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HILTON'S STEWARDSHIP



Dora Bilton's Stewardship.

DORA HILTON'S

STEWARDSHIP.

By C. J. L.



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Dora Hilton's Stewardship.

A STORY FOR GIRLS.

CHAPTER I.

SATURDAY EVENING.

"She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness." (Prov. xxxi. 27.)

IT was a fair scene on which Mrs. Hilton's eyes rested as she lingered for a few moments at the open window of her small but pleasant sitting-room. The neatly-kept garden in front of Myrtle Cottage was rich in sweet flowers. The perfume of June roses floated softly on the cool breeze that had sprung up scarcely an hour before the time of which I am writing.

The evening shadows were already gathering over the pine woods that formed the eastern boundary of Mead Park, though the gold and

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crimson of a glorious sunset still lingered in the western sky.

All through the long summer's day Mrs. Hilton had been busy with household cares, and the rest and quiet of that brief respite from pressing duties seemed to her, grateful and soothing to both mind and body.

Gifted with a quick perception of the beautiful in form and colour, I think she would have found much to admire in the beauty of the prospect before her, even if her gladness had been only admiration for the wonders and beauties of creation.

But Mrs. Hilton was a Christian, one who, even in her girlhood, had, through the teaching of the Holy Spirit, been made wise unto salvation ; one who, through living faith in a living Saviour, had learnt to call God, Abba Father. She had known sorrow ; one look at her pale face, as well as the plain black dress and widow's cap she wore, and you might be sure of that. But Mrs. Hilton had known comfort too, the comfort with which God comforts those who trust in His never changing love.

And in that still hour, very truly it might have been said of her, that she was leaning on Him whom having not seen she loved. Softly, and in almost a whisper, she was singing—

“The toils of the day are over,
The heart and hand are free,
And so with a child's glad trusting,
I turn to my rest in Thee.”

When the garden gate opened, and a smile of rare sweetness lit up the mother's face, as her

daughter Dora, a tall, fair girl of fourteen, came with a quick, light step up the gravel path, bordered, on either side, by rows of red and white daisies.

A few moments more and Dora was in her favourite seat, a low footstool near her mother. Mrs. Hilton kissed her affectionately, saying, as her hand rested fondly on Dora's waves of dark hair, "I think you have had a pleasant visit, Dora."

"Oh, yes, mother, really a good time. It was kind of you to let me go, I only hope you are not very tired doing all the work yourself," and Dora gave one anxious, questioning look to the pale face of her mother.

Perhaps it was only the deepening shadows of the twilight, but Dora thought it looked a shade thinner and paler than usual. But without waiting for an answer, she continued, "Now I am going to tell you all about it. Grace Bell came to meet me at the end of Meadow Lane, and we went through the fields into Mead Park. The Park is lovely, mother, I wished you could have been with us. We sat down to rest under the shade of a grand old elm-tree. The birds were singing overhead. Such a cunning little squirrel cracked his nuts among the branches, and more than once a whole herd of deer came very near us ; I could not help thinking of a verse of the psalm we read together this morning, 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works ! in wisdom hast thou made them all : the earth is full of thy riches' (Psa. civ. 24.)

"Grace put her arm round me and told me

all her secrets just as if we had been friends for years, though we have only known each other three weeks. She is a dear girl, mother ; I loved her the very first time I saw her at Miss Lang's Bible Class ; I am glad she has come to live at Riversdale. You know her father is steward to Lord W. Grace told me all about it. Her father has been steward to his lordship for several years, ever since Grace was quite a little girl. But he used to have the care of some property belonging to Lord W. in one of the mining districts, where even the trees looked as if they were always covered with coal dust, and at night the glow of furnaces shone out brightly against the dark sky.

"A fever broke out among the miners ; Grace's little brother Henry took it and died, and her mother, who has never been strong, was so worn out with the fatigue of nursing him, that she was ill for many weeks, and when she began to get better, the doctor said she ought to have entire change of air and scene ; so Mr. Bell wrote to Lord W., telling him that on account of his wife's health, he wished to resign his situation.

"But his lordship sent Mr. Bell such a kind letter, saying that as he did not wish to part with a steward who had served him so long and faithfully he had made arrangements for him to manage his estates at Riversdale. And Lady W. added a note to Mrs. Bell, telling her she hoped that with the blessing of the Lord on the pure air and pleasant scenes among which her new home was to be, she would soon get strong and well again.

"When we went into the house, Mr. and Mrs. Bell were very kind to me. Mr. Bell is a tall, grave man, I think I should have been almost afraid of him, only he has such a pleasant smile, and his voice made me think of my own dear papa.

"And Grace's mother is such a sweet, gentle little creature, I felt I longed to put my arms round her and kiss her, as soon as I saw her, and they said they were glad Grace had met with a companion about her own age, and hoped we should be true friends, and help each other in the right way.

"After tea, Grace took me into her father's office. It is quite a large room, with bookshelves on three sides of it, but a glass case is fixed in a recess near the window, and Mr. Bell opened it and shewed me quite a fine collection of fossils. Some of them were found in blocks of coal deep down in the mine, and Mr. Bell explained everything so clearly that it did not seem so hard to understand as when I read about it. How the coalfields were once waving forests, where tall trees grew, and graceful ferns uncurled their feathery fronds. But I have not told you one thing that surprised me a little; Grace said that some time ago, her father was obliged to leave home, as Lord W. wished him to attend to some business in Scotland.

"Mr. Bell was away almost three months, and during the whole time Mrs. Bell kept his books, wrote his letters, and managed everything so nicely, that on his return he had to do little more than take up his every-day work, just as if he had not been absent so long.

"Now I am sure it was very clever of her, and must have been a great help to her husband. But it seems strange for a woman to be a steward. Don't you think so, mother? Why, you are smiling at my question. I am sure of it, for the moonlight is on your face, though it is quite dark in the corners of the room. Please do tell me what you are thinking," and Dora nestled closer to her mother's side.

"Before I reply, Dora, I should like you to tell me what you mean by the word steward."

"It is too dark to look for its meaning in my English Dictionary just at present, but I think it means 'One who is put in trust with the property of another.' You know Lord and Lady W. have been abroad for more than a year; but his lordship wishes the estate to be managed and the cottages of the poor people kept in repair, just as if they were living at Mead Hall. Mr. Bell writes to him very often, but when he returns he will go over all the accounts with him, and so know exactly how his money has been spent. Is that what you mean, mother?"

"Yes, Dora, I find you have a right idea of the duties and responsibilities of stewardship. While you were talking, my mind went over some ways in which most, perhaps it would not be too much to say all, women are stewards, put in trust by God, with certain things for which they must one day give account."

"I don't think I quite understand yet, mother. Please tell me more about it?"

"Think a moment, Dora, and I am almost sure you will remember how most of the little

children and sick people in the world are nursed and cared for by women."

"Yes, mother, but I suppose it is really mothers and nurses who have to take care of them, and I am only a school-girl yet, you know."

"You are only a school-girl now, dear, but don't forget the nurses and mothers to whom you are so willing to leave the care of the sick and the young, were school-girls themselves, some of them not very long ago, and the circle of caretakers is far wider than you seem to have any idea, for

"'Mid the haunts of savage men,
In the forest's leafy glen,
On every league of peopled ground,
Little children may be found."

And if we even try to count the number of women and girls, who, as sisters, teachers, nurse-maids, toy-makers, or writers of children's books, are helping the mothers, I think we should be surprised. Loving hands and wise, thoughtful heads, as well as patient hearts, are sorely needed by the sick, and every woman ought to learn how to be of real use in the sick-room ; she is almost sure to have an opportunity sooner or later of turning her knowledge to account.

"But there is one other kind of stewardship of which I should like to remind you. Almost all the food products of the world pass through the hands of women, who are responsible for their proper use, and must be careful not to waste or spoil them by improper cooking."

"Oh, mother, Miss Allan said something very like that, when she gave us a few lessons on the 'Chemistry of Food.' I thought it was quite an interesting subject, indeed, I think most of the girls liked it, all but Augusta Lee, who said 'she did not know we went to school to learn cooking.'"

"Poor Augusta, I am always so sorry for her ; you know, Dora, her mother died when Augusta was very young, and though she has been indulged and petted, I fear she has not been rightly trained, and is growing up without any knowledge of how honourable, as well as important, it is, that a christian woman should know how to guide the house.

"But it is getting late, and I think we must not talk any more now. Do you expect Grace will be at the Bible Class to-morrow?"

"Yes, mother, I asked her to call here for me, because I want you to know her, then I am sure you will love her almost as much as I do. But I will go now and lay the cloth for supper."





CHAPTER II.

MISS LANG'S BIBLE CLASS.

"Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." (John vi. 12.)



SCARCELY a breath of air stirred the leaves of the poplar-trees on the lawn in front of Grove House ; but the sun blinds that shaded the open windows gave a pleasant sense of coolness to the dining-room, where the young people who attended Miss Lang's Bible Class were in the habit of assembling.

Dora Hilton and Grace Bell were among the first arrivals, and so enjoyed the pleasure, as Dora told her mother on her return home, "of having Miss Lang all to themselves for a few minutes before it was time for the Class to begin."

Miss Lang could hardly have been called young ; though not past middle life, threads of silver were plainly seen in her dark brown hair, and sorrow had left its traces on her thoughtful face.

The girls loved her dearly, each one felt she had a special place in the affection of her teacher, and there were few if any in the class who had not learnt to value her love and sympathy.

The room was almost full when the marble time-piece struck the hour of three, and Miss Lang took her seat. In a moment every voice was hushed, and a deep feeling of solemnity seemed to come over the Class as Miss Lang prayed in a very simple, but earnest, manner that the blessing of the Lord might rest on their Bible reading, so that every soul that loved the precious Saviour might behold new beauty in Him : that anxious ones might be led into peace, and careless ones, if such were present, aroused to see clearly their personal need of salvation.

Then Bibles were opened at the sixth chapter of the Gospel by John, and Miss Lang read the account of Christ feeding the five thousand. (John vi. 1-14.) Then she said, "I do not think it will be very difficult for those of our number who live in the country to picture for themselves the scene of which we have been reading. Let us look at it for a moment.

"Far and wide through the pleasant land of Judea the fame of the great Teacher had gone forth. While few, perhaps very few, really knew the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, many must have seen His wonderful works, and still larger numbers have heard how He had healed the sick, cleansed the leper, given sight to the blind, raised the dead.

"A crowd had collected, some from their houses on lonely hill-sides, others from the

villages, and perhaps a few from the towns. A common object had drawn them together : they all wanted to see the Lord perform some miracle, as well as to listen to His words. And may we not believe that some weary hearts really longed to drink of the living waters of which Christ had spoken to Samaria's daughter?

"The people followed the Lord to the hill country, near the Sea or Lake of Galilee. Will some one kindly point it out on the map of Palestine? Thank you, Grace. There it is, you see : it is one of the lakes through which the river Jordan passes, and you will all remember that in the gospels it is sometimes called the Sea of Tiberias, at others the Lake of Gennesaret. Much of our Lord's public life was passed in the neighbourhood of this lake.

"On the occasion of which we are speaking, they could not have been far from the fishing village of Bethsaida. The heart of Christ was full of compassion for all those tired, hungry people. We are told by John that the number of men was about five thousand ; and we can hardly be wrong in thinking that it was considerably added to by women and children.

"The Lord knew just how He was going to feed all those hungry people. His resources were more than equal to their need ; but He wanted His disciples to be in fellowship with Himself. So He turned to Philip with the question, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?

"Now, if you look at the first chapter and the forty-fourth verse, you will see that Philip came

from Bethsaida, so, of course, he would know just what was to be had in the place.

"His answer shews plainly he thought the outlook was anything but a bright one. 'Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.' Two hundred pennyworth would have cost about £6 5s. in English money, and would indeed have been a large sum to have been possessed by that little company.

"Another Bethsaida man, Andrew, then told the Lord how small a stock of food was at His disposal, saying, 'There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes.' We almost seem to hear the sadness of his tone in the words that follow, 'but what are they among so many?'

