you think Miss Brent would have learned to walk without her crutch, if we had not come here?"

"I don't know, dear. Perhaps not so soon."

"Well, we have done her a little good, at any rate; and she has done us good, too. Mother, if you had known what good friends we should have by this time, you would not have been so afraid that night, would you? There are



Miss Brent, and Mrs. Quin, and the doctor; and ever so many more. We seemed to be alone then, and now nobody in Dunwater has more friends than we have."

"Than you have, you ought to say," said Mrs. Wilbur, smiling.

And you too, mother. My friends are your friends, though you don't know them quite as well. Oh! it is very different from what it was this time last year. How lonesome we were that night! And you are better and stronger than you were last year. That is another thing we have to be thankful for. And Sarah has been here, and the war is nearly over; and Frank will soon get home again. There are a great many things to make us glad. Don't you think so mother?"

"Yes, dear, many things. God has been very good to us in many ways."

They were silent a long time after that. It grew dark as they sat there,—the mother, with her sleeping baby on her lap, and her little girl's head laid down beside him. The mother was going back in thought over all the year; and saying, that as far as her little daughter was concerned, she had nothing to regret in all that had come to them, though it had been more for her sake, than for her own, that she had dreaded the thought of leaving home. Some things had come to her from which she would have liked to shield her—watching and weariness, and house-

hold care. She had lost something out of her life in being separated from her companions, and deprived of the advantages that she would have enjoyed at home; but she had had many pleasures this year, and its discipline had wrought her no harm, but much good. She had improved in many ways, in health and strength of body, and in maturity of character. The mother's heart swelled with thankfulness as she thought of all Serena had been to her brother during the year, and she laid her hand lovingly on her bowed head. Then Serena said, softly:

"And I have another thing to be glad of, mother; and you will be glad too. Don't you remember you asked me, that night, if I was one of God's little children? I could not say it then,—but I think—I am almost sure—that I can say it now."

It was no surprise to her mother. Yet her heart leapt up joyfully as she heard the words. She bent down to kiss the lips held up to hers, as she murmured:

"Thank God for that, my darling." And Serena felt her tears upon her cheek.

"You know I am only a little girl, mother. I do wrong and foolish things sometimes; but I do love Jesus, and I am sure He will keep me safe always."

"Safe always, whatever befalls," murmured her mother. "Surely I ought not to be faithless, with this blessed comfort given me."

Again there was a long silence. The moon rose; and they sat in its light, trying to make themselves believe that they did it because it was pleasant to sit there; and not as the first of the long nights of waiting that seemed to be before them.

"Do you dread the winter, mother, more than you did last year?" asked Serena.

"For some things I dread it; but not so much as last year, I think."

"You are stronger, for one thing."

"Yes. Last year, at this time, I hardly expected to live through the winter. I am much better now."

"We are very poor now, mother; poorer than we were last winter."

"Yes, but I am not afraid. The money that comes from Maybrook makes the rent secure; and we can get work through Miss Brent and others. I am not afraid of poverty, dear."

And, perhaps, father will find something to do pretty soon," said Serena, in a low voice.

"We will hope so, dear. But I am not afraid that we shall be left to suffer. God is good. I am not afraid." But her voice did not sound very hopeful. Serena rose and leaned on her mother's shoulder.

"Shall I lay baby in his cot, mother?" asked she.

"Would you like his place, dear?" asked her mother, smiling.

"Oh! no. I'm too big for that now. I should tire you too much, I'm afraid."

But when baby was laid down, "just for a minute," Serena took the place she liked best, with her arms around her mother's neck, and her head laid on her shoulder. Many minutes passed, and she sat still. The moon she had been watching at first went out of sight; and the room was in shadow, though it was bright outside. She raised herself at last, and said:

"Mother, when it says, 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God,' it means painful things too, doesn't it?—things that it sometimes seems impossible to bear."

"Yes," said her mother with a sigh. "There are some things we could hardly bear, but for such a promise as that."

And when we are speaking about the things that God can do, there is no difference between hard things and easy things, is there, mother?"

"God can do what He pleases, if that is what you mean," said her mother. "All power is His."

"And He has so many ways of doing things, that we would never think of. And, mother dear, when *your* patience holds out, surely His will: 'Slow to anger, long-suffering, and plentiful in mercy,' the verse says. I don't think we need be afraid and unhappy, as though it wouldn't come all right at last—with father, I mean," added she in a whisper.

"We can only wait and pray for him," said her mother, brokenly.

And we can trust," whispered Serena. "It seems like doubting God's word not to take the comfort of the promise as we go along, don't it, mother dear?"

"My darling it is all we can do."

There came a familiar sound, a stumbling step, and a muttering voice at the door. Serena started up.

"Mother," said she hurriedly, "bring baby by-and-bye," and she sprang upstairs as her father entered. She stood still a moment to listen; and then, throwing herself down on her knees by her bed, burst into bitter weeping.

"Oh! mother, mother! What shall we do? It is not easy to trust, and have patience."

It was a heavy burden that she carried that night to Him who "hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows," and at His feet she laid it down for a little while at least. Soon she was sleeping sweetly, with her little brother at her side, unconscious of the weary watch that her mother was keeping alone.

This winter was not like the last. In some respects it was not so bad. Mr. Wilbur worked at his trade, and was therefore less exposed to temptation than he had been then. Sometimes, for a week or two, he would be home early every night; and he provided many things for his family. His wife began to be more hopeful

about him than she had been since they left home. He seemed to be trying to reform: but their life did not brighten much, for he was silent, sometimes sullen, and he was always ill at ease.

The playfulness of his little boy, more frequently than anything else, beguiled him into something like the cheerfulness of old times. The child was very fond of him. He always showed his joy when his father came in; and would go to him even from Serena, whom he loved best of all. His father loved him dearly too; and the mother began to hope that his little son might be the means of beginning a good work in him.

This went on till the year drew near a close, and then it was a long time before Mrs. Wilbur had courage to hope again. The poor broken man needed much help to withstand his foe, and out of his own house there were few to help; many who from thoughtlessness or malice, or greed of gain, helped his foe against him. The Christmas time, which ought to be a happy time to all, was very miserable to them. Mrs. Wilbur said little, it was not her way to complain; but Serena saw by many a token that her hope was gone, and the child suffered for her father and her mother too.

And did not the poor broken man suffer? Words could not tell the shame and misery he endured; many and many a time, when

coming to himself, he found that he had fallen back into the pit again. It seemed to come upon him as it had never come before, that he was a drunkard—one of those poor lost creatures whose doom, in the eyes of almost all the world, is sealed. It had never been made clear to him before that he had become a slave to his love of drink. He had pleased himself with the fancy that he needed only to will it, and he could do without it, as he had done before—that as he had told his wife long ago, he “could take it or let it alone.” But now he saw himself bound, hand and foot, a prisoner of Satan ; separated by a great gulf from his wife and his innocent children, from all that had made life desirable before it came to this.

It came to him with a pang like that which the condemned to death must feel, that there was no future to him but one of degradation and shame—none in this world ; in the next, what ? All that he suffered could not be told, even if this were the place to tell it. His shame and suffering did not work towards repentance and a changed life, but to a deeper and more hopeless fall.

They prayed for him still ; but when the words of prayer were not on their lips, their faith failed, and then the hours were dark indeed. Now again, as last winter, Miss Brent kept her light burning till all was still below ; and kind Mrs. Quin made errands at unseasonable times

to their end of the house, to assure herself as to what might be happening there. Sometimes the two women lingered together in the bitter cold without, fearing they knew not what. Mike got many a temperance lecture more effectual than even one of Father Matthew's would have been, though Nora seldom opened her lips to him on the subject now.

"Does she ever speak about him, Nora dear?" he asked one night, as she came shivering in from a longer watch than usual. She gave him an indignant glance over her shoulder, as she cowered down to warm herself over the stove.

