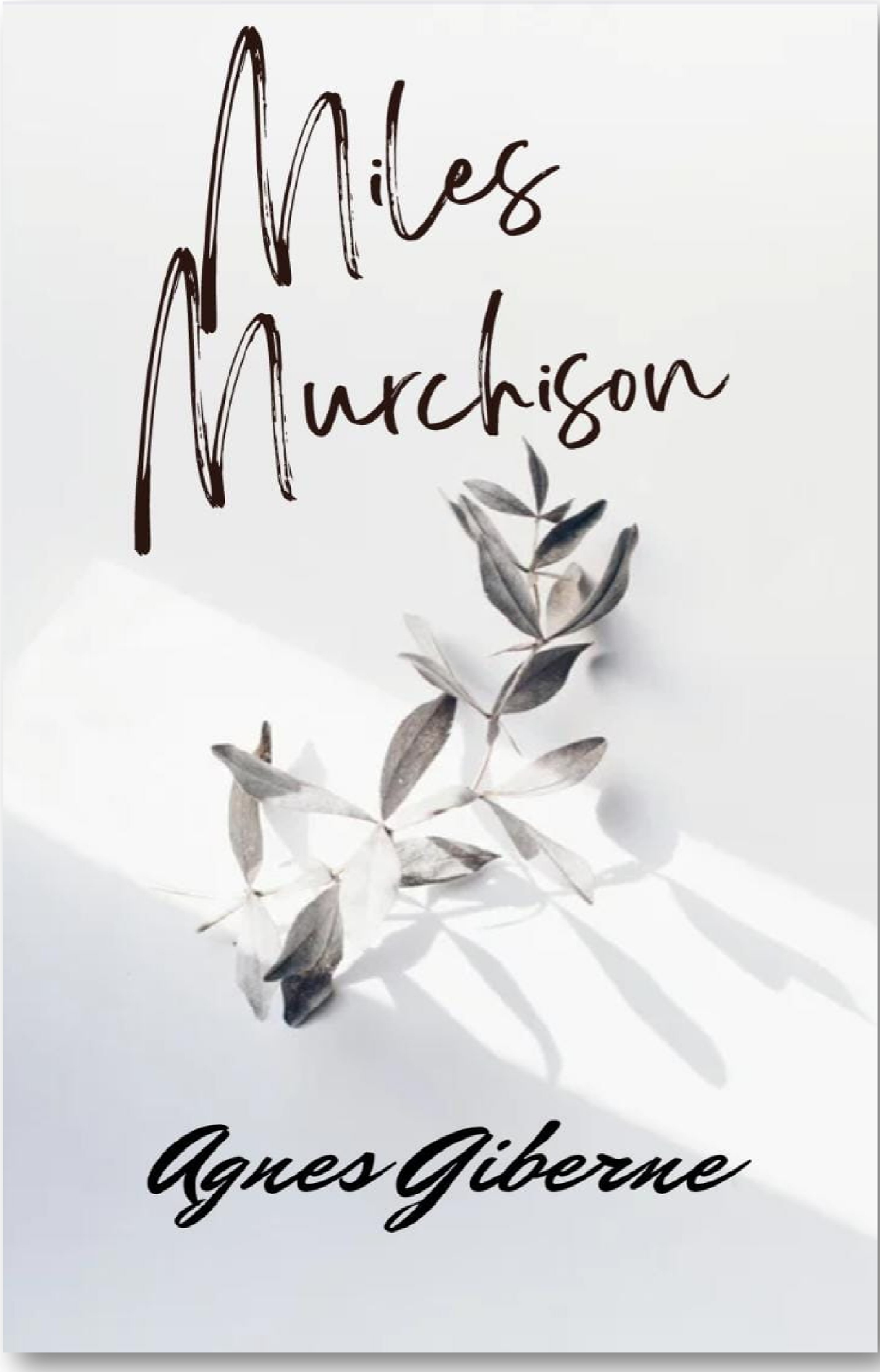
Miles Murchison



Agnes Giberne

MILES MURCHISON

BY

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Published in India by :

Saptarshee Prakashan

Gat no.84/2 Behind Damaji College

Mangalwedha Dist Solapur (Maharashtra), India.

Pin:-413305

Mob: 9822701657

- Typeset/Printed by Krutika Printers, mangalwedha.
- This edition published in 2023 by:

  Email: saptarsheeprakashan@gmail.com

  Website: www.saptarshee.in

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CHAPTER I.

A DAY'S PLEASURING.

MRS. MURCHISON'S STORY.

I NEVER shall forget that day,—never! Not if I live to be a hundred years old.

Till then I hadn't known real trouble in life—worth calling trouble, I mean. Of course there were worries and bothers, like in most people's lives. Things went sometimes cross, as I suppose they must; and clothes wore out too fast, and the children would be fractious or naughty, and measles and chicken-pox had their turn, and there wasn't always money enough to get what we needed.