"We are not told the name of the boy who brought the food, or where his home was. But we know the customs in Bible lands do not change very quickly, and those who have visited them tell us that little boys are often sent out by their parents to sell food: sometimes a kind of sweet-cake made with honey and flour, and much liked by the grown-up people as well as the children. Sometimes their stock-in-trade, which they carry in large flat baskets made from the bark of the palm-tree, consists only of bread and fish.

"You must not think the loaves were such as we see in the bakers' shops and on our tables. Loaves in Bible lands are what we should call rolls, or small flat cakes of barley meal, rolled out very thin, and often baked among the hot

ashes on the hearth. So it is easy for us to understand why such bread was always broken ; it would have been impossible to cut it.

“ We are told by some who read the gospels in Greek, the language in which they were written, that the word translated ‘ fishes ’ is one used only when a very small fish is intended to be eaten as a relish, as we eat a sprat or sardine.

“ We should not think two such fish enough for one person, so we cannot wonder at the question asked by Andrew, ‘ What are they among so many ? ’

“ But the One who said, ‘ Give ye them to eat ’ (Luke ix. 13), was the One who could also say, ‘ All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.’ (Matt. xxviii. 18.) As Son of God, the Lord Jesus used His power for those weary, fainting ones. In His hands the five barley loaves and two small fishes became enough and to spare. When all were satisfied, the Giver of the feast said, ‘ Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost ; ’ and obedient to His word, ‘ They gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.’ (Ver. 13.) And it seems to me that the Saviour’s words, ‘ Gather up the fragments,’ are words alike of counsel and encouragement to the young Christians in our Class.

“ ‘ I love the Lord Jesus, and I wish, oh so much, I could do something that would please Him,’ a dear girl said to me not very long ago. ‘ But,’ she continued sadly, ‘ I have so little time. I go to business, and sometimes it is so

late before I get home, and I am so tired, it is almost more than I can do just to read a few verses in my Bible ; and very often I am so sleepy I can't understand or remember what I have read.'

"But you own you have a little time, Annie, I answered brightly, 'Gather up the fragments ;' and I think you will soon be surprised to find how rich in opportunities of doing little kindnesses, of speaking words that cheer and comfort, your life has grown. Have you ever noticed we are told to 'Let our light shine' (Matt. v. 16)? Not to *make* it shine : the Lord Himself must do that. One cold, dark day, last winter, I stood to watch a lamplighter going his rounds. Everything looked cheerless and uncomfortable ; but as he came down the street he seemed just to touch the burner of first one lamp and then another with the lighted wand he carried, and clear and star-like the lamps shone out.

"And when the Lord in His grace puts light into our dark hearts, the light must shine out if we don't hinder it by our pride or self-will.

"We all have what we often call odd minutes ; and it is really wonderful how many Bible verses may be learnt in them ; how many garments for our poor friends made ; or how many letters written, if we are only careful to use them well and wisely, and not to let them slip away. Once gone they can never come again.

" 'He who is our Great Example
Let no moment run to loss ;
Not one precious hour He wasted
From the manger to the cross.'

“But I am sure it is only by keeping the eye fixed on Christ, and the heart ever turning to Him with the question, ‘Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?’ that we learn how to use our time for Him.

“You may have heard or read that men who are engaged in digging for gold are very careful not only of the large nuggets, or lumps of gold, but also of the smallest particles of the precious metal. A miner will sometimes spend many hours in washing with the greatest care the sand or mud of rivers, near which gold has been found, because he hopes to find a few grains of gold dust as the reward of his toil; yet how careless we often are about moments more precious far than the golden sand the miners value so highly.

“Our time is almost gone, but I want very much to say just a few words about a gift we every one possess, and for the right or wrong use of which we must one day give account. This gift we may call ‘Influence.’ I think perhaps some of us would find it not an easy word to explain. Its real meaning is the power the strong have over the weak. God has placed us in different positions. But there is one question we may each ask ourselves, Are the homes in which we live, as daughters, sisters, or servants, happier because of us? Or, to put it in other words, are we shining for Christ in school or home life? Are we helping any one, even a little child, to walk in the narrow way of life? Gather up the fragments of your influence, dear girls, they are far too precious to

be scattered by careless hands : remember, God entrusts to all talents, few or many.

“ And if through grace we can answer to the Saviour’s question, ‘ Lovest thou me ? ’ ‘ Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee ’ (John xxi. 15), we are responsible to live for Him and His glory. But our lesson time is quite gone now, so I must close by pressing home a question to the heart of each one who has accepted that salvation, which is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. vi. 23.)

“ How can I shew my love to Christ ? How in my home or among my friends and school-fellows can I, by loving words or unselfish deeds, shew that I serve a Good Master whose service is perfect freedom ? ”

A hymn followed, then again Miss Lang and her Class knelt in prayer, and very earnestly the teacher asked the Lord that the good seed of His precious word might not be lost, but falling on the prepared ground of believing hearts, bring forth fruit for His own glory.





CHAPTER III.

CLARA WILSON.

"He hath done all things well." (Mark vii. 37.)



AS soon as Dora and Grace found themselves alone in a shady lane, Grace, passing her arm through Dora's, said, "I have something to tell you, Dora ; you know, dear, our holidays begin on the 24th, and mother has given me permission to invite a dear friend from B. to spend the vacation with me."

A slight shadow seemed to pass over Dora's face, and for a few moments she remained silent. Her companion noticed her changed manner, and drawing her closer to her side, said tenderly, "Why, Dora, darling Dora, please do not be vexed with me ; I would have told you all about it yesterday, only I was not quite sure.

"But mother knew I wished very much to have Clara here for a few weeks, so without saying a word to me, she wrote to a friend of hers at B., asking her to arrange everything, and the answer to her letter only came after

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you had left our house last evening. It is all settled, and the Lord willing, Clara will be with us on Thursday evening.

"But, Dora, is it possible you are jealous? Do you think my heart is so very small it can only hold one person at a time? I am sure you will be interested in Clara Wilson when I tell you that she is deaf and dumb."

The clouds had all gone from Dora's face, though tears were in her eyes, as she answered, "Please forgive me, Grace, I know I am selfish; but I had hoped we were going to have so many pleasant times together during the vacation, and I must own I felt a little disappointed to find you would not be free for all the rambles in woods and fields I had planned. I am sorry, very sorry, for your friend; it must be so dreadful to be deaf and dumb. But I cannot quite understand her being a companion for you. It must be very dull. I once saw two deaf mutes moving their fingers about very quickly, and mamma said they were talking to each other. But I could not understand them at all."

"That was only because you had not learnt their language, Dora," Grace replied with a smile; "I think I must give you a few lessons before Clara arrives, then you will be able to join in our conversations. You know B., where we used to live, is a large town, and we have quite a number of deaf and dumb friends there. Mother takes a great interest in them, and used to invite them to the gospel preaching and other meetings, and she was always so pleased to interpret for them. Sometimes they would sit

round her like a class in Sunday school, and watch her fingers while she repeated to them what was being said.

“Several times in the year mother used to have them at our house to tea, and you have no idea how interesting it was to be with them. After tea we always had a short Bible reading. Father can talk on his fingers, but not so quickly as mother, so he used to ask her to interpret what he said. Sometimes the deaf and dumb would ask questions. Once I remember a young man asking mother to tell him the meaning of the word ‘propitiation.’ Not a very easy one to explain on one’s fingers, is it? Mother told him its real meaning was mercy-seat, or meeting-place. But she saw he did not understand, so she went on to tell him how the Jews were commanded by God to offer many lambs, always one in the morning and another in the evening, and how those lambs were types or shadows of the Lord Jesus and His death upon the cross; and then she shewed him a verse, I think it is in the ninth chapter of Hebrews, but I cannot remember the exact words, only I know it says the blood of Christ is of more value than the blood of bulls and goats. And he seemed so interested, and asked quite a number of questions.”

“Oh, Grace, how delightful it must be to be able to carry the sweet gospel message to those who cannot hear it for themselves. But you have not told me yet how you learnt to talk on your fingers.”

“I think it is about six years since Clara

came with her widowed mother to live with a married sister, not far from B. She had brought the address of our meeting with her, and found her way to it the very first Sunday she spent in her new home.

"We were all so sorry for her, and mother, who had learnt the finger-alphabet when she was quite young, began to interpret for her at once. She was not able to tell her much the first time, and one day when we were talking about it she told me she felt almost afraid to begin. But as soon as she looked to the Lord for help, such a beautiful verse came into her mind. It was, 'And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.' (Matt. xxviii. 18.) Mother said it seemed almost as if the voice of a risen, loving Christ really spoke to her. For all fear was gone in a moment, and she felt so glad and thankful that the Lord had given her a little service for Himself.

"Of course I wanted to learn to talk to Clara, too, and as we became great friends, though she is several years older than I am, I soon began to make progress. Sometimes I made a great many mistakes, and one day—I remember it quite well—I felt as if I could almost give up trying; but Clara said to me on her fingers, 'Only love can give patience. You must persevere, for there are many deaf and dumb, and some of them have very dark, sad lives, for they do not know Christ, and the Lord may use your fingers to tell some of them about His love.'

"One afternoon Clara came to our house, and

told mother she wished very much she would go with her to see some deaf mutes who were living at B. Mother went with Clara, and they invited all the deaf and dumb they found, to come and have tea with us, and father wrote to ask an old friend of his, Mr. M., if he would come and preach the gospel to them.

“Mr. M. wrote such a kind letter in answer, saying how much he should enjoy being with us, only he feared his coming would be of very little use as he did not know how to talk on his fingers, and there would not be time for him to learn, as it only wanted a few days to the time fixed for the meeting. So it was arranged that he should come and speak just as he would to people who could hear, and mother would interpret for the deaf and dumb, telling them on her fingers just what he said. And I cannot tell you what a happy evening we spent together.

“But I must not go on talking about the deaf and dumb or we shall be at your house before I have told you anything about Clara. You are a good listener, Dora.”

“I have been so interested in hearing about your deaf and dumb friends, dear; but please tell me about Clara now. I should like to know her story, then I shall not feel as if she were quite a stranger when I meet her for the first time.”

“Clara was not deaf from her birth, but when she was about four years old she took scarlet fever. After her recovery her mother noticed that she did not seem to take any notice of what was said to her. At first her friends thought

that her deafness might have been caused by a severe cold, but as weeks passed on, and her hearing did not improve, they became anxious, and took her to see a doctor, who made a careful examination of her ears, and gave as his opinion that poor Clara was quite deaf, and he said he could not hold out any hope of cure.

"It must have been a great trial to her mother, who had always seemed so fond and even proud of her bright, merry little daughter. I do not think she really meant to be unkind to Clara, but from that time she always treated her afflicted child with far less tenderness than her sisters. So that Clara's childhood was far from being a happy one.

"But though Clara could not hear, she was quick to observe and understand, and got on so well at school that there was some thought of educating her as a teacher of the deaf and dumb. But, as she had repeated attacks of severe illness, it was decided that she was not strong enough to follow teaching as an occupation by which she might support herself; so, after leaving school, she lived sometimes with her mother, sometimes with one of her married sisters.

"When she comes I will ask her to tell you how it was that the Lord brought her to Himself. You know we break up on Thursday, and as father has kindly promised to take me as far as T. Junction, on Friday afternoon, to meet Clara, you may expect an early visit from us."

"Thank you, Grace, I am sure mother will be almost as pleased as myself to see Clara. But will you really teach me how to talk to her on

my fingers? I am afraid you will find me very slow."

"Have a little patience, Dora, and then I shall be quite proud of my pupil; when you know the finger alphabet you will find it good practice to take your Bible and read a few verses on your fingers two or three times a day.

"But we must say good-bye now."

"Good-bye, Grace; I shall be quite ready to take your first lesson after school to-morrow."





CHAPTER IV.

THE TOAD ROCK.

"O Lord, how manifold are thy works ! in wisdom hast thou made them all : the earth is full of thy riches." (Ps. civ. 24.)