"What do you think she's made of? He is her husband, if he is a brute. What good would speaking do?"

"But doesn't she tell her troubles to Miss Brent, do you think? Surely the poor soul must speak to some one."

Nora shook her head.

"No, I don't believe it, unless it be to the little girl, maybe; and not much to her, I'm sure, for the child's own sake. Poor soul. She must be losing heart by this time. The trouble is there never *was* the makings of a man in him. He must have been a poor creature always."

"He's a good workman. There's none better, they say, when he likes."

"Ah, well. The more's the pity for himself and them. Couldn't *you* do something for him, Mike dear? Could you not speak to Mr.



Brotherton for him? If he is such a workman, he would have a good chance there."

Mike shook his head.

"Mr. Brotherton will have no such man in his employ. He's not trustworthy."

"But he might get to be so. For the wife and little children's sake, Mr. Brotherton might try him. Speak for him, Mike dear."

"I needn't yet," answered Mike, gravely. "This bout will last a good while yet, if I am not mistaken. It would do no good to speak to him yet."

Nora warmed her numbed hands, and considered awhile gravely.

"The only thing that amazes me is that the earth don't open, and swallow up the cursed stuff, and all who deal in it."

Mike opened wide his eyes. There were several things in the world that amazed him more than that; but it did no good to dissent from his wife when she was grieved or angry, so he was silent. Then he said:

"I'll try it, Nora dear. I don't mean that my word will go far with Mr. Brotherton, but I'll try and get the poor chap a place in our shop; it will give him a chance. The mistress knows the little girl by sight. I have seen her speaking to her in the street; and you might get Miss Brent to say a word to her, it might help. They say the master's pretty soft-hearted where the mistress is concerned, small blame to him."

Mike was as good as his word, and he succeeded in getting a situation for Mr. Wilbur in the employment of Brotherton the builder. But that was afterwards. There were many troubled days for him, and for them all, before that happened; days and nights through which Mrs. Wilbur struggled, like one in a terrible dream. It would be vain to write about these days. They came to an end at last.

He had been more at home for a day or two; and as Mr. Quin said, that "bout" seemed to be wearing over, when little Frank's birthday came round. The little fellow took his first step alone that day, starting from Serena's side and holding out his hands to his father as he took a few tottering steps towards him. Safely arrived, he turned and laughed and crowed to his admiring sister; and when she held out her hands and tried to beguile him back, he clung to his father and refused.

Poor Wilbur! Sick and miserable, and well-nigh hopeless, a great wave of bitterness swept over him as he felt the clinging touch of his little child's hands. With a groan that was almost a cry, he caught him in his arms, hiding his face as he clasped him close. The little fellow clung to him, laughing; then turned to his sister as if they were having a merry game together. He was set down upon the floor as suddenly as he had been taken up; and then the poor unhappy father rushed away,

and they saw him no more that day, nor that night either.

Serena shared her mother's watch till sleep overpowered her. She woke at midnight to find her mother waiting still, and listening to every sound.

"Mother," she cried, with a sudden burst of weeping, "do you think God has quite forgotten us?"

"I cannot tell. I am weary of hoping. But it cannot be. If He were to forget us, we must let go of everything."

"Oh! I know He has not. He cannot. But it is dreadful all these terrible days."

"I will not let go of the promise," said her mother, excitedly. "I *will* not. I have all this time been thinking more of the shame in the sight of man, than of the sin in the sight of God. That is past, but I must have his soul. He may be lost for time, but not for eternity. Lord! I will not let Thee go without this blessing. As Thou art true and faithful, help me. I am helpless but for Thy promise, which I will not let go."

But her words need not be written. They were such words as other poor souls have used in their extremity; words, which as God is true, no poor soul ever uttered in vain. Only we are blind and impatient; and we struggle and resist when God would lead us in a way we know not, foolishly wishing to choose our own. It is

a happy thing for His people that God's ways are not our ways; and that while we are groping in the darkness, He sees the end.

Just as the dim winter morning was breaking, Mr. Wilbur came home. He had evidently slept since he had taken anything, and was too chilled and miserable to be otherwise than manageable for this once. Fortunately, the morning was not one of bitter cold, or he must have perished; for he was without boots or coat, and hardly seemed to know what had become of them. They were brought home in a day or two, nobody knew how, unless indeed Mr. Quin did; but if he knew he told nothing. For a day or two Mr. Wilbur was too ill to leave the house; but except that his wife took some comfort in the thought that while he staid in the house he was safe from temptation, they were as wretched days to them all as could well be.

One night Mrs. Quin and her husband paid them a visit—a very rare circumstance indeed, as far as he was concerned. After the first awkward greetings were over, however, he had plenty to say; and among other things he told them that Brotherton and Co. had taken the contract for the new bridge that was to be built higher up the river, and they were looking out for new hands, for they were to set to work on the material at once, so as to have all ready when the ice broke up.

Mrs. Quin admired her husband for many reasons; but she gave him no credit at all for skill in the management of matters, where anything else besides good-nature and great strength was needed. It was all that the impulsive little woman could do to sit still when Mike rambled away from the bridge to other topics, so eager was she to make known to their neighbours the good fortune that was in store for them. For Mike had obtained permission from Mr. Brotherton to offer Mr. Wilbur a place in his shop. He had not got it easily either, or without the good word of the mistress, which Miss Brent had taken care to bespeak. But Mike said nothing more that night, and it is doubtful whether Nora herself could have managed half as well as he did. For he took care to fall in with Wilbur next morning as he was going to the town; and as they went on together he spoke again of the bridge, and of the number of men required; and then in an off-hand way, as though it were the thought of the moment, said he had better come along and offer himself to the firm. Wilbur hesitated. Mike turned toward the shop.

"They are particular there, at Brotherton's. They don't like strangers," said he.

"Oh, as to that," said Mike, "you are pretty well known in Dunwater by this time, and your folks too."

Wilbur winced at that, and with reason.

"I expect Brotherton's folks are a notch too high for me," and he turned to go away.

"Look here, Wilbur," said blunt Mike, "it's about as you say. But they needn't be too high for you, nor for any sober man. It don't pay the way you are going on now. I know all about it. I've been through that mill. Take a new start, and the little chap at home need never know that it hasn't been all right with you this while back. Some things can't be helped; but *that* can."

"They'll never take me on," said Wilbur, hesitating.

"They will if you'll take the pledge," said Mike, gravely.

"I shouldn't keep it if I did, I don't suppose," said he, hoarsely.

"I have, and why shouldn't you," said Mike. "Come along and offer yourself, and make a trial any how."

So Mike prevailed, and Wilbur was taken into the employment of Brotherton and Co. He was not asked to sign the pledge, but it was understood that he was only to be there while he proved trustworthy; and though he said nothing about it to anyone, he resolved that he would make one last effort to withstand temptation, and redeem his good name for little Frankie's sake.

I wish I could close this sorrowful chapter of little Serena's life, by telling you that all their

troubles were now at an end. But the next few months were troubled months to them all. Mr. Wilbur, with the help of Michael Quin, and other friends, who, unknown to him, kept sight of him about this time, stood faithful to his resolve; but he did not seem to take much comfort in it. He was gloomy and silent; and often he was irritable and impatient, even with little Frank, taking no notice of the means used by his wife to win him back to the interests and pleasures of the old time. It was a time of miserable suspense to her. She never saw him go out, but she feared he might return as he had so often done before.

They who have been so unhappy as to yield to the temptation to indulge in the use of strong drink, tell us that the horrible cravings that follow the attempt to break off the practice, are worse to bear than hunger or thirst, pain or sickness; more difficult to withstand than can be imagined by any but those who have suffered from it. Nothing of all this was spared to poor Wilbur. It seemed to him many a time that life could not be sustained much longer in a state so wretched; and more than once the thought came into his mind that it would be better to die and end it all.

