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Mr. and Mrs. Mansfield encouraging Sarah.

See page 97.

SARAH'S HOME :

The Story of a Poor Girl

WHOSE FATHER WAS A DRUNKARD AND WHOSE
MOTHER WAS UNKIND.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"SELF-WILLED SUSIE," ETC.

THREE ILLUSTRATIONS.

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SARAH'S HOME.

CHAPTER I.

SARAH'S HOME DESCRIBED.

THE readers of "Self-willed Susie"* will remember that poor SARAH ROSS had an intemperate father, a coarse, ill-natured mother, and, of course, a wretched home. Externally as well as internally, it was a dreary place. Mr. Ross's farm was a large and fertile one, but for more years than Sarah had lived it had been under a terribly heavy mortgage, and, besides this, it was sadly neglected, and, of course, the whole place wore a poverty-stricken, desolate look, which increased year by year.

The house was very old, a low, unpainted building, destitute of blinds or

* Published at 200 Malberry-street, New York.

plazas, and wearing, even to eyes that knew *nothing of its inmates*, an unhappy sort of look. There were no trees, shrubs, or flowers about it. Even the grass *looked withered and sickly as it struggled up among great coarse plantains and other weeds.*

Let us lift the broken latch and go into the house. There is no entry, so we find ourselves at once in the parlor, or what Mrs. Ross calls *the square room.* It is a low room, with very small windows screened by green paper curtains twice as big as they need be. The floor is covered with a domestic carpet, the stripes of which stand out with fearful hardness on the coal-black ground. There is no paper on the walls, no paint on the clumsy, old-fashioned woodwork, no pictures, no books, no glass of flowers—nothing, in fact, but half-a-dozen stiff wooden chairs and a dark naked table. Surely there is nothing to invite our stay here. Let us go on.

Never mind that door, dear. It leads only to the spare bedroom, which Sarah

so rarely sees that it can scarcely be called part of her home. *This* door brings us to the kitchen, which we like decidedly better than the parlor. It is larger and lighter, and although just now we find no one in it, it looks much more like an inhabited place. Two or three pans of bread which ought to go into the oven at once stand warm upon the stove-hearth, and the kitchen table contains flour, sugar, butter, utensils, and a pan of apples.

Where can Mrs. Ross be? Possibly she is gone to the dairy or pantry for a bowl of that rich cream that sometimes makes our country pie-paste so shocking to the eye and so grateful to the palate. The door is open and we will look for her. The pantry is soon explored, for it is only a dismal little closet lined with shelves, and leading by another door to a tolerably good-sized room in which a few pans of milk, a tub or two of butter, and half-a-dozen diminutive cheeses are doing their poor little utmost to fill the broad, time-darkened shelves. Under the shelves a

few boxes, jars, and tubs are ranged on the floor, and a saucy little mouse glances furtively up at us from behind one of these.

A door leading from this room into a ruin of a woodshed, and thence into a very dirty back yard, stands open, and we will close it lest the pigs and hens running about there might follow our example and intrude where they have no business.

It is clear that Mrs. Ross is not in the lower part of the house; so, returning to the kitchen, we open a door and ascend the almost perpendicular staircase. Only two tiny rooms are finished, and over the remainder of the chamber the bare rafters stare down at us from the low roof. There is little besides rubbish to be seen.

Let us peep into Sarah's room. Ah! here we find, not Mrs. Ross, but some one with whom we have more to do, Sarah herself. She is sitting upon the low bed, that half fills the room, quite idle, and apparently in a sort of sullen sadness. There are four sadly abused school-books, a paper box, and a small tin trunk scat-

tered about the rude little table. There is a dangerously rickety chair, and a large piece of broken mirror. That is all in the way of furniture. Various articles of clothing are hanging on nails driven ruthlessly into the plastered wall, and the curtainless window is ornamented by one or two cobwebs. But hark! there is somebody below now, for we hear a sharp voice calling, "Sarah! Sarah!"

"What!" responds the child rudely, and without stirring.

"Come down this minute, you good-for-nothing little hussy."

We do not answer to that name, of course; but we will follow the poor child who does as she slowly descends. Mrs. Ross has entered the kitchen by an outer door, which we did not before notice, and stands near the stove, holding in her hand a large dirty pail.

"There, wont you just look at that bread?" she cries angrily. "I spose if it had ris till it took the roof of the house off it wouldn't make any difference to you."

"You didn't say nothing about it," said Sarah doggedly as she began putting it *into the oven.*

"Didn't say nothing about it! Well, I declare! I wonder if you ever *will* get big enough so you'll know enough to go in when it rains, without somebody to *say something about it.* Now you start yourself, and hustle up that fire about as quick as you ever did, or that bread will be all over the bottom of the oven."

"Well, I *didn't* spose 'twould take you all day to feed the hogs, and so I just went up to make my bed," said Sarah.

"No more it didn't. There, now go set that swill-pail away. I guess we should have a fine lot of pork if I didn't feed the hogs; but what *hindered* me this time was stopping to pull the beets and onions. They was a spiling in the ground, *every one on 'em, and I stopped to pull 'em.* Now you just see if you can take the half-bushel basket and go and fetch 'em in."

Sarah obeyed, and while her mother made up the pies she tugged three or four

bushels of heavy vegetables from the garden to the cellar. The task of course was a severe one for a child of twelve years, and when it was finished she sat down upon the threshold of the kitchen door, almost ready to cry for the weary aching of her arms and shoulders. Her mother spoke no word of praise or encouragement, and presently her father came in, stepping almost directly over her, and asking, "Where in the world is the half-bushel basket?"

Sarah got it for him, and he strode off with it, muttering a threat against her if she meddled with his things again.

At any other time Sarah would not have minded this at all; but now she was tired and, it being near dinner-time, hungry also, and, quite against her will, the tears began to flow.

"There, now, bawl about that, wont you, you little sap-head?" exclaimed her mother. "I should think you'd heard enough of his stuff to know he aint worth a minding!"

Sarah was in an unusually tender mood

that day; a mood in which a few kind words would have made a deep and lasting impression upon her mind. But the kind words were not said, and she went up stairs again, saying to herself:

"O dear, there aint nobody in the world that cares anything about me, and I wish I'd died along with Fanny!"

Then, like a ray of sunlight into a dungeon, came to her heart the memory of sweet Lena Albro and her loving ministries of the past summer. Since the close of school Sarah had scarcely seen her gentle schoolmate, but carefully in her little tin trunk had boarded the simple gift of the dear child, and now she took it out and looked at it. There the words stood, beautiful in their sky-blue delicacy, on a pure white ground, and doubly beautiful in the blessed lesson they conveyed. "Little children, love one another," she repeated. "O dear, I wish I had somebody to love me, that's what I do, and I don't care if it *is* silly!"

Then she thought of Lena's tender manner toward her during the last sum-

mer, and an inexpressible longing came over her to hear once more the sweet, persuasive words she had so scorned, or tried to scorn rather, a few weeks ago. The desire grew as she thought of it, and when her mother called her down to dinner she asked if she might go over to Mr. Albro's.

Mrs. Ross answered ungraciously that she did not care where she went to, so she kept that whining face out of *her* sight; and as soon as the dishes were washed Sarah prepared herself and set out. The walk was a long one, though she abridged it somewhat by crossing the fields. She was used to long walks however, and soon found herself in the orchard back of Mr. Albro's house. As it chanced Lena was there, working away as busily as a little squirrel, gathering up a great pile of butternuts, for butternut and apple-trees grew and flourished there together as usefully and happily as if there had not been an irreconcilable difference in their respective *tastes*. Sensible trees, weren't they?

"O, how do you do, Sarah?" she cried, dropping her basket in her surprise.

"I'm pretty well. How's your folks?" said Sarah with an unwonted and terribly awkward attempt at civility.

"We're very well, what there is of us, thank you. There is nobody at home except father, and Mary, and me. Mother, and Susie, and Charlie went away to Aunt Susan's three whole days ago, and I was so lonesome I couldn't think what to do with myself, and that's why I'm out picking up butternuts."

Sarah did not reply, but silently set about helping her.

"Take care, you will stain your frock! Some of them aren't quite dry," said Lena; "that's why I put on this old thing. But I'm going down to the house to change it pretty soon, for I expect them home this afternoon, and I mean to be all nice when they come."

"Hope you don't mean to make company of your own folks," said Sarah, rather sneeringly.

"No, not company, exactly, but then

you know they've been gone so long, and I shall be gladder to see them than any company; and—and—why, you know what I mean, don't you? everybody likes to do little things to make it nice and pleasant for their own people, I suppose."

"My folks don't," said Sarah sadly.

"O dear, what a thoughtless speech!" sighed Lena to herself. But her regret was soon banished, for some one came up stealthily behind them, and a pair of soft arms encircled Lena, and as she turned, her face brushed close against that of her sister, bent down to kiss her.

"O, Susie, I am so glad you have come!" she cried, disengaging herself, and throwing her arms round her sister anew. "Have you had a good time?"

"Yes, grand, only I did wish you was with us. And Aunt Susan scolded mother well because she didn't bring you."

"O well, it was your turn to go. But come, I must go and see mother and Charlie this minute! Come, Sarah, you

have come to stay, haven't you? let's go down to the house."

Sarah would have preferred staying where she was, but she followed the sisters as, with arms closely clasped about each other, they tripped down the grassy slope to their home. Something in her throat kept growing bigger at every step, and when they entered the house, and she saw Lena clinging about her mother's neck, and heard Mrs. Albro say, "I am so thankful to find you well and happy, darling!" it burst out in the shape of a great sob, and just as Lena turned to hug little Charlie, asking him if he wasn't brimful of kisses, just like sister, she ran out of the house and sat down on a log in the back yard, crying bitterly.

"Poor child," said Mrs. Albro compassionately.

"Sure enough!" cried Susie, "she's got no sister now to be glad to see her, poor thing! Let's go to her, Lena."

"Let Lena go alone, dear," said Mrs. Albro.

Lena hesitated only a minute. "Yes, I shall have time enough to see you all, I can wait," she said; and stopping only to give Charlie one more kiss, she followed Sarah out of doors.

"I declare, mother, I don't believe you have one bit of confidence in me after all my trying to be good!" cried Susie passionately as soon as her sister was gone. "Here I haven't given Sarah Ross one single cross word since her sister was drowned, and I've tried to be good just as hard as I could try, and after all you don't think I can say a kind word to comfort her in her trouble. It is real provoking of you."

"Hush, Susie, you are speaking very improperly to your mother."

"Well, I know it, and I am sorry; but, mother, it is so discouraging! When shall I get good enough, so that you will think I do as well as Lena."

"My child, I think you are as praiseworthy in your general conduct now as Lena is."

"Do you really? Well, I believe I

don't agree with you, for I know I get into a passion three times where Lena does once," said Susie, laughing at her own inconsistency.

"That is very true, my child," said her mother, smiling; "but you see you have a worse temper by nature than Lena has."

"Yes, that is what I mean. Now I know very well that if you had sent me to talk to Sarah, Lena wouldn't have been vexed and jealous one bit, and I just flashed up in a second."

"And then, dear, in a few seconds more you saw you were wrong, confessed it, and made a brave effort to overcome the temptation."

"How did you know that?"

"O I saw it. Now, my dear, I think God is as well pleased with us when he sees us bravely resisting temptation, as when he sees us doing right without having been tempted to do wrong; and I think, since that sad time last summer—"

"O, mother, don't mention that! I was

so wicked! I am so much ashamed of myself every time I think of it."

"Don't interrupt me. Ever since that time, I think you have made a brave effort to overcome the evil inclinations in your heart. God judges us by our efforts, not by our success only, and so I think that you, though less amiable, have been even more praiseworthy than Lena. Are you satisfied now, little jealousy?"

"Yes, I know what you mean. Lena don't have to try so hard as I do. Sweet temper grows wild in her heart, the little darling, and I have to make a hot-bed to raise one bit. O dear!"

"Not quite so bad as that," said Mrs. Albro, smiling at her daughter's odd comparison. "Come, now, and help me put away these things."

Susie obeyed; but she had scarcely folded one shawl before she began to talk again.

"After all, mother, you haven't told me why you wouldn't let me go and see Sarah."

"Because, dear, I think it will be diffi

cult for any one to reach poor Sarah's heart, and Lena has the advantage of you in that she began first to treat her kindly. Besides, I think Lena loves the poor child more tenderly than you do, and will bear more patiently than you can any rude things she may say."

"Why, mother, I am just as sorry for her as I can be. She never had any chance to be good in her life, and I wont expect anything of her."

"Well, dear, I am quite willing you should talk with her, and show her all the loving-kindness you can; but just now leave her to Lena. Don't you know when you have done wrong, or are in trouble, you can open your heart better to one person alone than to two, even though you might feel exactly the same toward them?"

"I know it. O, mother, you can always set me right."

"And poor Sarah's mother cannot help her."

"Because she is real wicked herself. Now, mother, you see if I'll be left quite

behind by Lena," added Susie resolutely after a little pause. "I'll be so good to that poor girl that she'll have to work hard if she beats me!"

"That's right, dear; but don't forget to ask God to help you. None of us can do anything good in our own strength."

CHAPTER II.

SARAH DESIRES TO BE A GOOD GIRL.

LENA found Sarah sitting on a log, with her apron thrown over her head and her whole form shaking with her sobs. She stole softly up, sat down beside her, put one arm round her, and then began to try to think what to say. The longer she thought the more perplexed she grew, for she could think of nothing pleasant, nothing even tolerable in the poor child's lot. Before she had found a word to speak she was herself weeping bitterly, and Sarah's lips were the first to open.

"Don't you cry, Lena; you haint got nothing to trouble you," she said.

"O dear, I know it," said Lena with a fresh outburst, "and it was real cruel for me to be so happy with my sister right before you when your sister is dead. O, Sarah, I didn't think!"

"I wasn't crying about Fanny," said Sarah shortly.

"What then?"

"O everything! I wished I was dead myself. That's what I do!"

"O, Sarah, how can you dare to say so! What would become of you?"

"I don't know nor care," said Sarah sullenly.

"Sarah, don't; please don't; its dreadful! What would your mother do if she lost both her children?"

"She wouldn't care a pin for me! No longer ago than yesterday she said she wished I'd died instead of Fanny."

"O she couldn't have said that!" cried Lena in almost a fright, and I fancy I hear my little readers repeating the exclamation. But she did say it nevertheless. As unwise persons often do, Mrs. Ross dwelt on, and exaggerated constantly, the merits of the child she had lost, and undervalued the one that remained. I cannot believe Mrs. Ross really felt it; but certainly in a fit of passion she did say that she wished in all conscience, if

she must lose one of her children, it might have been that impudent, good-for-nothing Sarah. Rude and uncultured though Sarah was, she was no numb-head, and she keenly felt the cruel injustice done her. It was of this that she was bitterly thinking when we found her sitting in her little chamber. It was this that colored all her thoughts, and shaped all her *conduct through the day.*

"Yes, she did say it, as true as you live! There aint nobody in the world that cares a snap about me." - And poor Sarah fell to sobbing again more wildly than ever.

"I am sure I love you, Sarah," said Lena timidly.

"No you don't," were the words of the reply; but the hesitating, questioning tone robbed it of half its rudeness.

"*I certainly do,*" said Lena more boldly, "and Susie will love you too if you will let her, and so will my mother."

"O, Lena, I wish I hadn't never been ugly to you and Susie!"

"We never will think of it again, dear Sarah, if you will only be good now."

"Good! O dear, you don't know nothing at all about it; I can't be good."

"You can try."

"I have tried, Lena; I did try ever so much last summer when you was so good to me, and I couldn't, and you couldn't neither if you had such a home as I have."

"I don't know as I could," said Lena sadly.

"You know you couldn't, and I don't believe you would try any more than I do," said Sarah.

Lena was silent for a moment, and then said seriously, "Sarah, I do think I would try. I know it would be very hard, but mother says it is a terrible thing when people get so they don't try to be good, and the Lord is dreadfully displeased."

"O you needn't talk any pious talk to me," said Sarah roughly; "I don't want to hear it."

"Don't you say prayers, Sarah?"

"Not I!"

"O I shouldn't dare go to bed without saying my prayers."

"I do, then."

"But, Sarah, what do you think would become of you if you should die?"

"Old Harry would get me, I suppose," was the reply, accompanied by a short, disagreeable laugh.

Lena put her fingers in her ears with a cry of terror so genuine that Sarah was rather startled by it.

"Well, I didn't mean that," she said. "Of course I mean to get pious some time before I die."

"But, Sarah, how can you dare say such dreadful things?"

"O pshaw! If your father was swearing round half the time you wouldn't be so 'fraid of a few bad words, I guess."

Wiser persons than Lena might have been tempted to despair at this display of the hardness and blindness of the poor child's heart. Even while she began to have a glimmering perception of the beauty of goodness she excused and made light of fearful sins. Lena did not attempt to define the case, but it looked

very dismal to her, and covering her face with her hands, she wept great tears of almost hopeless sorrow. Sarah was touched by the evident grief of her playmate, though she had little idea of its cause, and she asked repeatedly, "What's the matter, Lena? What have I done?"

"O I thought you wanted to be good!" sobbed Lena after a while.

"Well, I do."

"I am afraid that can't be, Sarah, because you just laugh at the idea of saying prayers; and—and—you know what I mean, Sarah—you laughed at me for talking pious talk, as you called it, and nobody can be good unless they care about such things."

Lena's words were scarcely audible for the sobs that accompanied them, and Sarah felt the power of her sorrow more than that of her words.

"Don't take on so," she entreated. "I aint worth minding any way; but if you wont cry I'll do anything you say."

"Will you promise not to say any bad words?"

"Yes; only I never can remember it in the world."

"Will you try?"

"Yes, just as hard as ever I can."

"And will you"—Lena's voice had sunk to a reverent whisper now—"will you pray to the Lord to help you and make you good?"

"Why, it's no use, Lena. The Lord wont mind a word about me."

"Dear Sarah!"

"Well, well, I'll try. I'll do it just to please you, because—now I don't care if I do say something real silly, and you needn't laugh—you're the only person in the world that ever acted as if they cared a snap about me, and I want one friend, and I'll do anything you say if you'll only—" Sarah stammered and blushed as if she was awfully ashamed, but the words came out at last—"if you'll only love me."

"Why, how could you think I'd laugh!" said Lena innocently. "I am sure I don't think it's silly; and I don't know how in the world I could live if I

hadn't anybody to love me and to tell me so every day."

"Will you, then?"