VISITORS were expected at Myrtle Cottage. One look at Dora Hilton and you would hardly have needed to be told in words that friends for whose arrival she was almost impatiently looking, were already on the way to her house.

Tea was on the table ; the snowy cloth and bright teapot did one good to look at them ; while a vase of fresh flowers, gathered from Dora's own garden, lent the charm of their own brightness and beauty to the simply, almost plainly, furnished room, where Mrs. Hilton and Dora were waiting to receive some guests.

Dora had arranged and re-arranged the tea-table for at least the tenth time, till at length she seemed satisfied with the results of her work, then going to the open window from which she could see for some distance down the road, said eagerly :

"Oh, mother, how I wish the time would go faster; I really believe our clock is too slow. Will you please tell me the time by your watch?"

Mrs. Hilton drew out her watch, a relic of richer days, compared it with the clock on the mantel-shelf, and answered :

"The clock is quite right, Dora, and it still wants nearly half an hour to the time you fixed for the arrival of your friends, so you cannot accuse them of being unpunctual. As I see you are quite ready to receive them, will you hold a skein of cotton for me to wind, and I will tell you of a strange scene of which your words about the slow flight of time reminded me."

"Please, mother, perhaps one of our nice talks may make the hands of the clock seem to move a little more quickly. Now I am quite ready."

"I was thinking of a picture English history gives us of the last hours of an English Queen. You know Elizabeth sat on the throne of the Tudors from the year 1559 till 1603. If we may judge from portraits of her which are still preserved, she must have been gifted with perhaps more than a fair share of good looks, while her education had been so carefully attended to as to enable her not only to read and write, but also to converse with ease in Greek and Latin. Rich, admired, and beloved by her subjects, I have no doubt she became an object of envy to many whose rank was less exalted than her own. Fond of dress, amusement, and flattery, she sought happiness in these things, but sought it in vain. And as the evening of her life closed

in, dark clouds seemed to gather round the unhappy queen.

"Her path through life had been a lonely one, for while many had sought her favours, few had really loved the often haughty and imperious Tudor sovereign. Years had brought in their train, weakness alike of mind and body, but they had not sweetened her temper or turned her thoughts from the things of time to those of eternity.

"In her last illness she refused to go to bed, but sat for nearly a week by night and day propped up by pillows in a room of one of her palaces. 'She refused food, and sat,' wrote one who saw her only a few days before her death, 'with her finger on her lips, her eyes fixed on the floor, without a word.' She seldom broke the silence, but on one occasion her attendants heard her say, 'Time, time, millions of gold for an hour of time!'

"Her last words are said to have been addressed to her court physician, who told her Majesty 'She must go to bed.' 'Must,' the dying Queen replied, 'is *must* a word to be addressed to princes? Thy father,' she continued, 'would not have dared to use it to my father.'"

"What a sad story, mother," Dora remarked with a sigh. Then turning to the window she resumed the subject that had occupied her mind so often during the week, by saying, "They can't be long now, do you think they can? How strange it will seem to have a visitor we are not able to speak to, or even tell how glad we are to see her."

"We must be content, for a time at least, to use Grace's fingers instead of our own, when we wish to talk to Clara," Mrs. Hilton said, smiling at her daughter's anxious face.

"Yes, mother," Dora replied ; and then, thinking again of her deaf and dumb friend, said, "I have quite made up my mind to accept thankfully the services of an interpreter. I wonder what Clara will be like. Grace told me she is not tall, but has a bright, pleasant face, with dark eyes and hair. Still I cannot help thinking that one who is deaf and dumb must be in some way different from those who can hear and speak. I wish I could do something to shew the poor girl how sorry I am for her."

"'Freely ye have received, freely give,'" was Mrs. Hilton's answer. As she ceased speaking, Dora caught sight of two figures coming towards Myrtle Cottage, so without another word she ran to open the garden gate for her friends.

Tea was a very pleasant meal. At first Dora felt a little shy of her guest ; but as she watched the ease and rapidity with which Grace told Clara what was said by her mother and herself, or translated her silent language into words, she soon regained courage and confidence.

Before leaving, Grace said, addressing Mrs. Hilton, "Clara has just reminded me I must not forget my message, though I do not think there is much fear of my doing that," she added, laughing.

"Now, Dora, I will not be unkind enough to keep you waiting, but tell you at once that mother desired me to say with her love, that as

father has so arranged his work as to be free to take a holiday, he has promised, all being well, to drive us over to the Toad Rock on Tuesday, and we shall be very glad if Dora and yourself will join our party. Indeed, it will be a real kindness if you will consent to be our guides, for, as we are newcomers to Riversdale, it will be our first visit to Rust Hall."

Mrs. Hilton, to Dora's great delight, readily accepted the invitation so kindly given, and soon after the lengthening shadows gave warning it was time for Grace and Clara to say good-bye to their friends at Myrtle Cottage.

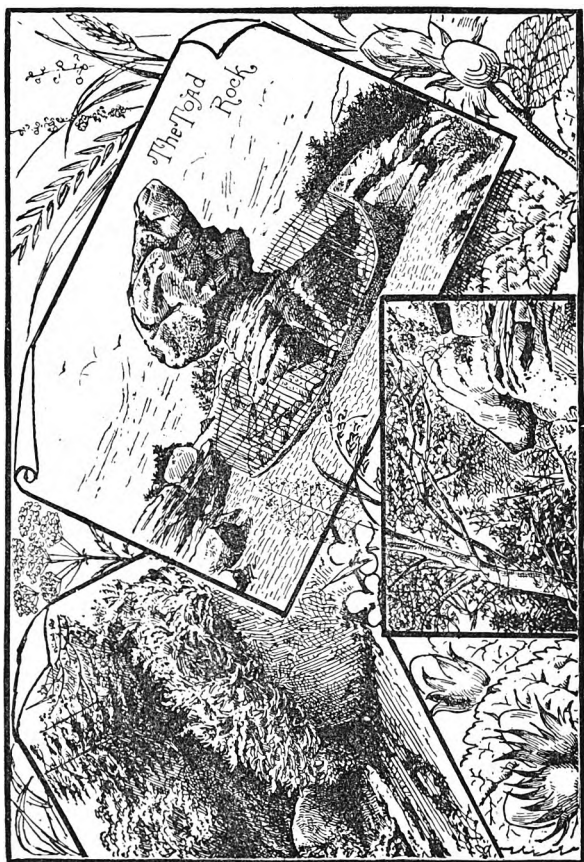
Tuesday morning proved to be all that even the most sanguine holiday-makers could possibly wish for. The sun shone brightly, while a few soft white clouds, which relieved the deep blue of the sky, only added to the beauty of the scene. A cool breeze gave promise that the heat of the day would not be too oppressive.

The party had arranged to start early, so as to have ample time to rest or ramble among the rocks. When they were fairly off, Mrs. Bell asked :

"Why does the place to which we are going bear such a singular name as the Toad Rock?"

"It is so called, I believe," replied Mrs. Hilton, "from its real or fancied resemblance to a toad. But Rust Hall is a lane of rocks, and Dora, who knows their names better than I do, will be able to point out to you not only our old friend the Toad, but also the Table, the Hen and Chickens, and the Lion Rocks."

"We have much to learn, I find," Mrs. Bell



replied with a smile ; " but is there not something unusual in the fact of rocks being found at all so far from the sea coast ? "

It was Mr. Bell who this time replied to his wife's question by saying :

" Although I have not visited these remarkable rocks, yet some time ago I heard a very interesting account of the districts in which they are found. It is supposed that long ago, in those far away times which, for want of a better name, we call pre-historic, a large sheet of water covered much of what is now known as the county of Kent. It is thought to have been a fresh-water lake, from the soft sandstone of which these rocks are composed, and the absence of such fossils as are commonly met with in places known to have been once washed by the sea.

" But," Mr. Bell continued, after looking for a moment at his pocket map, " I think we cannot be very far from what is marked on the map as Croborough Beacon ? "

" We are as near to it as we shall get," Dora answered, as she pointed out a green hill, which rose at a distance of about three miles from the road they were taking.

Mr. Bell drew rein, and looked with deep interest in the direction in which Dora pointed.

" How quiet and peaceful everything looks now," he remarked, after a short pause, " and yet how different the scene must have been when, three hundred years ago, in the year 1588, on the night of the 29th of July, beacon fires were lighted to give warning that the long expected

and greatly feared Spanish Armada had really been seen from the Lizard Point. The defeat of that ill-fated Armada is indeed a thrilling page in the annals of our country's history."

Mrs. Hilton replied, "But how clearly the hand of the Lord was seen in deliverance. How truly, as we recall it, are we led to say with David, 'Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men.' (Ps. cvii. 31.)"

"But I am afraid we are almost forgetting Clara."

Mrs. Bell, who had noticed Clara had been for some time seemingly much interested in looking at a mass of soft white clouds, asked her what she was thinking of.

Clara's face lighted up with a smile, and her fingers moved quickly, too quickly for Mrs. Hilton and Dora to understand a word, so Mrs. Bell interpreted her silent language into words for them.

"Clara," she said, "tells me she was thinking of the time when God led His chosen people Israel through the wilderness, His own presence going before them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night."

"Please tell her," Mrs. Hilton replied, "that I too was thinking about the clouds; but it was of another scene: how when a risen Saviour led His loved ones out as far as Bethany, even while He blessed them, a cloud received Him out of their sight."

Clara asked, "Is there not a verse in one of the epistles that says, 'when the Lord Jesus

comes for His own, they will meet Him in the clouds?"

Mrs. Bell took a Testament from her pocket, and pointed her young friend to two verses in the first Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians ; they were : " For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God : and the dead in Christ shall rise first : then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (Chap. iv. 16, 17.)

Dora repeated in a soft, low voice four lines of a well-known hymn :

" Yes, Saviour, Thou shalt have full praise,
We soon shall meet Thee on the cloud ;
We soon shall see Thee face to face,
In glory praising as we would."

Pleasant as the drive had been, every one seemed pleased when Dora told her friends they were almost within sight of the Toad Rock. At Mrs. Hilton's suggestion the whole party dismounted, and as soon as Mr. Bell had made arrangements that would ensure the horse being well fed and cared for, Dora acted as guide, and led them by a winding footpath to a spot where, as she laughingly told them, " the very best view of the rocks was to be had." The scene was one of never-to-be-forgotten beauty, and was enjoyed by all.

Grace and Dora were of opinion it would be delightful to spread the cloth for luncheon on a

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flat rock called the Table Rock. But as their elders objected on account of the heat being too great, Dora led the way to a clump of trees at no great distance, beneath whose waving branches willing hands soon arranged their mid-day meal.

Mrs. Hilton, who felt a deep interest in Clara, was anxious to know more of her history, and also to learn how she had been brought to a saving knowledge of Christ.

Clara seemed to understand Mrs. Hilton's wish, and seating herself on the grass near her, drew a small book-slate from her pocket, and made signs that they could converse by means of writing.

Mrs. Hilton took the slate and wrote, "Do not you feel lonely sometimes?"

The question seemed almost a surprise to Clara, but after holding the pencil for a few moments as if in thought, she wrote in a clear round hand: "No, I am not lonely now, for I know the Lord Jesus, who has said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' is always near me: and I speak in my heart to Him."

Mrs. Hilton then asked, "Can you remember when it was different with you?"

Clara's answer was quickly given, "Yes, before I knew the Lord I was very sad and lonely; you know I was deaf and dumb, and a child who is deaf and dumb is always alone and always afraid—afraid of the dark, afraid of death, afraid of judgment, but most of all, afraid of God."

"But now you know the love that casts out fear?" Mrs. Hilton wrote; and Clara answered, "Yes, thanks be unto God, for now I know the

blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John i. 7.)

Mrs. Hilton and Clara might have carried on their written conversation for some time longer with mutual pleasure and profit, had not Dora and Grace, who had been invited by Mr. Bell to accompany him in a walk-induced them to join their party.

But as I have already lingered too long over our own pleasant memories of the Toad Rock and its neighbourhood, I will only add that our friends spent a very happy holiday, returning in the evening to Riversdale, tired, it is true, but with hearts filled with thankfulness for what each felt to be a fresh proof of the loving-kindness of the Lord.