Once, when the winter was nearly over, his wife said something about going back to Maybrook again. But he grew angry, and said, using words such as he had never used before,

except when he was not himself, that she might go back if she were not content to stay; but as for him and the children, they would never go back to Maybrook again.

There was no answer to be made to this, and she made none. She could only wait patiently, and hope that as time wore on he might change his mind. It was not because she could not be contented in Dunwater that she wished to go away. She would have been well content there or elsewhere, could she have felt sure that her husband was safe from the terrible temptation that assailed him. She felt the work of reform must be made tenfold more difficult by the open display of strong drink everywhere. Here in every street his foe awaited him. In Maybrook it was not so; and, besides, she thought that surrounded by old friends, and old associations, it would be comparatively easy for him to fall into the regular round of his old life again. She longed for his sake to be safe away, and at home again; but she knew it would be worse than vain for her to press it till his mood should change, and so she waited and prayed, and hoped and feared for him still for many a weary day.

As for Serena she was but a child, and she could not understand all the strength and terror of her mother's doubts and fears; and so to her the last part of the winter was happier than the days that followed Christmas had been. The




novelty was gone from their Dunwater life now ; and she cared less than she had cared last winter to watch or mingle in the sports of the village children ; and, besides, she was beginning to think herself too old for such things now, so she staid at home, perhaps more than was good for her, helping her mother and caring for little Frankie.

Even to little Katie her visits were few. She went once or twice to The Mount ; but Miss Gilmour spent the last part of the winter in the city, and she did not care to go when she was not there. But her cares and troubles, though they made her very quiet and different from the merry little Serena who used to pass such happy days at the Hill Farm, did not really harm her, as it cheered and comforted her mother's sorrowful heart to know. And though it sometimes grieved her to think that her little girl should miss the brightness that had rested on her own girlhood, she could not fail to see that, though the path was rough, it was the Good Shepherd that was leading His little lamb all the way through ; and so she could not fear for her, nor doubt that the way by which she was being led was the very best and safest for the child.

## CHAPTER X.

NOT SO BAD AS MIGHT BE.

o winter passed away; and the time, drearier than winter, that comes between the melting of the snow and the bright warm weather. And then spring came, more beautiful and more welcome than ever it had come before, Serena thought.

There were several things to make it very pleasant to her just then. Her little brother could run about now, and took such delight in the sunshine as no child ever took under a roof yet; and Serena enjoyed the spring for him, and for herself as well. She was hopeful about her father, too. This was the golden thread that ran through all the days, making them bright. She woke in the morning, cheerful and hopeful, for she did not fear now to hear his voice in anger or complaint. Her mother's eyes were no longer weary with sleeplessness or weeping, though they were grave and anxious sometimes still. Her father was often silent and gloomy, and not easily pleased; but he was not giving himself up to the indulgence of that terrible sin, and her mother was not living in daily dread of

what might befall them all. Times must grow brighter with them now, she thought; and she sang like the birds in the spring sunshine.

There was another thing that gave Serena pleasure about this time. A very little thing it may seem, but it came to her out of her father's changed life, and was a great thing to her. Besides, it was pleasant in itself. For it is natural, and not wrong, that young people should take pleasure in the sight and possession of pretty things. So Serena felt pleasure, and something more, when one night there were brought home several large parcels which her father and mother had purchased; and to her astonished eyes were displayed material for summer clothing for them all.

Of course it is very foolish and wrong, when, as the hymn says:

"The garments meant to hide  
Our parents shame, provoke our pride."

And it is true that undue love of dress, among young and old, is a sin that sadly prevails; and that it is the cause of so many other sins, and so much unhappiness in the world, that it cannot be too decidedly checked, or too carefully guarded against. But Serena's delight in her pretty dresses was something quite different.

She never had cared very much about her appearance, or fretted when her clothes were shabby and worn. Still, it did seem nice to wear

a dress that was not faded, nor scant, nor unseasonable. But better than that, these new purchases stood to her as a token of her father's safety; as a promise of the coming back of the old happy days. So, no wonder she took much pleasure in them.

The garden work was begun early this year. Long before the ground could be touched, the fence was repaired, the currant bushes were trimmed, and several other jobs done, which made the little brown house seem more like home than it had ever done yet; and the time of their return to Maybrook seemed farther and farther away. There was pain in the thought, but it was not all pain. They could bear the thought of separation from their old friends and home better, now that life was beginning to look bright to them again; and they were looking forward to a happy summer.

The garden was in good progress, then, a wide border being left for Mr. Crawthorn's seeds and roots, and Serena worked in it with her father, busily and happily, during many a summer morning. For they did not always work silently now. It was quite like old times again, Serena told her mother one morning; for they had spoken of many a trifle, lightly and pleasantly as they used to do. And so the days passed along.

Serena had never gone to school in Dunwater; but they began to speak of it now, which made it

seem more and more, she thought, as if this was to be their home always. It was sad enough to think that they might never go back to their old home again; but Serena made up her mind that it was best not to think of that, but of the better times which seemed to be becoming more certain every day.

But one day in the beginning of summer, there came a letter to Mrs. Wilbur, bringing very sad news indeed. Her sister, Mrs. Turner, was very ill. It was hardly hoped that she could recover; and she longed so much to see her only sister again, that Sarah, who wrote the letter, begged her aunt, if it were possible, to come to them, if it were only for a few days. This was a great shock to Mrs. Wilbur. She grew very white as she was reading the letter, and when she laid it down she could only say, with great effort,

“Mary is very sick, and wants to see me. I shall go to-morrow.”

If her husband had wished her not to go, he would hardly have tried to prevent her after she said that.

“You will not take the children with you?” said Mr. Wilbur, in a tone which made it something like a question; but something also like a declaration that she was not to do so. But she did not heed his tone.

“No, I don't think it will be best; unless you will go with us.”

But, even before he spoke, his face said this was not to be thought of.

"Nobody wants me there, and I don't want to go. And, besides," he added more gently, "I could not leave Brotherton's without notice. But if you think best to take the children—"

"No," said she, decidedly. "Serena must stay and keep house for you. She can do it as well as I, for a little while. And Frank is best here, while there is sickness at the Hill Farm. You would be lonely without them; and Miss Brent will be close by if anything should happen while you are away."

And so it was arranged. Serena submitted to her mother's decision without murmuring. But her going away was a great trial to her; and she had to try very hard to look bright and content when they all went to the station to see her off. Then her father went to his work, and she went home with little Frank; but she thought it did not look the least like home, now her mother was gone.

But she made up her mind that she would not be unhappy; and when her little brother went to sleep, she had a quiet time to think over all her mother had said to her before she went away, and to remember some other things as well. And though she shed some sorrowful tears, this quiet time did her good; and she was ready to smile brightly by the time the baby woke.

After this, Miss Brent came in for a little while; and her gentle words and ways, quiet and cheerful at the same time, helped her also; and by the time her father came home, without having to try at all, she showed him as bright and cheerful a face as he could wish to see.

So the first day passed, and the second was quite as successful. On the third, Serena after a great many thoughts about it, determined to ask Miss Brent to tea; and, after a great many thoughts, Miss Brent determined to accept the invitation. It seems a very simple thing to have thoughts about; but it was an experiment on Serena's part, and she had her fears as well as her hopes concerning it.

For Mr. Wilbur had always avoided Miss Brent. He never came into the room if he knew she was in it; and if she came in while he was in the house, he sometimes made an excuse for going away, and sometimes he went without any; but he always went, though very likely he could not, even to himself, have given a very good reason for doing so. He either did not like her, or he was afraid of her, or ashamed in her presence, knowing that she must be aware of the life he lived; but that he avoided Miss Brent Serena knew, and no wonder that she hesitated awhile before she asked her to tea.

