

A Tale of three weeks



EGLANTON THORNNE

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BY
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CHAPTER I.

Left Behind.

"WHAT do you think?" exclaimed Katie Bartlett, as she came slowly into the schoolroom, where her two younger sisters were engaged in preparing the tables for school; "what do you think is going to happen?"

"Is it something nice?" asked Gertie, bright-looking child of eight. She spoke in a doubtful tone, for Kate did not look like the bearer of cheering news.

"Nice! I should think not, indeed," returned Katie, dolefully; "papa and mamma have made up their minds to go away; they are going to the seaside."

"Oh, you don't mean it!" cried Gertie and Florrie together, as they clapped their hands; "why, that is splendid news, Katie! How could you say it was not?"

"Well! you are sillies!" exclaimed Kate, in a tone of sisterly contempt; "do you suppose that we are going too? I never said so."

The faces of her sisters fell considerably.

"But are we not going?" they asked.

"No, indeed! Nurse and baby and little Winnie are to go with papa and mamma; but we three and Harry are to be left at home with Miss Jameson."

"Oh, how horrid! what a shame!" cried the children, and tears came into Florrie's blue eyes as she added: "We have not been to the seaside at all this year."

"Papa says that we must not expect to go every year," said Kate, speaking in an injured tone. "He says we had holidays enough before Miss Jameson came to us, and now we must work hard to make up for lost time."

"And are we to have school every day whilst they are away?" asked Gertie, looking troubled.

"Certainly; I don't believe Miss Jameson will let us off a single hour," said Kate, gloomily.

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Florrie, who delighted in strong language.

At this moment, their governess entered the room. She was a pleasant-looking young lady, with dark hair and dark eyes, and a resolute but cheerful expression.

"Come, children, what are you chattering about, and the table not yet ready?" she said, briskly; "what is the meaning of this?"

"Oh, Miss Jameson! have you heard?" asked Florrie. "Papa and mamma are going away, and we are to be left at home! Is it not a shame?"

"Hush, hush!" exclaimed Miss Jameson, "you know I never allow little girls to speak in that way of anything their elders may do. And I can't think why you should make a grievance of this. You ought to be glad that your dear mamma is going away. You know that she is very far from well, and the doctor has insisted upon her having a change."

"Of course I am glad that mamma should go," said Kate; "but why can't she take us too? We have not been to the seaside this summer."

"How much quiet and rest would your poor mother get, I wonder, if she took you all with her," said Miss Jameson, smiling.

"It will be horrid without her," said Florrie, impatiently. "With baby and Winnie and papa gone too, the house will seem wretched. We shall be perfectly miserable all the time they are away."

"Poor things!" said Miss Jameson, still smiling, "what a dreadful prospect! Are we all so disagreeable to each other that it will be impossible to find any pleasant way of passing the time together?"

"Oh no; oh no!" cried little Gertie, as she took her usual place at the table beside her governess, and contrived in so doing to get possession of Miss Jameson's hand and give it a kiss. "You will be with us, and you are always so kind. You will tell us stories sometimes of an evening, and let us hear your musical box, won't you?"

"We'll see, if you're good children," said the governess. "Now, Katie and Florrie, take your places."

But the two elder girls did not consider that Miss Jameson's stories or the performance of her musical box could make up for their losing the pleasure of a visit to the seaside. They were inclined to nurse their grievance, and they took their seats at the table with gloomy looks and pouting lips. They tried their governess's patience that morning, which was very unfair, since she was in no way responsible for the arrangement their parents had made.

It was a lovely autumn morning early in October. The schoolroom windows looked into the large garden lying at

the back of the house—a roomy old-fashioned house in the neighbourhood of Richmond. Few children have a happier home than the little Bartletts enjoyed. Their father was a well-to-do man of business, able to provide for his family every comfort and advantage that could be reasonably desired. They had a tender mother, who anxiously studied the welfare of her children, though her delicate health made it impossible for her to do as much for them herself as she wished. The children were surrounded by all that is pleasant and stimulating to childhood; though, like many children, they little knew how happy they were, but were ready to grumble and get out of temper directly anything occurred that was not to their liking.

Two days later, Mr. and Mrs. Bartlett left home for Bournemouth, where they proposed staying for a fortnight or three weeks. Their departure caused no small stir in the household. Miss Jameson's help was needed in various directions that morning; and her pupils, freed from her control, rushed hither and thither watching all that went on, and distracting their elders by the innumerable questions they put. Little Winnie was in a high state of delight at the thought of going away with papa and mamma; but baby was not aware the event was matter for self-congratulation, and screamed and struggled tremendously whilst being dressed for the journey. At last everything was done, and the carriage waiting at the door. Mr. Bartlett turned to say good-bye to the sad-faced group of children gathered in the hall.

"I hope they'll be very good whilst we are away, Miss Jameson," he observed; "I shall look to you for a report of

their conduct when we return. I daresay you won't keep them closely to their lessons. A little more time in the open air occasionally will do them no harm."

At these words the gloom on the girls' faces gave place to a gleam of satisfaction. They gave quick glances at each other, and there was the fervour of gratitude in the warmth with which they kissed their father.

Tears stood in Mrs. Bartlett's eyes as she said good-bye to her little girls. She was leaving home reluctantly in deference to her husband's wish. She could not believe that the change would effect much improvement in her health. She lingered on the doorstep to whisper to Miss Jameson, as she pressed some money into her hand: "It does seem hard that they cannot go with us, poor dears; but I know you won't let them be dull. Take this and spend it for them on new dolls or books—on anything you think they will most enjoy."

"You need not fear that the 'poor dears' will fret long," said the governess, brightly. "If you could look in upon them unseen this evening, you would not find any trace of dulness, I dare promise you."

And thus cheered, Mrs. Bartlett stepped into the carriage, and in a few moments they drove away.

The spirits of the children quickly revived as the noise of the carriage wheels died away.

"Did you hear what papa said? Wasn't it lovely of him? You will have to give us some holidays now, Miss Jameson. Oh, may we have a picnic in the park some day when the nuts are ripe? We must have a whole holiday on Gertie's birthday; we always do on birthdays."

But Miss Jameson only laughed and shook her head as she listened to these exclamations. She was not going to promise anything, she said. All would depend on how they behaved themselves.



CHAPTER II.

Miss Jameson's Grand Idea.