CHAPTER V.

UNCLE EDWARD.

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart ; and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” (Prov. iii. 5, 6.)



IDSUMMER holidays were over ; Clara Wilson had returned to her home, and Dora and Grace each found ample interest and occupation in home and school duties ; when Dora, returning a little later than usual one afternoon, found her mother waiting tea. Traces of recent tears were on the widow's face, and Dora was quick to perceive them and anxious to know their cause. Glancing at the postmark of an open letter that lay on the table, she exclaimed : “ Oh, mother, you have had a letter from uncle Edward, and I am almost sure he is in trouble, I can read it in your face. Is aunt Lucy very ill, or have my little cousins taken a fever ? Please tell me all about it.”

Mrs. Hilton smiled as she answered : “ You are looking on the dark side again, Dora ; your

cousins are, through mercy, quite well, and your aunt Lucy who has, as you know, been in very feeble health for some years, is not any worse than usual ; and indeed I do not know," Mrs. Hilton continued, "that I have any real cause for tears ; but our life at Myrtle Cottage has been such a calm and happy one, that the thought even of a short parting is painful to me."

Dora left her seat, and kneeling down at her mother's side, in a voice unsteady with deep feeling, "Oh, mother, dear mother ! I do not think I could bear to be parted from you. Surely uncle Edward does not, cannot want you to go and live with him and aunt Lucy at N., and leave me here ?"

"No, Dora ; the loneliness will be mine, not yours. Your uncle has written to ask if I can spare you to them for a few months. Your aunt feels her need of such help in the management of her house and the care of her children as he thinks you would be able and willing to give.

"The children, though somewhat spoilt and inclined to be self-willed, through being left too much to themselves, are, he writes, very affectionate, and quite ready to love cousin Dora.

"Your position in the family would be that of an elder daughter, and your uncle has kindly offered to make arrangements for you to take lessons in French and drawing."

"Poor aunt Lucy, how glad I should be to be of use to her," Dora replied ; "and my cousins too. I know all their names—Constance, Harry,

and Eva. But do you really think it would be best for me to go, Mother?"

Mrs. Hilton did not answer for a few moments, then said: "Dora, many times since I first knew the Lord Jesus as my trusted Saviour I have been uncertain as to what the will of God for me really was in some particular case. But when, with a real desire to do His will, I have taken the whole thing to Him in prayer, sooner or later the light of His word has shone so clearly on my path that I was no longer in doubt as to the next step. To-day, when I laid your uncle's letter before the Lord, praying that in this matter we might both have grace to do what would be most for His glory, the scripture that came to my mind was just one very short verse in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans: 'For even Christ pleased not himself.' (Chap. xv. 3.)

"You are no longer a child, Dora, and I should like the choice as to whether you go to your uncle and aunt, or remain at home, to be really your own. As I do not think of writing to my brother for a day or two, you will have time to think and pray over his proposal before you decide."

Dora sat quietly thinking for a few moments, then said, "Mother, I cannot remember much about aunt Lucy; though I know uncle Edward so well through his coming to Riversdale, I do not think I have seen her since I was quite a little girl, and you very seldom tell me much about her. Please, mother dear, do not be vexed, but I wish you would tell me if aunt Lucy is a Christian?"

"I am not vexed or surprised at your question, Dora, and am glad to be able to tell you that I believe your aunt Lucy is really a saved soul—one who is sheltered by the precious blood of Christ. And while I often long to see her shine more brightly for Him, I think sometimes she is much to be pitied. Perhaps if I tell you a little about her early life, it may help you to be more patient and gentle with her if ever you become an inmate of her home.

"Your aunt Lucy was an only child. I think she must have been a very pretty little girl. Her parents petted and indulged her in every possible way, and, as her father, Mr. Norman, who, at the time of which I am telling you, was rich in this world's goods, lived in a large house, and kept several servants, there were many visitors all ready to admire the dark eyes and flowing curls, or to be amused by the clever, witty sayings of the little lady who held her court there, and who ruled her numerous subjects in a somewhat imperious way.

"But Lucy was not really happy. I remember once when talking to me about her girlhood, tears filled her large eyes as she said, 'Oh, Helen, I cannot tell you how unsatisfying it all was. Pleasure and excitement do not, cannot give real happiness. I went to balls and parties, I was admired by many, and some I could not help knowing envied the rich and fashionable Miss Norman, but none ever guessed the secret that I was often very miserable, and I did not know how or where to find rest and peace.'

"I think Lucy was about nineteen, when

through God's blessing on some gospel meetings a young friend had induced her to attend, she was led to feel and own her need of salvation.

"Mr. and Mrs. Norman had made no objection to their daughter attending the meetings; but when they found Lucy no longer took any pleasure in the gay scenes they loved so well, they became very angry, and tried in various ways to drive away serious thoughts from her mind. But the love of Christ triumphed, and, in the midst of much opposition, she had grace and strength given to confess Him as her Saviour and Lord.

"From the time she first shewed an interest in divine things, your uncle Edward had taken a deep interest in her, and when after two or three years he asked Lucy to be his wife, she accepted his offer thankfully, and I have not the shadow of a doubt, entered on the new relationship with a sincere desire to be really and truly a helpmeet to her husband.

"For a time all went on well; but as at the time of his marriage your uncle, who was then only junior clerk in the firm where he is now one of the managers, did not receive a large salary, and your aunt knew very little about how to keep house, you will not be surprised to hear there was not much comfort in their home. You may judge for yourself how she must have felt on one occasion, when her husband had been obliged to be away from home a day or two, she wished on his return to surprise him with an apple-pie, a dish of which she knew he was very fond. After purchasing all the ingredients, she

found to her surprise and mortification that the one young servant they kept was as ignorant as herself of the art of pie-making.

"But as Aunt Lucy really loved and wanted to help her husband, she set to work with a will, and with the help of a cookery-book, soon made good progress. I think she would in time have become quite a clever housekeeper, had not a long and serious illness, soon after the birth of her little daughter Constance, left her quite an invalid. The doctor's opinion is that her weak health is caused almost entirely by derangement of the nervous system, and that complete rest and quiet are what she most needs.

"She is often too ill even to see her children for days together, and as your uncle is, as you know, obliged to be away from home very often, the children are left almost entirely to the care of servants.

"All this is very trying to your Aunt, and perhaps the saddest part of all is that she seems at times almost to question the love and wisdom of her heavenly Father in allowing her to be so weak and suffering.

"But we have talked quite long enough for the present. When you have finished your home lessons, I think we shall both enjoy a short walk, and as I want to know how Widow Price's sick child is getting on, we will call at her cottage."

On the morning after the conversation I have just related took place, Dora drew her mother into the low chair that was her favourite seat, and kissing her fondly, said :

"Please, mother, when you answer Uncle

Edward's letter, will you tell him that I am quite willing to go to N——, and that I will do my very best to be a real help and comfort to Aunt Lucy. The only thing I don't like about it is that I must leave you. But it won't be for long, and how we shall both look forward to my home-coming.

"But, mother," Dora continued, in a less cheerful tone, "Do you think I shall be of any *real* use to Aunt Lucy? I must own I am a little afraid, when I remember how young and inexperienced I am."

"I think I understand just how you feel, Dora," Mrs. Hilton said very gently, then added with a smile, "But you have no reason for being discouraged. We are not to trust ourselves or our own strength. But 'looking unto Jesus,' we are to lean on Him, remembering He hath said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' (Heb. xiii. 5.) You will have more to do, and perhaps more to bear in your new path than you have had in your quiet little home; but I believe the training will do you good by being in the hands of the Lord a means by which your own christian character will be matured and disciplined."

And so the letter to Dora's Uncle was written, and though unbidden tears would sometimes fill her eyes at the thought of the parting that must soon come, preparations for the journey made the days very busy ones to her mother and herself, and the untried path before her looked too bright and pleasant to leave room for much real sorrow.



CHAPTER VI.

A NEW HOME.

"A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger." (Prov. xv. 1.)



THE railway station at N. was a large and busy one, and as the train in which Dora was a passenger drew sufficiently near to allow her to look out of the carriage window, her first impressions were of noise, bustle, and hurry. Passengers coming and going, porters running hither and thither with luggage—all helped to give her a feeling of loneliness, and she could not help wondering if any one would be at leisure to attend to her.

But such thoughts were only for a moment. Uncle Edward had written to say he would meet her, and she felt sure only some very unforeseen event would hinder him from keeping his promise, and almost before the train stopped she caught sight of his tall form on the platform, and in a few moments was affectionately welcomed by Mr. Grange, while a porter at his bidding carried her boxes to a cab just outside the station.

When the first questions about her mother's health and her journey had been asked and answered, Dora said, "How is Aunt Lucy to-day, Uncle?"

There was a shade of sadness on the face of Mr. Grange as he answered, "Your aunt has been, I think, weaker and in more pain than usual for some days past." The warm weather we are having has added to the nervous exhaustion from which she suffers so much. But the children are all, through mercy, quite well and will be delighted at seeing you. For my own part, I can only say I felt it was very kind of you to come so willingly, and I hope you will be very happy with us, though of course you will find many things different from anything you have been accustomed to, and perhaps at first you may find the change rather a trying one.

"Your mother," he continued after a pause, "was, even as a girl, very gentle and patient, and now that she has been for many years a learner in the school of Christ, is in a rare degree a woman of 'a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.' (1 Pet. iii. 4.) But I have not forgotten a letter received from yourself nearly two years ago, in which you told me you had accepted the Lord Jesus as your own precious Saviour, so it is a comfort and joy to me to feel sure that you will know to whom to go for daily strength, and where you can 'find grace to help in time of need.' (Heb. iv. 16.) But here we are at home."

As the last words were spoken, the cab drew up before a house that seemed to Dora large

when compared with the modest size of Myrtle Cottage. A servant opened the door, and at the same moment Constance, Harry and Eva rushed into the hall and gave their cousin a very noisy greeting, while Mr. Grange opened the door of the dining-room, saying as he did so, "You may have Dora all to yourselves after tea, but she is tired now, and besides Mamma is almost as impatient to see her as you were."

He then led Dora forward to the couch where his wife reclined. Aunt Lucy received Dora kindly, though the young girl felt, she hardly knew why, chilled and repelled by the want of warmth in her manner.

Mrs. Grange told Constance to shew her cousin to the room that had been got ready for her. Harry and Eva said they wanted to go too, and as their mamma made no objection, Dora was led away in triumph.

The room that Dora was to call her own during her stay at her uncle's, though small was cheerful, and the furniture more expensive than any at Myrtle Cottage. But Dora could not help noticing, not only in her room, but through the whole house, a general want of brightness and comfort. Before she had been half an hour an inmate of her new home she found herself recalling words that had been used by her mother in speaking of a visit she had once paid to a sick friend at Riversdale: "Poor Mrs. N., I felt so sorry for her. One glance round her home told me that its mistress was too ill to guide it."

Dora found it no easy task to answer all the questions asked her by Constance and Harry.

It was quite a relief to her to be told that tea was waiting in the dining-room.

During the meal Dora had, for the first time, leisure to observe her cousins.

Constance, who, having reached the mature age of ten, considered herself almost grown up, had her mother's dark eyes and rich waving hair, but Dora could not help noticing that her face wore an expression of habitual peevish discontent. Harry was very like his father, and Dora felt at once they would be friends, even though he should prove, as she felt he was, quite capable of being a "regular tease."

Eva, though almost six years old, was considered almost as a baby by both Mr. and Mrs. Grange. She was really a very pretty child, with large blue eyes and long flaxen hair; and Dora who had often wished for a little sister of her own, thought how pleasant it would be to dress dolls for Eva, tell her stories, and try in many ways to win her love and confidence.

But long before the children's bedtime, Dora felt the task that lay before her would prove far from an easy one. Anxious to do all in her power to please her cousins, she went with them into the nursery, where a young servant, who was, as Dora soon learnt, the children's nurse-maid Ann, sat darning stockings. She rose and curtsied respectfully as Dora entered the room.