She was sure he would like Miss Brent if he only knew her well; and she knew that she would do him good, as she had done her mother

and herself, so she took courage to ask her. But what with her doubt as to how her visitor would be received, and her fear lest Miss Brent should suspect what was in her mind, she had rather an uncomfortable time till her father came in.

She need not have been afraid, however, as it turned out. Even if Mr. Wilbur had been in one of his most ungracious moods, he must have softened and brightened as he came into the house that night. On Miss Brent's lap sat little Frank, while his sister knelt on the floor before them, kissing and fondling his rosy feet preparatory to the putting on of a pair of new shoes, which Miss Brent had just made. The little boy was laughing and playing, and enjoying it all; but, as soon as he saw his father, his play and his sister were forgotten, as he struggled to get to him. The clasp of those little clinging arms must have banished all ill-temper from him.

The visit was successful, far beyond Serena's hopes. Miss Brent was rather silent, she thought; but Miss Brent was wise. The less she said, the more Mr. Wilbur felt obliged to say; and they got on very well together. Then, when the tea-things were put away, and baby had fallen asleep in his father's arms, Miss Brent told them some of the events of her past life, that Serena had never heard before, which interested her and her father too; and when Miss Brent rose to go, Serena felt sure that her father



would never again go away because of her coming in.

On the fourth day a letter came from her mother. It did not bring very good news, and yet it was not so bad as it might have been. Mrs. Turner was no worse, though they could hardly say she was better; but while she lingered in this state, Mrs. Wilbur said she would not like to leave her; unless, indeed, she should be very much needed at home.

"Hadn't we better write, and tell her what a good time we are having; so she needn't fret about us," said Serena.

"Why yes, Serena, if you are having a good time," said her father, very much pleased, though he did not care to show it.

"Don't you think we are, father? Of course, not so good as if mother were at home. But we are getting along nicely; and she will feel a great deal better about staying, if she hears that."

He thought there was only one thing that she would dread very much for them while she was away; and a feeling, which was half-shame and half-unreasonable anger, kept him silent.

"I have told her already all about everything; but I might add a line just to say that we have got her letter, and that she need not hurry home for us."

She was holding the open letter in her hand, as she spoke.

"Give me the letter. I will add a line," said her father.

"Oh! do, father. That will be ever so much better," said Serena, putting it into his hand.

It is not likely there would have been anything in it that it would not have been well for her father to see, even if it had not been intended for her cousin's eyes, as well as her mother's. And yet there was that in it which touched him sharply. Every little kind thing he had done, every pleasant word he had spoken, was written down, so that Mrs. Wilbur might see it and be content about them. He read it; and a keen pang of shame and regret smote him, to think how few kind words and deeds they had had to rejoice over for the last few years of his life, and theirs.

He did not send the letter away by the morning mail, as Serena hoped he might. All day, while his hands were busy, he thought of it; first with shame, and then with sorrow; and then, at night, out of a softened heart, he wrote a line or two, which came to his wife "as cold water to a thirsty soul." It was only a word or two, blurred and unsightly in comparison with the fair round characters of his little daughter; but she would not part with it to-day for untold gold.

So the days passed on till seven had passed. Quiet, uneventful days they were, with little to distinguish one from the other; till, at last,

a night came which changed all. It had been a busier day than usual, or her little brother had been more exacting than usual; for Serena needed every minute to get through her work, and make herself neat before the time of her father's coming home. Indeed, the usual time was past already, when she carried little Frank upstairs to make him nice too; and she was so busy talking with him as she went here and there, that she never heard a sound till she came down stairs again, and then she saw a sight that made her heart stand still. Her father was being brought into the house in the arms of two men, and one of them was Michael Quin. She did not move nor speak a word, till Mr. Quin turned and saw her.

"Oh! the poor little girl," cried he; and she saw that his eyes were full of pity for her.

For just a minute it seemed to grow dark about her, and the floor seemed unsteady beneath her feet; but she did not cry out, nor lose hold of her little brother, and then she heard Mrs. Quin say, sharply:

"The sense that men have! To bring him in here without a word to the child. Look at her face." Then she found that she was sitting down, and that Mrs. Quin was trying to take baby from her.

"There is nothing to be frightened about. He is not very much hurt, I hope," said a voice which she knew to be that of Dr. James, though

she did not see him. She heard her father call faintly, "Serena," and then she saw his face.

He was hurt then, not intoxicated! Oh! how her heart sprang up at the knowledge. It might be bad, but not so bad as that would have been. If they had told her he was dying, it would hardly have been so bad as her first fears. She was well and strong in a minute again; though she had grown faint and sick at the first sight of his helplessness. She was quite able to get all that was needed when Dr. Gilmour came; and as thoughtful and hopeful as one could desire a nurse to be.

It was bad enough. The scaffolding of the new bridge on which her father, and several other men, had been working, had given way; and they had fallen into the water. But Mr. Wilbur had struck the projecting stone-work in his fall, and was seriously injured, as it proved, when Dr. Gilmour came to examine him. One leg was broken just below the knee; and one side was hurt, they could scarcely tell how severely. Still, unless there were internal injuries beyond what he at present thought, there was no danger, the doctor said; but that he would be well again soon.

"It is bad enough," said Dr. James, intending to comfort Serena; "but not so bad as it might have been."

"No, not half so bad," said Serena, earnestly; and then she added, "I am glad—so glad, and

thankful;" and then she cried a little for the first time, which was not very surprising. By-and-bye she said :

" I am going to write to mother. When they were bringing him in I thought—I was afraid—Oh! it might have been a great deal worse. But there is no use talking, I could never make you understand, and I don't want to either."

He understood her well enough by this time, though he said nothing; and she said no more. It was a great deal easier for her to write to her mother, " Father has had a fall from the bridge, and is hurt," than it would have been to tell the sadder story of his falling into sin. It seemed to her that she could not have written that to her mother, and she kept saying to herself, " I am glad, I am thankful," till the trouble that had come upon them seemed light and easy to bear. But there was more trouble to come.

That night the doctor came again; and while he was there Mr. Brotherton came, and with him Mr. Musgrave, the engineer who had made the plan of the bridge. They were grieved at what had happened, and begged Dr. Gilmour to consider them responsible for all that might be needed by the suffering man. They were inclined to smile at the idea of his being left all night to the care of the little girl who had opened the door. Dr. Gilmour did not smile, for he knew her better. But he looked grave when he came from the patient's room, and told

her that the watch must not be hers that night. All her strength would be needed for the days that were before her; and she must be content to sleep at night, at least till her mother came home. Serena listened quietly while the doctor went on to say, that he should be able to tell better in the morning how much her father was hurt; and though she remembered afterwards that he looked grave and anxious as he spoke, it never came into her mind that already he had begun to fear the worst.

Michael Quin watched that night, or rather the patient watched; and the weary Michael slept. Dr. Gilmour looked grave when he saw him in the morning. He was not suffering much pain, but he was restless and feverish and not at ease. He seemed better as the day wore on, and slept a little now and then; but he always woke with a start, telling Serena that he had been dreaming that he was working on the bridge, and that he had fancied himself falling again. Little Frank was in the room now and then; and his father noticed him, and talked with him a little, and the long day ended, and night came at last.

Serena would fain have staid all night with her father, as he also seemed to wish; but she did as the doctor bade her, and went to bed; for the day which had begun to her before the sun rose, had made her more weary than ever she remembered to have been before. That

night the patient slept better; but it was not a natural sleep, and he did not wake refreshed, as Serena hoped he might when she looked in upon him in the early morning.

This day was even wearier than the last had been. The patient's face was haggard, and his eyes were wandering and anxious; and he asked Serena a great many times when she thought her mother would be home; and once he asked her if she thought she would be sure to come. Serena quite laughed at that, and it was the best answer that she could have given; for he laughed too, thinking what a very foolish thing it was to ask; and after that, for a little while, he was more at ease.

But, by-and-bye, the old restlessness came back again; and when night came, and he had taken the opiate that the doctor had left, he held Serena's hand, and begged her not to go away.