IT was Mrs. Bartlett's habit, when well enough, to go to the schoolroom at five o'clock, and have a cup of tea with the children. The schoolroom tea was emphatically a "hungry" meal, to borrow a Scotch term. The children were wont to come in from their walk or their games with powerful appetites, and it was marvellous the quantity of bread and butter and home-made cake they would contrive to dispose of. The tea hour was such a bright cosy time, when their mother was ready to listen to all they liked to say, and to answer as many questions as they chose to put. But this evening the room looked less cheery, although there was a bright clear fire burning in the grate, for their mother's easy chair stood empty. The children were disposed to grumble as they took their places at the table, until Kate conceived the grand idea of making toast.

"You would like some toast, wouldn't you, Miss Jameson?" she said, and Miss Jameson kindly said that she would like some, although she knew by sad experience that Kate's toast was not over nice. So Gertie was despatched to the kitchen to fetch a toasting fork, Florrie armed herself with the bread knife, and the toasting began.

Florrie's piece of bread fell into the fire almost immediately, and when rescued was so blackened that Miss Jameson decided that it was fit only to be given to the dog, if he would condescend to eat it. Kate's attempt was not much more successful. She did not indeed drop her slice into the

fire; but she first smoked it and then burnt it, so that a good deal of scraping was necessary ere the blackened slice could be eaten. Florrie decided that toasting was stupid work, and gave it up; but Kate persevered in spite of scorched cheeks and tingling fingers, until everyone at the table had been provided with a piece of toast of her making, which, hot-buttered, was thoroughly appreciated by the children, though Miss Jameson found her portion rather over toasted.

"Whatever shall we do this evening?" asked Gertie; "you will tell us a story, won't you, Miss Jameson?"

"Perhaps I will by-and-by, if you take your work and sit down," she replied; "I want you to do a good deal of needlework whilst your mamma is away."

"I hate needlework," grumbled Kate, "I am sick of that antemacassar. What is the good of antemacassars? I think they are stupid things—always sticking to people's backs, or falling out of their right places."

"Oh, Miss Jameson, need I finish hemming that duster?" asked Florrie, "I am so tired of it; I would so much rather do wool-work."

"That's just like Florrie," exclaimed Kate, "she always gets tired of her work, and wants to do something different; but she must finish it, mustn't she, Miss Jameson?"

"She can finish it this evening if she is industrious," said the governess; "and then I can find her some pleasanter work to-morrow."

"I am going to make a new apron for my doll," said Gertie, with an air of importance; "mamma gave me a piece of muslin yesterday."

"How would you all like to have some new dolls to dress?" asked Miss Jameson.

"Oh, Miss Jameson!" cried all three at once, "that would be too lovely! Did mamma say that we might have some?"

"Yes," said Miss Jameson, smiling to see their delight, "I have some money to spend for you in any way you like best. But I hardly think that you want dolls; you have so many already."

"Oh, but they are getting shabby," said Florrie; "and it would be so lovely to get new ones, and dress them all ourselves. I should like that work, Miss Jameson."

"I don't want a doll," said Harry, a sturdy little fellow of five; "I should like an engine."

"Well, I'll see if I can afford you one," said Miss Jameson; "but now, children, I must tell you that I have a grand idea in connection with these dolls."

"A grand idea!" echoed the little girls; "oh, what is it?"

"You know that my sister is a nurse in a children's hospital?"

"Oh, yes," said the children, for they had often heard their governess speak of this sister.

"Well, the ward of which she has the oversight is full of poor children, some of them the most miserable little creatures you can possibly imagine."

"Are they very ill?" asked Gertie.

"Some of them are very ill, and suffering constant pain; and, what is most sad to think of, many of them are sufferers through the wicked neglect and cruelty of their parents. When I have gone to the hospital from this bright and happy

home, my heart has ached when I have thought of your happy lot, and contrasted with it the lives of these poor little ones."

"It does seem hard," said Katie, looking thoughtful; "I cannot think why God lets them be so unhappy."

"Ah, that we cannot tell," said Miss Jameson; "but we know that God loves these poor little children, and that He is pleased when we do what we can to brighten their sad lives."

"You take them flowers sometimes when you go to see your sister, don't you, Miss Jameson?" asked Florrie.

"Yes, dear; and you can't think how pleased they are to see even the commonest flowers."

"I wish I could do something for them," said little Gertie. "There is a lovely chrysanthemum coming out in my garden. If I pick it, will you take it to those poor little children, Miss Jameson?"

"I am afraid your flower will have faded, Gertie, before I am able to go again to the hospital," said Miss Jameson, smiling at her; "but I have thought of something you might do for these children, if you felt inclined, which would give them great pleasure."

"Oh, what is that?" asked the child, eagerly.

"My sister was telling me that at her hospital, which is situated in a disagreeable neighbourhood, and is not so well known as the larger hospitals, the children are badly off for toys. One day a lady visitor gave one of the children a doll, and that doll was the delight of the whole ward. It was handed about from bed to bed, and they all wanted to have it at once."

"Oh, I know, I know!" cried the little girls simultaneously; "I know your grand idea, Miss Jameson."

"You mean us to get some dolls and dress them," said Kate, "and then give them to the poor little children in the hospital. Oh, that will be nice; that will be far nicer than dressing them for ourselves."

"I am very glad you think so," said Miss Jameson; "what do you say to it, Florrie?"

"Oh, it will be splendid!" she exclaimed. "I only wish we could begin to-night."

"It will be 'more blessed' than keeping the dolls ourselves," said Gertie, who had repeated for her text that morning the words: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

"You might make some scrap-books too if you like," said Miss Jameson; "there are plenty of pictures and Christmas cards that you could use. Harry could help with that perhaps."

"Oh, what a splendid idea!" said Kate, and immediately rushed away to examine her store of Christmas cards.

"What shall we dress the dolls in?" asked Florrie; "will you buy some stuff; Miss Jameson?"

"I shall have to buy some, I daresay," she replied; "but I was thinking that we might ask Mr. Carter, the draper, if he could give us some scraps. I am sure he would be glad to help, if he knew what you were going to do."

"Oh, I daresay he would," said Florrie; "he gave me a lovely piece of pink satin one day, and I made it into a hood for Belinda."

"The things will have to be made very neatly," said the governess; "you will need to take pains, Florrie. The dolls must be well turned out, or I shall be ashamed to send them as your gift to the children's hospital."