Constance proposed they should shew Dora her doll's house. But Harry objected, saying he did not care for dolls or their houses, they were only fit for girls. His silkworms were, he told Dora, "worth looking at." Constance pouted,

shrugged her shoulders, and told Harry he was "a nasty, disagreeable boy, and she was sure cousin Dora never would like him ;" to which Harry retorted by saying "he would rather be a nasty disagreeable boy than a proud stuck-up girl," while Eva added to the general confusion by beginning to cry.

Poor Dora felt almost ready to cry too, and wondered how Ann could possibly go on with her mending so quietly. Ann, who was on the whole a very well-meaning girl, noticing Dora's distressed face, said kindly :

"Don't take any notice, miss; you will soon get used to the noise. I never saw such children as these are for quarrelling, and fighting too sometimes, I am sorry to say. And their poor mamma too ill to be worried, even by hearing of their naughty ways, though if I do speak to her," the girl added in a lower tone, "missus only gets cross, and says it is all my fault, and that I don't know how to manage children properly."

Dora stood for a few moments uncertain what to say or do, then remembering having heard her mother say "that to give children some occupation was one of the very best ways to insure their being happy," she said, "My mother, your aunt Helen, sent each of you a small present. Who will help to unpack my box, then I can give them to you?"

To Dora's great delight, the storm of angry voices was hushed in a moment, and the children were all ready and willing to offer their services ; indeed, so eager that it needed all the tact and patience she possessed to prevent the presents

being torn before she could remove their paper wrappings.

There was a scrap album with several sheets of scraps for Constance ; a box of paints for Harry, and a picture book for Eva. All were pleased, and the remainder of the evening passed on the whole, peaceably.

After the children were in bed a message from Mrs. Grange recalled Dora to the sitting-room, where she was much pleased by hearing her uncle say, "As Dora and her cousins seem on such good terms, I think we may ask her to be of some real use to-morrow. What do you say, Lucy?"

Mrs. Grange replied to her husband's question by saying, "It is such early days, Dora, that I really do not like the idea of setting you to work. But I have been too ill to spare Ann to go for her usual monthly holiday for some time, and as I know she is very anxious to see her father, who is ill, I think, if you are not afraid to take the entire charge of the children for a few hours, of letting her go to-morrow. Harry goes to school, that will be some comfort. But Constance has her holiday later than usual this year, so will be at home."

Dora crossed the room, and kneeling down by her aunt's couch, said, "I left my mother and Riversdale to be a help and comfort to you, Aunt Lucy, and I think it is very kind of you to let me begin so soon. Need I tell you, I will do my best to fill Ann's place."

The next morning passed off better than Dora had even dared to hope. Dora had



The noise brought Mrs. Grange on the scene, page 59.

succeeded in keeping Constance busy in helping her to dress a doll for Eva, and all went on smoothly, till some time after Harry's return from school, when Dora, who had been busy in another part of the room, was startled by the sound of a fall, followed by loud cries, and looking up saw Harry had fallen on the sharp edge of the fender, and was bleeding from a cut on his face.

Constance, who stood near to him holding a torn page of her scrap album, said in a loud angry voice, "I am not a bit sorry if you have hurt yourself, you had no right to touch my album."

The noise brought Mrs. Grange on the scene. Harry and Constance each blamed the other as the cause of the quarrel; Harry saying that the album would not have been torn if Constance had not taken it from him so roughly that he fell down, and Constance declaring that Harry was a naughty boy, and always tore her books.

Mrs. Grange having assured herself that Harry's cut was by no means a deep one, turned to Dora and said in a fretful complaining tone, "Only just what I expected; indeed, I told your uncle that I did not see how a girl who has no young brothers or sisters of her own could be of much use in helping me with the children. I am afraid your coming to us was a mistake, but it can't be helped now."

Poor Dora! She could not trust herself to say one word in answer. It seemed so unkind to blame her as if she had been the cause of all the trouble, when she had really tried to keep

peace. Glad to escape from the room she took refuge in her own, and having locked the door threw herself on the bed, sobbing as if her heart would break. How she wished she had never left her mother and her happy home. Should she tell Uncle Edward that Aunt Lucy thought her coming had been a mistake, and ask his permission to return to Riversdale?

But other thoughts followed quickly. Was it an echo of far-off music or a whisper of peace that seemed to come with wondrous power to soothe and calm the wounded spirit? No, only two lines of a well-known hymn that came into her mind as she lay there, feeling as if all the sunshine had faded out of her life and she could not be happy any more—

“What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer.”

Yes, she knew to Whom to go for the strength and comfort she so much needed, and rising from the bed she knelt down, and though at first tears came faster than words, as she prayed she seemed to grow calm and almost happy.

When she rose from her knees, after trying to wash the tear stains from her face, she returned to the nursery and said, “I am really very sorry for what has happened, but please, Aunt Lucy, do shew you are not angry with me by letting me try again.”

Aunt Lucy answered by a kiss, and Dora felt she was sorry for the pain her sharp words had given.





CHAPTER VII.

SHADOWS AND SUNSHINE.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.” (Rom. viii. 28.)



RS. HILTON had said, on parting with Dora, the daily need of grace and patience to meet the demands made upon her at her uncle's house, would prove a valuable discipline for herself. Dora soon saw her mother had judged rightly, and though at times she found her cousins very trying, Harry and she were fast friends; for though, like most boys, he was often thoughtless, he had a kind heart, and was really sorry when by his conduct he had given pain to any one whom he really loved.

Dora told him stories, heard his lessons, proved his sums, found his various schoolboy possessions, which, before her coming, had almost always been lost when most wanted by their owner.

Eva, too, loved her cousin, and though the

spoilt child was often fretful and exacting, still Dora contrived to amuse and occupy her, and quarrels in Mrs. Grange's nursery were by no means so frequent as they had been when Dora entered it for the first time.

Constance gave by far the most trouble, but even her sullen temper at times gave signs that she felt the power of gentleness, and Dora was hopeful and thankful.

But was Dora herself always patient and gentle? Ah, no; truth compels me to say that she was not, and her saddest, darkest days were those on which she had been impatient with the children, or quick to take offence at some hasty word from her aunt. But at such times, as soon as she was able to get away to her room, her Bible seemed almost to open of its own accord at a verse marked by her mother before leaving home, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John i. 9); and, though the page was often wet with her tears, yet Christ, as a risen, loving Saviour, became more precious to her soul as she tasted the sweetness of His pardoning and restoring grace.

Long, loving letters, too, from her mother and Miss Lang were a great comfort and help to her. Grace Bell, too, proved herself a good correspondent, and her letters not only kept Dora informed of what was going on among friends and neighbours at Riversdale, but sometimes as she read she almost fancied herself seated in her old place in the Bible Class, listening to the voice of her much-loved teacher. Part of one

such letter Dora has given me permission to copy for my readers :—

“How I wished you could have been with us at the Bible Class last week, for I know you would have enjoyed it ; but as you were many miles away, I must try to tell you a little about our lesson, even though I know my pen will not do justice to Miss Lang’s words.

“We read 1 Samuel xxv., then Miss L. talked to us about the power of gentleness as shewn in the history of Abigail in a very beautiful, impressive way. I cannot tell you all she said, only a few words here and there just as I remember them. One thing I hoped I should not forget was, that although we are not told anything in the Bible about the girlhood of Abigail, we may be almost sure that she had helped to make her home a happy one by being as gentle and sweet tempered as daughter or sister as she was in after years as a wife.

“Annie Mayne asked if it did not seem strange that Abigail, with her beauty, and wisdom, should have been married to such an ill-tempered, unlovable man as Nabal must have been ?

“Miss Lang reminded us that in Eastern countries girls are, as a rule, married very young, and have no voice in the matter, not even being consulted, and are seldom if ever allowed to see their future husbands till the marriage has really taken place.

“It must have been a moment of the deepest possible interest when Abigail met David. What a scene when four hundred armed men, all eager to avenge, with their swords, the insult Nabal

had offered to their beloved commander, turned from their purpose by the gentle pleading of one woman.

"Then we turned to a verse in the first Epistle of Peter, I think we may call it one of her favourites, she quotes it so often, 'The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.' (1 Pet. iii. 4.)"

The unvarying kindness of Mr. Grange, too, was a great help and comfort to Dora. When, on returning home in the evening, he noticed Dora was looking paler or more tired than usual, he would often propose taking her for a walk, and as his visits were always welcomed by the poor, Dora soon made several friends among the suffering and lonely ones to whom she was introduced by her uncle.

The weather toward the end of August became very sultry and oppressive. Mrs. Grange evidently suffered more than usual, and became so ill as to be unable to leave home, so the hope of being able to spend a short time in the country, about which the children had been thinking and talking for many weeks, had, much to their disappointment, to be given up; and as much of Ann's time was taken up in waiting upon her mistress, the children were by degrees left almost entirely to Dora's care, and though she often thought of the happy days she spent at Myrtle Cottage, and longed for a quiet talk with her mother, her life was far too busy a one to leave her much time for sadness, and she was learning the blessedness of seeking to make others happy.

One evening Mr. Grange returned from the counting-house earlier than usual, and after spending an hour in the room of his wife, entered the nursery with a smiling face, and asked Dora if she would like to go for a walk with him. Like to go out with Uncle Edward ! Indeed she would, for her head ached, and she felt that fresh air and change of scene would be a great treat to her ; still she hesitated.

"Come, Dora, make haste," her uncle said kindly.

Dora looked wistfully out of the open window, then answered, "I really do not think I ought to go this evening, uncle, as Eva is not very well and likes to have me put her to bed ; and I promised Harry I would help him to cut out a card-board model of a windmill, and—"

But Mr. Grange did not give Dora time to finish her list of reasons for remaining at home, by saying, "You must allow me to decide the question for you. Ann is coming to take your place. A walk will do you good, and your aunt and I both feel that in your loving care for us and ours you are in danger of neglecting yourself."

How glad and grateful Dora felt as she listened to her uncle's encouraging words. It did not take long to put on hat, jacket, and gloves ; but before leaving her room she knelt for a few moments, and with a full heart thanked the Lord for this fresh proof of His loving kindness, then ran downstairs.

Mr. Grange was waiting for Dora at the hall door. A quarter of an hour's walking took them

through the town into a suburb where the houses were small and poor-looking. Groups of ragged children were playing on the doorsteps, and untidy women lounged about and chatted with each other.

Dora and her uncle walked on for some time in silence. At last he said, "We are going to see a King's daughter, Dora."

She looked up quickly. The light that shone in her uncle's face helped her to understand his meaning, and she answered with a smile, "One of the Lord's hidden ones, as mother would say, I expect, uncle."

"Yes, Dora ; my old friend, Ada Lee, is one of whom it may truly be said that, though poor in this world's goods, she is rich in faith. You will find in Miss Lee one who will prove, I am sure, not only a loving friend but a wise counsellor to you, Dora.

"I should not have been content for you to be with us so long without knowing one whom I value so highly, were it not that Miss Lee only returned home last week from friends living at a distance from N."

As Mr. Grange ceased speaking, he stopped before a small but very neat-looking house. A little girl opened the door in answer to his knock, and Dora followed her uncle through a dark passage and up a narrow staircase. Their guide then opened a door, and in another moment Dora heard the cheery voice of her uncle saying, "Miss Lee, I have brought my niece, Dora Hilton, to see you ; I expect you will soon be great friends, for both can say of

the Lord Jesus, 'He loved me, and gave himself for me.' " (Gal. iii. 20.)

Miss Lee did not rise to receive her visitors, but her smile and the words of welcome as she greeted them were so bright and pleasant that Dora was quite at home with her at once. Perhaps she could not have told any one what it was about Miss Lee that attracted her so strongly, but unconsciously to herself, Dora was learning how real and blessed are the bonds that unite the children of God to each other.