"If the doctor says I may stay, I will," said Serena; "if he thinks it will be better for you. No, I am not very tired, and it would not matter anyways; for mother will be here to-morrow, perhaps to-night, and then I can rest."

The doctor did not object, for he saw how necessary it was that the sick man should have rest. Serena was to lie down beside him; but she was not to talk to him.

"And you are not to try to keep awake, child; but sleep as much as you can," said the doctor.

So they took the light away, and left them.

“Serena,” said her father, in a little while, “give me your hand. I seem always to be going to fall, and then I wake.”

She took his hand firmly in hers, but did not speak.

“Are you very tired, child? Sing to me as you used to sing to your mother.”

She sang a little hymn, the first that came into her mind; and then another, and then they both fell asleep.

So the night wore away, and the day broke. Then Serena saw, or dreamed that she saw, her mother’s face bending down over her; but she did not speak to disturb her father. It was broad daylight before she stirred again; and then she heard the doctor’s voice saying that her father was better, and that little Serena was the best nurse of them all.

“I don’t believe even mother knows what a good nurse her little girl is,” said her father; and then Serena turned to see her mother.

“Oh! mother, I am so glad!” She could not say another word for a long time. She did not need. Her mother knew well all that could not be spoken; and in the midst of their trouble, great as it was, they rejoiced together.



## CHAPTER XI.

“TO THE UTTERMOST.”

**D**URING the first two or three days after the trouble came, it seemed to Serena that all would be well again if only her mother were come home. She thought the restlessness and uneasiness of her father were merely caused by the impatience with which he looked for her return; and for a few days after she came back, it almost seemed as if she were right. But the improvement was only for a time. He never slept well, even with the help of strong opiates; but tossed, and started, and cried out in his sleep. It was in part owing to the jar and shock his system had received when he fell, the doctor told Mrs. Wilbur; and it was in part the consequence of his former habits, though he did not tell her that. But nothing could be plainer than that the injured man was not getting better, but rather worse.

The neighbours were very kind in the many ways that are so needed in a time of sickness. Mrs. Quin was more than kind. If these strangers had been of her own blood and kindred, she could not have done more for them.

At first, she wondered greatly at Mrs. Wilbur. She could hardly believe in the reality of a sorrow that did not find expression in words and tears. But as the days went on, and she saw the ceaseless watch kept over the sick man by his wife and child, and read in the faces, growing daily paler, and in the eyes more full of anxious pain, how they loved him, and longed to save him, and how they suffered for his sake, she devoted herself to them with an earnestness that never slackened while they needed help.

Mr. Brotherton came sometimes, and Mr. Musgrave, who had more time at his disposal, came often. Mr. Wilbur's weekly wages were paid all this time as regularly as though he had been working on the bridge; so that there was no immediate anxiety on that score. Mrs. Turner still continued ill, and needing much care, or Sarah would have come to them. But Serena never thought of being in a strange land now; for even in Maybrook they could not have found kinder friends than they found here.

Serena was her mother's chief help and comfort at this time; always hopeful, always mindful of what was to be done. Sometimes she went to the town on necessary errands; and once or twice she went with her little brother to the Mount Garden, because the doctor told her she could never continue to do for her father all that he needed, unless she kept herself well and strong by going out into the open air.

But wherever she went, or whatever she saw, her thoughts were in the darkened room, where her father lay. Through all the pleasant summer sounds, came the voice of his restless moanings and feverish tossings to and fro.

Mrs. Wilbur never left him through the day; but at night, it was Serena who did for him the little that could be done to ease his pain and weariness. It was his little girl who bathed his head, and held the cup to his lips; who sang to him, and soothed him, and cared for him always. If he was wakeful, he was not content unless he could see her; and if he slumbered, it was always with her hand clasped in his. Whoever came and went, or waited and watched, Serena was always there; always alert and cheerful, though sometimes anxious and afraid.

But he did not grow better. The weather grew warm; and do what they might it was not easy to keep the heat out of the little brown house. For a time they thought it was the heat that made him so languid and weak; but he did not rally when the days became cooler, and Mrs. Wilbur began to watch the doctor's grave looks more anxiously. The sick man watched them too; and from the questions he asked, and from words he let fall, they knew he was beginning to think how it was all to end.

For a long time it never came into Serena's mind that her father was going to die. She knew that he might have long to suffer, and

that he might never perhaps be quite well again. But, sitting by his bed-side during these long wakeful nights, she used to dream and plan about the happy life they should have together, when the time came that her mother should not be anxious about her father any more.

One night, she was startled out of her sleep by the voice of her father. He was not speaking to her, but to himself; saying how tired he was, how restless and uneasy.

“Shall I sing to you a little while, father?” said Serena, raising herself up.

Are you awake, dear? Yes, you may sing. Sing something new,—something that I never heard before. I am so tired of everything.”

Serena paused a moment to think.

“Well, I will, father; one I never sung to you before. Mother likes it very much,” and she began:

“Oh! eyes that are weary, and hearts that are sore,  
Look off unto Jesus, and sorrow no more;  
For the light of His countenance shineth so bright,  
That on earth, as in Heaven, there need be no night.”

“Your mother likes that, does she?” asked he, when she had finished the first verse. “She knows what that means. ‘Eyes that are weary and hearts that are sore.’ Ah! I am weary, too;” and he moaned and tossed his arms about. Serena did not answer, but sang on.

“Your hymns are all alike,” said her father, when she stopped. “It’s Jesus,—always Jesus.”

"Why yes, father; there is no one else, you know, to help us when trouble comes. There is no one else to trust to at any time."

"When trouble comes," repeated her father. "It has come to me. I wish He would help me."

"He will, father. He is helping you, I think. He is making you patient to bear your trouble."

"Patient! I am not patient. Why! there are times when it's as much as I can do to keep from crying out and saying horrible things."

"But, father," said Serena, hesitatingly, "a little while ago, maybe, you would have spoken them."

A little while ago. Yes, I suppose so. Oh! what a fool I have been! And now I know that I never shall be well again. I am going to die."

"Father," said Serena, very much startled, "are you worse? Shall I call mother?"

"No, dear. She couldn't do anything for me. I am no worse than usual, but that is bad enough." In a little while he added:

"I used to say I would never go to Maybrook, and now I know I never shall."

Serena was greatly troubled. She had never seen her father like this before. She was never to encourage him to talk at night, the doctor had told her; but just now she didn't know what to do. Before she had time to think what was best, he asked:

"What was it you said a little while ago, about help when trouble comes."

"About Jesus," said Serena, eagerly; "oh, yes!

there is no one else, and He never fails to help those who trust in Him. The Bible says so, and mother says it has always proved true to her.

“Oh! your mother. That is quite different. She is a good woman,—always was. It would be strange if she didn’t get help.”

“But mother never expected help because she was good; but because—well, because Jesus has promised it—and because He loves to give it.”

“Oh! well. It comes to the same thing in the end,” said her father, wearily. “Your mother and I stand on very different ground, where the Lord is concerned.”

It was quite true in one sense, Serena knew; and yet, in another sense, it was not true; and she tried hard to disentangle her thoughts about it.

“I only know that Jesus loves poor sinners, and that He has promised to receive all who come to Him. I don’t think goodness has anything to do with it. I am only a little girl, and I don’t know how to say it right; but I know He said himself, that He ‘came to seek and to save the lost.’”

“To save the lost!” He had heard the words, doubtless, many a time. He had heard them as one hears words in which he has no concern. But they came to him with a meaning now. If ever a man was lost, in every sorrowful sense, surely he was. He repeated the words in a heavy, helpless way several times, and then he was for a long time silent. And then Serena

sang again,—a hymn that must have brought back to him some memory of the past :

“ Like sheep we went astray,  
And left the fold of God ;  
Each wandering in a different way,  
And all the downward road,”—

and so on to the end. After this he slept, or seemed to sleep; for he did not speak again till morning dawned.