"Love you? yes, indeed! Why, Sarah, I have loved you for a long time, but I love you still better now, and I will love you as long as I live." And Lena sealed her promise with a kiss, and then led her friend into the house.

The afternoon passed very pleasantly. Susie vied with her sister in showing kind attentions to their visitor, and before night Sarah found herself trying harder than ever she had tried before in her whole life to conduct herself prettily and properly. She stayed until it was almost dark, and then set out for home with sad reluctance.

That evening, before Lena Albro went to bed, she said:

"Mother, I do begin to hope that the Lord has given me a new heart, and made me love him."

Mrs. Albro had hoped so for many weeks, so she expressed no surprise, but asked quietly, "Why, my child?"

"Because, mother, when Sarah Ross was talking to-day she laughed about saying prayers, and said she didn't want to hear any pious talk, and it grieved me a great deal worse than any hateful thing she ever said to me. Should I feel so bad, mother, to hear religion sneered about if I didn't love the Saviour a little myself?"

"I do not think you would, my dear child," said Mrs. Albro; and then she added fervently, "thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift."

When Sarah Ross got home her mother met her at the door.

"Well, miss, this is a pretty time o' night for you to be out. Now let's know what kept you."

At another time Sarah would have invented an excuse without hesitation, but in her present improved state of mind she preferred to tell the truth. So she said civilly, "Nothing in particular. I didn't suppose you'd care about my staying, and I didn't hurry."

"Didn't suppose I'd care! You knew I'd been working like an old slave all day,



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Mrs. Ross scolding Sarah.

and had milking and everything to do. Now you start yourself, and wash those milk-pails about as quick as you ever did."

Sarah's better mood was ebbing fast, but she took the pails and left the room in silence. There was no light in the room, and when, after cleansing the pails at the spout in the back yard, she returned and put them in their place, she turned one of them into a pan of boiled cider that had been left to cool upon the kitchen table. The fault was not really hers; it was the place where the pails were always placed at night, and in the darkness she could not see that anything was there. Mrs. Ross knew right well that the fault was her own, but, like many unreasonable persons, she was only irritated the more by the reflection, and her temper instantly overflowed upon the unlucky instrument of the mishap.

"There, now, you good-for-nothing little plague, I hope you've done mischief enough. You destroy more every month of your life than your neck is worth!"

Sarah's good resolutions were all forgotten now, and she responded with angry promptness, "Yes; and more'n yourn's worth into the bargain."

At this Mrs. Ross declared she was the "*outrageousest* impudent young one on the face of the earth," and ordered her instantly to bed.

In the solitude of her room the angry tumult of her feelings had a chance to subside, and then she remembered that she had promised Lena she would pray. "What an idea!" she exclaimed, with a short, bitter laugh. And yet she had promised sincerely, and she could not help thinking seriously of it.

"Pray, pray," went on her soliloquy. "Yes, I said I'd pray the Lord to help me and make me good. Well, that's what ought to be done for me. Wish I was good; that's what I do." Then she knelt down by her bed, and, merely as a fulfillment of her promise, said, "O Lord, please to help me and make me *good*."

The poor child had never before attempted to address herself to the Divine

Being, and when the words had passed her lips she was suddenly filled with awe at the solemn thing she had done. Before she had felt that it could not be of the slightest consequence whether she prayed or not, but now she almost feared that all the hosts of heaven would be rallied to take just vengeance on her for her boldness. Poor, dark-minded child! The wondrous condescension of our blessed Saviour, the sweet encouragements and promises of his Holy Book, were all unknown to her. God seemed to her, indeed, a consuming fire, and she trembled at the thought of his righteous wrath.

Upon these feelings followed naturally a remorseful sense of her wickedness—of her last especial sin; and, spurred on by agonizing fears, she resolved to do what even to her dark mind was a plain duty, make confession to her mother. The confession of our faults is a hard duty in all cases, but I pray that none of my readers may ever know *how* hard it is to confess to such a person as Mrs. Ross. I have always thought that act of poor Sarah's

one of the bravest ones I ever knew about. She did not allow herself time to shrink or tremble, but walked straight to her mother and forced from her lips these words :

“ Mother, I hadn't any business to sauce you back again just now ; I'm sorry I did it, and I want you to forgive me.”

Dear little friend, you have some time in your life asked your mother to forgive you some fault, have you not ? And do you remember, surely you cannot have forgotten, how she rejoiced over your penitence *even as much as she had mourned* for your sin ? How she clasped you in her arms and kissed you, and wept over you, and could ask no more of God than that he would forgive you as freely as she did ? Happy child that you are, do not dare to judge poor Sarah. Her mother's reply, uttered in tones and accompanied by looks even more bitterly sneering than the words, was this :

“ Forgive you, you little saphead ? I'll *lick* you, more like !”

Sarah waited for no more. The hot

blood of shame crimsoned her very neck, and fiercer anger kindled a fearful spark in her eye. Every other emotion was swept away, and she rushed back to her room, mentally berating herself for being so silly.

"Guess I wont ask that question again in a hurry of her or anybody else," she said, tossing herself into bed.

No more thought of duty, of prayer, of God; or if she did think, it was only to say despairingly:

"It's no use, I can't be good any way."

CHAPTER III.

HOPE DAWNS ON SARAH'S HEART.

A WEEK passed away, during which Sarah Ross scarcely allowed herself to think for a moment of her talk with Lena. She had settled it in her mind that it was of no use for her to try to be good; she had ridiculed herself for her nonsense, and there the matter, as she thought and resolved, was to end. No, not exactly there, for there was one thing she resolved to do, or rather refrain from doing.

"I wont be hateful to Lena Albro any more, that's what I wont," she said to herself with great decision. And a happy thing that resolve proved for her.

It was the practice of good Mr. Mansfield, the minister of Deepwater, to hold Friday evening meetings alternately in each of the school-houses of his parish, and this week came the turn of the Clifton district. These meetings were gen-

erally very well attended, for there was a goodly number of believing hearts in the district; and besides, Mr. Mansfield was dearly loved by almost all who knew him, and his message was respectfully heeded even by those who cared not for his Master.

The Ross family, although they never attended at public worship on the Sabbath, sometimes appeared at the meetings in the school-house. Usually the neighbors were careful to apprise Mrs. Ross of the meeting; but this time it chanced to be neglected, and the first intimation she had of it was when Laura Clifton called on her way to see if Sarah would go with her, adding after she had preferred her request:

"Mother told me to tell you she hoped she should see you there too, Mrs. Ross."

"Well, she wont," snapped Mrs. Ross, who considered herself ill-used in that she was informed of the meeting so late. "A good deal I am going to hurry myself to rig up now and get over to the school-house just as the meeting is breaking up."

"May Sarah go?" asked Laura timidly.

Mrs. Ross said she didn't care; but Sarah, catching the unlovely spirit of her mother, declared she would not stir a step. Laura kept down a strong inclination to retort, and leaving the house met Lena Albro at the gate.

"There now," she exclaimed, "I know what you have come for, and you are real good; but you have taken your long walk for nothing. Sarah wont go, for I've asked her."

"Perhaps—"

"O no, don't bother; she wont go. Come along with me."

"Let me go in a minute, please," and Lena disappeared.

Laura waited half pontingly for a minute or two, and then spying her brother William coming slowly down the road wearing an unusually serious face, she ran forward, joined him, and proceeded to the school-house.

Meanwhile Lena had timidly opened the kitchen door, and in reply to Mrs.

Ross's rather surly invitation that she would be seated, had said :

"No, thank you ma'am. I came to see if Sarah was going to meeting."

"It's no difference to me whether she goes or stays," replied Mrs. Ross, turning to leave the room.

"Wont you go, Sarah?"

"I guess not."

"Why, please?"

"Nothing particular, only I don't want to."

"O, Sarah, *do* go! Mr. Mansfield always says something to the children, and he talks *so* good."

The argument was an unlucky one. Sarah didn't want to be talked to. "No, I shant go," she said decisively.

Tears started in Lena's eyes, and her lip trembled as she said, "O, Sarah, I thought you would go if I came all this way for you."

"Dear me, what a baby you are; I spose I shall have to go just to stop your roaring."

Sarah was obliged to resort to her ha-

bitual abruptness of manner, for she was just ready to roar herself, if I may use the word as she did. She ran up stairs and hustled herself into her better clothes with fierce haste, assuring herself all the time that Lena Albro was just nothing but a bothersome little baby, and nobody could *cross her one single bit or she would cry.*

The walk to the school-house was a hurried one, and not much was said by either of the children. No preaching was expected at these meetings. Mr. Mansfield read a portion of Scripture and remarked upon it at some length. The remainder of the time was devoted to speaking and prayer.

Mr. Mansfield was just rising in the desk to speak, the opening prayer and *song being ended, as our little friends* glided in. The Bible was open before him, but his glance was cast round upon his little audience as he pronounced the ninth, tenth, and eleventh verses of the seventh chapter of St. Matthew: "Or what man of you, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone; or if he ask a

fish, will he give him a serpent; if ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall *your Father which is in heaven* give good things to them that ask him?"

"Your Father, my dear friends," the good man went on. "Not a stranger, not your neighbor, but your Father." He then spoke feelingly of the tenderness of earthly parents. Of the willingness, even of bad parents, to give good gifts to their children. Next he spoke of God as a father, infinitely kinder, tenderer, and more pitiful, as well as greater and wiser, than any earthly parent. While the good man thus spoke, the wondrous idea contained in the two first words of the Lord's prayer dawned dimly upon the dark mind of Sarah Ross. "Our Father!" she said to herself in amazement. "My Father, and a good, loving, kind father too, like Lena's father!"

Let us not blame her, poor child; that was as high as her mind could reach then. She had never had much love for her parents, nor had she ever for a moment

believed that they loved her, and the natural yearning of the human heart for love had been as effectually stifled in her case, perhaps, as it ever is. But, thank God! that yearning is a deathless one. Many waters cannot quench it, though they may bury it terribly deep in their cold bosom. Lena Albro's tenderness, even while she scoffed at it, had awakened in Sarah's heart a longing wish that she had some one to love her, and now the thought that God might be to her, even her, such a father as Mr. Mansfield was describing, overpowered her, and she leaned forward upon her desk and wept. She heard no more of Mr. Mansfield's words. She knew not that Mr. Albro and one or two of his neighbors had offered prayer and spoken briefly of their love to God and his cause. But at last a voice did arrest her attention, a familiar enough voice, but so strange in that place. It was the voice of William Clifton.

"Friends and neighbors," said he, "I don't know whether any of you have known it or not, but I've been in trouble

for a good while. When Mr. Ross's little girl was drowned, partly through my fault, as I couldn't help feeling, though nobody blamed me, I felt dreadfully; no mortal creature knows how I did feel. I thought sometimes I would be willing to go and throw myself into the Beaver pond, if by that means I could bring her back to life, and—" William paused and looked uneasily at Sarah, and then, as if impelled unwillingly, repeated and concluded, "to life and hope. Then I began to think what better was I, how much more fit to die, and I tell you, friends, the idea frightened me. I've been in dangerous places before now, places where I stood a smart chance to lose my life, but I never realized what an awful thing it is to die unprepared, as I did then. I don't call myself a coward, but I'll own I trembled then like a poplar leaf. Well, I grew worse and worse for weeks. I was afraid of my own shadow. Why, I was actually afraid to handle the horses, the gayest of them, lest something might happen to me. Well, the second week in

September I went to take my little sister to New York; I hated to leave her there. She too had a narrow escape at that awful time, and I've hated to have her out of my sight since then; but she had had the promise, and wanted to go, and of course it wasn't my business to find any fault. I staid one day longer than I meant to, I was so loth to leave her, and I suppose, with that and my other trouble, I was a pretty mopish fellow. The day before I left I was alone in the parlor, and Cousin Alice came tripping in. I remember she had a great doll baby in her hands, and she showed it to me, and asked me if something about it wasn't pretty. I wanted to please her, but I couldn't make as though I cared anything about it; in fact, I could hardly speak. In an instant that child's face changed. She tucked the baby under her arm, and asked softly, 'What is the matter, Cousin Will?'

"I don't know what possessed me. I never did such a thing before or since, but I opened my whole heart to that child.

I never shall forget how round her eyes grew. 'Why, Will,' said she, 'don't you know that the Lord will take you to heaven when you die if you ask him?'

"I told her I didn't know anything about it."

"'Don't know! why, Will, haven't you read the Bible?'"

"Yes," said I.

"And don't you believe it? Don't you think God tells the truth?'"

"Yes, but—"

"'O don't say but, Will! Just ask him to take care of you and he certainly will. Promise me, Will, that you will ask him.'"

"I promised her, and her face grew bright again. She didn't seem to have any more doubt or fear than if there were no such things in the world. She raised her doll up in her arms and went off talking to it. My friends, I think I began to know then what the Scripture means where it says we must be become as little children. The first prayer I ever offered in my life was that God would give me *faith like the faith of my little cousin.*"

I've been a praying man ever since, but I haven't felt right. I haven't enjoyed myself. I've been afraid, or ashamed, I can't hardly tell which, to speak and let people know how I felt. But to-night, while Mr. Mansfield was showing up how willing God is to be our father, I almost felt as if I heard a voice saying, 'Choose you this night whom you will serve.' My friends, my mind is made up to serve the Lord, and I want you should all pray that I may serve him faithfully."

William's words caused deep feeling in the little circle, and when the meeting closed people lingered longer than usual, speaking to each other. Many persons offered their hands to William Clifton, and spoke words of Christian fellowship and encouragement to him. Lena Albro noticed it almost enviously.

"O mother," she said, "it is too bad! I am sure I am glad for William, but he oughtn't to have all the help. Why *won't* somebody speak to poor Sarah?"

"You may put that question to our pastor if you choose, dear," said Mrs. Albro

smiling, for she knew that Mr. Mansfield stood near enough to hear her.

"What is it, little one?" said the good man, turning around and looking very kindly at the little girl.

Lena blushed, and glanced appealingly at her mother; but Mrs. Albro did not help her, and she was obliged, though scarcely able, to answer, "I was wishing some one would speak to Sarah Ross. She's been crying all the evening." She faltered; Mr. Mansfield thanked her, and then slowly made his way to the place where Sarah Ross stood. She had dried her tears, and he merely asked her about the health of her parents, and then turned to speak to some one else.

"O dear," sighed Lena, "couldn't he say more than that?"

But the minister was wiser than she. A quarter of an hour later he had placed Sarah Ross in his buggy, and was driving slowly, straight out of his own way, toward her home.

"Poor little girl," he said, "you are lonely since your sister died, aren't you?"

Sarah was too much awed to do more than barely assent.

"Yes, it is very sad; but don't you know, dear, you have a better friend than sister or brother?"

"O dear, I wish I had!"

"Why not, then, my child? Why not accept of Jesus as your father, your elder brother, your dear friend and helper?"

"I would if I could, but—"

"But what, my child?" said the minister patiently.

"Why, I don't know nothing at all about him. I'm afraid of him."

"Afraid of him, my poor child? Afraid of Jesus who died for you; who rose again, and now stands at the right hand of the Father to intercede for you?"

"But I've been so bad."

"My child, he knows it all. There is nothing hid from him; and yet he stretches forth his arms and says, 'Come.' You have known tender, forgiving human beings, have you not? Those who would love you in spite of cruel things you might do to them?"

"Yes, one," said Sarah promptly.

"Only one, poor child?" asked Mr. Mansfield sorrowfully.

"No, not but just one single one, and that's Lena Albro."

"I trust, my child, that you know many more, only you do not know them as such. But one is sufficient for my purpose. Tell me how you know her as such."

"Why, sir, I spoiled her things, and hurt her, and plagued her in every way I could, and then she just gave me things, and spoke pleasant to me, and helped me, and—O dear!" Sarah stopped abruptly, and had much ado to keep herself from weeping aloud.

"My child," said Mr. Mansfield after a little pause, "that dear little girl's conduct, as you describe it, is beautifully like that of our blessed Saviour. It gladdens my heart to know that we have such a precious little lamb in our flock; but, lovely as she is, Lena's goodness, her tender, loving, forgiving spirit is no more, when compared with our Saviour's, than a tiny drop of water compared with the

ocean. Now, my child, are you afraid to go with all your sins to a Saviour so great and good?"

"I don't know as I be," said Sarah, speaking very slowly.

"I do not wish you to misunderstand me," continued Mr. Mansfield. "Persons who persist in their sins may well fear God, may well tremble at the thought of meeting him."

"I don't want to persist in my sins," sobbed Sarah; "I'd be good if I knew how."

"Yes, I hoped that was your feeling," replied Mr. Mansfield, "and that is why I dared to encourage you. God is, indeed, a terror to evil-doers, but to the truly penitent *he speaks only in tones of love and encouragement*. He asks nothing unreasonable. Only believe in him, repent of and forsake your sins, and—"

"O dear, that's the trouble," interrupted Sarah. "*I can't forsake my sins. I have everything in the world to make me bad, and I can't help being bad.*"

"Not of yourself, certainly," replied

the minister; "but do you not know that God offers to help you?"

"O dear! I wish he would," said Sarah.

"Then ask him, my dear child, ask him to come by his Holy Spirit and make himself a dwelling-place in your heart, and guide you and teach you every hour of your life."

As Mr. Mansfield said this he stopped his horse at Mr. Ross's gate, and Sarah sprang to the ground and ran into the house without even bidding him good evening. The house was dark and still. She fastened the door behind her, and groped her way to her own room, with the dismal, lonely feeling that almost any child would experience in similar circumstances.

"Dear, I should have thought mother might set up," she said fretfully. "I wish I could find a match or anything else."

But no match was at hand, and, stumbling against this and blundering over that, benumbed by the cold and awed by the darkness, she crept at last to her place and tried to compose herself to sleep.

But the excitement of the evening had left her too nervous to sleep. She wanted some water, she wanted a morsel to eat, she wanted *somebody to speak to her*. At length she grew so uneasy that she rose and groped her way to her mother's room.

"Mother! mother!"

"Well, what now?" snapped Mrs. Ross.

"Mother, where are the matches? I want a light."

"Well, you wont have a light to burn the house with, so now. You can find your way to bed well enough."

"But, mother, I want something to eat."

"Well, I shant get up; I'll risk you till morning."

"O dear! I *must* have some water."

By this time Mrs. Ross's patience was exhausted. "I tell you I wont be bothered with you. Take yourself off or you'll get what you don't want," she cried.