"And we must make all the clothes to unfasten, mustn't we?" said Gertie; "it is no fun to play with a doll unless you can dress and undress it."

"To be sure not," said Florrie. "When shall we get the dolls, Miss Jameson?"

"To-morrow after school, if you do your lessons well," she replied; "but now, Florrie, remember that that duster must be finished before you begin your doll's clothes."

"Oh, dear! that horrid duster!" exclaimed Florrie, impatiently. But she fetched it, and sat down to her hemming.

"Oh, I wish to-morrow would make haste and come," said Gertie, as she turned over the heap of Christmas cards that Kate had tossed on to the table.

"Suppose it should rain," suggested Kate. But that was too sad a prospect to contemplate.

As they continued to discuss their delightful plans, the children quite forgot to ask Miss Jameson to tell them a story, and they could hardly believe that it was bed-time when the clock struck eight. All but Florrie, who gave a sigh of relief as, her hem complete, she folded up the tiresome duster.

CHAPTER III.

The Dolls.

HAPPILY the next, day rose bright and fair. The children, impatient for twelve o'clock to come, were somewhat restless during school hours; but their intentions were good, and they really tried to do their school-work well; so Miss Jameson made allowance for their occasional fidgets, and the whispered allusions to the pleasure in prospect.

Promptly at twelve o'clock books were put away, and a very few minutes sufficed for the children to get equipped for their walk. It was not far to the town. They crossed the bridge over the Thames, and saw the river gleaming blue in the sunlight, and the foliage which skirts its green banks brilliant with the rich hues of autumn. But the children gave no thought to the beauty of the scene. They were intent upon one thing—dolls; and they hurried on as quickly as possible till the tempting shop was reached.

And now what a business the choosing of the dolls was! There was a grand assortment of dolls of every description. There were dark dolls and fair dolls, boy dolls and girl dolls, baby dolls and dolls that were quite grown up, judging by the style in which they wore their hair; dolls that could shut their eyes, and dolls that could stand alone! Amid such a variety Miss Jameson found it no easy matter to direct the choice of her pupils. But a thought of the price helped to a decision, for they could not afford to purchase costly dolls, since they wanted to make the money go as far as possible.

At last, after much deliberation, Kate decided that she would like to have a baby doll which could be dressed in long clothes, like the baby brother who had been taken to the seaside. Florrie chose a lovely flaxen-haired beauty, on whom she at once bestowed the name of Lily. Gertie was not to be diverted from her fancy for a black doll of more striking than prepossessing appearance; and when she pleaded that there might be a little black girl in the hospital who would like to have a doll of her own colour, Miss Jameson yielded, and allowed her to gratify her taste. Besides these Miss Jameson selected two dolls, one with dark curls and the other with wonderful golden curls, which she intended to dress herself; and at Harry's earnest request she added to the number a quaint little sailor doll. Then Harry's engine had to be bought, and altogether these purchases took so much time that when at last they got away from the shop it seemed, as Florrie remarked, as if they had been there half the day. And now there was the draper's to be visited, and there Miss Jameson purchased some muslin and lace for the baby doll's robe, and other necessities.

Fortunately Mr. Carter was in the shop, and, being taken into the children's confidence, readily promised that the piece drawer should be ransacked for the benefit of the dolls. The result was a supply of most suitable pieces. Amongst the number was a piece of pale blue cashmere, which would make a most becoming gown for Miss Lily, and some yellow satin in which it was generally agreed that black Topsy would look grand. From the draper's the busy party passed

on to the bookseller's, where some strongly-bound scrap-books were purchased.

Then at last the happy children turned homeward. Lily, Topsy, and Baby they carried with them, feeling it impossible to wait until they were sent from the shop.

"Oh, if only we could begin to dress them this afternoon!" said Gertie.

Then Miss Jameson, feeling sure that the children would settle to little else, promised that as soon as each had finished her practising for the day, she would cut out the doll's clothes and set them to work.

If Mrs. Bartlett could have looked into the schoolroom an hour or two later, and seen the bright faces gathered about the table, scattered with scraps of material of all shapes and colours, she would have seen that there was little fear that the children would be dull.

"How nice this is!" said Kate, as she hemmed her baby's robe; "I am so glad you thought of it, Miss Jameson: I fancied the days would seem so long and dreary whilst papa and mamma were away; but now I know that we shall be as happy as possible until they come back."

"Do you think that we shall be able to get all the dolls dressed before mamma comes home?" asked Florrie, addressing her governess.

"I don't know," said Miss Jameson; "there is a good deal of work even in such tiny garments, and you are not very expert with your needles. And I must insist upon everything being done neatly." For she hoped that this doll dressing would effect an improvement in the little girls' sewing.

"We must work as hard as possible every day, and then perhaps we shall get them done," said Kate; "I should like to have them all dressed to show mamma."

"So should I," said Gertie; "oh, Flo! have you thought of a name for that dark one?"

"What do you think of Adelaide Ruth?" asked Florrie, with an air of deliberation.

"I think the Ruth sounds rather odd," said Gertie: "must it have two names?"

"Children most always do," replied Florrie; "do you like Constance Adelaide better?"

"Oh, yes, that sounds ever so much better," decided Gertie.

"Now, Miss Jameson," said Kate, when all the cutting out was done, and every needle was in motion; "won't you please tell us a story."

Their governess very willingly complied with the request, and was relating the most thrilling episode of the tale, when she was interrupted by the entrance of Sarah, the children's maid.

"If you please, Miss Jameson," she said, "Mrs. Bartlett has sent to know if the young ladies and Master Harry can go there to-morrow after school to spend the rest of the day."

The Mrs. Bartlett, from whom this invitation came, was the children's grandmother, an elderly lady who resided at Twickenham. They were generally very pleased to spend a day at her house; but now there was a general clouding of faces at Sarah's words, and Kate exclaimed at once:—"Oh,

Miss Jameson, must we go? I would so much rather stay at home and work at our dolls' clothes."

"And so would I! And I," echoed her sisters.

"That is out of the question," said Miss Jameson; "you must certainly go, since your Grandmamma wishes it. It is very kind of her to ask you."

"Your aunt, Mrs. Hobson, is staying there, and little Miss Edith," said Sarah.

"Oh, that makes it worse," exclaimed Florrie, with a groan, "I do hate going when Aunt Sophie is there. She is always finding fault with us, and Cousin Edith is as disagreeable as possible."