Long anxious weeks followed one another. Serena hardly knew how the time passed. The days and nights seemed to run into one another, till she lost all count of the days of the week, and all thought of what might be going on beyond the room where her father lay. Sometimes, when she looked out in the morning, she saw the river sparkling in the sunshine; and sometimes it was dimpled by the wind, or the falling rain; and this made nearly all the difference.

Even her little brother was seldom with them now, to break the monotony of anxiety and pain. Miss Brent kept him for the most part in her own rooms, or in the garden.

And so week after week passed on, bringing no change for the better, as far as health of body was concerned. It grew plainer every day that the sick man would never rise from his bed again. Oh! what a time of suffering it was to him! All the sad, remorseful thoughts of the poor man as he lay there could never be told. Looking back over the last few years of his life, he realized how blind, how foolish he had been.

And now it was all past. It could never be recalled, never atoned for, never forgotten,—as sometimes of late, he had hoped it might be, in the changed life he was trying to live. It was all past. His life had been wasted—worse than wasted—and now it was slipping away from him; and what was to come after?

Day after day his wife sat beside him, speaking faithful, earnest, hopeful words, when he was able to listen to them, and pleading with God in his behalf in the long times of silence that came between. "I will not let Thee go! I *will not* let Thee go, except Thou bless me," was her heart's unceasing cry. She did not ask for his life. All thoughts of her children's need, her own helplessness, were lost in her intense desire to know that all was well with his passing soul; and for this she prayed as one that would not be denied.

Others cared for him too, and came to see him—the minister of the church which Serena and her mother had attended, and Mr. Musgrave. To them, especially to Mr. Musgrave, who was wise with the wisdom which comes with earnest love to Christ, he listened always, sometimes he listened eagerly, as though he caught a glimpse of what they longed to show him; but he said little in reply. Even when questioned he was slow to answer; but it was easy to see that his silence did not arise from indifference, or because he was unaware of his danger.

It was different when he was alone with



Serena. Most of those summer nights they passed together; and when he was kept awake by pain or restlessness, he used to speak to her of his sorrow for the past, and of all his doubts and fears for the future; and more than to any other it was given to his little daughter to comfort him, and lead him to the light.

One night she had been reading to him the fifteenth chapter of Luke's gospel. He seemed to be sleeping when the reading was ended, but in a little time he said:

"What was that you told me one night about Jesus saving the lost? Don't you remember?"

"Yes, father. He said it Himself: 'The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.' That means all of us, I think, father."

"All? Do you mean that you and your mother, and I, are all to be saved the same way!"

"Yes, father. There's only one way and one Saviour. 'He saves His people from their sins.'"

He regarded her a moment with a look in which there was some wonder, and a great deal of love and sorrow.

"Your sins and mine! Do you suppose they mean the same thing?"

"I suppose so, father. I am only a little girl, and I have not lived so long as you have. But I don't suppose that makes any difference."

"What sins can a child like you have to answer for? It is very different with me. You could never understand."

Serena understood what he meant better than he thought; but she did not know what to answer for a moment.

“But, father, it is because Jesus died. I don’t suppose even a little child could have been saved, if He had not died. And Jesus is God, you know; and when it comes to what He can do, there is no such thing as hard or easy. It is all easy to Him. Don’t you remember it is said, ‘He is able to save to the uttermost those who come unto Him;’ and somewhere it says, ‘He saves the chief of sinners.’” There was a pause.

“I seem to see it,” said he in a low voice. “Jesus is God, and surely nothing can go beyond *His* uttermost. ‘The chief of sinners.’ I am one of these.”

He was silent a long time after that,—so long that Serena fell asleep; and perhaps he slept too. But just as the day was breaking, she was wakened by his voice:

“Serena, say it to me again, all that you said about the *uttermost*, and the chief of sinners. I seem to get a glimpse of how it all might be; but it passes away out of sight, and I lose it. Tell me all about it again.”

She told him then, and many times after that, of Christ’s love to poor sinners; and how this love works in their salvation. She repeated, over and over, the story of the Cross, in a child’s words;—simple, because she was a child; but clear and appropriate, because she was a child

whom God's Spirit had taught. And the truth, unincumbered by names and terms of which, in his youth, he had wilfully made stones of stumbling, went home to his heart, as in the days of his youth it had never done. Though she was hardly conscious of the honour and blessedness, God's Holy Spirit was making her His messenger to her father's heart. For He did speak to him with power; and the hard heart grew soft, the blind eyes were opened, and the lips long dumb were made to sound his Saviour's praise.

The rejoicings that spring up round a death-bed change like this, must ever be with trembling. "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living," were the words that rose in Mrs. Wilbur's heart many times a day. Through the weariness of many a day, and the darkness of many a night, she had clung to God's simple word and promise, as the drowning cling to the hand held out to save.

And the time came when the hope grew stronger than the fears; when, in the joy of a grateful heart, she could not find words to praise the love which so surely and so safely was bringing the wanderer home. They did not speak much of the past; nor, indeed, of the future; for he grew weaker every day. Once he said:

"You never gave me up, even at the worst time. It helps me to understand how God can

have thought of mercy toward me, lost as I seemed to be.’

As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts,” said his wife, softly. “It is well for us that it is so.”

But the peace of the dying man did not flow full and deep. Painful recollections, remembrances of sinful deeds, of good gifts despised, of warnings set at naught, of a lifetime wasted, filled him with vague fears for the future, when weakness and weariness pressed upon him.

“I seem to see how it may be, that even I should be saved. I seem to have hold of the Cross at times ; but it slips away, and then I am afraid.” He said this when he was one night alone with Serena ; and she answered him, as she had done many times before.

“But I don’t think you need be afraid, father. It is Jesus who is holding you ; and don’t you remember ? ‘None shall pluck them out of my hand.’ And you know, dear, ‘He saves to the uttermost,’ even ‘the chief of sinners.’”

“To the uttermost !” “The chief of sinners !” Whatever else might fall unheeded on his ear as the end drew near, these words moved him always. When his lips could no longer utter the name of wife and child, they heard him, between his broken slumbers, murmuring, ‘To the uttermost.’ They were the last he heard on earth—the last he uttered.

He died one summer morning, with his wife's hand clasped in his, and his little daughter's head on the pillow beside him.

"'He saves to the uttermost,' father dear," said the child; her white lips almost touching the cheek of the dying.

There was a sudden lighting of the changed face; a gleam in the eyes over which the film of death was gathering, and he said joyfully:

"I see it now! 'To the very uttermost!'"

And then, in a minute or two, Miss Brent's hand was laid softly over the closed eyelids, and Serena was lifted in Mr. Musgrave's arms, and carried from the chamber of death.

It was all over now, the watching and waiting; the prayer, the longing that would not be denied. Now they must leave him in God's hand, and sit silent—silent, yet hopeful; knowing that His word is sure, who hath said, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out."

Kind friends did what might be done for the living and the dead. They prepared him for the grave, and carried him away; and let the sunlight into the room that had been hushed and darkened so long. They did not bury him in Dunwater. Far away, in the beautiful graveyard of Maybrook, were lying his father and mother, and a little sister who had died when he was a child. So they carried him away to lay him down beside them there.

## CHAPTER XII.

### GOING HOME.

**S**ERENA'S sojourn in "a strange land" had now come to an end. She was going back to the old home, and there were many who loved her, waiting to welcome her there. So it could not be but a glad time to her; but it was a sorrowful time too. For there were friends who loved her in the home she had found so far away; and sad partings must come before the joyful welcomes.

But for a little while after her father's death, she was too spent and weary to be very glad or very sorrowful for anything. For a little while it seemed to her that nothing in the world mattered much, except to get safely through it to heaven at last.