"It is always a great treat to me to have a visit from a young Christian," Miss Lee said in a low, sweet voice. "Shall I tell you why, dear?" she added, turning to Dora. "Just because I know the lambs are very dear to the heart of the Lord Jesus, who, as the Good Shepherd, gave His life for the sheep. But sometimes I find a lamb of Christ's fold gets sick, or very very tired, or sometimes has wandered away from Him. And the Lord, who knows that though I cannot go out, I love Him and long to do something for Him, often sends one of His own here, and gives me the joy of serving Him in His little ones. And there really is a bright side in not being able to walk: I do not mean only because I know it is my Father's will for me to sit still, but because I am always at home, so that any of my young friends who may need a word of help or comfort know just where to find me."

The hour spent in Miss Lee's little room passed all too quickly for Dora, and when she said good-bye to her new friend it was with a

promise of paying another visit at no very distant date.

During their walk home, Dora learnt from her uncle that for more than ten years Miss Lee had been quite unable to walk, and that, though few would have guessed the truth from her bright face and cheerful manner, she often suffered from attacks of severe pain.





CHAPTER VIII.

CHRYSANTHEMUMS.

"Unto you therefore which believe, he is precious."
(1 Peter ii. 7.)



REALLY as Dora wished to accept the invitation of her new friend, several weeks passed before she had an opportunity of paying a second visit to Miss Lee. Mrs. Grange, who had taken a severe cold, was confined to her room for several weeks, and it was quite late in October before Dora felt herself really free.

When quite ready for her walk, she lingered for a few moments to arrange some chrysanthemums she had gathered in a glass flower-holder near her aunt's chair. Mrs. Grange asked with a smile, "Have you brought all the flowers out of the garden to my room, Dora?"

"Oh no, Aunt Lucy, only just a few of them for you to enjoy their beauty. I wish you could walk round, if only once, just to see the show of

chrysanthemums ; they are lovely. There are large white ones, I am not sure I know their proper name, but Harry and Eva call them snowballs, and yellow ones looking just like golden balls, while Lady Clair and Queen Mab have put on very beautiful autumn dresses ; and there are dear little pompons hardly larger than daisies, but wearing such bright liveries of orange and brown."

"Thank you, Dora, I almost seem to see the garden through your eyes ; but I was going to propose that if it would not take you too long you might gather a large bunch of autumn flowers, and take them with my christian love to Miss Lee."

"Oh that will be delightful, aunt ! How kind of you to think of it. It will not hinder me five minutes to gather the flowers, and I am sure they will give Miss Lee much pleasure."

Half an hour later, and Dora entered Miss Lee's little sitting-room. "I was expecting you, dear," were Miss Lee's first words, as she returned Dora's kiss.

"Expecting me, Miss Lee ! Why how did you know I was coming ?" Dora asked, with a somewhat puzzled look.

"Well perhaps it was almost too much to say that I was quite sure it was you who were coming ; but I felt so much better than usual this morning that I just asked the Lord, if I could be of use to any of His little ones, to please send the one to whom I was to give a word of cheer or comfort here this afternoon, and then you came before my mind. I felt I



Gathering Flowers.

wanted to see you to know how you were getting on, so that I was really thinking of and praying for you when you knocked at the door."

"Do you pray about everything, Miss Lee?" Dora asked, almost in a whisper.

"Pray about everything! why yes, dear, of course I do. Is anything that can grieve or gladden a child of God too small a matter for the ear and heart of our heavenly Father?"

"Perhaps you have not begun yet to take the small worries, the every-day cares and duties to God in prayer; but you will find, as I have done, the strength and comfort of being very childlike and simple.

"But what lovely flowers! my favourite chrysanthemums, too."

"They are for you, dear Miss Lee, with Aunt Lucy's christian love," Dora said, as she placed her flowers in the thin, white hand that was extended to receive them.

Miss Lee was silent for a few moments, but a flush of pleasure lent colour to her cheeks and there was a glad light in her eyes as she bent almost lovingly over the blossoms, and seemed to drink in their faint but delicious perfume, then, turning to Dora, said brightly, "How kind of Mrs. Grange, and you too, dear. You do not know how I love chrysanthemums, the last flowers of the year; they always seem to whisper a sweet Bible promise to me. But I see you do not quite understand. Here is my Bible. If you turn to the fourteenth chapter of the prophet Zechariah, and look at the seventh verse, you will see some words underlined in pencil."

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Dora found the place quickly, and read : " At evening time it shall be light."

" Thank you, dear. Though I know the words refer to a time when God's long-loved people Israel shall return to their own pleasant land, I cannot tell you how day by day the Lord is making the promise good to me now. For it is evening-time with me, Dora, the evening-time of my life. But it is light, and the light of a risen Saviour's love seems to grow brighter and clearer every step of the way. But we must have tea now. Will you kindly call Susan, my little maid ?"

For months after, the memory of that pleasant visit seemed to cheer and help Dora in doing small duties, and bearing the common every-day trials, that often worry and fret the more, because they are so trifling, not worth, we think, speaking or writing about.

But in the few hours Dora had spent with Miss Lee, she had been reminded of the calm, restful faith of her own loved mother, and if now and then the thought would come in by the way—and it very often would come when Dora had the headache or was feeling more tired than usual—" Mother and Miss Lee would not always find it easy to be gentle and patient if they had to put up with Constance's trying temper or Harry's careless ways"—she would remember that with each the secret of strength lay in the fact that Mrs. Hilton and Miss Lee were learners in the school of Christ ; and then Dora would open her Bible—not the one that she had used at Myrtle Cottage, but one that had been

a parting gift from her mother, and on the fly-leaf of which, in that mother's handwriting, were words Dora often read and re-read : the words of One whom she knew as her precious Saviour : " Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me : for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt. xi. 29, 30.) And as she turned its pages, very often some inspired word of encouragement or promise would tell her that the daily grace and strength she so much needed might be hers through Christ.

Uncle Edward, too, was a great help and comfort to Dora, though she did not see much of him, as, owing to his business engagements, he was obliged to leave home early in the morning, often returning late in the evening. She knew, too, that the long and severe illness of one of the partners in his firm made it necessary for him to undertake a large amount of extra work, and often Dora, as young she was, could not help noticing from his often weary face and languid step that he was feeling the strain a good deal ; yet he never seemed to forget that his wife and Dora had trials, too, though of a different kind to his, and he was always patient and gentle with them.

Sometimes, but not so often as she could have wished, Dora was able to get a quiet talk with her uncle. One such talk was a great help to her.

Dora had been telling Mr. Grange how much she wished to be the means of leading her

cousins to Christ. But tears filled her eyes as she continued in a low, grieved voice: "Oh, uncle, I am afraid they will never learn from me, for though Eva will often ask me to tell her Bible stories, and Harry, I believe, really wants to be a christian boy, sometimes I get so cross and ill-tempered, and though I am always very sorry afterwards and tell them so, I am sure they take notice of my unlovely ways. And how can I expect them to believe that I do really want to please the Lord Jesus?"

Mr. Grange drew his niece closer to him, and said gently, "I know, Dora, perhaps even better than yourself, how hard it is always to do right; indeed, I believe there is only one way. Shall I tell you what I think it is? BEING right; and the only way to be right is to keep very near Christ, our good, great Shepherd, that we may hear what He has to say to us. (John x. 27.)

"If at times this seems hard and trying for us, it is always a comfort to remember we are only to take one step at a time. I have known some dark days, Dora; but never one in which I had not light enough to see the next step.

"Tell the Lord all about your desires, and how you fail. Do not keep anything back, or have any secrets from Him. 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee.' (Ps. lv. 22.) And so resting, so trusting, there will be more glory for your Saviour, and more real joy and blessing filling your cwn soul."



CHAPTER IX.

BY THE SEA.

"The sea is his, and he made it, and his hands formed the dry land." (Ps. xcv. 5.)



ALL through the cold dark days of winter Dora's hands were filled with household cares too numerous to mention, yet all needing patience, care, and at least some degree of knowledge and skill.

My readers must not run away with the idea that I wish them to think of Dora as a model housekeeper.

She was only just entering her sixteenth year, and so could have but little of the wisdom that can only be gained by experience. But one good habit formed in her childhood was a great help to her in her new home, that of pains-taking.

More than once, however, the kind doctor who attended Mrs. Grange had said, "Dora only needed a little training to make a first-rate

nurse : she was so quiet and orderly in a sick room."

Sometimes, but not very often, she was free to spend an hour or two with her friend, Miss Lee, and always returned from her visits cheered and refreshed ; for Dora, too, was beginning to pray about everything, and very blessed and precious to her soul were the moments when, in the quiet of her own little room, she was able to tell out to her Saviour all her joys and sorrows.

Early in the New Year, Dora hoped for a visit from her mother, but to her great disappointment Mrs. Hilton was not free to accept the loving invitation of her brother and his wife to spend a few weeks under their roof, as for a time she had left Myrtle Cottage, and was taking care of a family of motherless children.

So the days went on till it only wanted a week of the time when Dora would have been for a year an inmate of her uncle's home.

Constance and Eva were in the garden, and Harry in the sitting-room with his father and mother. Dora sat alone in the nursery, mending a frock Eva had torn in her play. As she worked her thoughts went back to the Saturday evening with which my story opened, when as the shadows deepened round them in the pleasant little parlour of Myrtle Cottage her mother's words about Stewardship had been so lovingly spoken.

How many things had not the Lord put her in trust with since that well-remembered evening?

What account could she give of her stewardship ?

These and similar questionings filled Dora's mind when she heard the sitting-room door open and Willie came bounding upstairs three steps at a time.

"It's all settled, Dora, and it's splendid, I tell you, it's just splendid.

"Now why don't you throw down your work and begin to jump about and say it's first-rate news?"

"But you have not told me the news yet, Harry, and see, I am all attention." Dora said laughing.

"Why, we are all going to stay at Sandrock-by-the-sea, you know, Dora, for a whole month. We are all going, you too, and father said I might come and tell you: indeed, I don't think we should get on very well without Cousin Dora.

"Father wrote to a friend of his there, to take lodgings for us, but he was not sure of being able to take his holiday till to-day, so only mamma knew a word about it. We are to go to-morrow week, father says, if the Lord will, the boy added in a reverent whisper. But I must be off now and tell the girls."

Dora's heart beat quickly, and a brighter colour than usual glowed in her cheeks, as Willie, with all a boy's delight at being the bearer of such important news, scampered off to join his sisters in the garden. For though her early years, which were spent among the fields and lanes of Kent, had made her familiar with country sights and sounds, she had never seen the sea, and much as she longed to look on her mother's face, and

listen to her voice, she felt the proposed visit to the seaside would be a great treat, and a fresh proof of the loving kindness and tender mercy of the Lord.

But aunt Lucy was calling "Dora! Dora!" so she folded her work and went to join Mr. and Mrs. Grange.

"Well, Dora, what have you to say to our plan of a visit to Sandroek?" Mr. Grange asked.

"Oh, uncle, I think it will be delightful. You don't know how I have wished for a peep at the sea, ever since I was quite a little girl. When I used to read of ships sailing away over its blue waters, I used to shut my eyes, and try to picture to myself what the sea must be like, I could only feel sure that it is very grand and glorious."

"The sea is His, and He made it," Mr. Grange repeated, as if in answer to Dora's words, and she felt sure by the far-away look on her uncle's face that he was thinking of things unseen.

But in a few moments he again joined in the conversation, helping Mrs. Grange and Dora to arrange for the journey.

The week that followed was a busy, and it must be owned, rather a trying one to Dora; so many things had to be thought of, so much must be done. Mrs. Grange did not feel herself strong enough to undertake shopping, so employed Dora a good deal in going errands for her, while the children, whose holiday had begun, wanted a great deal of her advice and help in the disposal of their various possessions.

Eva's favourite doll had to be packed and unpacked at least a dozen times before the little girl could be persuaded that it would travel safely. Harry, too, needed all her tact and patience to convince him it would be impossible to take his pet rabbits, book chest, and a variety of other schoolboy's treasures to Sandrock.

But all was ready in good time, and on the last evening of their stay in town, Dora very gladly availed herself of a little free time and went to say good-bye to Miss Lee.