But still, as I say, I hadn't known real trouble in all the sixteen years I'd been married, nor in all the twenty years I'd lived at home before that. I had such a happy home in my girlhood, and Jervis had been all along such a good husband to me. I won't say he never spoke a sharp word; but then I won't say I never did neither; and if he had his faults, I had mine too. Anyhow, he worked hard and steady, and he brought home his wages regular, and he didn't spend his time nor earnings at the public-house, and we had a tidy little sum growing at the Post Office Savings Bank, and he and I were in good health, and the children were well.

We lived at Littleburgh, and my husband was foreman in the building works, and he was trusted and liked. I didn't wonder neither—I who knew him as only a wife can know her husband. Some men are trusted and liked by outside people, and their own wives could tell a mighty different tale

if they chose to speak out, which most wives won't do; but it wasn't so with Jervis and me.

For some time we had gone on, without so much as a day's journeying away from home. Jervis wasn't given to gadding about, or finding his amusements anywhere and everywhere except in his own home, nor spending on pleasure what properly we'd ought to lay by for our children. And as for me, why, I had every single thing to do in the house—all the cleaning and cooking, and washing and working, and looking after the children; and that means a deal more than the men ever think. It wasn't likely I should have time for running about, leaving things to take care of themselves.

Sometimes I do wonder, when I see maidservants in nice places, with good food, and all sorts of comforts, and kind mistresses, and no cares, I do wonder when I see them in such a hurry to go and get married, and set up for themselves. Not as I'm saying a word against girls marrying, when it's right and proper for them, if it's a good sober steady man that's in question, and if he has regular work, and if there's a store laid by against a rainy day, and if the girl is fit to manage a little home and to do for her husband comfortably, and if neither of them are in too great haste; why, of course, there's no objection whatever. To have a little home of one's own sounds nice, and it ought to be nice, and it may be nice; but folks don't know beforehand what a deal of toil is wanted to keep it nice, nor how many get tired of the toil in a little while, and let it go nasty and get dirty and messy and untidy, more like to a pig-stye than a home.

More especially when a lot of children come, and when one don't feel good for anything, and work never ends, morning, noon, nor night.

Well, as I say, I wonder sometimes, knowing all this. For the change from a good place to married life in a cottage, or maybe in two or three rooms, is oftentimes a change from light work to hard work, and from ease to poverty. When a girl grumbles at what she has to do in service, and wants to get married, she don't guess how much more she'll have to do, when every single thing depends on herself. Seems to me, a good husband is a gift from God, and a happy home's the same; but there's none too many of either in the world.

I wasn't in service before I married Jervis, but I was the eldest of a lot of children, and my mother made me work hard and no mistake. So much the better. It was a good training for my married life.

But I always do think to this day that Jervis and I would have been wiser, if we had waited just a few years, and had laid by more. Then, instead of only a little sum being ready when trouble came, it might have been enough to be a real help, and we shouldn't have been near so dependent on others. It is all right telling us to trust for the future; and so we ought; but all the same we've got to provide for ourselves, and not to go on in a happy-go-lucky way, just taking our pleasure, and hoping things 'll all come right somehow. That's not trust; it's laziness and selfishness. People ought to think of their children, if they should have any.

Well, if I run off on this, I shall forget all about the story I've got to tell; and that wouldn't do at all. Most folks would rather hear a story than be preached to.

It came all as a sort of surprise to me one day, when my husband said to me unexpected-like—

"Annie," said he, "I've set my mind on a day by the sea."

"You have, Jervis!" says I; for I couldn't think whatever he was at.

"A nice long day by the sea," says he. "I'll get a day off work— they'll give it me, I'm always so regular—and we'll go early. We'll get to Ermespoint by ten o'clock," says he, "and we won't be home again till past nine at night."

"It'll cost a lot," said I.

"That's the first thought with you," says he. "And I'm not blaming my little woman, either." He often called me his "little woman"—not as I was so especial small, only I was sort of thin, and I'd small bones; and though he wasn't uncommon tall, he was of a broad make, with big hands, and very strong. "I'm not blaming you for it," said he. "If you weren't such a careful body as you are, why, we shouldn't have such a comfortable home as we've got. It's the woman of a house has to do with that, I know well enough," says he. "But all the same, Annie, I do think we've earned a day's pleasuring; and I don't think it'll be money thrown away. I'd like to be out of it all for once. I spent a day in Ermespoint years ago, and I've never forgot it; and I'd like the children to have just such another day to look back on."

Well I didn't go against him, though I couldn't help thinking what a nice sum all those fares together would make

to add to our savings in the Post Office Bank. Not only him and me, but Miles and Louey, and Rosie and Bessie. And only the two youngest would go for half-fares. Louey was over twelve, though she didn't look it; and some of the neighbours advised us to pass her off for younger, but Jervis wouldn't hear of it. "I'm not going to tell lies for nobody," said he in his sturdy sort of way; "and I don't see as it's any less dishonest to cheat the Company than to cheat a man. Louey's over twelve, and she shan't make believe to be under."