Of course there is a sense in which this is true; and the knowledge that it is so, comes sooner or later to all; but it is not true in the sense that it seemed true to the weary little Serena. For though there is much to suffer in the world, there is also much to enjoy; and, above all, there is much to do; and though Mrs. Wilbur watched her little daughter somewhat anxiously for a time, she knew that the old

cheerful, helpful spirit would come back, and that she would be wiser and better, and more useful all her life, for the trouble that this sorrowful summer had brought.

As for the mother, it would be useless to attempt to tell all the thoughts that passed through her mind. Young and happy people, whose hearts have never been deeply stirred by such trouble as hers, could never be made to understand how she sorrowed, even while she rejoiced. Yes, she rejoiced, for had not her prayers been answered? Not in the way in which she had hoped, or for which she had striven, but in a better way, doubtless, since it was God's way; and in a manner which was not at all touched by the weariness and despondency that fell for a few days on little Serena, she realized that it mattered little for all the rest, so that heaven was won at last.

They did not say much to each other these first few days, either about the past or the future. Indeed, Miss Brent had nearly all the talk to herself. Never, during all the time they had known her, had her friendship been so precious and necessary to them as now, when they were about to lose her. For Miss Brent was not going with them, as they had sometimes pleased themselves by saying she must certainly do, when the time should come for them to go home again. Their home, for a while at least, must be at Mr. Turner's; and they did

not know very well where it would be then, except that it would be in Maybrook ; for they did not know whether, in these changed circumstances, they would be able to keep the old place or not. So Mrs. Wilbur could not urge her friend to cast in her lot with her as yet ; but they all hoped that, at no distant day, it might be so arranged for the pleasure of them all.

But, in the meantime, they must part. No wonder Miss Brent was sad ; for she loved them all dearly, and she would be left very lonely when they should go away.

“Are you quite well, Miss Brent ?” said Serena, suddenly, as they were all sitting together one afternoon.

They had been very quiet for a long time ; and Miss Brent was sitting, not working, but with her hands lying idly on her lap, as Serena had never seen her sit before. Her eyes were turned away to the sky, and the far-away hills ; and there was a look on her face that startled the child while she gazed. It was gone when she turned round to say she was quite well. But Serena could not forget it.

Her usual look—the look by which her friends knew her—was one that told of great and sore trouble quite outlived. Her look now was as though a trouble had fallen upon her, which possibly she might not outlive. Serena could not put it to herself in this way ; but she felt all the same that something was amiss, and as she



sat watching her, it came into her mind that Miss Brent had changed greatly of late. She looked ill and wan, and her hair was no longer worn in the pretty way that had pleased Serena long ago. It was lying close down over her pale cheeks; and sometimes, of late, it had been covered with a plain close cap, which changed her appearance utterly. She had taken to her crutch again at times, too, though Serena had hardly thought about it all till now. But as she sat pondering, and putting all these things together, her face grew very grave indeed. Miss Brent turning, met her look.

"Why, what would you have?" said she. "Not surely that I should look bright and smiling, when my friends are going to leave me?"

"Is that all that is the matter?" asked Serena, wistfully.

"Is not that enough?"

"I don't know," said Serena, gravely.

"Only listen to her. One would think she saw something strange in my looks; she regards me so wistfully. What can the child mean?"

Miss Brent turned to Mrs. Wilbur, but she was looking grave too; and she said:

"What is it, dear? You have heard no bad news from your brother, I hope?"

"No, the best of news, as far as he is concerned. He is well and happy—too happy to need me—that is all."

And then she added, after a little:

“No, that is not quite all. I have no new trouble; but something has brought the remembrance of old times back to me, and sorrows which I thought I had outlived, hurt me a little. But it will only be for a little while.”

“I wish the way were clear for you to go with us at once,” said Mrs. Wilbur.

“I wish it were, dear; but it is not: and it would be if my going would be the best thing for us all. But you are not to think that I am going to fret, or be otherwise than quite content—quite at peace again—after a little while.”

There was something more to be said, they all felt. But Miss Brent was silent for a long time after that; and Serena could not help sending toward her many a wistful glance as she sat there, so unlike herself; with idle hands, and sad, averted eyes. But this did not last long. I can scarcely tell how it came about; but when little Frank grew tired, and fell asleep, and it was all quiet in the little parlour, Miss Brent told them the story of her life.

Some time I also may tell this story, but not here. If it had been possible for Mrs. Wilbur to love and honour her more than she did before, she must have done so now; and, more than ever, she desired that they might, at no distant day, make their home together.

The time of their departure drawing very near now, Serena thought she would go and bid good-bye to all her friends, and to all the

pleasant places where she had gone with her little brother. But somehow the days passed on, and she did not care to go. The Mount garden would have been neglected like the rest, if her mother had not sent her out one fair morning to take her last look of it. She would have needed no sending if Miss Gilmour had been at home; for she longed to see her, and to hear about Mrs. Seaton, who had not come to The Mount this summer, as she usually had done. But Miss Gilmour had been away for some time; and, for a week or two, the rest of the family had been away also; so when Serena went it was with no hope of seeing any-one, except, perhaps, Mr. Crawthorn.

The garden was quite deserted; that is, it was silent from all sound of voices; but it was so beautiful in Serena's eyes, after her long absence from it, that it seemed as though she could not gaze enough upon it. It was far on in September now, and on some of the trees the leaves were growing sere and thin; and some were glowing in the autumn crimson and gold. But in the sheltered garden there was little trace of the frost yet; and it had never seemed so beautiful to Serena, as it did on this last day.

Any place must have looked beautiful in such bright yet softened sunshine, and amid air so mild, and sweet, and still; and Serena went up and down the walks, seeing the flowers around her, and the sky, and the far-away hills and

woods, like a child in a dream. Even the thought that she was seeing it all for the last time had no power to spoil it to her; weary at last, however, though very quiet and peaceful, she went to rest in the summer-house awhile.

There were brown and crimson sprays among the vines that covered it, and there were spots of sunshine within, where, in the summer-time, it used to be so dim and cool; and as she sat down on the little seat, where she had so often sat at Mrs. Seaton's side, Serena felt a little sad and strange in the changed aspect of the place. By-and-by the sad thoughts that were passing through her mind, as to whether she should ever see Mrs. Seaton, or the rest of her kind friends again, changed, and passed into a strange dream, as she drooped her head on her hands, and fell fast asleep.

She did not sleep long, however. She thought in her dream, that some one called her name; and she woke as she strove to answer, to see, not Miss Gilmour, as she had thought, but Miss Gilmour's mother. She rose in some confusion, for she was more shy of Mrs. Gilmour than of any of The Mount people; but the lady stooped down and kissed her, and then Serena saw Dr. James, and her confusion was at an end. He had always been kind to the little stranger; and he had been kinder than ever, since she had been sorrowful and not quite well. She was greatly surprised, however, at Mrs. Gilmour's

kiss, and at the softened voice in which she spoke to her; for though she had been kind to her for little Katie's sake, Serena had never considered this lady as one of her special friends, as from the very first Mrs. Seaton and Miss Katie had been. So Serena stood shyly before her without speaking, very glad in her heart that Dr. James was there too.

"Have you been ill, dear?" said the lady, sitting down and drawing the child down beside her.

"No, not very ill; but not quite well—a little tired—that is all."

"And are you really going away so soon?" asked Dr. James.

"In a few days. I came to bid good-bye to the garden. I have had such happy times here." She sighed and smiled too, and then she asked, "Has Miss Gilmour come home?"

"Yes; she is not quite well. You must come in and see her before you go home. She has something to give you," said Mrs. Gilmour, and then she rose suddenly and went away. Dr. James followed her, but came back in a minute, looking very sad.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Serena; and then a sudden thought came to her, as she watched Mrs. Gilmour's black dress disappearing down the path, and, startled, she added:

"Is it—is it grandmamma Seaton?"