"Hush, hush, you must not speak so," said Miss Jameson; "it is not right."

"It is perfectly true," said Kate, calmly. "Even mamma says that Cousin Edith is spoilt. She pinched Winnie and made her cry the last time she was there."

"And then told a story, and said she had not done it," chimed in Gertie.

"Hush, hush, it grieves me to hear you talk so," said Miss Jameson; "for however naughty Edith may have been, you should not speak of it. You should try to hide her faults, and love her in spite of them."

"I can't love people who are so disagreeable," said Florrie, perversely.

"There, say no more about her," said Miss Jameson. "I wish you would not speak of people at all unless you can speak well of them."

"Oh, Miss Jameson, need we go to grand-mamma's," cried Gertie; "do send a message to say that we cannot come."

"I cannot do that," she replied; "your grandmother's wishes must certainly be considered before yours. Tell Mrs. Bartlett's servant, Sarah, that the children shall come to her house to-morrow as soon as their morning's work is done."

Sarah went away. There followed an outbreak of temper on the part of the children.

"That is always the way," sighed Kate; "as soon as we plan something nice, something happens to put a stop to it."

"I am sure that mamma would have let us stay at home if she had been here," said Gertie.

"Miss Jameson only makes us go because she wants to get rid of us," exclaimed Florrie, defiantly.

"Florrie, do you know that you are very rude?" said Miss Jameson; "you must beg my pardon for that speech."

Whereupon Florrie stubbornly refused to do so, till Miss Jameson was obliged to make her put away her work and go at once to bed.

The pleasure of the evening was now spoiled.

Both Kate and Gertie were cross and fretful as they continued their work. "It is all Grandmamma's fault," Kate muttered, when Miss Jameson remarked on her ill-humour.

"Now, Kate," said her governess, gently, "do you really think that your Grandmamma is to be blamed for this sad ending to our evening?"

Kate looked down, and said nothing.

"I shall be sorry that I ever proposed your dressing these dolls, if it gives rise to so much self-will and temper," said Miss Jameson.

The children bade her good-night, and went off with gloomy looks to bed. But when Miss Jameson went upstairs a little later she heard her name called eagerly as she passed the door of the room in which the three little girls slept. She opened the door and looked in. She saw each one sitting up in her little bed, and their faces told her at once that a change of mood had set in.

Florrie's bed was nearest the door, and she spoke for the rest. "Oh, Miss Jameson," she said, earnestly, "we are very sorry that we turned up so cross and nasty. Will you forgive us?"

Her governess did not reprove her for the inelegance of her language. She only went to Florrie and kissed her in a way that made her quite sure that she was forgiven. Then she passed on to the other beds, and there were some tears shed as the children told her how very, very sorry they were.

"I can't understand it," sighed Kate; "I thought we were doing a good thing, yet it all ended so badly."

"The work itself was good," said Miss Jameson; "but you gave way to bad thoughts and feelings whilst you were engaged in it. We shall do even good things in a wrong spirit unless we ask God to keep us from sin. Have you asked Him to help you to do this doll dressing in the right way that it may be an acceptable work to Him?"

"Why no, I never thought of that," said Kate.

"Then, dear, it is no wonder that things went wrong," said her governess. And with that she kissed each one again and went away.

The next minute three little white-robed figures were kneeling on the bedroom floor. They were asking God to help them in their work for Him.

CHAPTER IV.

The Visit to Grandmamma.

THE children took their places at the schoolroom table the next morning with quiet subdued demeanour. They had not forgotten their sorrow and contrition of the previous night. They meant to behave well; but still they felt it hard that they obliged to spend the day at grand-mamma's, when they would so much rather have been at home dressing their dolls.

As soon as their lessons were finished, the little girls began to prepare for their visit. Some sighs were heaved as they peeped into the drawer where the dolls lay side by side. "It is always the way," sighed Kate, glancing at her work, "something always happens to prevent my getting on. I could have finished that frock to-day if Grandmamma had not sent for us."

But Miss Jameson would allow no grumbling or dawdling. They were soon dressed, and on their way to Twickenham. Miss Jameson walked with them to Mrs. Bartlett's gate; but there she wished them good-bye, and went back alone, not displeased perhaps at the prospect of a quiet afternoon.

"There is Edith," said Kate, as they walked up the path, and caught sight of a fair-haired child standing at one of the windows of the house; "what has she got that white thing round her neck for?"

"Oh, she has got a cold, I suppose," said Florrie, impatiently; "she is always having colds."

"Then we shall have to stay indoors. How horrid!" exclaimed Gertie.

"Oh; I hope not," said Katie, in a tone of dismay, for one of the chief pleasures of a visit to Grandmamma was a game in the large old-fashioned garden, which lay at the back of the house. "Surely it can't hurt her to be out on such a lovely day as this!"

But they soon learned that there was to be no play in the garden for them that afternoon. Cousin Edith, a pretty delicate-looking child, who was often ailing in health, had a bad cold and sore throat, and her mother, who idolised this her only child, was tenderly anxious that her darling should run no risk of increasing her cold. The cousins had been invited for Edith's amusement; and since she could not go into the garden, it was out of the question that they should do so.

"I don't believe it would hurt Edith, aunt," Kate took it upon herself to remark; "papa says that it is a mistake to coddle children."

"My dear Kate, you should not be so ready to give your opinion," Mrs. Hobson said, reprovingly. "There is no coddling in this case. A delicate little creature like my Edith requires to be more carefully cherished than strong robust girls like you."

"We are not so very strong," said Florrie. "Gertie often catches cold, and she had to take cod liver oil in the spring. But mamma never keeps her in when the weather is fine."

"Really, you young people are very forward in expressing yourselves," said their aunt; "I understand that

you have a new governess. I hope she will do something to improve your manners, for they need improvement."

"How do you like her?" asked Edith, in a hoarse little voice.

"Very much indeed," said Florrie; "she is the nicest governess we have ever had."

"And oh, what do you think?" cried Gertie. "We are dressing dolls for the poor little children in the hospital. It was Miss Jameson's idea. Isn't it splendid? My doll is a black one."

"A splendid idea for throwing away money," said Mrs. Hobson. "Your parents need be rich to indulge you in that way. What do they want with dolls in hospitals?"

"Oh, Aunt Sophie! the poor little children want them," exclaimed Kate. "How would you like to think of Edith lying all by herself in a little bed with nothing to play with?"