Poor Sarah sobbed aloud as she crept back to her dismal place. "O dear," she said, "I wish I had a friend. I wish God

would be my friend, for nobody else will, that's sure." Just as she said this there flashed across her memory the words, "When my father and mother forsake me then the Lord will take me up." At first she could in no wise remember when or where she had heard them. She did not even know that they were Scripture words; but her mind seized and dwelt on them as words that must surely be meant for her. She repeated them many times, and at length remembered that having once been sent, early in the morning, to do an errand at the house of a pious neighbor, she had been present at their family worship, and had heard that text impressively read. "Then it's Bible, of course," she said, "and O I do believe it was meant on purpose for me. O, Lord, do take me up. I am sure my father and mother have just as good as forsaken me. They don't care anything about me, and wont do anything to help me. O, Lord, do take me up and make me good, and I'll try to do the very best I can."

New, and strange, and strangely sweet were the emotions that filled the breast of the neglected child. A feeling of safety, peace, and protection came over her. • Why, she could not tell; but she felt no more fears, no more loneliness, no more trouble of any kind. She laid herself down, wondering that she had never thought before how good and kind God is, and how safely she might trust in him. To these thoughts succeeded a feeling of love and gratitude such as she had never before experienced, and an earnest desire to do something to please a being who was ready to do so much for her. With these thoughts she fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

SAD SCENES.

BEFORE it was fairly light the next morning our little friend was awakened by the sharp voice of her mother crying, "Sarah! Sarah! get up and come down this minute."

It was much earlier than her usual time of rising, and besides, there was something very strange in the sound of her mother's voice. For a moment she fairly *shook with fright*. Then the thoughts of the last evening came back to her mind, and she repeated as she hurried on her clothes the words, "When my father and mother forsake me then the Lord will take me up." The thought assured her somewhat, and it was well; for a terrible sight met her eye as she descended the stairs. Her father was tearing about the kitchen, screaming, swearing, and groaning, in a manner more horrible than I can

describe. Nearly every article in the room was upset or broken, and her mother stood cowering at the door, ready to flee at any instant.

"O, mother, what *does* ail him?"

Mrs. Ross stepped quickly into the parlor, drew Sarah after her, and closed the door. "He's got the *delirium tremens*; that's what ails him," she replied with fierce emphasis. "And it's more'n I know but he'll kill us all. You go and get some of the neighbors here just as quick as you can."

Sarah waited for no second bidding, but ran with all speed to the house of Mr. Morris, which, though more than a quarter of a mile distant, was nearest. For nearly a week past Mr. Ross had been drinking much worse than usual, and had been at home very little day or night. His wife was so well used to this sort of thing that she had taken little notice of his absence; but this morning when, with the fearful fires of drunken insanity burning in his brain, he had come home, she was suddenly aroused to the terribleness

of his condition, and the stubborn pride which had so long rejected all aid or sympathy was forced to give way. Mr. Morris's family had just risen when Sarah rapped loudly at the door. Mr. Morris opened it.

"Why, good morning, child. What is the matter? folks sick?" he said, looking wonderingly at her frightened face.

"Yes, father is awful sick, and mother wants you should come right straight up there."

"Your father! Why, what's the matter?"

"O I don't know; I guess he is crazy. Mother said she didn't know but he'd kill us!"

"O sho, now, sho!" said Mr. Morris compassionately, and casting a meaning glance at his wife. "Where's Sam? There'll be more'n one man needed."

"Why, father, don't you know he went home last night?" said Juliana.

"Botheration! that boy is always out of the way when he is wanted. Look here, sis, 'taint safe for your ma to be

alone with him, and I'll go straight up there; but you run over to Mr. Albro's and tell him to come. Tell him I want him."

Mr. Morris was outside the gate by the time he finished speaking, and Sarah lost no time in doing his bidding.

Mr. Albro understood the message very well, and both he and his hired man went quickly to Mr. Morris's aid. They were none too many. Three strong and determined men though they were, they were barely able to control the insane rage of the unhappy man they had to deal with. They got him into his bedroom at last, however, and then Mr. Albro sent his man for a doctor.

Dear children, you never saw a case of delirium tremens, did you? I cannot describe it to you; I do not know that I would if I could, it is so very dreadful! It is a kind of insanity in which the patient fancies himself tortured by demons, entwined with loathsome serpents, pursued by unearthly phantoms; in short, the whole mind, and soul, and body

seem given up to the tortures of the world of woe. This insanity, however, never comes upon any save those who have drank deeply of intoxicating liquors, and one would suppose that one sight of a person suffering from it would forever *deter a man from touching the noxious cup*. But, alas! the power of the tempter is strong, and thousands go down yearly to the drunkard's grave.

Mrs. Albro urged Sarah to stay to breakfast; but she was too excited and anxious to do so, and hurried home. While yet several rods distant from the house she heard distinctly the unearthly yells of the wretched sufferer, and she hardly dared open the kitchen door; she did so, however, and *found her mother working vigorously to repair, as far as she could, the mischief her brutal husband had done*.

"Mother, what is the matter with him?" she asked fearfully.

"I told you once, and that's enough."

"Will he die?"

"I *don't know*."

"Mrs. Albro told me to tell you she should come up here in two hours or so."

"Well."

Sarah did not in the slightest degree understand the nature of her father's malady. She saw and heard the horrible symptoms, but of its cause and probable termination she could form no idea. Of course she was frightened and distressed; *of course in her excited state she felt pitiable need that somebody should talk to her, enlighten her, and comfort her.* Her mother, as we have seen, would enter into no conversation with her, and she turned away with a sick, wretched feeling at her heart, and went up stairs. Had an angel taken his dwelling in that poor little room, an angel whose mission it was to whisper consolation in the heart of its little occupant? *It would almost seem so,* for no sooner had she opened the door than the thought of the evening before returned to her mind. "When my father and mother forsake me then the Lord will take me up," she repeated, and dropping upon her knees she pleaded her

forsaken condition, and prayed God to take her and be her father, protector, and friend; ending her prayer with a characteristically emphatic promise, "and, *Lord, I'll do just the very best I possibly can!*"

By way of fulfilling this promise Sarah went immediately down stairs, and, in a tone so respectful that her mother looked round at her in amazement, asked, "Can't I do something to help you, mother?"

"O dear, I don't know what I want to do myself," replied Mrs. Ross.

"*I suppose the men haven't been to breakfast,*" said Sarah, meaning Mr. Morris and Mr. Albro, who, she knew, had hurried away on the instant.

"Well, you go and wash some potatoes and I'll get some meat cooking."

Sarah was not exactly what one could call a *lazy child*, but her habits had heretofore been so extremely heedless, changeful, and disobliging that her services, except those compulsorily rendered, were really worth very little. But this morning she performed the task allotted to her,

and then set about sweeping, dusting, setting the table, etc., with such alacrity that, busy as Mrs. Ross was, she found time to wonder more than once, "what in life had come across that young one!"

Mr. Ross was so violent that it was scarcely safe for his attendants to leave him, even one at a time, and only a few hurried morsels were taken from the breakfast table when it was prepared. With a kind of vague feeling that she ought to offer the gentlemen something more than the ordinary fare of her family, Mrs. Ross had brought out a portion of the only rarity she had, a dish of preserved plums, and Sarah, with the keen appetite of childhood for sweetmeats, could in no wise comprehend why they remained untasted.

Abashed somewhat by the presence of those whom, despite her stubborn pride, she could not help regarding as her superiors, and ignorant of the proprieties of her place, Mrs. Ross had directed Sarah to make the coffee, and had betaken her-

self, milk-pails in hand, to the barn-yard, so when Mr. Morris left the kitchen Sarah chucklingly seized upon the dish of fruit with the exclamation,

"Aint I lucky now! mother'll never know in the world but they ate the sauce!"

She had done such things without compunction scores of times before, but now, midway between her mouth and the dish, the spoon was suddenly arrested. "O dear, now, that aint doing the best I can. I know mother's real saving of this sauce," she said to herself, and then a colloquy pretty nearly like the following ensued:

Inclination. "She needn't be so stingy with it!"

Conscience. "That's not my business. The sauce is hers, and she told me when she made it not to meddle with it, and I mustn't."

Inclination. "It looks so good!"

Conscience. "Let it alone."

Inclination. "One taste at least!"

"No, no, no! I said I'd do the very best I could, and if I don't God wont be

my father, nor have anything to do with me."

Down went the dish upon the table, and Sarah turned her back resolutely from it. One victory was gained, and let no one call it a trifling victory; for if the poor wretch in the bed-room had in his youth gained and maintained a precisely similar victory he might now have been a happy, useful, and honored member of society, instead of the ruined thing he is.

"There, let them preserves alone!" cried Mrs. Ross, coming in just as Sarah was setting down the dish.

"I haint touched 'em, nor aint going to," said Sarah.

"Likely story! you're always poking your nose into every thing you can find!"

It was very discouraging, and Sarah felt it bitterly; but she knew her mother had had every reason to distrust her, and she smothered the angry retort that rushed to her lips. By this time the rattle of the doctor's carriage was heard, and Mr. Albro came out of the bed-room and met him at the door.

"Sure, sure! Well, well, it's just what I expected. I told him six months ago he'd have the 'man with the poker' after him if he didn't look out," Sarah heard him say in reply to something Mr. Albro said in a low tone.

There were more inaudible words, and then the doctor said: "Well, can't tell. Don't generally consider the first attack very dangerous, but the liquors are so terribly poisoned now-a-days, and he's been nothing but a rum cask for years. Tell better when I see him. Savage, aint he?"

A fiendish howl from the bed-room forestalled Mr. Albro's reply, and, followed by the doctor, he hastened back.

But Sarah would have waited to hear no more if they had talked all day, for she was crushed to the earth by a painful sense of shame. Ever since she had been old enough her father's intemperance had been a source of bitter mortification to her, and much of the reckless bravado that made her so disagreeable was assumed as her only and miserably insuffi-

cient defense against the humiliating ridicule and, to her high-strung spirit, equally humiliating pity of her companions. But never, among all the wretched possibilities *she dreaded, had she once dreamed* that her father's disgrace would or could be paraded before the world as she now saw it. Of delirium tremens she, of course, knew nothing; but by the doctor's words she distinctly understood that his malady, whatever it was, was caused solely by his *intemperance, and that it was universally known to be so.*

"O I wish I could go and hide in a hole where nobody could ever see me again in the world!" she mentally exclaimed. "I wish I hadn't any father. I wish—O dear! I know I'm wicked, but *how can I be good and have everybody pointing at me and saying, there's that old drunken Ross's girl!*"

"When my father and mother forsake me then the Lord will take me up," whispered a still small voice.

"Yes, but then this is a great deal worse than being forsaken. O Lord,

what shall I do?" and poor Sarah gave way to an agonized fit of weeping.

"What's up now?" asked Mrs. Ross, coming out of the dairy. "What are you *roaring* about?"

"O dear! I was thinking of father," sobbed Sarah.

"Just thought of it, have you? Well, quit it and go to washing them pans."

Poor child! Surely she could hope for no comfort from her mother. At first, as we have seen, she wished to hide herself in her shame from all the world; but by degrees, as she realized the hardness of her mother's nature, and felt in her bitter trouble such pressing need of love and pity, her pride gave way, and she found herself watching eagerly for Mrs. Albro's promised coming. By the aid of his powerful drugs, Dr. Winchester soon reduced Mr. Ross to a passive state. One man could now attend him, and as Mr. Morris volunteered his services the others went home. About ten o'clock Mrs. Albro came up with kind proffers of neighborly friendship and aid. Mrs. Ross said

she was *much obliged*, but didn't know as she wanted anything.

Mrs. Albro would not be so coldly put off. There was always something to be done, she said, in a house where there was sickness, and she had come prepared to stay all day if she could be of any service.

At this Mrs. Ross could not well help offering to take her bonnet and shawl, which Mrs. Albro laid aside as cheerfully as she would have done if her welcome had been a cordial one.

"Now, Mrs. Ross," she said, when Mrs. Ross came back from the spare bedroom, "you must not be backward one bit about telling what you want. Don't you remember about Mr. Albro's being taken so suddenly sick two years ago this fall? Well, do you know, I had to send over to Mrs. Clifton to borrow a couple of shirts. And if it hadn't happened that sister Susan came over and made some for me just then, I do believe I should have had to borrow sheets and pillow-cases too, the sick require such very frequent changes.

Now, I'll own I was a little mortified about it at the time, but in thinking of it afterward I didn't care one bit. The best of housekeepers sometimes get slack about such things, but neighbors ought always to be ready to make up any such deficiencies. I thought, Mrs. Ross, perhaps you might be as badly off as I was, and so I've brought my thimble and will make or mend anything you like."

Mrs. Albro was out of breath when she finished her long speech, for she had resolutely said out her say despite two or three attempts to interrupt her.

Mrs. Ross was partly won by the frank sympathy and kindness of her neighbor, and partly influenced by the necessities of her case, so she said, with an awkward mixture of gratitude and pride:

"Well, you're very good. Some of his shirts does want mending, and if you've a mind to do it I'll satisfy you for it."

Mrs. Albro did not smile or protest that she should be quite ashamed to think of being paid. She merely took the basket when it was brought, and selecting

a torn garment, drew spool and pieces from her own little basket and set to work.

"Well, I say for it, that's thoughtful," said Mrs. Ross more cordially by far than was her wont. "I was just wondering where I could find some patches. I spose there's enough of 'em in the house, but I'm so tossed up I don't know anything this morning."

"Just so," returned Mrs. Albro cheerfully. "Do you know, I've sometimes had persons insist on helping me, and with the kindest of intentions too, and they would make me more work than they did. I believe I'll put new wrist-bands on this one, wouldn't you?"

"O do just what you think best. Sarah, you go and put up the curtains in the square room."

Sarah obeyed with alacrity. Somehow half the bitterness of her degradation seemed gone while she listened to Mrs. Albro's simple words. She was too shrewd to be deceived. She knew very well that Mrs. Albro understood fully the

shameful cause of the sickness of which she spoke with so much compassion; "but," she said to herself, "she has too much respect for us to say anything about it," and with this thought came to the poor child a feeling of self-respect as far removed from her habitual boasting bravado as it was from the agonized humiliation of an hour ago. "I am sure we aint to blame for father's drinking," went on her soliloquy, "and Mrs. Albro don't act as if she despised us for it, and if I do just as well as I can, perhaps folks wont think any worse of me for that."

Comforting herself thus, the child arranged the room, brushed away dust and a stray cobweb or two, then drew the wooden rocking chair up to the table by the window, and finally went and gathered such green things as she could find and placed them in a broken pitcher on the window.

"Take a seat in the square room, do, Mrs. Albro," said Mrs. Ross when these arrangements were completed. "Taint quite so dirty there. And Sarah, you get

your little chair for Mrs. Albro's feet. I do wish I was worth a cricket."

"O this answers every purpose," replied Mrs. Albro as she seated herself where she was requested. "You have got some very pretty leaves here, Sarah."

"Wish I could have got some flowers," said Sarah smiling.

"Flowers are getting very rare now. I heard the girls mourning yesterday, that even the asters and chrysanthemums were nearly gone."

"I mean to have a posy bed next year," said Sarah, quite forgetting her trouble.

Meanwhile poor Mr. Morris in the bedroom was thinking of something very different from flowers. Dr. Winchester had directed that his patient should take a sponge bath, and Mr. Morris had been obeying his orders. He now stood near the parlor door and made some jocose remarks about his patient.

Sarah's excited feelings burst forth. "O dear!" she exclaimed passionately; "I wish I was dead, that's what I do!"

"My poor child!" said Mrs. Albro, ex-

tending her arms with such genuine motherly tenderness of manner that Sarah stepped forward and allowed herself to be encircled, "My poor child, you must not allow yourself to speak or feel in that manner. It is very displeasing to God."

"I know it, but— O dear, what can I do!"

"I don't think I quite get your meaning, dear. I know you are in bitter trouble, but I don't understand how you feel."

"Why I feel shamed to death!"

"Then you know—"

"Yes, yes! I know all about it. It's rum that has made father sick and crazy, and every body despises us!"

"No, dear, that is not true; your poor father is blamed, of course, but he is also deeply pitied."

"Mr. Morris just made fun of him," said Sarah bitterly; "and you laughed yourself, you know you did!"

"My dear child, Mr. Morris is naturally a very mirthful sort of man. He finds something ludicrous almost every-

where, and he will have his joke. But Mr. Morris has one of the kindest hearts, and deeply pities your poor father. I confess I smiled at his droll words, but even at the same instant I felt almost angry with him for saying them."

"But don't you despise my father and all of us?"

"No, my poor child. May God save me from being so wicked."

"I don't see how you can help it," said Sarah perversely.

"My child, I will tell you how I can help it. It is by remembering constantly that my conduct has been far more offensive to God than the conduct of your poor father is to me."

"Is that so?" cried Sarah, in unfeigned amazement.

"Yes, my child. You have very little conception, none of us have, how entirely pure and holy God is. The best and the worst human beings are all alike, vile and corrupt, *except as, through the faith of some in the blood of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, they are saved from their sins.*"

"O I see!" cried Sarah eagerly. "It is because you are a Christian that you don't despise us!" Then the half-forgotten feelings of the evening before returned to Sarah's mind. "O, Mrs. Albro!" she exclaimed, "I tried to pray last night, and I did think the Lord heard me, and would help me, and take care of me. But this morning when the trouble came I forgot it—no, I didn't really forget it, but—"

"But you did not have so much faith as you ought," said Mrs. Albro, seeing that Sarah did not go on. "It was not strange, *but, my child, God is able to do all things for you. He will not scorn or despise you. He is all tenderness, all pity, all love. Though all the world should point at you in derision, he will hold you in his arms, and smile upon you, if you will only trust in him.*"

"O, Mrs. Albro, I will trust him; I know he is good!"

Mrs. Albro's arms were clasped closer about the child as she said, with tender solemnity. "May the Lord help you to

keep that resolution forever. May he give you strength and courage, according to the burden he has laid upon you."

Mrs. Ross now came in, and before her hard cold face no more could be said on the subject. After a while Mr. Morris came into the parlor, saying, "Well, I guess I've done neighbor Ross more good than the doctor. He's as peaceable as a lamb since I got done sponging on him."

"I dare say you've made him cleaner'n he's been before this ten years!" said Mrs. Ross with a short laugh.

Mr. Morris grinned, and Sarah's face crimsoned. She turned to Mrs. Albro almost unconsciously, and received a kind, encouraging look, that took away half the pain after all. It was an hour or two before Mrs. Albro had another chance to speak to her, and then it was only for two or three minutes.

"My dear child," she said, "if I have understood your feelings you are sincerely wishing to be good."

"Well, I do, Mrs. Albro," said Sarah earnestly; "I don't s'pose any body will believe it, but it's so!"