Very gladly Miss Lee welcomed her young friend, and entered with such real interest into all Dora told her of her uncle's plans for making their visit to the seaside a very pleasant one, that as the latter rose to go, she could not help saying,

"How I wish you were going to Sandrock too, dear Miss Lee. I shall feel as if it were almost wrong to enjoy my holiday when I think how lonely you will be in your quiet room."

"But you must not think of me as lonely or alone, Dora, for it would not be true," Miss Lee replied, and as she spoke a glad light seemed to break over her face. "No, dear," she continued after a pause, "I am never alone, for the Lord Jesus has made His presence and love so very real to me, that I often find myself saying,

'Lonely, no not lonely,
While Jesus standeth by,
His presence fills my chamber,
I know that He is nigh.'

I know the Lord Jesus as the One who bore all my sins in His own body on the cross. I know

too, that He has said, 'I will come again and receive you unto myself.' (John xiv. 3.) But sometimes, Dora, I think daily strength and comfort flow into my soul from the knowledge of what He is now doing for me. I am afraid no words of mine can make you understand how precious I find it to know that the One who is even now at the right hand of God the Father, is the One who loves me, the One who knows all about my every need.

"But I must not keep you any longer now, dear, for it is getting late, and I am sure you must all be tired, and will need a good rest if you are to be strong for your journey to-morrow."

Every one under Mr. Grange's roof seemed to wake early on the following morning, and though the children were in such high spirits, Dora was afraid their noise would make her aunt quite tired before they really set out on their journey. Mrs. Grange said she was feeling stronger than she had done for many weeks, and when they were all comfortably seated in the railway carriage, Dora found as much to amuse her as any of the party in the different objects of interest kindly pointed out by her uncle.

Once they passed an old castle which Mr. Grange told them had been a Norman stronghold. It was almost a ruin, and sheep were feeding in what must have been part of the interior. But Dora, who was always interested in English history, found it easy to recall scenes that might have taken place there long ago. She thought she could almost hear the clang of

steel and the tread of men clad in heavy suits of mail armour.

A favourite text of her mother's came into her mind, and looking up she said aloud, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower." (Prov. xviii. 10.)

Mr. Grange was about to answer, when a cry of delight from Harry, who had been for some time standing at the carriage window, made the whole party look round. Yes, the sea, with its blue waves glittering in the sunshine, lay before them, and Dora looked on it with ever-deepening wonder and admiration.

The pretty station of Sandrock, bright with creepers and flowering plants, was soon reached. In half an hour our travellers were at their lodgings, all ready to do justice to the good tea they found had been prepared for them.





CHAPTER X.

LITTLE BUT WISE.

"My meditation of him shall be sweet. I will be glad in the Lord." (Ps. civ. 34.)



HE sun was shining brightly, when on the first morning of her visit to Sandroock, Dora found the family at breakfast. Harry, who had been out for an early stroll with his father, was eager to tell how he had seen more than one fishing boat come in ; while his sisters reminded Mr. Grange of a promise he had made to take them for a sail.

As the sea was calm, he said, if mamma had no objection, he was quite ready to fulfil the engagement Mrs. Grange having, to the great delight of all, consented to make one of the party, a very pleasant morning was spent on the water, and all returned to their early dinner with bright faces and good appetites.

After dinner Mrs. Grange went to her room to rest till tea time. Dora offered to stay with her

aunt, but finding her services were not needed, very gladly joined her uncle and cousins in an afternoon ramble on the shore.

It was quite low water when they got down to the beach, but Mr. Grange told them it was the best time to learn lessons of the wisdom and goodness of God by examining a few of the many objects of interest they were sure to find among the shingles or on the sands.

Small shells and seaweeds there were in plenty, but soon the whole party were gathered round Eva, who had found what she considered a prize, and was holding it up to be admired.

It was a strange-looking object: a soft, round, flat body, from which five arms or rays of almost equal length were reaching out from its sides.

"What is it?" asked the younger children at once.

"I am not quite sure, but I think it must be a starfish. It is like a picture of one in a book I have at home," Dora said in a rather uncertain tone.

"Yes, Eva has found a starfish, and a very curious little creature it is. Shall I tell you its history?" Mr. Grange replied, holding out his hand for it as he spoke.

"But, father," Harry exclaimed eagerly, "I don't think it can be a real fish. It has neither head nor tail, and I am almost sure it can't swim."

Constance and Dora laughed, but Mr. Grange said, "Harry is right. The starfish has neither head nor tail, eyes nor fins. It is not much of a swimmer, though I believe it can remain for a

long time under water, yet it belongs to an order of soft-bodied marine animals which writers on natural history have classed among fishes.

"It has no bones, but very small lumps of lime form a kind of framework for its soft body. Look at its mouth on the under side of the body just in the centre.

"Sometimes the starfish will fold one or more of its long arms round a small crab, and draw it toward its mouth. We should say the crab was much too large to be swallowed whole ; but the mouth of the starfish seems to grow larger, till at last the prize is comfortably disposed of, shell and all, in the stomach of the starfish. Then all the soft parts of the crab are sucked out by the hungry fish, after which the mouth again expands and the empty shell, often looking very little changed, is turned out.

"The starfish has a great number of feet, though we cannot see any of them just now, as they are all drawn in, and so out of sight. But look closely and you will see round the edge of each arm a double row of very small holes. Through each of these holes the starfish can at will push a tiny foot, hollow underneath. This hollow is of great use to our little friend, as by what is called exhausting the air, it gives a firm footing, and so enables it to walk, without danger of falling, up the steep sloping side of a rock.

"But I think you will be as much interested as I was in hearing of the clever way in which the starfish opens an oyster."

"Oh, papa, you must be laughing at us now. How could this soft little creature open an oyster? I tried once for a long time, but had to give it up and I am sure my fingers are stronger than the arms of the starfish"

"No, I am quite in earnest, Constance. What the starfish lacks in strength it makes up for in patience. When starfishes visit an oyster bed they often do great mischief, but their way of oyster dredging is really very curious.

"A starfish folds its rays round an oyster, and then puts its mouth quite close to the mouth of the oyster. Tiny white bladders then rise round the mouth of the starfish. In this position the patient little creature will often remain for many hours, until the oyster opens its shell to take food. Then the starfish seems to drop into the mouth of the oyster a little of some fluid that has the effect of rendering the oyster unable to close its shell. It then becomes an easy prey to the starfish."

"That is very interesting, Uncle Edward. I had no idea so much was known about starfishes.

"But did you notice that one of the rays of our specimen is much shorter than the other four? I wonder what is the reason."

"Nothing is more common, Dora, than to find starfish with one or more of their rays broken or nipped off; but as soon as the old ray is gone, a new one begins to grow, and in time becomes as large as the others. Ours is a very common kind of starfish, and has only five rays. Some have twelve or fourteen rays, but these kinds are

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not very often found on the sand at low water, but are brought up in the nets of fishermen.

"Now, I think we had better carry our starfish to one of the pools of sea-water left among the rocks by the receding tide ; but I trust we shall not forget the lessons it has taught us of the care of God for all the creatures His wisdom and power have created. We cannot study even what we call the lowest forms of plant or animal life without having our hearts drawn out in grateful love and adoring praise to the Creator, for—

" ' All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All that is wise and wonderful,
The good Lord made them all.' "

"But I see Harry has found some new object of interest. What is it, my son?"

"Only a cockle, father ; a live cockle, I think. But one side of its shell is almost covered with what look like small shells, though I must say they are not very pretty ones."

"You have got a fine group of acorn barnacles. I think we had better ask Eva to lend us her pail. We will fill it with sea water and put your cockle in. When we get indoors we can transfer it with some of the water to a thin drinking glass, and place it in the light. We shall then find that these strange looking shells are the homes of living creatures. Acorn barnacles, as these are called, from their shells being in shape something like an acorn with the top cut off, pass through some very wonderful and interesting changes.

"A baby barnacle is what is called a free swimmer, able to move about from place to place ; and a very lively little fellow it is, not at all unlike a large water flea, but provided with two pairs of feelers, six legs, a forked tail, and *one* eye. Its soft body is covered with a thin shell. But you know all healthy babies grow, and in a very few days the young sailor becomes too large for its shell, so casts it off just like an old suit of clothes. Another shell begins to grow, but larger than the old one ; but as this, too, soon gets too small, it is thrown off in the same way. A third suit is quickly outgrown, then the barnacle is ready to settle down for the rest of its days.

"But how is this done? The barnacle fixes itself firmly to some shell or piece of rock ; a kind of glue which soon becomes very hard comes from its mouth, its six legs are turned into what looks very much like a tiny plume of feathers. Away goes the one eye, and the shell we are now looking at soon forms something like a house with four doors at the top.

"But what is the use of these doors? When we get our barnacles in a good light we shall soon see, if we have a little patience to watch. Two of the doors will open, and we shall see the tiny plume peep out. If we look closer we shall see that what we at first thought feathers are very much like fingers. We see them open and then close as if grasping something. What has the little creature caught? Something too small for our eyes to see, but not too small for that feather-like hand to feel. It was something in

the way of food, for the doors are closed again, and the tiny morsel finds its way to the stomach of the barnacle.

"There are several other kinds of barnacles. One is called the ship barnacle. We shall be sure to find some, and it will be easy to know it by its long stalk. But I think we must not begin to talk about it now, but bend our steps homewards, as it is getting late, and tea will be waiting."

"Oh, Uncle Edward, I shall long remember what a delightful ramble we have had," Dora said, with a grateful look at Mr. Grange, as she took up Eva's basket of beach treasures.





CHAPTER XI.

PLAYING AT SOLDIERS.

“Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (2 Tim. ii. 3.)



DELIGHTFUL as rambles by the sea-shore were to our young friends, Harry Grange found almost equal attractions on Sandrock Common, though it could lay claim to but little of natural beauty. A review was in progress one bright morning as our party were on their way to the beach, and at Harry's earnest request, Mr. Grange consented to stay for a short time, and so give them an opportunity of observing the movements of the troops.

Several hundred men, all wearing the uniform of their different regiments, were divided into companies, while their officers, mounted on beautiful and spirited horses, rode quickly from rank to rank.

Military bands were [playing, regimental

colours flying, and Harry thought he had never witnessed a more enchanting scene. But when, for a moment, the boy turned from what was passing before his eyes, he could not help noticing that his father's face wore a grave, almost troubled look.

"Oh, father, I think it is splendid, but I see you don't care about it," Harry said in a somewhat disappointed tone.

Did Mr. Grange hear Harry, or was he speaking to himself, as slowly and impressively he repeated a bible verse?

"And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Micah iv. 3.) Then seeing that Harry had not understood his words, he added, "A review may be in itself what many people would call a grand sight, but when we remember that these men are not playing at soldiers, but training for war, I cannot help feeling it is a solemn thing."

"But, Papa, if a war should break out, and these soldiers be obliged to do real fighting, you know that they will only kill their enemies," Constance said, as if anxious to take sides with her brother.

"Think for a moment, Connie, if you are quite sure that such a way of treating our enemies will bear the light of God's word," Mr. Grange said gently.

Constance was silent, but Dora, who had taken

out her pocket Testament, asked, "Is this the verse you mean, Uncle Edward? 'But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.'" (Matt. v. 44.)

"Thank you, Dora. You see we have plain directions from the life of the Lord Himself, about the way in which we are to treat our enemies. We know too, that when He was on the cross He prayed for His murderers, saying, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' (Luke xxiii. 34.) And if His law of love is written in our hearts we shall seek to follow in His steps who went about doing good."

"But Father, all the boys at my school are very fond of playing at soldiers; you don't think it is wrong, do you?"

"No, Harry, I do not object to you spending part of your play-time in marching erect, and it may surprise you a little, after what I have said, to know that my earnest desire and prayer for each one of you is, that you may be not only make-believe, but true and good soldiers."

"Oh, Papa, we don't quite know what you mean," Constance interposed with a merry laugh. "I don't care much about even playing at soldiers, so I am sure I should not like to be a real one."

"I don't think girls would be much use for soldiers," Harry said in a very decided way.

"Why not, Harry?" Mr. Grange asked with a smile.