"I think it is a kind thought," said old Mrs. Bartlett, gently; "and the undertaking has this advantage, that it will teach the children to sew."

"That is desirable, certainly," said Mrs. Hobson. "I remember seeing some needlework of Florrie's that astonished me very much. I should have been ashamed if Edith had done no better, although she is eighteen months younger."

Florrie coloured and bit her lip. Aunt Sophie's reproofs were well intended, but they had a very irritating effect. The tempers of her three nieces were all more or less ruffled by her words; and as Edith, owing to her indisposition, was

more than usually perverse and peevish the prospect for the afternoon was not hopeful.

After dinner the children were sent to play "quietly" in the breakfast room, whilst Grandmamma took her afternoon nap. It was some time ere they could decide what the game should be, for Edith objected to whatever the others proposed. Yet when asked to name a game herself, she would say nothing. At last it was agreed that they should play at hide-and-seek, one of the party hiding a little ball for which the others were to make search.

The game went well for a little while; but soon Edith grew very cross, because she was not so quick as her cousins, and one of them found the ball each time. It was Kate's turn to hide the ball, and the others were supposed to cover their eyes that they might not see where she put it. She was just slipping it beneath the fender, when suddenly she turned and exclaimed angrily:

"Edith, you peeped! I saw you! What a horrid cheat you are!"

"I didn't peep," said Edith, stoutly; "I'm not a cheat. You ought not to call me such a name."

"What a story! You did peep, I saw you. You were looking straight across at me," cried Kate, indignantly.

"What a nasty mean thing," cried Florrie. "I hate cheats."

"I'm not a cheat; you're very rude," cried Edith, bursting into tears; "I won't play with you any more. I shall tell mamma." And so saying she made for the door. But Kate was there before her.

"I won't let you go to your mother," she said, as she planted herself firmly against the door; "it's horridly mean to tell tales, as you always do."

"I will go; you shan't stop me," cried Edith, wildly, and she tried to kick and pinch her cousin. But Kate defended herself with ease, and remained provokingly cool. The others came to her aid, and drove Edith back, and Florrie pushed the round table across the room in such a way as to bar Edith's approach to the door. But this was an unfortunate defence, for Edith, trying to push it aside, clutched at the table-cloth and dragged it off, bringing with it to the ground a beautiful china vase, which had been standing on the table. The vase was shattered by the fall; and the children, their romping suddenly arrested, stood looking at each other, aghast.

Edith was the first to speak. "There!" she said, not without triumph, though she too was considerably frightened, "see what you have done!"

"What you have done, you mean," said Florrie, "it was you pulled the cloth."

"I didn't," she said.

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried the others in chorus.

Edith began to cry anew, and ran from the room, no one now attempting to stay her. The three sisters stood looking at each other in blank dismay.

"Now there will be a row," said Florrie, expressing herself as usual with more force than elegance.

"Will Grandmamma be very angry, do you think?" asked little Gertie.

"She is sure to be angry," said Kate, "for I know she was very fond of that vase; but I shall tell her that you and Florrie were not to blame."

"We ought to have gone with Edith," said Florrie; "there is no knowing what she will tell Aunt Sophie."

"Little story-teller!" said Kate, indignantly.

But ere they could say more their grandmother and aunt arrived on the scene. Mrs. Bartlett was very vexed indeed when she saw the condition to which her vase was reduced. She scolded the children roundly; and when she paused for lack of breath, their aunt took up the tale, and her words stung the children even more than their grandmother's. In vain Florrie declared that it was Edith who had dragged the vase off the table. Edith denied it; and Mrs. Hobson was sure that her child spoke the truth, whilst Mrs. Bartlett impartially decided that the children were all to blame alike.

The rest of their visit passed heavily enough to the little Bartletts. They saw Edith petted and made much of by her mother, whilst they were treated to reproachful looks and reproofing words. They took their tea with a sense of dark disgrace overshadowing them. Harry alone was able to maintain unbroken serenity; but then he was such a little boy, that as long as he was treated to plenty of cake and jam he could not imagine anything amiss.

It may be guessed what a story the children had to pour into Miss Jameson's ears when at length they returned home, only too thankful that their visit was at an end. She heard them in silence for a time; but soon she was obliged to check

their words, for she was shocked at the bitterness with which they spoke of their cousin Edith.

"And was Edith the only one to blame?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't suppose that our conduct was perfect," said Florrie, frankly; "but really it was all through Edith that things went wrong. Oh, she was cross! And then to cheat as she did, and tell stories! It was horrid."

"And I suppose you told her that you thought so?" said Miss Jameson. "You did not try to coax her into a better temper, nor to show her how much better it is to be fair and truthful?"

"Why no. What would have been the good?" asked Katie; "I have no patience with Edith."

"I hate her," exclaimed Florrie, vehemently.

"Oh, Florrie! Florrie!" cried her governess, "you cannot know what you are saying. Do you forget what the Bible says of one who hates another?"

"What, Miss Jameson?" asked Florrie.

"He that hateth his brother is a murderer," said Miss Jameson, slowly.

"Oh," exclaimed Florrie, looking startled; "what a dreadful verse, Miss Jameson. A murderer, you can't think that I felt like that?"

"No, dear, I do not; but it is to such dreadful things that hatred leads. I cannot believe, however, that you really hate Edith. But I wish you children would ask yourselves how it would be with you, if God should feel towards you as you feel towards Edith."

"Why, Miss Jameson, how could that be?" asked Gertie.

"It might easily be," returned Miss Jameson, "if our God were not a God of love. Think how often you sin against Him and grieve Him, yet His heart is ever full of love towards you. Should you not try to forgive Edith and all who vex you, as God, for Christ's sake, forgives you?"

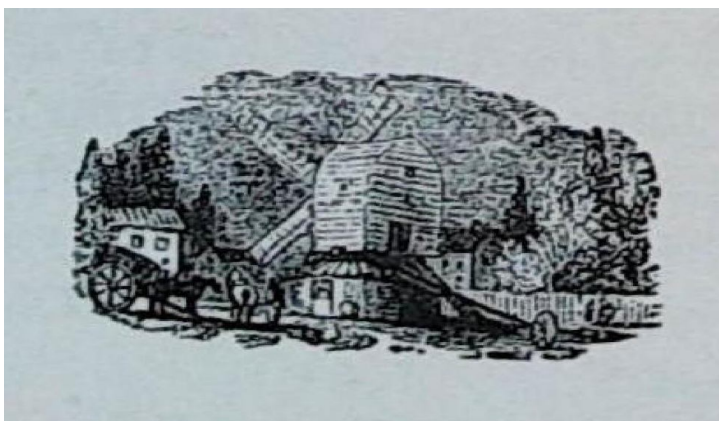
"I don't feel as if I could forgive Edith," said Florrie, with a sigh.