"Well, my dear, you understand, do you not, that in order to do right we must carefully obey God?"

"Yes, and I do mean to try, only I don't know very well what he wants me to do."

"I will tell you, Sarah, one thing that I am very sure he wants you to do. He wants you to submit patiently and willingly to whatever he sees fit to lay upon you. I can see that you are deeply mortified by—by *some things in your family*. You feel rather bitterly—"

"Well, who wouldn't?" interrupted Sarah hotly.

"Christ would not, my child. When he was here on earth he bore the sins and the shame of the whole world. He was mocked, spit upon, laughed at, and insulted in *almost every way*; but no impatient word ever passed his lips, no bitter thought ever lived in his pure heart. He bore the unutterable anguish

of the cross for you; cannot you bear a little shame for him?"

"For him, Mrs. Albro?"

"Yes, my child. Jesus Christ is glorified in the presence of the Father and all the holy angels by every effort, no matter how feeble, that is made on earth to obey and honor him."

"O Mrs. Albro! is that so?" cried Sarah, almost in an ecstasy. "Can I really do anything for the Lord?"

"Yes, my child; so great is his condescension that he accepts even the poorest service that is offered in the right spirit as something done for him. And O my child, the rewards he bestows are blessed!"

"Why, I never thought of such a thing, Mrs. Albro! I was wishing last night, when I thought how good he was, that I could do something to please him; but I didn't s'pose he cared how I felt about father. Why, Mrs. Albro, I wont care if all the world laugh at me, if the Lord wants me not to care."

"My child, God does not desire you to

harden your heart and become unfeeling. In his wisdom he has seen fit to put a bitter trouble upon you, and you must necessarily feel it deeply. What he requires is that you should accept it in a meek, submissive spirit, and bear it patiently. He has inflicted upon you, as it were, a blow, of which you must feel the keen smart; but you can refrain from sullen or angry murmurs and complaints."

A new realm of thought, feeling, and effort was opened up to Sarah Ross by this conversation. She was a child of good native understanding. She saw clearly that however undesirable her home might be, it was the home God had chosen to give her, and "of course," she said, "he don't want me to grumble about it."

From that hour it was Sarah Ross's fixed purpose and almost constant endeavor to bear the bitter trials of her lot patiently, as a service of the Lord. We have seen that she was rude, disobedient, and untruthful, and let no one suppose that her character was suddenly and

wholly changed. Indeed, it seemed at first that only one of God's requirements was made known to her, namely, that she should submit humbly and patiently to the disgrace of her family. But it is one of the great instances of the Divine wisdom and goodness that in the hearty fulfillment of almost any duty we are unexpectedly and almost unconsciously led to understand and perform many more duties. So it proved with Sarah.

It would make this chapter quite too long if I were to dwell on the events of the day.

Mrs. Albro staid until near night, winning slowly upon Mrs. Ross's heart by her unaffected kindness and delicacy.

Mrs. Clifton came over in the afternoon to offer the services of "some of our boys" as watchers for the night. Mrs. Albro grasped her hand and congratulated her upon the blessed change in her son William in a manner that brought tears to her eyes.

"Yes, William is a changed boy, cer-

tainly," she said tremulously. "I pray that it may last."

In a small place like Deepwater a case like that of Mr. Ross is a fearful novelty, and the news flies apace. Good Mr. Mansfield, in his evening prayer, made earnest mention of his unhappy townsman, and the next morning, together with his wife, rode over to visit the family. Mrs. Ross received them with the most frigid coldness, answered their kind inquiries in monosyllables, and would have made no mention of her husband whatever if the doctor had not paid his visit while they were there; as it was, she merely admitted that Mr. Ross was sick, in a manner so plainly indicating her determination to maintain the strictest reserve, that Mr. Mansfield felt it improper even to ask admission to the room. Having made every suitable effort to engage Mrs. Ross in conversation without success, he asked her if she was willing he should pray.

"You can do just as you like," she replied.

So Mr. Mansfield and his wife knelt in that gloomy room to bring the case of the unhappy family before God. Mrs. Ross sat bolt upright in her chair, and Sarah, though she longed to take what she felt to be the proper posture, was restrained by the fear of her mother's sneers. The minister prayed, as was his wont, with tender earnestness, and tears almost choked his utterance as he commended the members of the family individually to the merciful care of God. The presence of her mother made Sarah use every possible self-restraint; but when, in the low and broken tones of deep emotion, the pastor begged "the waters of eternal life for the dear child whose spirit, we humbly trust, is already thirsting," her sobs could be restrained no longer.

When the amen was said Mrs. Ross scarcely left a decent interval of silence before, in low but distinctly audible tones, she ordered Sarah to "leave the room, and stay till she could behave herself."

Mr. Mansfield heard the order with uneasiness, for he was nearly ready to go,

and of course wished to talk with Sarah first. He waited, however, hoping that she would soon return. But she did not reappear, and at length he said :

“Mrs. Ross, I had some conversation with *your daughter the evening before last*, and I thought I saw reason to hope that her mind was impressed by religious truth. I should be very glad, madam, if you do not object, to converse with her further.”

Mrs. Ross's face expressed astonishment, but she made no reply. She went and called Sarah, and then, instead of returning to the parlor, busied herself in the kitchen.

By patient questions and kind assurances Mr. and Mrs. Mansfield drew from Sarah some expression of the feelings we have seen, and they spoke many words of loving counsel and sympathy. Mrs. Mansfield gave her a little morocco covered testament,* and asked her to come to the Sabbath-school, and finally left her with her heart greatly strengthened for the weary work before her.

* See Frontispiece.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. ROSS BREAKS HER ARM.

It was nearly two weeks before Mr. Ross was able to leave his bed for any length of time. The violence of his disorder abated, and his reason returned in a few days it is true, but his whole system was poisoned and enfeebled, and never in her whole life will Sarah forget hearing the doctor tell a neighbor, in answer to some question, that he was afraid Mr. Ross was going into a kind of *rum consumption*. She had to go up stairs and kneel by her little bed a long time before the burning blood of shame would leave her cheek.

The people of the Clifton district were almost all good neighbors, but there was one who, in attention to the Ross family in their trouble, outdid all the rest, and that one was William Clifton. It is very possible that he felt a tenderer pity for the family than he would have felt if he

had not been the unlucky instrument of bringing upon them a heavy sorrow, and a satisfaction, on that account, in doing what he could to comfort them. But I think, after all, he did his humane work more from his new-born love to God, and consequent good-will to even the meanest of God's creatures, than for his own peace of mind.

He it was who made the circuit of the district one frosty morning, informing all able-bodied men that they were "hereby instructed and warned to muster, armed, equipped, and provisioned, on a certain field described, to take, at the edge of the hoe, certain potatoes detained for an unreasonable and illegal length of time in Mr. Ross's field." He it was who, almost wholly unaided, housed and husked Mr. Ross's corn; he that looked after the cattle and sheep, mended fences, and sawed firewood. Mrs. Ross had always been extremely jealous and envious of the Cliftons. They were the wealthiest family in the neighborhood, and the bitter things she had said about their fine place, their spirited

horses, their carriage, and their handsome furniture would make a good-sized book. But William's Christianlike conduct won at last upon her churlish heart, and she was heard to say that she hoped she should "live to see that boy come to the good luck he deserved;" and at another time, "that if it was his religion that made him do as he did she wished, in all conscience, everybody had religion." Nor did she hesitate to tell her husband that it was many a year since his fall work had been done so promptly and well.

And yet, solid as were the benefits the young man conferred, they were very trifling compared with the one great benefit which he labored and prayed to have bestowed on his poor neighbors. As soon as Mr. Ross was able to be out of doors, William, to use his own somewhat vulgar expression, went at him "like a thousand of brick," to persuade him to sign a pledge of total abstinence from all intoxicating drinks. Now, I suppose that if ever, under any as yet unthought-of combination of circumstances,

a thousand of brick should go at any body it would go with a good deal of force, but there, I think, the parallel ends. William used the most forcible arguments he could command, but he also made use of kind, even affectionate entreaty. Mr. Ross listened to him attentively. The poor man felt his degradation bitterly, and during the weary days of his convalescence he had made many silent resolutions that he would never be caught in that scrape again. This he freely said to William, and was ready to make any number of pledges of moderation, but persistently declined to go further. William reasoned and pleaded. He appealed to his self-respect, to his regard for the respect of the community, and, finally, to his feelings as a husband and father.

At this stage Mr. Ross suddenly cut the argument off by saying,

“Look here, young man, you’re talking now about what you don’t know nothing at all about; just you wait till you have a family of your own, and if you come to be situated just as I be, you see if you

don't want drink or something else to help you along."

After that, for a considerable time, the unhappy man avoided resolutely all conversation on the subject.

And how was it meanwhile with Sarah? Well, the poor child was struggling on against much discouragement and in the midst of much darkness, but struggling still, trying earnestly still to do and bear what God required of her, so far as she understood it. She saw as much of Mrs. Albro and Lena as she could, but this was not very much, for she had a good deal of work to do, and she did not dare to shirk as she had formerly done. Many and precious, however, were the lessons she learned of them; for scarcely ever did she meet them without finding herself roused to combat some new fault. All who went to the house or met her elsewhere noticed, with pleasure, her improved conduct; but her hardbound mother seldom gave her an approving word. I am very much afraid I shall be accused of exaggerating the character of

this woman, for surely but few of my readers have ever met a person whose mental and moral nature was so wholly embittered, whose heart was so dead to the sweet emotions of love and kindness. It had not always been so. At her marriage, Mrs. Ross's heart was comparatively tender, and she had, I think, a degree of real love for her husband; but the stubborn pride against which we have seen Sarah contending had been the demon of her life, and instead of recognizing it as such, and combating it accordingly, she had boasted of and nursed it as a virtue.

When Peter Ross began to drink ardent spirits, which was soon after his marriage, his wife felt bitterly his neglect of her and his disregard of her feelings; but she would not humble herself so far as to ask him to do what he clearly ought to have done voluntarily and for her sake. She never had courted his attentions, and she guessed she shouldn't begin now. If he didn't care enough for her to spend his evenings at home he might go

and be hanged; she would not interfere.

So she said, and so her strong will helped her to continue; but God alone knows the agonies of that proud heart as it struggled on its mistaken way, crushing, pressing, murdering every sweet womanly *instinct, driving the juggernaut of pride* over living, quivering heart-strings, because their throbbings were insultingly neglected. But the work was done now. May I be forgiven if I judge harshly, but it seemed so. It seemed that the sweet wine of pure and lovely womanhood was turned hopelessly to gall and vinegar, the flowers all dead, and the heart given up for a den for cold, railing, venomous serpents. May God save you and I, dear reader, from being the subject or the cause of a ruin like that.

Between two and three weeks after Mr. Ross got about the neighbors were almost dismayed to learn that Mrs. Ross had, by an unlucky fall, broken her right arm.

Mr. Morris told his wife he thanked

his stars it was the women that would be wanted up there now. For his part he had been hunting for something to perfume his clothes with ever since he was there.

Mrs. Morris reproved him, not so sharply, however, as she might have done if she had not known he would be among the first to respond to any call of real want wherever it came from; and only waiting to look up two or three little things she thought might be needed, proceeded directly to the house of her afflicted neighbors.

"Well really, Mrs. Albro," she exclaimed as she entered the kitchen, "there is no hope of getting the start of you when anybody is in trouble. I thought surely I should be first this time."

"I have only been here a little while," said Mrs. Albro.

"Has the doctor been here?"

"Yes; and refused to touch it. He says he is afraid it is a very bad break, and advised them to send to E. for a surgeon."

"O dear! Well, have they sent?"

"Yes; our man has gone. Will you go in the bedroom and see her?"

Mrs. Morris warmed her hands at the stove a moment, and then both ladies repaired to the bedside.

"Well, it does seem as if I should die," said the sufferer, in reply to an inquiry from Mrs. Morris.

"The agony must be terrible, I know," said Mrs. Albro tenderly; "but we hope you will soon be relieved."

"Soon! It's every step of ten miles."

"Yes; but Nelly Bly is very fleet, you know."

Mrs. Ross groaned, and then after a short silence burst out angrily, "I declare I should think Doctor Winchester would be ashamed of himself. If I was a doctor and didn't know enough to set a broken bone I'd shut up shop and not impose on folks."

It was of no use to tell Mrs. Ross that Deepwater did not afford surgical practice enough to give a medical man experience and confidence sufficient to warrant him

in undertaking a severe injury; so she grumbled on uninterrupted until Sarah came into the room and changed the current of her thoughts by asking directions about the work.

It would be a weary task to rehearse all the *harsh, fretful, complaining words* with which the poor woman embittered her own distress and vexed the kind hearts of her attendants during the time that necessarily passed before the surgeon could arrive, and I am glad that it is not necessary. When Dr. Adams arrived he immediately confirmed Dr. Winchester's opinion as to the seriousness of the injury, and enjoined much more quiet than a broken arm usually requires.

Well would it have been for poor Mrs. Ross if she had obeyed him; but no sooner was her pain somewhat relieved by the *needful adjustments* than she insisted on rising from her bed to look after her work. Mrs. Albro and Mrs. Morris reasoned and expostulated in vain, and Sarah promised her most faithful service with no better success. Mrs. Ross said she should not

hurt herself. Sarah could do, only she wanted somebody at her heels to watch her and tell her every minute. Mrs. Morris grew disgusted with her obstinacy and went home. Mrs. Albro persisted in staying until the next morning, but by that time she was convinced that no one could be of any service to the misguided woman, and she too went home and told her husband she really feared Mrs. Ross would kill herself.

The week following was a trying one to Sarah. Of course almost all the work came upon her, and the burden was far too heavy for her young shoulders. Much of the work she was quite unaccustomed to, and although she tried faithfully she irritated her mother fearfully by her awkwardness. It was, "Well, I do declare, I believe I could work that butter better with my feet than you do with your hands;" and, "Now don't for conscience' sake put your head into that dough, pretty much all the rest of you is there a'ready;" and, "O for pity's sake, you good-for-nothing little torment! here's this lard tub

wide open and a mouse in it." And so on from morning till night.

Sarah tried to bear it patiently; she tried to crush down the angry spirit in her heart; she tried to restrain her lips from bitter replies; but it was only a part of the time that she was successful. I do not wonder at this. The force of habit alone would have been very strong, and we know that very many of her habits were unlovely, unkind, uncivil. But you will see at once that she had also fierce temptation to contend with. Her sense of justice was outraged almost every half hour in the day. She knew right well that she did not deserve the cruel taunts and threats, the insulting epithets and bitter censure her mother constantly bestowed. She knew that she tried hard to do what her mother wished quickly and well, and that nearly all her failures were the result of *ignorance or inexperience*, for which she was not blameworthy. O no, I cannot wonder that fierce anger often flamed up into her eyes, or that un-filial words leaped burning from her lips.

But I will tell you what I do wonder at. I wonder, I must ever wonder and admire, at the loving patience of the gracious Saviour, who kept her from giving up in despair under her many discouragements. I wonder at the long-suffering of the blessed Spirit who lingered about her, helping her infirmities, helping her in the morning to take up her heavy burden and arm herself for another day's battle, helping her through the day, enabling her to keep down part of the sinful inclinations of her heart; and, above all, helping her at night to confess, with penitent tears, the sins of the day and pray for pardon and peace.

I found it very difficult to form an adequate idea of the state of Sarah's mind at the time, and I find it still more difficult now to impart the ideas that I did form satisfactorily to my readers. Perhaps I cannot do better than to say that her interior being was something like a very filthy and every way miserable hovel, which some one had just undertaken to cleanse, furnish, and fit up for the dwelling-

place of some person of wealth, refinement, and purity of taste. There was a little onslaught made upon the dirt, the rubbish, the cobwebs, and a few choice articles had been brought in, making a strange, incongruous mixture, at which one looked in doubt and perplexity, and with almost equally mingled hope and fear.

For nearly two weeks Mrs. Ross persisted in her dangerous course, her arm getting daily more fearfully purple and swollen, until from wrist to shoulder it was one blotch of terrible inflammation. Her neighbors warned and entreated her in vain; but not until the pain became quite insupportable would she consent to let Dr. Adams be called again, or even to allow herself anything like sufficient rest. When at last the surgeon did see her he almost instantly informed her that immediate amputation was her only chance, and got for his pains a volley of coarse abuse, and an intimation that he had better not keep his horse standing too long at the gate.

Of course Dr. Adams could not enforce his orders, and three days more passed. At the end of that time, groaning and swearing, the poor woman submitted to the knife; but it was too late. The arm was amputated at the shoulder; but Mrs. Ross had a *taint of scrofula in her blood*, which had taken advantage of this long aggravated injury, and now the angry humor blazed up to her very neck, and Dr. Adams had very little hope that the wound he had been forced to make would ever heal.

Now, indeed, Mrs. Ross was effectually laid aside; and let us not blame Sarah too much that, for a moment, she exulted in the prospect of doing as she liked and nobody to find fault.

“O dear, now, that’s just as I used to feel before—before I tried to be good,” she added upon second thought. “I won’t take any advantage, though; I’ll let mother know everything, and I’ll do just as near what she wants as I can.”

Hired help for Mrs. Ross was out of the question, for two substantial reasons:

First, Mrs. Ross was really too poor to pay a girl; and, second, no girl in Deep-water would have consented, for any pay, to stay there. The neighbors all understood this, and for many weary weeks kind-hearted women took turns in attending to such of Mrs. Ross's daily wants as could not be trusted with Sarah. As for Sarah, every body agreed that "it did beat all how capable and faithful she proved herself." She met with many mishaps and failures, it is true. Her bread soured, and her pies got burnt now and then; but as a whole she certainly got on well. At first she conscientiously carried everything she spoiled to her mother, and received even bitterer, angrier scoldings than ever; but one day she happened to be in the bed-room with the fragments of a broken platter in her hands when Dr. Adams came.

"In a rage, hey?" said he, taking his patient by the wrist and pulling out his watch. "Well, Mrs. Ross, it is a great pity that dish is broken, and undoubtedly miss there ought to be hung; but,

madam, don't you find it tiresome lying here?"

"Yes, it's enough to kill anybody."

"And I s'pose I should get something quite different from a blessing if I should tell you you would have to lie here the rest of your life."

"O dear!" groaned Mrs. Ross pitifully.

"I don't want to scare you, poor woman," said the doctor, changing his tone, "but there is one solemn fact that I feel bound to tell you. Every paroxysm of anger in which you indulge, heating and exciting your whole system, aggravates your disease, and, now mark me, it is but a precious little more aggravation it'll bear before it'll carry you to a place where you won't want any platters any way!"