"You know, father, a real soldier has to learn

to fire guns and dig trenches, and do lots of things girls are not a bit of good for. A boy at our school has a brother in the Army, and he told me all about it."

"A soldier, Harry, has to obey orders, simply to do as he or she is told. I think you know that in the word of God Christians are spoken of under what are called figures—sometimes as running in a race, sometimes as fighting in a battle. Now soldiers need a captain or commander, and the Lord Jesus Christ is Himself said to be the captain of our salvation, and the apostle Paul, when writing to his son in the faith, Timothy, told him to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; and the same apostle, in his letters to the believers who were living at Ephesus, wrote, 'Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God.' (Eph. vi. 13.)

"Now the Ephesians must often have seen Roman soldiers wearing suits of armour, or coats and caps made of thin plates of iron or steel, so I do not think it would be very hard for them to understand what was in the mind of Paul when he wrote to them about armour.

"We cannot as Christians do without shield and sword in the battle or warfare in which we are engaged. You remember the shield is to defend the soldier, the sword he must use for attack. But I think Dora has something to tell us."

"Yes, uncle, Harry seems to think that all the fighting ought to be done by the men and boys. But I remember some lines mother used often to repeat; I think I know them:

“ ‘ And thou of gentle spirit,
Formed not for earth’s fierce fight,
May yet be Christ’s brave soldier,
And honoured in His sight.’ ”

“ Yes, Dora, your lines express just what I wanted to say to you. You and I fight under the same banner. We owe the prompt, loving obedience of good soldiers unto Him who loveth us and has washed us from our sins in His own precious blood.

“ But I had no idea how late it was getting, so I must leave you to go down to the beach alone this morning, as I have important letters to write. But if Dora will give up her shell collecting and return with me I shall be glad of her company.”

“ Oh, Papa, please don’t take Dora away ; we all want her, indeed we do. She is going to build me a castle on the sand, and dig a real moat all round it, and we are going to make the queen’s garden quite gay with seaweeds, and Dora knows where to find the best,” Eva pleaded with an appealing look at her father.

“ Dora is quite free, Eva ; I lay no commands upon her,” Mr. Grange replied. Then turning to his niece asked, “ How are you going to decide ? ”

For a few moments Dora stood irresolute, then turning to her uncle, said brightly, “ You lay no command on me, Uncle Edward, but I think from your manner that you wish me to return with you, though I cannot even guess your reason. I am glad to do what will please you. Eva darling, I won’t forget your castle this afternoon, and I think, too, that Harry is counting on

my help in mending his fishing net. But I must not keep uncle waiting."

As Mr. Grange and Dora took a path across the Common leading to their lodging, the former said, "I think you are having a happy holiday, Dora."

A glad smile lighted her face as she answered, "Oh yes, Uncle Edward, I cannot tell how much I am enjoying it all. It was very kind of you and Aunt Lucy to bring me. But please, dear Uncle, don't think I am an ungrateful girl if I tell you there is just one thing I can't help wishing for sometimes. If dear mother could only be with us it would be delightful."

Mr. Grange smiled. "Yes, Dora I think it would be delightful, and I think I should welcome my sister almost as gladly as you would your mother. And now I am going to tell you a secret, soon I hope to be one no longer. Ever since we came to Sandrock, your aunt and myself have been anxious that your mother should make one of the party. But difficulties, of which I need not speak now, stood in the way of her coming to us, and it was her wish that we should not say a word to you about our hope that she would be able to join us. It was a great comfort to me to remember a Bible word, 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' So I was encouraged to make my desire known to Him in prayer. Only this morning the post brought a letter from your mother, telling how, one by one, difficulties had been cleared away, and we might look for her arrival by the 10.30 train this morning. Your aunt arranged to meet her

at the station, and it was to give you the pleasure of a little quiet time together before the children came in that I asked you to give up your morning on the beach and return with me."

They were within sight of the house as Mr. Grange ceased speaking. Dora did not reply, but bounded forward with a cry of delight, for she had caught sight of her mother's face looking out from the open window of the sitting-room, and in another moment Mrs. Hilton and Dora, with hearts too full for words, were clasped in each other's arms.





CHAPTER XII.

A STORY OF OLDEN TIME.

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Cor. v. 7.)

IT was a very happy party that might have been seen forming a group on the sands, on the afternoon of the day that had been one of such glad surprise for Dora.

Mrs. Hilton was always a favourite with young people, and even Constance who, as a rule, was not easily pleased, found an opportunity of telling Dora, her mother was real kind; while Harry and Eva were agreed that auntie was a proper sort of aunt, and they were very glad she had come.

Eva's castle was built on a larger and grander scale than the little girl had even ventured to hope. A ground plan of the whole was first drawn by Mrs. Hilton, on a smooth space of fine yellow sand, in the centre of which a tower of considerable height was quickly raised. Harry then offered to dig a moat. When deep enough, with Eva's assistance, it was filled with water; a piece of wood, washed up by the tide, doing duty



Picnic on the Beach.

as a drawbridge; while Dora and Constance, who had gathered a quantity of shells and seaweed, laid out the grounds and gardens in such a way as to produce as very pleasing effect.

When all was done they sat down to rest a little, tired it must be owned, but quite ready for what Dora always called a real good talk.

A few rain clouds were in the sky, and Harry looked at them from time to time, with something very like a shade of trouble on his bright young face. At last, turning to Mrs. Hilton, he said, "I shouldn't wonder if we have a wet day to-morrow, and I do so want it to be fine all the time we are at Sandrock. I do not want to see one drop of rain—Do you, aunt?"

Mrs. Hilton smiled as she answered gently, "I am not going to spoil the pleasure of to-day, Harry, by fretting because it may rain to-morrow. I shall be quite sure that each tiny raindrop is a messenger sent by God on some errand of mercy, for the shower and the sunshine come from the same wise and loving hand.

"But perhaps you would like to hear the true story of a man who had learnt to trust God so fully that, in very difficult and trying circumstances, he was able to look up in childlike faith and love and say, 'It is all for the best.'"

Harry forgot all about the clouds in an instant, and jumping up in great delight, he exclaimed, "A story. Oh, girls, aunt is going to tell us a story, Please begin just now, we will be all attention."

So Mrs. Hilton wisely forebore trying the

patience of her young listeners, and began her story by saying,

"As Bernard Gilpin, about whom Harry wants so much to hear, lived more than two hundred years ago, I must try and explain to you a few of the ways in which England, at the time of which I am going to tell you, differed from England as we know and see it.

"People who wished to go from one place to another never thought of doing so by means of steamboats or railway carriage. Rich people took long journeys on horseback, or in strange-looking, uncomfortable carriages; while the poor seldom went further from their own homes than they were able to travel on foot. Schools, too, were few and far between, and though the sons of gentlemen were often well educated, the children of the poor, or even of what we now call the middle class, were left almost without books or teachers.

"But I have not told you the saddest thing of all yet. There were very few Bibles in the land, and so far from wishing her subjects to love and value the word of God, Queen Mary, who at that time reigned over England, did all in her power to prevent that blessed book from being in the homes and hands of English people.

"The day was indeed a dark and sorrowful one, yet there were gleams of gospel light. The Lord had not left Himself without witnesses. And few, perhaps, stood more firmly for Christ than Bernard Gilpin, the rector of a parish in Yorkshire called Houghton-le-Spring. His was no idle, aimless life. His one desire seemed to

be to tell others of the Saviour he had found, and so he preached the gospel, visited the sick, taught the children, looked after orphan boys, receiving them into his own house; and not content with the work that lay so near to him, frequently rode long rough rides over the hills to far-away villages or thinly-peopled hamlets where, but for his loving, faithful work, the people might never have heard of Christ.

“More than once Gilpin had received a letter from one of his uncles, who was a bishop, and very often in London, telling him to be careful, or his long preaching journeys and simple Bible teaching would get him into trouble with the Queen. What was he to do? After earnest prayer he made up his mind to trust in God, and go quietly on with his work.

“His copy of the Bible was not quite the same as the one we use, called the Authorised Version, which was not printed till nearly fifty years after.

“Bernard Gilpin’s favourite verse, Romans viii. 28, read thus in his Bible: ‘All things work for the best to them that love God, which also are called of his purpose.’

“‘It is all for the best’ had been the motto of his life. He had borne the sweet message to many tried and suffering ones, and the time when he should stand in need of the comforts and strength the word of God alone can give was drawing very near.

“The storm, that had been long gathering, broke at last, when a party of soldiers, wearing the Queen’s uniform, might have been seen on their way up the rough road that led to Mr.

H

Gilpin's house. The captain carried a sealed letter, which soon proved to be an order, signed by Queen Mary, commanding Bernard Gilpin to appear in London, and there answer certain charges that had been brought against him.

"He lived in martyr times, and for the moment he must have shrunk from the thought of the possible suffering and even the cruel death in which that journey to London might end. But it was only for a moment. Turning to the officer, he answered, 'It is all for the best. I am ready to accompany you, and have but one favour to ask. As the poor people among whom I have laboured for several years have a great affection for me, do not compel me to set out on my journey till dusk, as I shall then be spared the pain of saying farewell to them, and they the temptation of seeking to deliver me from your hands and thus resisting the authority of the Queen, who is our lawful sovereign.'

"As the soldiers were by no means sorry to have a few hours' rest, permission was readily given, and late in the afternoon of the same day the little household at the parsonage assembled with sad hearts to see their much-loved master depart on a journey from which they hardly dared to hope he would ever return.

"The snows of winter in some parts of the road made travelling not only slow but dangerous work, and quite half the journey still lay before Bernard Gilpin, when one frosty morning his horse stumbled and fell, crushing one leg of its rider in such a manner that it was, on examination, found to be badly broken. Quite unable

to continue his journey, he was carried to a way-side inn, and a doctor sent for. Setting the injured limb gave great pain ; the next morning poor Gilpin was so ill that it was decided he must rest for a week or two.

“‘Do you think your broken leg is for the best?’ the soldier, who kept guard in his room, asked him one day.

“‘Yes, friend, it is all for the best,’ was the answer, spoken in a bright, cheerful voice from the bed of pain. ‘Though my poor sight is all too dim to see how it is best for me to lie here, yet it would ill become me to doubt or question what my Lord has told me in His blessed word.’

“And so the days passed slowly on. Already their journey had been delayed three weeks, and as Mr. Gilpin, though still far from strong, began to show signs of improvement, it was decided that on the morrow he should again set out for London. The officer, who had been absent for a few hours, returned. One look at his face told Gilpin that he was the bearer of important news. Making a low bow, he said respectfully, ‘Never, sir, did you speak a truer word than when you told me your broken leg was for the best. Under God it has made you a free man. During my absence to-day I received certain news of the death of Queen Mary, and her half-sister, the Princess Elizabeth, who is the next heir to the crown, is, I have heard, of your way of thinking, and I might get but small thanks for taking you to London as my prisoner ; so you are at liberty to return to Houghton-le-Spring, where I know many will give you a hearty welcome.’

"And so in His own gracious way God delivered His servant. The news that the friend they loved so well was at liberty and on his way home reached Houghton-le-Spring before Mr. Gilpin, and rich and poor, high and low, went out to meet him, and standing in the midst of his beloved people he led them in a short simple service of praise and prayer."

Harry jumped up and clapped his hands with delight. "O aunt, I like your story so much," he said eagerly, "I could not see at first how it could be best for Mr. Gilpin to break his leg and have to suffer so much pain; but it was plain enough after Queen Mary's death, was it not?"

"Yes, Harry; and though in the way our heavenly Father sometimes deals with His children there may be many things we cannot understand, it is always safe for us to trust His unchanging love, knowing that if we are Christians we are called 'to walk by faith and not by sight.'

"But the lengthening shadows remind us it is time for tea, Dora, and I will walk on while you collect your spades and pails and try how soon you can overtake us."

And here we must say good-bye, for a time at least, to Dora Hilton. Her life lessons are as yet far from being all learnt, but while her own felt weakness is casting her more simply on the strong for strength, her desire and prayer are that clearly and brightly her light may shine for Christ.



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