"Ask God to help you to do so," said her governess; "for if you do not forgive Edith, how can you say to-night in your prayer: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us? You would be asking God not to forgive you."

"I never thought of that," said Kate, thoughtfully. "Dear me! how hard it is to be good."

"It is hard," said Miss Jameson; "but so is everything in life that is worth striving after. And who would not rather struggle up the steep hillside than sink in the mire at its foot? But now you are tired and excited. You must not talk any more to-night. Good-night."

And the children went to bed without saying another word about their cousin Edith.



CHAPTER V.

Gertie's Birthday.

"MISS JAMESON," said Kate, the next morning, "do you know that Monday will be Gertie's birthday?"

"Next Monday?" she returned. "Is it so near? Well, what of that?"

"May Florrie and I go into the town with Sarah this afternoon to buy our presents? We must not let Gertie know why we have gone; but I daresay she will guess."

"I daresay she will," said Miss Jameson, smiling; "yes, I think Sarah will be able to take you this afternoon."

"Oh, thank you," cried Katie. "Now which do you think Gertie would like best—a book or a skipping-rope?"

"I should like to be able to say a book," said Miss Jameson, shaking her head; "but I am afraid Gertie would prefer a skipping-rope."

"Miss Jameson," suggested Florrie, gravely, "we have always had a holiday on birthdays."

"Have you indeed?" she replied smiling; "then it will never do to make Gertie's an exception to the rule."

"Oh, Miss Jameson," burst in Katie, "may we go to the Park on Gertie's birthday? It would be so lovely to spend the day there."

"Well, we will see," said Miss Jameson, "it will depend on the weather. It is getting almost too cold to spend many hours in the Park; but perhaps we could take some luncheon with us, and get home to a late dinner."

"Oh, how lovely!" cried the two girls; and as Gertie came running into the breakfast-room they cried to her, "Gertie, Miss Jameson says that we may go to the Park on your birthday."

"Oh, how splendid!" shouted Gertie, "how delightful! The nuts are just getting ripe. I heard the gardener say so yesterday."

"So that is all you think about," said her governess, laughing, "Shall we ask if your cousin Edith may go with us?" she inquired a minute later.

Instantly the faces of all three fell.

"Oh!" they cried at once, and the exclamation was not now one of delight, but of dismay and dissatisfaction.

"You see she has no one to play with at her Grandmamma's. It must be rather lonely for her there, poor little girl," said Miss Jameson.

Still the three kept silence, and their faces were very expressive. At last Florrie spoke: "I would not mind if she were pleasant," she said; "but Edith is always so disagreeable."

"Yes," said Katie, slowly, "I suppose we ought to ask her. It would be doing as we would be done by; but—it will spoil all our pleasure."

Katie had thought seriously of what her governess had said on the previous night. She had tried to forgive Edith, and she hoped she had forgiven her; but she could not feel that it would be pleasant to have her company in the Park on Monday. Here was another proof that it was hard to be good,

for she felt sure that it would be the right thing to ask Edith to join them.

"I think we must leave it for Gertie to decide, as it is her birthday," said Miss Jameson.

Gertie glanced anxiously at her sisters ere she spoke; but they said nothing, wishing her to have entire freedom of choice. Then, after hesitating for a few moments, she said timidly: "Miss Jameson, I would like to ask Edith. It is what Jesus would have us do, is it not? And perhaps she will not be so cross on Monday."

Miss Jameson smiled tenderly on the little girl. "Very well, dear," she said; "you and I and Harry will walk to Grandmamma's this afternoon, and ask if Edith can accompany us on Monday. Kate and Florrie are going into the town with Sarah."

The two elder girls exchanged significant glances as their governess said this; whilst Gertie coloured and smiled in a way that seemed to show she understood the meaning of this arrangement.

"Now I have news for you," said Miss Jameson, as the children took their places at the table; "guess from whom this letter comes?"

"From mamma!" cried Gertie.

"Right," said Miss Jameson; "and I am glad to tell your that your mamma is already much better for the change, whilst the others are as well as possible. See, here is a little book of views of Bournemouth for you to look at."

The book was seized upon with delight, and that and their mother's letter were eagerly discussed by the children as they took their breakfast.

Later in the day, Florrie and Kate came back from their shopping expedition in high spirits. Kate had bought a capital skipping-rope, and Florrie a charming little work-basket fitted up with scissors and thimble and bodkin which she was sure Gertie would like, for it would be so handy for the dolls' needlework. These presents were smuggled upstairs, and put safely away in a drawer in Miss Jameson's bedroom. Then, having removed their hats and jackets, the two little girls came down to the schoolroom, trying to look as if their visit to the town had been a matter of small importance.

"Edith can't go with us on Monday," Gertie exclaimed, as soon as they entered. "She is in bed, very poorly indeed."

"Oh, I am glad!" exclaimed Florrie, instantly.

"Florrie!" exclaimed her governess; "I am surprised at you."

"Oh, well, I don't mean that I am glad she is ill," explained Florrie; "but I am glad that she cannot go with us on Monday. Now we shall have a chance of enjoying ourselves."

Miss Jameson said no more; but Florrie felt uncomfortable as she saw how grave a look her face wore.

The next day was Sunday. Nothing was heard of little Edith, and Miss Jameson hoped that she was better. The children thought little about their cousin. They were thinking too much of the morrow's pleasure, and anxiously wondering as to the weather, to give any thought to her.

Happily the morrow proved as bright and warm as an autumn day could be. Gertie was delighted with her sisters' presents and the book which Miss Jameson gave her. But these were not all. Early in the morning a box arrived from Bournemouth directed to her, which was found to contain a lovely set of doll's tea things, a story book, and a packet of choice bonbons. But what was best of all, Gertie thought, she received two letters, written especially to her, one from her father and one from her mother.

"I thought it would be dreadful to have a birthday without papa and mamma," she said; "but now these letters have come I do not mind. It is just as if they were speaking to me, although they are so far away."