At this Sarah began to cry.

"O don't fret, child," said the doctor kindly; "you're doing the very best you can, I see plainly; but when you break another dish, or do any other mischief, don't you fetch it, or any account of it, into this room. If your conscience troubles you,

tell your father; but as you value your mother's life don't let anything come to her knowledge that will throw her into a passion. Will you promise, child?"

Sarah looked hesitatingly at her mother.

"It's a pity I wasn't out of the way and done with it," said Mrs. Ross sullenly. "Well, well, it's no odds to me what you do."

And so it was settled from that time forth. Mrs. Ross asked no questions; in fact *she seldom spoke at all, except to make known her wants.* She seemed sullenly resentful of what she called her cruel fate, and indifferent to all else.

To Sarah the change could not be otherwise than a happy one. At first she missed her accustomed scoldings almost as much as she would have missed her *dinners; but almost before she was aware of it, her temper had improved a hundred per cent.* Her father rarely scolded; never, in fact, except when he had been *drinking, and no one knew that Peter Ross had touched the poisonous cup since*

his illness. He was but little in the house, indeed, since the doctor's stern edict. Sarah's intercourse with both her parents was almost wholly confined to a few necessary questions and as many brief answers. It was a sadly lonely life, especially after the visits of the neighbors became less frequent. But, though father and mother had in a manner forsaken her, the Lord had taken her up, and the child had sweet seasons of rejoicing in view of this comforting fact.

Good Mr. Mansfield rode over as often as he could, and always left her feeling better and stronger. Mrs. Albro spent whole days at the house after the other neighbors considered themselves under no further obligation, ministering tenderly to the comfort of the invalid, and patiently initiating Sarah into the mysteries of the culinary art. Susie and Lena came occasionally too, and so also did Laura Clifton and Juliana Morris; but Sarah had no time to play with them, and their visits were generally very short, at least all of them except Lena's. She, sweet child,

always staid as long as she could; and though she seldom ventured a word of counsel on her own responsibility, she seldom failed to utter some precious and pertinent truth, prefaced by "Mother says," or "I heard Mr. Mansfield say," or "My Sabbath-school teacher thinks," and Sarah grew to love her far more dearly than she had ever loved any being on earth before. Still there were many long lonely days in which Sarah had no companionship, save her work and her thoughts, and she often found herself wondering how she could live if she had no more to comfort her than she had had a few months ago. Then she wondered how her poor mother lived, in all her great misery, with no hopeful trust in God, no love for the sweet words of his holy book. From this thought there sprang a pitiful tenderness of feeling that gradually communicated itself to her manner, and by the time the snow of winter surrounded her home the neighbors began to say Sarah Ross seemed really another child.

CHAPTER VI.

SARAH'S LESSONS IN WELL-DOING.

OF course our young friend's religious hopes and feelings were known and spoken of among those who wished her well. One day, in early winter, Mrs. Clifton went to the house, and spent the day cutting and preparing such needful winter garments as Mrs. Ross had been able to procure cloth for, carried them home at night, and sent next day for all the women within a radius of three miles to help her do the requisite sewing.

Now, I don't know how to account for it, but I do really believe that ladies who eschew scandal everywhere else will talk it at a sewing circle; and I have come to feel that it is a place where one peculiarly needs to watch and pray. Certainly the ladies of Deepwater were not, as a usual thing, very censorious; but that day they did speak some awfully severe truths about poor Mrs. Ross. Just as Mrs.

Smith was affirming that she should expect her husband would "carry on" worse than Mr. Ross if she acted like Mrs. Ross, William Clifton came into the parlor and diverted the conversation from its mischievous channel by begging loudly for a needle, and declaring he could sew like a Grover and Baker! He was speedily supplied with work, and then he wanted his needle threaded and the bees-wax brought, and a cricket for his feet, and somebody to fan him. At last, that is, after having taken eight or ten remarkable-looking stitches, he intimated that he should not feel able to do much more unless he could have a cup of tea to quiet his nerves and brace him up a little. At this somebody ventured to insinuate that it might be nearly as much work to wait on him as to do the sewing, whereupon he went off in an apparently great rage, protesting he would go somewhere where his genius would be appreciated. He did so, and presently reappeared with a great tray, full of rosy apples and nicely-cracked hickory nuts.

But, though there was in William Clifton, as his mother sometimes half impatiently told him, play enough for six boys, there was sober, earnest thoughtfulness enough also for at least one noble fellow. That evening, after nearly all the family were in bed, he spoke out suddenly: "Mother, I believe there was more truth than good-nature in what some of the ladies said to-day."

"About what, William?"

"About Mrs. Ross."

"O well, I don't think we shall make her any better by talking about her," said Mrs. Clifton.

"I know; but, mother, Ross said something to me once that made me think if he had a pleasant family perhaps he would try to reform."

"Perhaps; but—well, I haven't any patience with a man that makes a beast of himself just because he has an unhappy home."

"Mother, you don't know a man's temptations."

"Well, do you?" said Mrs. Clifton half

smiling, and thinking rather sadly what a little while it seemed since she pressed the first kiss upon the lips that now talked of the temptations of a man.

"Yes, some of them even now, mother. And, mother," said the young man rising and speaking with almost vehement earnestness, "if you had not done a hundred thousand things—"

"Hasn't one of my boys been promising to leave off speaking extravagantly?" said *Mrs. Clifton* kindly.

"Yes; but, really and truly, I don't call that extravagant. I do positively believe you have done a hundred thousand things that *Mrs. Ross* never thought of doing, not to mention the thousands of mischievous things you have left undone, to make your home a pleasant one. And, mother, if you hadn't done these things, and if we had had no dear old grandmother, no kind Aunt Susan, no little pet of a sister, your boys never would have been—the respectable fellows that they are, if I do say it."

"The credit, the honor, the blessing

they are," said Mrs. Clifton feelingly, all the woman in her heart roused and quickened by her son's filial words. "Well, I am sure I am sorry for Mr. Ross, and for all of them; but I don't know what we can do more than we are doing."

There was a silence, and then William began again. "They do say that Sarah is wonderfully improved."

"It's perfectly astonishing," rejoined his mother; "*I never saw such a change in a child in my life.*"

"And her mother is pretty much out of the way, aint she?"

"Yes; the poor creature don't get out of her room, and I am afraid never will."

"It is very sad, of course; but—well, it's an ill wind that blows good to nobody. That little girl must have things pretty much to herself now; and, mother, how do you know but what, if she had somebody to put her up to it, and teach her, and help her, she could make her father comfortable, and flatter him, and get him to quit drinking?"

"Why, William, one would suppose Peter Ross was your brother!"

"And isn't he, in one sense? Say, mother, you and Mrs. Albro just put your heads together and see what you can do!"

Mrs. Clifton, though really a benevolent woman, was not of a very hopeful turn of mind, and she regarded William's plan as a rather visionary one. Such a man as Peter Ross would never be turned from his evil ways by anything that a child could do; but then William, dear boy, was so much in earnest about it that she must, at least, speak to Mrs. Albro on the subject. So when she found time she rode over to the white cottage, and told her friend what William had said. Mrs. Albro approved the plan entirely. It could certainly do no harm, and it might do great good. She would speak to Sarah at the first opportunity, etc. Susie and Lena were in the parlor while this conversation was going on, and Lena's eager ears drank in every word, her eyes sparkling and her cheeks ablaze. Her mother smiled and nodded to her sympathetically

several times, and at length said, "There's a missionary for us. Lena is a very enthusiastic friend of Sarah's."

"And very likely she would be the best one to speak to her. Suppose you try it, dear."

"O might I?" cried Lena eagerly. "I am sure I could persuade her to try."

"No doubt Sarah will be easily persuaded," said Mrs. Albra. "The difficulty will be for her to know how to go to work to persuade her father."

"O I think she could!" said Lena earnestly.

"Well, dear, what advice would you give her?" asked Mrs. Clifton, putting her arm round the little girl, as in her eagerness she came close to where the ladies sat.

"O I would tell her to make every thing nice for him, and coax him, and read stories for him, and—and—" Lena stopped, blushing deeply.

"Well, go on, my child," said her mother.

"And pray for him," whispered Lena.

"Ah, we can all do that," said Mrs. Clifton.

"And let us do so," added Mrs. Albro. "But what say you, Mrs. Clifton, shall we let this zealous little reformer go and see Sarah first?"

"Certainly, and I am sure Susie will have a share in it too," said Mrs. Clifton, noticing *Susie's blank look*. "I'll tell Laura about it, and we will have a little girls' missionary society."

"Only we wont call it so," said Lena smiling.

"Why not, pray?"

"O because Mr. Ross's folks wouldn't want to play heathen."

"Ah, our cause is in good hands, I see," said Mrs. Clifton; and Mrs. Albro, can we wonder? looked just a little bit proud.

The next morning, when Susie and Lena were getting off to school, Lena asked her mother if they might get excused as soon as their lessons for the day were finished.

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Albro smiling.

"And may we go—"

"Just anywhere you like," said the mother, without waiting for the question to be completed, and wearing a very knowing look.

"And stay—"

"Until somebody comes after you with the sleigh. I foresaw your request, and asked your father about it."

"Dear mother!"

"And, children," added Mrs. Albro, "*if there should be anything left of your dinner you had better take it along.*"

"Well I fancy there will be if we are to carry that great basket load; what is it anyway?"

"O buns, and biscuits, and cookies. We can't expect Sarah to be a very nice cook yet, though I am sure she does very well considering her chances, and I thought perhaps they would like a taste of something different."

So the children trudged away to school, tugging the heavy basket between them, and promising themselves that they would study so hard that they could get dismissed by two o'clock.

Sarah was very glad to see them. She was ironing, but she folded her blanket immediately and began taking the irons from the fire.

Now, ironing was Susie's speciality in the way of house-work. To be sure, if I had N. P. Willis's shirts to get up I should not think of getting her to help me; but she was a very good plain ironer nevertheless, and she prided herself upon it not a little.

"Don't take the irons away, Sarah," she cried; "finish ironing, and let me help you."

"Visitors shouldn't work," said Sarah smiling.

"O yes; come, now, let's play keeping house; you be mistress, and we'll be the servants, or daughters, or what you like."

"Daughters, then," said Sarah, rearranging her blanket. This ironing had ought to be done, fact."

"How many irons have you got?"

"Four."

"O good; you are better off than we, for we haven't got but three. Now, you

make a rousing fire and they will heat fast enough to keep us both at work."

"And can't I have anything to do?" said Lena, pretending to pout. "O, I know what I'll do."

So saying, she opened the basket they had brought and then ran into the pantry for a plate, which she filled with a biscuit, a bun, and a slice or two of tongue.

"There, now, I'm going to carry these to your mother and see if I can't tempt her to eat. Mrs. Clifton told mother her appetite was failing dreadfully."

"O dear, yes," said Sarah; "I can't hardly fix anything she'll touch. But wait, she never eats anything without she has some tea with it. I'll go and ask her."

"Now see here, children," interposed Susie patronizingly, "you just make the tea and not say a word to her about it. When father was getting better of the *bilious fever* he had a dreadful poor appetite, and all the way mother could make him eat anything was to surprise him with something he hadn't seen, nor smelt,

nor thought of. If she asked him beforehand he was just sure to say, 'I guess not, my dear;' when if she fixed it and carried it to him, he'd just smile and take the spoon and eat."

Sarah hesitated a little, but finally consented to take Susie's advice. The tea was prepared, and, as there was no such thing as a tray in the house, Sarah followed Lena into the bedroom with the cup in her hands.

Poor Mrs. Ross was feeling worse than usual, both in body and mind. At another time I am sure she would not have been so ungrateful; but now, as the loathing which sick persons often feel at the sight of food came over her, she said, "O dear, child, do carry that victuals out of my sight; I'm just as much obliged to you as though I took it, but I can't eat."

"O, mother, do," pleaded Sarah, stepping forward with her tea; "I'm sure you need something."

"You've been making tea to waste, have you? Now carry it out straight, and when I want tea I'll let you know."

Lena retreated in dismay, and Sarah followed, shut the door, and burst, I am sorry to say, into a passion of angry tears.

"There!" she exclaimed, "it aint the least use that ever was to try. I'd do anything in the world to please her, but I can't, and I'm clear discouraged."

"O well, *sick people are always cross,*" said Susie cheerfully.

"It aint that," replied Sarah. "She aint any crosser than she always was. Nobody ever did please her, or ever can, or ever will. O dear, dear, dear!"

"Sarah, Sarah!" expostulated Lena.

"O dear, I know I'm awful wicked; I thought I never would get mad at her again, and here I am, and for just nothing at all too. O, Lena, I never shall be good!"

"There, there, don't cry," said Susie, *coming up and putting her arm around Sarah.* "You are just like me; I fly in a passion at things that wouldn't disturb Lena a bit, and then I feel so sorry and ashamed."

"Yes," said Lena; "and mother says—"

"Stop, let me tell. Mother says I aint so vèry much worse than Lena after all, if I only try as hard as I can to govern my temper."

"O I *do* try, I *will* try," sobbed Sarah; and then she went back into the bedroom and asked, in her kindest tone, "Mother, can't you think of something I can do for you?"

"No; just go out and keep still, for I want to get a little sleep if it's a possible thing."

CHAPTER VII.

SARAH'S TEA-PARTY.

WHEN Sarah re-entered the kitchen she found her two visitors whispering together very earnestly. They stopped as she approached, and Susie resumed her ironing, nodding significantly to Lena, who presently, in a rather confused manner, began to speak.

"Now, Sarah, I'm going to tell you something, and—and I want you should promise not to get vexed."

"Well, I wont."

"Well—why—you see—O, Sarah, you wont be mad, will you?"

"No, certain; out with it."

"Taint anything but what you know. It's about your father."

"O, about his drinking," said Sarah, reddening; "well, I am sure I can't help it."

"You aren't angry, Sarah?"

"No, no; but what's the use talking of it? I'm sure I feel as bad as ever I can about it."

"I don't want you to feel bad, but—O, Susie, do help me."

"Well, I guess I'd better, for you never will tell anything at this rate. Of course you've got too much sense to get mad, Sarah, so I'm coming right out with it. Mrs. Clifton was at our house yesterday, and she and mother spoke about your father's drinking rum, and they said just what you know very well yourself, that your poor mother hasn't made his home very pleasant for him."

"Well, I know it," sighed Sarah; "but she can't do anything now, and I don't see as it's any use to bring up what's past and gone now."

"No; but that isn't all they said. They said that everything is in your charge now, and you could do what you liked, and may be—there, Lena, I've got you by the lions now, haven't I?"

"Yes, and I wish I had half your courage," said Lena, kissing her sister. "You

see, Sarah, they thought that if you should try every way to please your father, and make everything nice for him, and amuse him, may be you could coax him to leave off drinking rum."

"I've thought of that very thing my own self!" cried Sarah, her eyes and cheeks growing bright with excitement; "and I've tried as well as I could, but there don't seem to be much that I can do toward it."

"O I'm sure there's a great deal you could do," said Lena earnestly.

"Well, what?" asked Sarah.

"O, do everything he wants done," said Susie.

"And do everything in a real pleasant way, just as if you felt happy to do it," said Lena. "Mother says there is often more in the manner of doing things than in the things themselves."

"But father don't scarcely ever want anything."

"Don't want anything?"

"Well, he don't tell of it if he does. He never talks to me hardly a bit."

"Don't talk to you!" cried Susie; "why, I never heard of such a thing in my life! If my father didn't talk to me I should pull him all to pieces."

"O no," said Lena; "but we should climb on his knee and coax him."

"Climb on his knee!" said Sarah, laughing rather derisively. "I haven't done such a thing since I was a baby."

"We do, then," said Susie; "and if father is ever so much worried about the farm work or anything, we can always make him forget about it."

"O, well, I couldn't do any such thing; and it wouldn't suit my father, either."

"Perhaps not," said Lena gently; "but I am sure he would like to have you talk to him and be company for him."

"And fix nice things for him to eat," said Susie.

"And read to him."

"And get him to tell you stories."

"And do a hundred things that nobody can tell you or think of till the minute to do them comes."

"O girls, I don't know what I can do, but I will try," said Sarah fervently.

"And everybody will help you," said Susie. "All the neighbors are anxious to have him do well, and they will help him and encourage him."

"And they will all pray for him and for you," whispered Lena.

Winter afternoons are short, and there was but little more chance for conversation before Sarah thought it time to begin getting supper. This she did as nicely as she could, her young visitors helping and chattering all the while. When all was ready she went and called her father, who had all the afternoon been thrashing in the barn. Mr. Ross came in, but as soon as he saw his daughter's visitors he went into the wood-shed and began cutting up a large stick of wood.

"Aren't you ready, father?" asked Sarah, *following him.*

"Yes, pretty soon. Go along and eat your supper, and don't wait for me."

The truth was, Mr. Ross felt his degradation, and was abashed in the presence

of the innocent children of his upright neighbor. If they had understood his feelings they might not have had the bold, childlike confidence with which, as it was, they acted.

Sarah had baked pancakes, that being the kind of cookery in which she usually succeeded best, and this time they turned out admirably. Even the first one slipped off the pan as nicely as if it was not a peculiar trick of first pancakes to persist obstinately in leaving the pan only by fragments, and all its successors followed its example by behaving themselves with great propriety.

"What a lovely brown they are," cried Susie, "and so light and nice looking! Now, Sarah, don't you let a knife touch them till your father sees them."

"O he wont come till he's ready," said Sarah. "We may as well sit down before they're cold."

"What's he doing so very important, I wonder; I'm going to see." And to Sarah's utter amazement Susie ran out into the shed. "O, Mr. Ross, can't that

log wait? Sarah has made the most splendid pancakes you ever saw, and they'll be all spoiled."

"Go and eat 'em, then," said Peter Ross.

"Dear, don't you think we know better manners than that? And besides, Sarah has taken so much pains, and she'll feel real bad if you don't see how nice she has done."

There was no reply, and Susie lingered, busying herself by tearing great fitches of bark from some white birch logs.

"Run along, little girl," said Mr. Ross at length, "I'm afeard some o' these chips will fly in your eyes."

Mind, young reader, I don't quite commend Susie's conduct as a pattern. I think she was a little too bold, though I am sure she did not mean to be saucy.

"No, sir," said she, "I'm going to stay here till you go in with me, and if you have a mind to put my eyes out with your chips, and have me grow up a blind beggar woman, leading a dog by a string, you can."