Dr. James did not answer in words; but she

knew by his face that her dear old friend was gone, and she sat down again without a word.

"When?" she asked, after a little pause; and when he answered, she repeated—"A week! A whole week in heaven!" and then it was a long time before either of them spoke again. Serena looked out over the scene on which they had gazed together so many times. It seemed only the other day that her friend had been here. Where was she now? The eyes that Serena lifted to the tranquil sky, had no shade of sorrow in them, only wonder and joy for the friend who was now to be for ever in the presence of the Lord.

"We cannot grieve for her," said Dr. James.

"Oh, no! She was ready and waiting—glad to go. It was that she was looking forward to all these years. Her husband is there, and her little children—and Jesus is there." Serena then rose, and, coming close to him, she said softly:

"I am grieved for you, Dr. James, and for the rest; but not for her."

"No; it is well with her. But everything seems changed. Half the pleasure I took in anything was because of the pleasure it gave her."

"But she may take pleasure in that still—pleasure in your pleasure, I mean. I wonder if she sees us now."

"Who knows!" said the young man, gravely.

"The angels know some things about us on earth," said Serena; "and perhaps the saints can

see us, and be glad for us, only it would be for other things, because they see clearer now.’

“What other things?” asked Dr. James.

“Better things, I mean. You told me once that you cared for your prizes, and your gold medal, and your success, because it pleased the others—and especially Mrs. Seaton. But now, I suppose, these things would seem little to her. You know it is over ‘one sinner that repenteth’ that the angels rejoice.”

It was with no thought of giving him a lesson that she said it, but he felt it none the less for that. Not even his mother was more dearly loved than she had been who might now be looking down on him from heaven. Her lovely Christian life had proved to him the blessedness of those who trust in the Lord. Her last words to him had been—“Come to me there, beloved!” and ever since it had seemed to him the only thing greatly to be desired.

“I would give all the world if it were mine to know that I should go to her there,” he said to himself, but to Serena he said nothing. Indeed there was little more said after that. They went round the garden together, lingering here and there; and when they came to the gate from which could be seen all the garden, and all the country beyond, Serena turned for a last look.

“Perhaps I may never see it all again; but I shall never forget it—*never*. Oh, how beautiful

it is, and how happy I have been here!" she sighed; but she added, smiling, "I am so glad I have all this to remember."

They went into the house, where Miss Gilmour was expecting them. Serena had not seen her for some time. They had both watched by a death-bed since then; and, for a little while, neither spoke.

The "something" which Miss Gilmour had to give her was "grandmamma's hymn-book." When she saw this token of her friend, the cover a little worn, and the tinted leaves a little soiled from frequent turning, the faded ribbon, wrought with a baby's golden hair, still hanging as a mark between them, she never thought about her tears. They rushed in a flood, that she could not have stayed if she had tried ever so much; and Miss Gilmour let them flow on.

"But there is not one of them for her. I am only glad for her," she tried to say; "and we shall see her again. It would be wrong to grieve for her. I loved her dearly, too, Miss Gilmour."

"And she loved you. She bade me say she would expect you there."

It was all she could do to say it.

"It seems wrong to take it from you," said Serena, fingering the old book tenderly. "Are you quite willing that I should have it, Miss Gilmour?"

"It was sent to you, love. I have other things that were her's; and James has her Bible."



They had much to say to each other, which need not be written here. Miss Gilmour told Serena of the last bright days of her grand-mamma's life—which even the slow, sure coming of the angel of death could not darken; and Serena told her in few words, how her father's long suffering had ended in joyful hope at last. And then they wandered away to pleasant things they had to remember and to hope for; and then Serena said it was time to go. She bade her friend "good-bye" with tears, but with smiles too, for Miss Gilmour said:

"We shall be sure to meet again;" and Serena repeated, "We shall be sure to meet again."

And if, looking into that beautiful pale face, it came into her mind, that the meeting might not be till they had passed through the gate into the "Golden City," there did not seem anything very mournful in that. For was not heaven near, and time short, and were not the meetings and partings of earth of little moment, in view of the blessed home, where partings are no more.

There were other partings after this—some of them sad enough. Mrs. Quin grieved sincerely for their going away, and so did her husband. There was nothing he would not have done for them in these last days; and the packing and moving, which would have been a troublesome affair left to themselves, was scarcely felt, because of his efficient and timely help.

"Sure, it will be a long time before he can do

enough to pay you for all that you have done for us, you and your little children," said Nora.

"I am sure I don't know how."

"Well, I can't tell you," said Nora. And yet she did tell her something of it. She told her of the time when Mike took the pledge, and what led him to doing it, and how he afterwards set his heart on getting Mr. Wilbur into the employment of Mr. Brotherton; and though she did not mean to tell it, she yet betrayed how he had cared for him, and watched over him, and helped him many a time; and, as she listened, Mrs. Wilbur could only say, again and again:

"God will reward you."

"He has done it already," said Nora, heartily, "a hundred and a hundred times."

When they parted from Miss Brent, it was with a certain promise on her part, that, if it were possible, she would visit them in the following summer; and they thought of a great many pleasant things that might happen to keep them together after that. So the good-byes were spoken pretty cheerfully, considering all things. But when they were fairly out of the house, Serena seemed to realize for the first time how much harder the parting must be for their friend than it was for them. She, and her mother, and her little brother, were going away together. Some of the pain of parting must pass away in the joy of the welcome awaiting them. But how sad and solitary Miss Brent must be! She

nodded and smiled as she met the child's gaze; but there was such a look of pain in her kind eyes, and she seemed so frail, and helpless, and lonely, standing there in the door, leaning on her crutch, that seeing her, Serena burst into sudden weeping, crying out:

"Oh! Miss Brent! I can't bear to leave you so."

But the very last moment was come. They could do nothing now, but go away and leave their friend to sit down and weep alone.

This was not the very last "good-bye." At the station they found Dr. Gilmour, and little Katie; and, with them, Dr. James. There was only time for a word or two, but they were very pleasant words to remember; and their faces were the very last that Serena saw in Dunwater. By-and-by, when she looked up again they were passing between the long fields that had seemed so endless to her two years ago. There were the meadows still fresh and green, and the bare grey hills, with their brilliant crown of forest trees; there were the long, low farmhouses, with clumps of hollyhocks and asters before the windows, and the children playing about the doors; and if anyone had told Serena that the last two years and all that had come and gone with them was only a dream, for the first minute she would hardly have doubted that the words were true.

But then there was the remembrance of Miss Brent, leaning on her crutch, and trying to smile



RETURNING HOME.



on them as they came away; there were the faces of the kind friends at the station, and the hope of meeting Frank and Sarah, and all the rest, and of seeing Maybrook again. And besides, here was little Frank, and her mother; and Serena had to put down her face on her mother's shoulder to hide her tears again.

"It is because I don't know whether to be most glad or sorry, mother," said she; "but I think it will be all gladness, by-and-by."

It was the story of little Serena in a strange land that I promised to tell; and now my story is done. It must be left to my young readers to imagine the happy meeting with their friends at Maybrook, and the happy life she lived "ever after" as the fairy tales say.

That the "happy ever after" came true, and will come true to the end, they need not doubt; for Serena is one of those concerning whom God has given his angels charge. She is one of those to whom it has been said: "Because thou hast made the Lord which is my refuge, even the Most High thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling."

Not that from henceforth all that we call evil shall be averted from her; sickness and suspense, watching and weariness, fears for the living, tears for the dead. It would be wonderful if, in a world like this, she should be kept from all

these. But not half so wonderful as that which shall certainly happen to her, and to all those "whose trust is in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." She may not be kept from trouble, but she shall be kept safe in the midst of it. She may be weak and weary often; sick, and sorrowful, and bereaved. Yet none of these things, not even death itself, can really harm her; and so the "ever after" shall go beyond time, to the other side of the swelling flood, and little Serena shall be happy for evermore.