Soon after ten the children and their governess set out on their walk to the Park. They had some distance to walk ere they reached the Park gates, but there was such a delightful freshness in the air, and the sun was so bright, that no one complained of fatigue as they passed through the town and climbed the steep hill to the Terrace. Here they lingered for a few minutes, the children playing about, too excited to think of resting; whilst Miss Jameson enjoyed the exquisite view of the river, never more lovely than now when the foliage on either hand was brilliant with the vivid yellows and warm russets of autumn, and the sunshine gave to every touch of colour its full value.

But the children were impatient to reach the Park, so on they went, and were soon plunging through the dead leaves beneath the chestnut trees, and searching for nuts. Somewhat to the surprise of the rest, it was Miss Jameson who found

the most nuts. She was quick to see which of the prickly burrs held fruit, and which had already been rifled of their contents. But as she did not care for nuts, and divided all she found amongst the children, her keen sightedness was no disadvantage to the others.

The children would have remained beneath the chestnut trees all the morning if she had let them; but presently Miss Jameson decided that they had had nuts enough, and led the way in another direction. They passed down a green slope to a little thicket of purplish brown hawthorn bushes, beyond which they saw a herd of deer feeding. Gertie was anxious to get a near view of these graceful creatures, but this was not easy, for though the children pressed on as quietly and cautiously as possible they were yet many yards from the deer, when first one and then another tossed up its antlers and looked round inquiringly. The next moment the whole troop was in motion, and running across the slope one after another, they disappeared from sight amongst the trees beyond.

Gertie would have liked to run after them, but her sisters soon convinced her of the utter folly of such an attempt. They wandered on till they reached a wilderness of red and yellow bracken growing so tall as at once to suggest hide-and-seek to the children's minds. Miss Jameson willingly joined in a game; and when all were tired, they sat down in the warm sunshine and regaled themselves with the milk and buns which they had brought with them. Then reluctantly they turned to retrace their steps. They did not hurry home;

and it was late in the afternoon ere they reached the house, thoroughly tired, but all in excellent spirits.

On the schoolroom table was spread a meal of a very mixed character, which yet looked very inviting to the hungry eyes that surveyed it. In the centre stood the tempting cake which cook had made in honour of Gertie's birthday. There were "maids of honour" too, as the Richmond cheese-cakes are called, and baked apples and custards, besides more substantial edibles.

The children were just taking their places at the table, their faces radiant with satisfaction, when Sarah appeared at the schoolroom door, her face as long and grave as possible.

"Please, ma'am," she said, addressing Miss Jameson; "Mrs. Bartlett's servant has been here to say that the young ladies are not to go there on any account. The doctor has been to see Miss Edith, and he says that she has got scarlet fever!"

"Dear me!" said Miss Jameson, looking troubled; "I am very sorry to hear that."

The children were dismayed at the news. The girls looked at each other in silence; but little Harry put their thoughts into words when he said, half frightened at the grave faces around him: "But she won't die, will she, Miss Jameson, because she has scarlet fever?"

"I hope not," said the governess, rather tremulously; "but she is such a delicate child. We must all pray that God will spare her life."

"Oh," said Katie, under her breath, "I wish we had not been speaking so unkindly of her."

Florrie could not speak. Her face had grown perfectly white under the shock of painful fear. All the joy of Gertie's birthday was over for her.

CHAPTER VI.

Lessons not Learned from Books.

THE children had expected to spend a happy evening in dressing their dolls; but now it was with grave, sad faces that they set about their work. It was dreadful to know that Cousin Edith was so ill, and then to remember how vexed they had been with her on Friday, and what unkind things they had said.

"Of course she was cross because she felt so ill," said Kate, sagely. "I expect we should have been as bad. I am always like a bear when I feel sick."

"If we had known she was going to have scarlet fever, we wouldn't have minded," said Florrie.

"But how could we know," returned Kate, impatiently. "The thing is, we ought to have known better than to get vexed with her. We might have guessed that there was some reason for her being so very cross."

On the morrow the children were very anxious to know how their cousin was, but the news which came was not comforting. Little Edith was very ill; and as the days went on, the reports grew more and more alarming. The fever ran high, and soon Miss Jameson knew that the child's life was despaired of. She hardly dared to tell the little girls how ill their cousin was; but they knew enough to make them very unhappy whenever they thought of cousin Edith.

The doll dressing was meanwhile proceeding. Topsy was fully dressed, and looked resplendent in her yellow satin gown; Miss Lily's blue frock was almost finished, and

promised to suit her charmingly, though Florrie had been rather careless in gathering the skirt, and had been made to do the work a second time. Kate's baby doll's clothes, which required to be made so very neatly, were nearly completed. The scrap books too were progressing. But the children's pleasure in their work was clouded by the thought of their cousin's peril. On Florrie's heart it weighed most heavily. She felt that if cousin Edith died, nothing could ever make her happy again. She had fancied that she did not love Edith; but now she knew that she did love her, and that she would miss her cousin sadly if she were taken away.

Another Sunday came, and little Edith was no better. Katie and Florrie could not keep from crying when in the morning service they heard the clergyman request the prayers of the congregation on behalf of Edith Hobson, who was lying seriously ill. They cried again when they reached home, and found that a message had been sent by their grandmother saying that Edith was no better, and the doctor had little hope of her recovery.

"What will Aunt Sophie do if she dies?" sobbed Kate; "the only little girl she has!"

Florrie said nothing. She was quieter than Kate; but it was not because her feelings were less deeply moved.

Miss Jameson did her best to comfort her pupils. She spoke to them of the Saviour who loves little children, and reminded them how He had healed the nobleman's son, and raised the daughter of Jairus. Then she knelt in prayer with them, and asked the Lord to spare little Edith's life, if it were His will.

That night when the children had been long in bed, Miss Jameson sat alone by the schoolroom fire. She was thinking sadly of the little life that she feared would soon pass from earth, and the terrible blank that its departure would make in the mother's life. All was still about her when suddenly she was startled by the sound of a step on the stairs. What could it mean! Was one of the little girls walking in her sleep? The next moment, to Miss Jameson's astonishment, the door opened, and Florrie appeared in her white night dress, with her dark hair streaming over her shoulders. At first Miss Jameson imagined that she was dreaming; but it was no dream that had brought to Florrie's face that look of deep distress. With a sob she threw herself on her knees beside her governess.

"Miss Jameson! I thought I should find you here, and I could not bear it any longer. I am so miserable, oh, so very miserable."