Mr. Ross laughed, but kept on chopping, and only said, "Get yourself into the house, child."

Mr. Ross watched her for a minute or two, a smile breaking slowly over his coarse face the while, and then threw down his ax, saying, "Well, well, I'll knock under;" and, half embarrassed, and more than half amused, he followed the merry little creature into the house.

To the table? Not yet a while. Dirty, miserable drunkard as he was, Peter Ross was not quite lost to all sense of decency yet; and though years had passed since he had shown anybody such an attention before, he washed and combed himself, changed his begrimed shirt for a clean one, and put on his best coat ere he approached the table. Sarah looked on in silent amazement, and in that hour the first glimmering perception of what a pleasant home might do for her degraded father dawned upon her mind. At supper Susie and Lena chattered away as freely and merrily as they would have done in

the presence of their own genial and dearly loved father. Susie pressed the pancakes upon Mr. Ross's notice, and finally won him to say that Sarah was "quite a smart little housekeeper."

"I guess she is," pursued Susie warmly. "Why, father would be ever so proud if Lena and I could cook so nicely, wouldn't he, Lena?"

Lena didn't quite think he would be *proud*, he was too good for that, but she was *sure* he would be "*very much pleased*."

Sarah's face grew even redder than it had been while bending over the frying pan, and somehow her eyes met those of her father. Was it possible? Was Peter Ross really smiling on his daughter? It was even so, and O ye who have been smiled on all your lives, hope not to understand the rushing torrent of emotion that swept through Sarah's heart. Bursting into a fit of uncontrollable weeping, she cried out, "O father, father; I don't care if it is silly, I'd do anything in the world if I could only please you."

Peter Ross dropped his knife and fork and gazed at his child. At first his face expressed only stupid wonder. Then—but I despair of describing the transition. I don't suppose he had a handkerchief about him, or that he would have used one if he had, but certainly there was a bright drop in each of his heavy, blood-shot eyes. I don't quite think Lena was artful enough to do it on purpose—perhaps the tremulousness in her sympathetic little heart communicated itself to her hand. However it was, she certainly upset half a cup of tea just in time to relieve a vast deal of embarrassment. Sarah stopped sobbing to wipe it away, and Mr. Ross asked, "Did it burn you, sis?" with more apparent interest than the case required.

After supper Sarah hustled the dishes unwashed into the pantry, and then brought a large pan of butternuts, placed them on the stone hearth, and sat down to crack them. To her renewed surprise her father offered to do it for her, saying, not ill-naturedly, that he "never did see

any womankind yet that could crack but'nuts without pounding their fingers."

"And smashing the meats all up too," added Susie; "O I'm the *greatest* case for butternuts!"

So Mr. Ross sat down, and the trio gathering around him; he tossed one alternately into each lap, until, careless children, their nice aprons were sadly soiled. While this little scene was enacting Mr. and Mrs. Albro came in. Mrs. Albro shook hands with Mr. Ross, patted Sarah on the cheek, and then went into the bedroom. Mr. Albro sat down and cracked and ate nuts with the humor of a boy, chatting meanwhile with Mr. Ross about the weather, the crops, the school meeting, etc., gradually leading the conversation up to higher things than Mr. Ross often spoke of, and infusing, nobody could tell how, a feeling of self-respect into the poor man's heart that had long been a stranger there. Presently he disappeared from the kitchen, and after a little time returned, bringing—no, I'm not drawing a

funny picture—a *milk-pan* full of fine apples. You needn't laugh! It was his way of expressing his good-will, and did not one Joseph of old take a very similar method to express his love for his young brother?

They were really superior apples, and Mr. Albro took pains to assert what was, of course, perfectly true, that his farm did not produce any at all to be compared with them.

"Want to know," said Mr. Ross. "Well, our trees done first rate this year. Might have a bushel or two of this kind and welcome if you'd carry them home."

"Really, Mr. Ross, I'm greatly obliged to you," said Mr. Albro frankly, "and I shall certainly come after them."

Now I am aware that there are persons who would call Mr. Albro's conduct in this matter deceitful, for he certainly had a sufficiency of fair apples at home; and his main object in the transaction was to give his neighbor a little taste of the independent, self-respectful, man-among-men feeling he had well-nigh forfeited.

Now Mr. Pettyman would have responded to such an offer about as follows: "O no, thank ye, Mr. Ross. We're well enough on't for apples, and if we want, I'm as well able to buy 'em as you be to give 'em to me. Much obliged to you, but I couldn't think of taking 'em from you."

Mr. Ross would have slunk back into his *miserable self*, feeling *meaner and more ashamed than ever*; Mr. Pettyman's selfish pride would have been saved, but I do not think his conduct would have been one whit more honest than was that of Mr. Albro.

By eight o'clock Mr. Albro gathered his happy family into his sleigh and set out for home.

"That poor woman fails constantly," said Mrs. Albro sadly.

"Seems to me she ought to have better care than she can have under present circumstances," said Mr. Albro.

"Certainly she ought. I fairly begged her to let the neighbors come in turn and spend the nights with her, but she obstinately refused."

"Poor creature! May God have mercy on her soul!" said Mr. Albro, and then added, after a pause, "Children, how did you succeed in your mission?"

"O splendidly!" cried both the children. "Why, father," said Susie, "Mr. Ross would be just as nice as anybody if he had somebody to—to talk to him, and tease him, and help him."

"And could you make Sarah understand it?" asked the mother.

"Why, yes, I think she did; at least I'm sure she'll try."

And Sarah did try. That night after she had lighted her candle to go to bed she set it down upon the table, and, scarcely knowing why, went and stood by her father.

"What do you want?" said he after a time.

"O nothing as I know of. I was thinking—"

"Speak out, child."

"I was thinking how pleasant it has been this afternoon, and—I was wishing it could always be so."

"You can't always have company, child."

"But—we could—we could be company for one another. That's what I was thinking."

"Have you been lonesome since your mother was laid up?"

"Yes, father, and before. O father, I've been a naughty girl, but—"

"You haint had no chance to be anything else," said Mr. Ross so feelingly that Sarah was encouraged to go on.

"I know I've been very bad, father; I haven't minded you and mother, and I've done most everything that's wicked. But, father, I am trying to do better. I will mind you and try to please you, father."

"I haint no fault to find." Mr. Ross was obliged to restrict himself to short sentences by this time.

"Father, I've got a Testament, and I like to read it, and it tells people how to be good. Father, shouldn't you like to read it too?"

"Sarah, what alive has come over

you?" exclaimed Mr. Ross in astonishment. "You talk like a minister."

Sarah could not reply, but, bursting into a flood of tears, she took up her candle and hastened up stairs.

All that long night Peter Ross sat in his chair, leaving it only now and then at the querulous call of his poor wife. What *his thoughts were no mortal will ever know*; but from that time forth he was, in some respects, a changed man.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOY COMES TO SARAH'S HEART.

Two or three weeks passed away, during which Mrs. Ross became so much worse that the kind-hearted matrons of the vicinity thought it necessary to insist on attending at her bedside during the night. She received this attention with sullen thanklessness. They could not do anything for her, and she was just as well off alone. Mr. Ross, however, welcomed and thanked them. He had become, as he said, *concerned*, and tried in his rude way to be kind to his unhappy wife, who was truly passing away.

Perhaps I cannot more graphically describe her state than by repeating a conversation held by two of her neighbors.

"You've been up there to-day, haven't you, Mrs. Morris? Well, what *do* you think of Mrs. Ross, any way?"

"Well, I can't hardly tell you, Mrs.

Smith. She's in a strange way. Sometimes I think she isn't hardly in her right mind."

"Do tell if you have thought that? I haint dared to speak it out, but I've sartinly thought so myself. Why, I can't never get a word out of her scarcely when I'm there."

"Neither can I, and I can't find out as anybody can. She don't seem to want anything or care for anything. It's awful to say it, but it does seem to me she thinks Providence has abused her, and is put out about it, and just lies there and sulks about it all the time."

"O dear, dear! Well, do you suppose she'll ever be any better?"

"I'm sure I can't tell. The doctor says, as he has said till quite lately, that he didn't see anything to hinder her from getting up if she'd take her medicine, and be taken proper care of, and do as she'd ought to."

"Well, that's what she wont. Why, the last night I watched there I couldn't, if I died, get a spoonful of food, drink, or

medicine into her mouth. She's got it into her head that all the doctor gives her is *mercury*, as she calls it."

"O dear! Well, she's dreadful ignorant, I always knew that."

"She is that. Why, one day last week I went up there, and being there was nobody in the kitchen when I went in I opened the bedroom door softly and looked in. Mrs. Albro was there a talking to her about her soul, and she said—O, it scares me when I think on't it—she said she hadn't a mite of an idea there was any worse place anywhere than this world. And Mrs. Albro she burst right out a crying."

"I don't wonder. Well, do you know whether anybody else has talked to her?"

"O yes. Mr. Mansfield and his wife go there very often—folks do say she don't treat 'em decent; and Mrs. Clifton too. I s'pose it's William that puts her up to it. She aint a woman that likes to go forward in such things much; but that boy, aint it wonderful, he's just as natural and full of life as ever, and yet

when he gets about it he'll talk like a minister."

"Yes, and his religion aint all talk neither. He *does* more than any other two I know of. I do hope his example will be blest to us all."

As I said before, Mr. Ross really tried *to be kind to his poor wife, but he met* very little encouragement. She did not scold and storm as formerly, to be sure; but sour discontent at almost everything he did was expressed in her face, and oftener than otherwise she remained wholly silent when he addressed truly kind questions to her respecting her comfort and wishes. Once, when he displayed more than common desire to serve her, she told him, with cruel irony in her tone, that "if a man wanted to do anything for his wife it was a good plan to begin while something remained of her."

The words struck home to the inmost soul of the wretched man. He knew, *bitter as they were, that he deserved* them. He knew, he thought, at least,

in his present softened state that, deeply as she had erred, he had been far the guiltier of the two, and now, dying though she was, not one jot of atonement would she accept. The thought was maddening, and, snatching his hat from its peg, he rushed to his barn. Sarah had watched the scene. She had noted the haggard despair of her father's face, and well she guessed the dreadful remedy he would seek. Quickly as her trembling limbs would carry her she was at his side.

"Father, what are you harnessing the horse for?"

"I'm going to the village.

"What for? O father, father, *don't!*"

"Go into the house."

"Father, *don't* go to the village," and the child seized her father by the arm.

"I tell you go into the *house*," said he, shaking her off roughly.

"Father, haven't I minded you? haven't I done the best I could?"

"Yes, yes, child; I haint found no fault with you."

"Father, wont you do something for me? I don't ask much of you. Wont you stay at home just for me?"

"Sarah, I can't do it; I can't live; I'm tormented by —. Go into the house, and don't think anything about me."

"Father, it will kill you."

"I know it; go into the house."

"And what will become of you? Where will you go? O father! father! father!"

"I shall go to —" (I omit the word, of course.) "That's just where I shall go. I know all about it. Now go into the house."

The last words were thundered out in tones of fearful passion, and accompanied by a gesture threatening a blow. Sarah retreated sobbing and terrified.

Blessed providence! At the very moment Sarah entered the kitchen by the back way William Clifton was applying his knuckles to the side door.

"Good morning, sis. Mother sent me to know if you don't want—" But he had no chance to finish.

"O William, William," Sarah cried out, "I'm so glad you've come! O do go and speak to father! He's going to the village and I know he is going after rum. There, he's driving out of the barnyard this minute. Do go and stop him."

Sarah's request and her earnest manner of making it rather puzzled William, and without fully believing that she knew what she was talking about, he stepped out into the yard. One look at Mr. Ross's face convinced him that something unusual was astir.

"Halloo!"

Mr. Ross grunted a slight response and chirped to his horse.

"Say, there, what's your great hurry this morning; can't you stop to speak to a fellow?"

"I'm in a hurry."

"Well, so be I. Let me ride, wont you?" and, without waiting for permission, William jumped into the sleigh.

"Come, now, Ross, what's up?"

"_____."

"O fie, don't swear. What's to pay?"

Make a clean breast, as the phrase is, and very likely some of us can help you."

"No you can't, William Clifton, I'm a ruined man; I've ruined myself, and my family, and there's nothing for me but to finish up the job and go to ——"

"There, there, Mr. Ross; there's a record kept up above, and there's too much of that kind of thing against your name now. Leave out the oaths, and tell me what's the matter, will you?"

But Mr. Ross would not talk or listen. The old hopelessness had come again, the old agony of remorse and shame, and with the old cowardice he meant to drown it in the cup of death. William saw he could do nothing by talking, so after a while he quietly possessed himself of the reins and turned the horse's head toward his own home.

"No, you don't come that," said Mr. Ross, perceiving his intention, and turning the horse again in the direction of the village. "You mean well, I know, but you can't do anything; you'd better go home."

"No, I'm going on to the village," said William; and a roguish smile lit up his features, seeming to say, "We shall see whether I can do anything or not."

Fortunately for William's purpose, there was but one place in Deepwater where Peter Ross stood any chance of procuring ardent spirits, and that one was kept by a man who had more humanity in his composition than one would suppose a rum-seller could have. When the unhappy man hitched his horse to the post in front of the store, for dry goods and groceries were sold in the front room, William jumped out of the sleigh and followed him closely, even into the dirty little back room containing kegs, demijohns, and bottles. Desperate as he was, and shameless as he tried to be, Mr. Ross disliked to call for his dram in the actual presence of his young neighbor, and he fidgeted about for full five minutes, hoping the young man would return to the front shop. But this William showed no signs of doing, and finally, with a miserable attempt at a laugh, he called for a glass of brandy, and



No. 718.

William Clifton saving Mr. Ross from Drinking.

asked William what he would take. The barkeeper took no notice of the jest, but proceeded to fill a tumbler, and was in the act of handing it to Mr. Ross, when William spoke.

"See here, Mr. Jones, I want to make a speech. This man," laying his hand on Mr. Ross's shoulder, "has almost killed himself with liquor, as you very well know."

Mr. Ross squirmed and muttered, but William raised his voice a little and went on.

"Last fall he had the delirium tremens, and was in a tremendous tight place for a good while, as you know also."

"Come, come, give me the glass; this is rather dry preaching," said Mr. Ross.

William had been gesturing some before, so it didn't really look pugilistic when he placed a brawny fist between the barkeeper's and his customer's and went on.

"There is another thing that you perhaps know with more certainty than the

rest of us, although it is pretty generally believed, and that is that he hasn't had a drop of liquor since that time, and has been trying in good earnest to reform."

"That's so," said Mr. Ross; "you never said a truer word in your life; but I can't do it. Don't be fooling, Jones, give me the glass."

"No; he thinks he can't do it," pursued William. "No doubt he honestly thinks so. He told me, not an hour ago, that he had ruined himself and his family, and he was just going to finish the job and go to destruction."

The hand that held the glass moved backward a little at this, but still William went on.

"Mr. Ross is in trouble now. His wife is sick, likely to die, they say; and I suppose there's that in his affairs that's neither my business nor yours, that is worse trouble than death commonly makes. That is why he is here, because he is in bitter trouble, and feels weak, and thinks he can't bear it."

By this time the glass of brandy was standing upon the shelf behind Mr. Jones.

"A fine stroke of business," sneered Mr. Ross.

"Well, well, Mr. Ross," said Mr. Jones, finding his voice for the first time, "the fact is I'm afraid you have drunk too much. I'm really 'fraid it's a hurtin' of you, and if you're in such a bad way as Clifton here thinks, why—why, I don't know as I darst to have anything to do with it."

"God bless you, Jones," said William, extending his hand almost involuntarily. "And, Jones, I wish you'd think the matter over seriously, and see whether, on reflection, you dare to sell the accursed stuff to anybody. Come, Mr. Ross, let's go home."

Of Mr. Ross's feelings in regard to his young neighbor's exploit it was difficult to judge. William more than half expected him to go into a violent rage, but in this he was happily disappointed. They had driven half the way home be-

fore either of them spoke a word. Then Mr. Ross said, "William, what on earth makes you trouble yourself about me so much?"

William did not reply for a moment or two, and then said deliberately, "Mr. Ross, I'll tell you. I'm scared about you. I am afraid you are in the broad road to everlasting destruction."

"Well, supposin' I be; it aint a thing that's going to hurt you, as I see."

"No; and if I should jump into that snow-drift, and persist in lying there until I froze to death, it wouldn't hurt you; and yet I think you'd be pretty apt to pull me out if you could."

"Well—of course—in such a case any fellow would."

"Ah, yes, Mr. Ross; any fellow can understand the necessity in such a case; but, well, how strange it is," he added, half to himself, "that folks can't understand how infinitely more important it is to save a soul than a body. Mr. Ross, did you ever think what eternity is?"

"Don't know as I ever did, particular."

"Then think of it now, Mr. Ross."

"You know," resumed William, after giving him time to comply with his request, "that you felt a little while ago as if you could not possibly endure the pain of mind you was suffering. How do you think you could bear remorse a thousand times keener, and know certainly that you must bear it forever? You cannot realize--no one can comprehend what eternity is. If we could, this world would seem too small to be worth speaking about, let its troubles or its pleasures be what they might."

"Well—I—I declare you set things out awful," said Mr. Ross in tones of awakening interest, and William, with more wisdom than zealous young missionaries always possess, left him to the silent ministries of his own thoughts. When Mr. Ross got home Sarah met him at the door, her face red and swollen with bitter weeping. There was yet enough of the father left in his heart to be touched by the sight, nor did her eager, searching, questioning glance at his face escape his notice.

"All right, Sarah," said he, averting his head.

"O father, are you? Haven't you—?"

"Been drinking! No, child, not a drop."

Never before in his life did Peter Ross allude to his intemperance in the presence of his daughter. Never before in her life, at least not since she had been old enough to remember it, had Sarah thrown her arms round her father's neck and kissed him. But she did it now, and wept and sobbed wildly upon his bosom besides. He did not kiss her; I suppose in the long, dreary, loveless past he had forgotten how; but the great arms were drawn closer and closer about her, until, had the joy in her heart been less absorbing, she might have cried out with pain.

The feeble voice of the suffering wife and mother separated them, but, thank God! it had no power to break the precious link that in those moments had been forged between them.

The remainder of the day passed with little to distinguish it from other days.

In the evening, when Sarah had done such things as she could for the comfort of her mother and the watcher through the night, and all was quiet, she went and stood wistfully beside her father, who sat by the fire.

"What do you want?" asked Mr. Ross.

"Nothin', only—to see you a minute."

Mr. Ross put his arm round her.

"Sarah," said he, after both had been silent for several minutes, "you wanted a spell ago I should read your Testament; you may go and get it if you have a mind to."

If any one had told Sarah afterward that she went to the top of the stairs at one bound she would not have disputed it, for she did not know how she got up, or down either, for that matter. She was getting to be what a few months ago she would have called a great cry-baby, for warm tears flowed easily now, and for causes precisely similar to those which then produced coarse, mirthless laughter. A great tear dropped warm and soft upon the rough hand that received the Testa-

ment, and the guardian angel hovering near shaped from it a crystal key and unlocked therewith another tear fountain that had been so long closed that few believed in its existence.

Mr. Ross was almost as ignorant of the Bible as the heathen. He had no conception of the richness overflowing every separate chapter, and he commenced at the beginning as he would have done with any other book. And it was well, for surely no part of the holy book is richer in the peculiar instruction needed by the poor, the ignorant, the wretched, and the guilty, than the book of Matthew. On, and on, and on he read: of the Babe of Bethlehem; of the star in the east; of the wise men, and of cruel Herod; of John, the honored Baptist of his Lord; of Christ in the wilderness, alone, weary, hungry, tempted, yet giving no place to the adversary; of ministering angels; of the fishermen, and the sick who were healed. On he read, through the wondrous sermon on the mount, and, like those who listened, he was astonished

at the doctrine. Still on: of the cleansed lips; of the stilled tempest; of the two men exceeding fierce that he delivered from the devils that possessed them; of the palsied, whose sins he forgave; of the blind and the dumb, to whom he gave sight and speech; of his compassion on the multitude, scattered abroad as sheep without a shepherd; of his sending out *the twelve with blessed instructions, and* of his promises to all such as should receive them; of his terrible denunciation of the favored but ungrateful cities where he had taught and labored; of his precious call to the laboring and heavy laden; of the blindness of the Pharisees; of the one sin that "shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, neither in the world to come;" of his outstretched hands and condescending words, "Behold my mother and my brethren;" of the sower and his seed; of the tares; of the mustard seed; of the leaven; of the hidden treasures; of the pearl; of the net cast into the sea; of the cruel treachery of his own countrymen; of profane Herod and mar-

tyred John; of the desert and the five thousand, and the five loaves and the two fishes; of Christ walking the waves, cheering fearful Peter, and healing the sick with a touch of his garment; of scribes and Pharisees rebuked; of other multitudes healed and fed; of Christ in his glory, his face shining as the sun, and his raiment white as the light; of Peter asking, how many times shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? and his Lord's reply, until seventy times seven; of little children brought to him, of whom he said, "*Forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven;*" of the laborer hired at the eleventh hour, and receiving the full reward; of the meek Son of the Blessed riding upon an ass; of the fruitless fig-tree cursed and withered; of—but I need not linger. On and on he read, through the whole book: of the insulting mock trial; of Barabbas released; of the scourge, the thorns, the cruel mockery, the agonizing death, and joy-bringing resurrection.

I am quite aware that the foregoing is

not what a theologian would pronounce a correct and satisfactory résumé of the book of Matthew. I did not undertake that, but merely to relate those points which Peter Ross more particularly noticed.

The night was far spent when he closed the holy book. It is impossible to give much account of Mr. Ross's mental exercises, for he was one of those persons whose speech is of things rather than of thoughts; one of those much-to-be-pitied ones to whom the gift of communicating ideas and feelings has been almost wholly denied. Many a man, and many a woman too, has been scorned as stupid who in reality was only dumb, whose bosom teemed ever with silent, hopeless emotions, filling the soul with vague uneasiness that it literally failed to recognize as the vain strugglings of mighty thoughts for utterance.

Mr. Ross could do little more than to tell what he did, and of course all that I can do is to repeat what he did tell.

Having closed the Testament, he waited for a full half hour, until the watcher, leaving her patient asleep, came out of the bedroom. As soon as she had closed the door he abruptly asked her if she knew how to pray.

"Well, I can't say as I do," said the woman, embarrassed.

Mr. Ross said no more, but took up his candle and went up to Sarah's bedroom. The child was sleeping heavily, however, and the weary, care-worn look upon her tear-stained face forbade the father to waken her.

"Then," said Mr. Ross, "I undertook to pray myself; but I found I couldn't, and—well, I traveled the house till daylight."

Sarah's first words when she entered the kitchen in the morning were, "Father, are you sick?"

"No."

"Father, what does ail you? You are sick I am sure," persisted the child.

The man did not reply, but after a minute he said, "Sarah, you go see if your

mother wants anything, and then come out and shut the bed-room door."

"She appears to be asleep," said Sarah returning. "What is it that you want?"

"Child—I want—to have you pray—if you know how."

The wonder, the joy, the gratitude in Sarah's heart made words for the moment impossible, and not interpreting her *silence aright*, her father added, "You know how, don't you, child? I thought you did."

"O father, father, father! Yes, I can pray. It's very easy."

Yes, Sarah could pray, and prayer, or rather praise, was just now the only possible outlet for the great billows of joy that were almost breaking her heart-strings with their mighty heavings. Dropping upon her knees she poured out, not the penitent cry for mercy that was struggling up from her father's heart, but a song of thanksgiving, ay, of triumph, in and through the boundless love of Him who can save to the uttermost. When she *rose from her knees her father regarded*

her steadily for a moment, and then said, "Child, is it all so?"

"O, father, it is! I am sure God is *going to help you*," replied Sarah, answering his thought rather than his words.

"If I wasn't any worse than common folks," said the awakened man doubtfully, and rather to himself.

"O, father, God is so good. If you'll only pray and try—"

"There, there! go see what your mother wants. She's calling me, but I don't want to go in there now."

Mrs. Ross wanted to know "what under the sun you and your father find to keep up such an everlasting gabble about."

Sarah briefly explained.

"Well, there's need enough," sneered Mrs. Ross, "but I reckon you'll want some breakfast by 'n by."

When Sarah returned to her father he laid his hand upon her shoulder and said, "Sarah, I can't make no promises on my own hook, and 'twouldn't be worth while for you to take any stock in 'em if I

should ; but if it's all true—if God does help folks, and if he's a mind to help me, I'll do all I can toward it, and I'll quit drinking and be a better man."

How quickly even long dormant seeds of natural affection spring up when the sterile rock of the human heart is smitten, and the waters of eternal life and love begin to flow. Sarah scarcely knew how it came about, but she found herself clasped once more in her father's arms, crying and smiling, and uttering such fragmentary bits of loving encouragement as came unstudied to her lips.

It was long before Peter Ross believed it ; but at length, and ever after, he did believe, and in the hour when his faith laid hold of Jesus his scarlet son was washed white in the blood of the Lamb.

CHAPTER IX.

SARAH LOSES HER MOTHER.

IN the course of the day William Clifton made it in his way to call at Mr. Ross's house. After the "halloo!" which for some strange reason a great many men, as I notice, substitute for "how do you do," William with a rather quizzical look said, "You aren't mad with me, eh, Mr. Ross?"

"No."

Mr. Ross spoke this single word so soberly, so altogether strangely, that William was puzzled and surprised. He feared that the poor man had taken his interference as an outright insult, and began awkwardly to make an attempt at soothing him. But Mr. Ross soon interposed. "Look here, Bill Clifton, I aint a fool, though I'll own I've acted like one. You've done me a pile of good turns the last six months, but you did the best thing

for me yesterday that you ever did in your life."

"Do you indeed think so?" exclaimed William, a sudden light breaking joyously over his rugged face.

"Yes, I do. I'm sensible on't, and—well, if you can do anything more for me I want to have you do it."

"Anything more? I don't think I understand you."

Mr. Ross did not reply, but William could see that he was agitated, and partly guessed the blessed truth. While he was considering how he could best encourage him to open his heart, Mr. Ross rose and, taking his hat from its peg, glanced significantly toward him and walked out of the house. William followed, and the two were soon sitting leaned up against a pile of "corn-fodder" that William had himself stacked up on the barn-floor. There, by long and patient questioning, the young man drew from his poor neighbor such account of his exercises of mind during the last night as he was able to give. There he drew from his pocket the

little Bible that was now his constant companion, and pointed out the passages telling of Christ's surpassing love for sinners. There, with a silent prayer going up on every breath, for wisdom to speak aright, he earnestly, even tearfully, entreated the conscience-stricken man to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

There was no opposition in Peter Ross's heart; the enmity of the natural man had been slain even then, but the darkness *of his ignorance was very dense, and* though William found much encouragement, he failed to recognize the new creature in Christ Jesus. There they knelt together, the beardless youth who had consecrated the bright morning of his life to his Maker, and the middle-aged and guilt-stained man, but that day born into the kingdom, and William poured out his heart in supplication.

Meanwhile Sarah, guessing well what was passing in the barn, had retired to her own little chamber, and she also was besieging the throne of grace in her father's behalf.

Ah, how merciful is our loving Father! and how little do those even who follow closest after him know of his goodness! The blessing so earnestly besought by *these young disciples* was already ready to be given; but let no one suppose that these prayers were useless. No, our blessings come only as answers to prayer, and every petition, every tear, will give additional emphasis to the "Well done, good and faithful servant," that, if they grow not weary in well-doing, they shall *one day surely hear*.

And what a wondrous mystery is this new birth. How beautifully like, and yet how strangely unlike, are the various instances. The light of God's reconciled countenance bursts with *sadden glory* upon some, melting every cloud of doubt and fear in an instant, while to others it comes like the dawn of morning, slowly, softly, sweetly, but none the less surely, *dispersing the foul mists of sin and ignorance*, and ushering in the perfect day.

That hour in the barn was one never to be forgotten. Peter Ross had changed

much during the last few weeks, but the change from this time forth was far greater still. Mr. Mansfield's pious heart was *soon gladdened by the good news*, and with patient faithfulness he did all that man could do toward instructing and enlightening the dark mind. Mr. Ross soon began to go regularly to church; he attended better to his business, and became, in all respects, a noticeably better man. *But there was also a great change in his family.* Let us hear what Sarah said about it.

"O, Sarah Ross, how do you do? Do come to the fire and warm yourself. Take off your things. Can't you stay a little while?" were a few of the many exclamations with which Susie and Lena Albright greeted their young friend one cold afternoon.

Rather to their surprise she laid aside her bonnet and cloak, according to their invitation.

"Are you really going to stay?" cried Lena. "O I'm so glad! But how could you get away?"

"Well, I'll just tell you. O you can't

think—" Sarah choked up and stopped speaking.

"*Why you are crying!*" exclaimed Susie in alarm. "*What's the matter? Is your mother worse?*"

"No, no. O dear, I'm such a baby!" said Sarah, drying her eyes with her apron, and smiling, though they filled again instantly. It was father that made me come, and he's so good lately. O I never was so happy before in my life!"

"And after all the tears keep coming," said Susie.

"Well, I know it; but it isn't because I feel bad. You'd cry yourself if your father never had loved you one bit in all your life, and never had taken any notice of you hardly any way, only maybe to swear at you when you vexed him; and then if he got to be real good, and did everything he could for you, and talked pleasant, and praised you when you tried to please him, I guess you'd cry."

"O I'm just as glad as I can be," said Lena fervently.

"You don't know—I can't tell you

nothing at all about it," persisted Sarah, *regaining her voice*. "He wont let me bring in any wood, nor draw any water, nor do anything that is hard when he is around. I *don't care one bit for doing* the things, but it seems so good to think he cares about me so. This morning I *didn't get up till it was dreadful late*, and I felt—well, I wasn't afraid he'd be mad, because I've kind of got over that, but I felt awfully ashamed and fairly dreaded to go down. Well, what do you think? He had got the table all set, and the potatoes in baking, and the coffee boiling, and there he sat by the stove, looking just as pleasant as—as anybody's father. I went along to him—I've got the trick of going up and standing side of him lately—I didn't never use to think of such a thing—and he put his arm round me and said, 'You was all tired out with your hard day's work yesterday, wasn't you? You're nothing but a poor little slave any way.' I ran *right away from him then*, for I didn't want he should see the tears; and I'm that babyish that no one can

“speak to me but I cry. Well, I got the breakfast on the table. The potatoes weren't washed very clean, and the coffee wasn't good, for he had put the new right in with the old that was left yesterday, and, of course, it wouldn't settle; but I wouldn't have had him know it for anything. But there was one thing—I couldn't help laughing any way in the world—he had got a sheet instead of a table-cloth. The table-cloth lay right before his face and eyes on the pantry shelf, but you know men never can find anything, and he went to the bureau for a clean one, and he didn't seem to notice the difference.”

“Well, I'm sure that was nothing but fun,” said Susie.

“I know it, but—well, I've seen him get so provoked when mother found fault with things he did, that I didn't want him to know I thought he'd done anything amiss.”

(Mrs. Ross, had such a thing taken place when she was about, would very probably have disregarded entirely the

motive and grumbled loudly at the mischief, embellishing her speech, perhaps, by a statement that if she had a child six years old that didn't know better than that she would whip him.)

"I tried my very best not to laugh, but that great sheet did look so comical, hanging down 'most to the floor, that I couldn't help it, and father asked what pleased me, and said he wanted to laugh too. I told him I didn't want to tell, but he knew by my looks it was something about the table, and he made me tell. I told him it wasn't a bit of harm, but he seemed to feel real bad."

(You and I, dear reader, can understand, though Sarah perhaps did not, that it was not about his blunder that Peter Ross felt real bad. Poor fellow! It was as strangely sweet to him to have his feelings tenderly regarded as it was to his child, though he made fewer remarks.)

"He told me to get the tablecloth, and then he took the things off and folded the sheet—he fussed ever so long to fold

it just right—and then he put it back in the drawer, and set the table again.”

“Didn’t you have a pleasant breakfast?” asked Lena, with warm sympathy glistening in her eyes.

“I guess we did! And then after breakfast father said he was going to do the work himself all day, and take care of mother, and I was to rest, because he said I’d been working too hard lately. He told me to put on my things and go visiting somewhere, and that’s just how I happened to come here.”

“Wasn’t he good? O, Sarah, you’ll have a happy home yet.”

“Yes, indeed! I have now. Why, I never knew anybody could be so happy! If mother was only well, and—” Sarah paused suddenly, with a little sigh, and the conversation was turned upon something else. Both Mrs. Albro and the girls did all they could to make Sarah’s visit a pleasant one, and the afternoon passed happily away. Once, when Sarah and Lena found themselves alone for a little while, Sarah said, “I didn’t tell you

the best about father. I can't talk so well before Susie, you know. Will you believe, father reads in the Bible every day? He read in my Testament that Mr. Mansfield gave me, you know, for a good while, but now he has bought a beautiful large Bible, and we read in it together every single evening!"

"O! O! O! And does he pray?"

"Not yet. I mean, not with me. I'm sure he prays by himself. I've asked him, and he always says, 'You pray, child.'"

"And do you?"

"Yes," whispered Sarah. "I refused the first time—no, not the very first time he asked me, for that time it came over me so suddenly, and I was so glad that I couldn't help kneeling right down and tell it all out to the Lord. But he didn't ask me for a good many days after that; and when he did—I don't know—I felt kind of bashful—I thought I couldn't, and he didn't urge me. I felt real bad about it afterward for fear I had done wrong, and Mrs. Mausfield came to our house the next day and I told her. She said she

didn't wonder at me any, but she told me to pray if he asked me again, and to try to get him to pray with me. So I have ever since, and I wouldn't have believed how easy it comes."

"Sarah Ross, I wish I was half as good as you!" cried Lena impulsively.

"For pity's sake, how you do talk! Why I don't know as I ever should have thought of trying to be good only for you."

"Ah, you mustn't make me proud. Mother says if we do any good it is only God making us do it, and we have all the more reason to be humble and thankful."

When Sarah went home her mother spoke fretfully of her absence, and added, "It isn't long that you'll need to stay at home on my account any way."

Her words proved true. Her strength and appetite declined steadily, and by the beginning of March her decease was looked for daily, and the neighbors managed that the family should never be left alone. Christian hearts ached, and many a prayer was offered with and for her; but

deadly apathy, so far as the salvation of her soul was concerned, seemed settling hopelessly over her spirit. One sunny, though cold day in March Mr. Ross chanced to remark in her hearing that it was "'mest time to tap the sugar works."

She brightened a little at the thought, and said, "I declare, it does seem as if some new sugar would taste good."

"If it wan't for this wind sap might run *to-day, possibly,*" said Mr. Ross, looking wistfully out of the window.

"I don't believe there's wind enough to make any difference," said the invalid.

"O bless your body, mother, you don't hear it on this side of the house. It comes terribly strong from the east. I'd tap all the trees on the farm if I had any idea I could get a pailful of sap, but it's no 'arthly use."

"Well, it's no consequence whether I *have anything done for me or not.*" Mrs. Ross said this in tones of sullen anger, and then, O pitiful sight! feebly moved her wasted form in the bed so as to turn her face away from her husband.

"Look here, mother," said Peter Ross, with a desperate attempt at cheerfulness, "I can melt over some old sugar so't you wouldn't hardly know the difference."

There was no answer.

"O say, mother, you haint never tasted of that honey Mrs. Clifton fetched you the other day. Shant I get you some o' that? It looks proper nice."

Still no word passed the poor white lips, and Peter Ross knew from long experience that nothing he could say would avail. Poor man! He went into the kitchen and sat down to think over, with remorse and agony, the thousands of instances, in which he had given her back words even more cruel than her own, and worse still, had shown total indifference to her wishes. "I'd give the best cow I've got for a table-spoonful of new sugar," he said to Mrs. Smith, who chanced to be there.

"Well, she'd ought to have it, seeing she fancies it, to be sure," returned Mrs. Smith; "but, pity's sake! she wouldn't

take six drops on't if she had it. I wouldn't feel bad about it if I was you."

Mr. Ross did not try to explain that he longed to please the poor dying wife now in the merest trifle, precisely because in the miserable past he had cared so little to please her; but he took down his bitt and went to the place on his farm where the sun warmed up earliest, and tried vainly to wrest from the unbudding trees the sweet that had suddenly become so precious. But let us not expend all our pity upon him. Surely the poor invalid, to whom the grasshopper had truly become a burden, needs the largest share. The sunshine was bright in her southwestern window, and, no doubt, she truly thought her wish might be gratified. She had had for many years good reason for feeling that her wishes were cruelly *disregarded*, and it was *no time now*, in her weakness and pain, to control the ill-temper that she had so long indulged and nourished. Trembling on the verge of eternity, with no everlasting arms beneath

her, no pitying Saviour's bosom to lean upon, no blessed "hills" from whence she might look for help, we can only tremble with fear, sorrow, and agonizing pity, praying God to save us from a fate so terrible, thanking him that he has spared us the dreadful necessity of judging our fellow-beings, and leave her to his infinite justice.