"Why, Florrie, what are you thinking of?" exclaimed Miss Jameson; "you will catch a dreadful cold, coming down like this!"

"I don't care if I do," cried the child, wildly; "I can't bear it."

Miss Jameson caught up a thick shawl which lay near, and wrapped it about the child; then lifted her on to her lap. She was trembling violently from cold and agitation.

"Now, Florrie, tell me all about it," said Miss Jameson; "what is troubling you so?"

"Oh, you must know," cried the child, "it is about Edith. Katie can pray; she has prayed, and she says she is sure that

Jesus will make Edith well; but I can't think so; I can't pray; my heart feels too bad. Miss Jameson, if Edith dies, I shall feel like—that dreadful word—a murderer!"

"No, no!" said her governess soothingly; "you must not think that, Florrie. You did not really hate your cousin. You said it, but you did not mean it."

"But it was wicked of me to say it: I shall have to give account of it in the day of judgment," sobbed the child, giving confused utterance to the thoughts that had been working in her disturbed mind. "And oh, Miss Jameson, I was glad that Edith was ill, and could not go with us to the Park. I said I was not, but I was really glad. I did not feel a bit sorry for her. But then I did not think that she would be so very ill."

"And now you are very, very sorry that you had such unkind thoughts. You feel how wrong it was. Well, you cannot ask your cousin now to forgive you; but you can and must, dear Florrie, ask your Saviour to forgive you. Kneel down now, and tell Him all about it, and ask Him to forgive you."

Florrie knelt down and hid her face in her governess's lap. She uttered no word aloud, only a sob was heard now and then; but Miss Jameson knew that the child was pouring forth her sorrowful confession in the ears of Divine love. She prayed too, both for Florrie and for her little cousin. Presently Florrie raised her head. Her eyes were still wet with tears, but the look of deep distress had passed away. "I have told Jesus all," she whispered, "and I have asked Him to make Edith well. Do you think He will?"

"I hope so, dear," was all Miss Jameson could say.

Then she led Florrie back to bed. Her sisters were fast asleep, and the little girl stole into bed as quietly as possible that she might not wake them. When Miss Jameson looked at her a few minutes later she too was sleeping, and her face wore a happy expression although it was still stained by tears.

Miss Jameson went downstairs the next morning with a sense of dread upon her mind. She greatly feared that the day would bring sad news. But Katie met her at the foot of the stairs, her face radiant with joy. "Oh, Miss Jameson!" she cried breathlessly, "Edith is better! Grandmamma has sent to let us know. The fever turned last night, and now they think she will get well."

"Oh, that is good news! how thankful I am!" cried Miss Jameson.

And thankful indeed were all the children. But Florrie said little. Her feelings were too deep for words. Her prayer had been heard. The crushing load had been lifted, the dark fear had passed away. Not soon would she forget the lesson which this sad experience had taught her. She was resolved that in coming days she would be as patient and loving with her little companions as she would wish to have been should death come suddenly to break up the companionship.

As the days went on there was still hopeful news of Edith, though her recovery was very slow, and it was long ere her cousins saw her again.

There was no fear now that the children's occupations would be interrupted by an invitation to their grandmother's,

and the dressing of dolls and making of scrap-books went on steadily. And quite as a surprise at last the children received the welcome news that their parents were coming home on the following day.

Rendered nervous by hearing of Edith's attack of fever, Mrs. Bartlett could no longer be happy away from her elder children. She must see them ere she could feel sure that they were perfectly well.

"Why it seems no time since they went away," said Gertie, who was nevertheless very glad to hear that her parents were about to return.

"Three weeks to-day," said Kate.

"It seems a long time to me," remarked Florrie, gravely; "so much has happened since they left us."

"Won't mamma be surprised to see all the dolls and scrap-books!" said Gertie. "Well, we've been very happy on the whole, but it is nice to think that they are coming back."

And very joyful was the meeting between parents and children on the next day. Their mother was quite as much surprised and pleased at their industry as the girls expected. She heartily approved of the undertaking, and to the children's delight she promised that they should one day go with Miss Jameson to the hospital and give their presents to the poor little patients.

How much talking there was when, an hour after her arrival, Mrs. Bartlett came to take tea in the schoolroom as usual! Every particular of what had happened during her absence was confided to her. But Florrie could not rest till she had drawn her mother aside and made her confession of

wrong thoughts and feelings. Not many words were needed to make her mother understand the bitter sorrow she had felt when she feared that her cousin would die. And her mother's sympathy was very sweet to Florrie, and the few wise words she spoke abode in the child's memory.

We may not dwell on the children's visit to the hospital. It was a touching sight to see the happy, healthy, well-cared-for children passing up and down amongst the little beds, and speaking kind words to the stunted sickly little sufferers who lay on them. It was pleasant to watch the pale sad faces light up with joy as the children distributed their gifts. The young Bartletts knew that day as they had never known before how richly God had blessed them in their happy home-life, and they felt that they must show their gratitude by far deeper love to Him and warmer love to others.

"What do you think, Miss Jameson," cried Kate that evening, when she came to the schoolroom to say good-night to her governess; "papa has seen Aunt Sophie to-day, and he told her about our going to the hospital, and she says that she will give a cot to the hospital—that means, you know, that she will pay for some little child to be always there. She wishes to do it because she is so thankful to God for sparing Edith's life."

"I could never have believed it of Aunt Sophie," said Florrie, solemnly; "never—after the way she spoke of the hospital that day."

"Then you see, Florrie," said her governess, "that it is not well to judge anyone hastily. Many persons are kinder and better than their words seem to show."

"Oh, Miss Jameson," cried little Harry, "mamma has bought a new text to hang up in our room. It is 'Little children, love one another.'"

"I know why she chose that one," said Florrie. And the others thought that they knew too, but they said nothing.

Not in vain did the words stand constantly before the eyes of these children. A glance at the text was sufficient to check them when they were disposed to utter hasty and unkind words. Daily did they pray to be made loving and Christ-like, for the experience of these three weeks had taught them their own weakness and sinfulness, and their inability to do any good thing without the aid of God's Holy Spirit. When after many weeks little Edith was able to visit her cousins again, she found them strangely kind and patient, whilst they on their part wondered at the change in her. For she was no longer selfish and disagreeable as she had been before, since she like them was trying to follow Jesus, and to do what He would have her do.