Through the day Mrs. Ross failed rapidly, and a good many persons came to the house. Naturally enough, her wish for new sugar was spoken of, and, just at night, one woman came to the house who, hearing it mentioned, remarked that a few days before her children had gathered and boiled a little sap, and if they had not eaten it all up, which was doubtful, she would send it over in the morning. Mr. Ross was strongly inclined to go for it himself immediately; but Mrs. Smith, who knew well that it could not be of the slightest consequence to the dying woman, persuaded him not to leave the house.

Through the night Mrs. Ross seemed

a little better, and in the morning when the sugar came Mr. Ross warmed and carried it to her, with a slight hope that it might temporarily revive her. The wish for it had been but a momentary one, of course, and long outlived by the anger caused by what she considered a slight. When Mr. Ross placed the saucer before her, saying cheerfully, "Come, mother, here's some new sugar, and it's as clear and clean as can be," she felt how impossible even the meanest of earthly enjoyments had become to her, and the old bitterness in her heart was stirred.

"Take it away!" she said sullenly.

"O just taste on't; like enough 't'll do you good."

Mrs. Ross pushed the saucer away with an irritated gesture.

Unwisely, but with tender intent, Mr. Ross persisted, taking up a little of the sweet in the spoon and attempting to convey it to her mouth. She did not want it, she would not have it! she was tired and worried already with resisting it; her temper was all of strength that re-

mained of her, and it flashed up again. "I tell you keep it away!" she said more energetically than it had been supposed that she could speak. "You never did *do anything for me till it was too late*, and all I want of you now is to let me alone!"

Mr. Ross left the room and the house.

Half an hour later Sarah found him in the barn on his knees, sobbing, groaning, and trying to pray.

"Father, father, they say she is dying! Do come quick."

His whole frame shook as he rose, and he seemed scarcely able to go into the house. "God will help you, father," said Sarah, partly comprehending his misery.

"I know it, but—Sarah, child, kiss me, wont you?"

The child sprang into her father's arms, pressed her lips to his cheek, and then said, "Carry me, father, and go quick." The wrung heart ached a little less, for the loving child pressed against it for a minute or two. Then setting her down at

the door, they entered the bed-room together. Mrs. Ross was indeed dying, and her husband saw it at a glance; but I can never believe that *the wretched woman* knew it herself, for when he extended his hand, as a silent token of pardon and farewell, she slightly but unmistakably withdrew her own and averted his eyes!

“Mother, mother! Do speak!” cried Sarah wildly.

The eyes of the dying mother turned upon her child, and the white lips moved; but the destroyer snatched the words, whatever they might have been, before they were uttered. The final struggle came on, and *without another word or sign the wretched woman* passed into eternity. . . . Let no one suppose that Mrs. Ross, unhappy as her relations with her family had been, was not deeply and sincerely mourned. Her husband's grief was different, no doubt, from the grief of men bereaved of loving and gentle wives. It partook largely of remorse, and of that most agonizing of all pains, the helpless consciousness that it

was now forever too late to repair the wretched wrongs he had done her. It was *very affecting to see how the poor man* tried to atone to the senseless clay that was left for the neglects and unkindnesses that had so sorely wounded and embittered the spirit. On the afternoon of the day of her death he went to Mr. Albro, and with much evident embarrassment asked to borrow a, for him, rather large sum of money, offering his yet unsold wool, or even his cattle or sheep, as security.

Mr. Albro immediately handed from his desk a sum still larger than that asked, merely saying, "Never mind the security, Mr. Ross."

The poor fellow hesitated and stammered *something, and finally took the money* and left the house without an intelligible word. A brother of Mr. Albro's chanced to be visiting him, and having formerly known something of Mr. Ross, he said, in good-humored surprise, "That's a smart operation, Charley."

"Well, I think it is."

"You never will see a cent of it again."

"O yes; I think Ross will pay it."

"I would have taken security any way."

"That is money," continued Mr. Albro, smiling, "that I collected with a deal of trouble last week in order to take up a note that comes due next week, and now, unless I can get it out of you or some other good-natured fellow, I shall be obliged to get the note renewed."

"I won't give you a dollar you improvident blockhead," said the brother, laughing, yet half in earnest.

"Perhaps you will. See here; that man has been a miserable drunkard, utterly unworthy of respect or confidence. He has felt himself nearer on a level with dogs than with men; but for months past he's been a changed man. I do think he is thoroughly reformed, and I'm determined he shall know, once in his life, what it is to be treated like an upright man. I haven't got another neighbor anywhere about that would even offer me security

if they wanted to borrow a small sum for a short time, and Ross knows it; and it will do him more good to be trusted in a frank, neighborly way than most people are aware of."

"Whew! Well, what was it you said you wanted?" And Mr. Gilbert Albro took out a plethoric check-book, at which his brother laughed so merrily that Susie and Lena both ran into the dining room to know what it was that amused their father so much.

Mr. Ross went home and placed part of the money in the hands of Mrs. Clifton, with the request that she would procure material for a black silk dress, "a good handsome one," in which he desired his wife should be buried. Mrs. Clifton remonstrated, thinking it a needless expense and one he was ill able to afford.

"Well, I 'spose folks'll call it extravagance," he replied, "but you get it. She always wanted one, said a good deal about it one time and another, and—O dear! I wish she'd a had it when 'twould done her some good."

"O, father!" sobbed Sarah, who well remembered her mother's angrily expressed wish that she could have one gown such as other women wore, "it seems as if it is cruel to get it now when it's too late."

Peter Ross groaned. "Well, it's all we can do," he said bitterly. With the remainder of the money he procured a costly coffin, and suits of deep mourning for himself and Sarah. Alas! who ever found comfort in things of this sort? Too late! too late! too late! was written in hard lines upon all.

CHAPTER IX.

SARAH BECOMES A WOMAN.

It is late autumn again. A year has passed since our little story commenced. It is a warm day for the season, and Sarah Ross stands in the front doorway of her home, gazing eagerly down the lonely road. What can she be looking for? Ah, we see now. Susie and Lena are coming up the hill, and Sarah flies to meet them.

"O I'm so glad you have come! I've been waiting this long time."

"Why, it's real early," said Susie. "Mother said you'd think we came to dinner instead of tea if we came any earlier."

"I wish you had; O I had the nicest pudding to-day. Father thinks there never was such a cook as I'm getting to be. But what a lot of roots you have brought; I didn't expect half so many."

"O they'll never be missed out of our garden," said Lena. "Will your father be ready to set them out?"

"Yes; I told him this morning you was going to bring me some flower roots, and he has been at work most all day spading up and fixing the yard."

"Sure enough! What a large nice place you have got," said Susie, gazing round admiringly. "O, Lena, I *must* tell! We thought we'd wait and surprise you, but I can't keep it. Mother was up to Mrs. Clifton's yesterday and told Laura we were coming here to-day, and she said she'd come, and bring some rose bushes and things."

"O good!" said Sarah, with animation.

"And that isn't all. When we found out she was coming we thought we'd give you a real surprise party, and—"

"You're spoiling the surprise," said Lena laughing.

"Well, never mind. We came up to Juliana Morris's last night and told her, and she said she'd come, and would send

word to Mary Stanley besides. Shant we have a grand time!"

"Yes, only—"

"Ah, I know what *only* means," cried Lena. "You are afraid you haven't got *goodies* enough prepared to set before all the town. See here!" and Lena began hauling the plants out of the basket. At the bottom, securely wrapped in many folds of thick paper was — "O such a quantity of cakes and things; I declare I can't thank you enough."

"It's mother you are to thank," said Susie. "There's no danger of us thinking of such a thing."

"And mother said," began Lena, "that she didn't doubt you'd have things real nice for all the company you expected, for she says you are a perfect little wonder of a housekeeper; but she said you had too much sense to cook up much more than you expected to want, when your family is so small, and you might not have enough for so many."

"Well, fact, I was 'fraid I hadn't quite enough. Father don't eat any sweet cake

hardly; he likes meat and potatoes mostly, and I don't make much for ourselves. What cunning little cakes those are! What is it you call them?"

"Ginger snaps. O do you know Charley calls them cookey snaps! They look some like cookeys, you know, and he can't remember."

"Dear little Charley! I wish he was here."

Mr. Ross now came out of the house. Can that be the man who objected to sitting at table with his neighbor's children a year ago? Well, he doesn't look like a person likely to back out of any respectable society now.

"Hillo, little cluckadees! Well, what's the good word from your house to-day?"

"Nothing special," said Lena. "O yes there is. Father told me to tell you there's something the matter with one of Nelly Bly's fore feet, and he wished you'd come down to-day or to-morrow and see what you think of it."

Meanwhile Susie was singing:

"When she walks she lifts her foot,
And then she puts it down."

"Sing 'tother two lines, sis, and you'll just hit it," said Mr. Ross. "I've always noticed that 'ere beast had a leetle mite of a notion to overreach."

So Susie went on merrily :

"And when it hits, there's music
In that part ob da town."

"Come, come, Susie," said Lena, "mother thinks that's a dreadful foolish song."

"O dear, I know it. Well, it's a good thing I've got a sensible sister, for I need somebody at my elbow every minute to keep me straight."

"See all these roots, father," said Sarah; "are you ready to set them out?"

"Sartin, sartin. I didn't lay out to do anything to-day only what choring was wanted round the house."

Mr. Ross went for his spade, and the work of embellishing the long neglected yard began.

Such a chattering; such discussing about where the violets would look best, and where the pinks could be seen to best advantage, and whether this corner would be large enough for the red rose-bush when it grew. Sarah's delight was so boundless that her father said, "Why, child, if you was so beset for posies you'd ought to say something about it in the spring."

"You had so much to do then, you know," said Sarah.

"Was that why you didn't ask to have the yard fixed?" said Mr. Ross, straightening up from a delicate lily of the valley he was planting and looking his daughter in the face.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, well, that young one knows more than half the grown folks," murmured the father to himself, bending again to his work. "Look here," he added aloud after a pause, "what little turns you want wont make much difference. There's work enough behind-hand, to be sure, but I'd rather stay up

nights than you shouldn't have what little comfort there is for you in your slave's life. If you get in such a takin' again about anything don't let it be six months before I hear on't."

Susie and Lena expected a burst of tears from Sarah at this, but they were mistaken. She was getting too well used to kindness from her father to cry at each fresh instance. There was deep feeling in her tones, however, as she replied:

"O, father, how can you call it a slave's life? I don't know as I *could* have been any happier this last summer if I'd had an acre of flowers. But, then, it's real nice to have them. Don't you think so?"

"Well, I can't say as I care much about 'em for my own use," said Peter Ross smiling. "I'd rather see a good corn-field."

"Father says your cornfield beats the whole town," said Susie.

"Well, 'tis good, fact," returned Mr. Ross, looking pleased. "My crops this year'll put a stop to a pretty good bit

of interest, I reckon. Where you goin' to have this, Sarah?"

"O that's the snowberry, isn't it, Susie? And where is the white rose? I thought, father, we'd carry them up—to—the burying ground."

"Well, I would," said Mr. Ross, lowering his tones suddenly. "I'll carry you up in the morning, and we'll set 'em out."

There was a pause in the talk, and then Sarah asked the girls if they had seen her poor mother's grave-stones.

"Yes; they're real nice! and, Sarah—you wont think it's impudent?—mother said she wondered whose idea that text on the head-stone was: 'God requireth that which is past.'"

"It was father's own thought," said Sarah. "He reads the Bible a great deal lately—we've had prayers regular, night and morning, this good while—and that verse seemed to strike him. O father feels dreadfully because he wasn't more kind to mother. He says it's in his mind day and night, and all the way he can

take any comfort is by confessing it to the Lord and praying about it."

Laura, Juliana, and Mary now came in sight, and our little friends ran to meet them.

"Blackbirds and bobolinks!" cried Peter Ross as the six happy girls came, all chattering at once, into the yard.

Each of the three new comers were laden with contributions to Sarah's new garden, and Mr. Ross jocosely declared he should be obliged to plow up the six-acre lot. Room was found in the yard, however, and all the pleasant gifts were soon nicely planted.

"Well, what next, Sarah?"

"O fix us a swing, please, father!" cried Sarah.

"R'ally I don't hardly know as I can," said Mr. Ross. "I'll go and see, though." And away the six girls trooped after him to the barn.

There seemed indeed to be no good place for a swing. Mr. Ross put one up indeed, but he remarked as he did so:

"It's a careless-looking piece of work.

I daresn't trust such a crazy pack as you are to swing here alone. I shall have to stay and swing you."

"O all the better!" cried Laura Clifton. "Come, Sarah;" and she would have pulled Sarah into the swing with her; but Sarah knew her duties too well, and insisted that all her young friends should precede her.

Well, dear child, she was happy enough without swinging. It was something so delightful, so wonderful to her, to see her father, who, until the last year, had never, as far as she knew, been able to look anybody in the face for the shame of his miserably wicked life, genially and naturally helping her young friends in their amusement, and receiving their earnest and respectful thanks.

"Do just look at father!" she could not help whispering to sympathetic Lena.

"Yes, and it's all your work," said Lena, answering her thought rather than her words.

"Indeed, it is far more *your* work," said Sarah.

"After all we are both wrong," said Lena with sweet seriousness. "It is God's work, and we can't thank him enough."

But I linger too long over these sweet common-places.

When Sarah gathered her happy little party at the tea-table she half feared her father would omit the simple words of prayer and praise which had of late consecrated their humble meals. But she had no need. With simple earnestness Mr. Ross thanked God for the blessings of this life, and commended himself and the little group around him to the kind care of the heavenly Parent. The noisy gayety of the children was hushed for a time; but it soon rose again, and the meal went merrily on. When it was ended Mr. Ross took his hat to go out, saying:

"Well, little ladies, I s'pose you'll be gone before I get my chores done, so I'll say good-evenin' now. I'm just as much obleeged to you for coming to see Sarah as she is herself, and I hope you'll come

just as often as you can, all of you. It does Sarah a sight of good to see her mates once in a while, and she don't have any too many pleasures at the best."

"I am sure we shall be very happy to come," said Laura Clifton prettily. Juliana Morris protested that she didn't know when she had had such a good visit; and Susie said, in her characteristic, prettily impudent way:

"Well, we're here so much that I don't see as we need to pay any compliments. Mother said the other day you might about as well take us to board and done with it."

Susie was Mr. Ross's special favorite. He patted her on the head and told her to come on. "Well, you might be in a worse place," he added rather meditatively. "Time was when a child in this house was like a lamb among the wolves, but Peter Ross isn't the drunken brute he was, is he?"

"O please sir, don't speak so," said Juliana Morris, respectfully and earn-

estly; "all those sad things are forgotten."

"Yes, quite forgotten," echoed all the girls eagerly.

"I wish they were, or could be," said Peter Ross, with a deep sigh. "Good-night, little girls, good-night."

Sarah Ross is past twenty now, a tall, well-formed, and singularly handsome young lady. Her hands are not very soft or white, to be sure, for her acquaintance with the dish napkin, the wash-board, the cheese-tub, and the churn has been too long and too intimate to permit that. She has never been to school since the summer when we first made her acquaintance, but she is very far from being an ignorant girl. There is a goodly supply of choice books on the parlor table now, and Sarah has made good use of her leisure. If you were to visit her now you would be agreeably surprised, I am sure, to notice the propriety, the refinement, the purity, delicacy, and lady-like grace of her words and conduct. If you are a literary person, and

have tact enough to draw her out, you will ask yourself where and how this hard-working farmer's daughter possessed herself of such extensive information; such keen, critical, penetrating insight; such general appreciation and sympathy with literature. Half a dozen newspapers come regularly to her home, but the religious paper is the first one she reads; and few persons of her age know more accurately, or have more closely at heart, the interest, prospects, and general state of the Church. She has been for a good many years, as her father has also been, a communicant in the village Church, and the good pastor preaches all the better, I am sure, for the earnest attention, the warm sympathy, and intelligent understanding expressed in her upturned face. There is no class in the Sabbath-school better taught than hers, and none, except perhaps Lena Albro's, more unitedly and affectionately attached to their teacher.

And her father? Well, Peter Ross is not very much changed since we last saw him. He has worked very hard for years

past. He talks of living easier now. Little by little, year by year, his heavy debt has been paid off, and he owes no man a dollar. The farm, he says, is Sarah's now, for he should have been on the town before this time but for her. There is no denying that he exaggerates Sarah's merits, for he dotes upon her, in the opinion of some very conscientious people, quite too much; but I am myself of the opinion that her wise industry and economy have hastened a good deal the day of his emancipation from the galling thralldom of debt. There are lines of deep thought and sadness on Peter Ross's face. He will not outlive his wretched memories. The prayer-meeting at the school-house is held weekly now, and the deepest sobbings of penitence and godly sorrow for sin that ever rise there are heaved from the ever-aching breast of Peter Ross.

But of Sarah once more. I find myself very reluctant to cease speaking of her. Perhaps some reader will ask, "How is it that Sarah Ross, in her secluded home, with all her hard work and meagerness of

opportunity, has become the charming woman described?" I will tell you. She has improved carefully every opportunity that she had. Some persons of cultivation and refinement were, as you have seen, among her acquaintances, and she made every possible effort to profit by their companionship and example. Her sincere desire to improve attracted the approving attention of the good and wise who knew her, and they delighted, as all good and wise persons do, in extending a helping hand. She read her Bible faithfully, she asked wisdom constantly of God, *who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not*. Her society is much sought now by those who desire improvement for themselves as well as by those benevolently inclined. Laura Clifton visits her a great deal of late, and roguishly calls her by a sweet little name spelled with six letters, that, strictly speaking, Laura has never had a right to give to any one. They read and sew together, they work in the flower garden together, they know all each other's hopes and fears, likes and dis-

likes, aspirations and disappointments. If any one presumes to remember Peter Ross's former degradation, or Mrs. Ross's ill-temper, which certainly does not often happen, Laura warms up instantly, and sometimes delivers rather spicy little speeches. There is a handsome house being erected now on a pretty site, a stone's throw from the old brown cottage, which is really getting too old to be longer inhabited. Laura takes a vast deal of interest in the new dwelling, and has embroidered a very handsome pair of ottomans for the parlor already.

Where does the money come from? Dear me, how very shrewd you are! I am sure I don't know where it came from, but I am sure that when the house is completed it will be more truly than any place ever has been yet, SARAH'S HOME.

THE END.

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