That's how it was Jervis got to be trusted. Nobody ever found him out in untruthful or crooked ways, and so they got to know they might depend on him always.

Well, as I was saying, I wouldn't go against him, though I had my doubts if he was wise, and I've often and often wished since that we hadn't gone!

And yet maybe that's a foolish wish. For we did what we thought to be right at the time, and nobody can do more. It's no manner of use to judge, after things have happened, by what couldn't be guessed beforehand. Besides, what did happen don't show that we were wrong to go. Trouble don't always mean punishment. It's often sent just to do us good, like medicine given to a sick child, and it may be the very best thing that could happen. And if we hadn't gone to Ermespoint that day, but had stayed at home, who's to say that something quite as bad mightn't have come to us some other way?

Jervis had no difficulty in getting a day off from work, though it wasn't a Bank holiday. He asked it so seldom, that

the masters said "Yes" at once. We had a fine day too. Right glad we were to see the sun go down, with red streaks across the sky. Jervis said, "Red at night is the shepherd's delight;" and then he told us there were other good signs too, most likely meaning fine weather. The air was dry; and the swallows had been flying high; and there wasn't too clear a view of the distance.

He was in the right too. We woke up to a beautiful July day— all sunshine and blue sky. I'm sure I didn't sleep much the night before, and the children said they hadn't either; and we were all ready for an early breakfast, so as to get off by the eight o'clock train.

Jervis had on his Sunday coat, and he did look so nice in it, you can't think. I always felt proud of my husband in that coat. Not that I didn't feel proud of him in his working clothes too; but then I suppose I was proud of him for what he was inside; and in his Sunday coat I was proud of him for what he was outside. A woman does like her husband to look nice, you know, and I'm pretty sure a husband likes his wife to look nice. And though one may say folks don't love each other for their looks, yet it is wonderful what a lot of difference looks make in one's feelings. Anyhow, I know I liked to see Jervis in his Sunday coat; and I know he liked to see me in my Sunday bonnet, which was quiet but pretty. He wasn't too busy that very morning to tell me how nice I looked in it. And I was proud, of course; why shouldn't I be? What's the woman made of, I wonder, who doesn't like her husband to tell her she looks nice?

We had to wait a while on the platform, because the train was late; and Rosie and Bessie each held one of his hands, and Louey kept watch over the lunch-basket, and Miles never left my side. That was always the way. Louey had always been a quiet sort of independent child; and the two little girls, but most of all our pretty Bessie, were my husband's great pets; and Miles would do anything for me. If we had any favourites among the children, I suppose Bessie was her father's favourite, and Miles was mine; yet it isn't fair to talk of favourites, when we loved them all so dearly. Miles was fourteen and Louey twelve, and Rosie and Bessie were nine and seven. Nobody could call Louey or Rosie pretty, but little Bessie was lovely.

Miles had just done with his schooling, and Jervis hoped soon to get him into the building trade. The worst of the matter was, that Miles didn't care to be a builder. He was a quiet boy, fond of books, and fond of writing; and he'd always had a hankering after something different. But Jervis said that was nonsense, and of course the boy must do as he had done. So there was just a little difficulty between the two, and I suppose that was why Miles turned more than ever to me. He knew I felt with him always, whether or no I could help him.

Miles had such a pleasant face. I don't think it was only because I was his mother that I thought so. He wasn't handsome, and handsomeness don't matter much, but he had such a bright look, and he was so true, and he never was rude or rough; and if a gentleman or lady spoke to him, his cap was off in a moment. To be sure, I'd been particular about

my boy's manners, which is more than some mothers can say, and he's thanked me for it since. I've never had no notion of letting my children grow up like a set of young bears, without a thought of how to behave themselves.

The train came puffing up, and we all got into a third-class compartment, where nobody else was. The children were delighted, because they could move about and chatter without disturbing folks. Presently Miles said to me,—"That's the life I should like, mother," as we passed a farm house, standing all by itself in the country.

"Perhaps you wouldn't if you tried it," said I; for I knew there wasn't a chance of any such life for him.

"I should, though," said he. "I know what I like."

Then Bessie asked her father, "Is Ermespoint a very pretty place?" I suppose the children had asked this question a hundred times, but Jervis never grew tired of answering it.

"It's the prettiest place I ever saw," said he. "There's high cliffs, you know, and a sandy beach; and rocks here and there; and beautiful waves rolling in. I've only been once, but I did say then, if I could choose a home for myself, I'd choose to be there. Likely as not, if that came about, we'd be wishing ourselves back at Littleburgh."

I wondered if he'd heard Miles and me the minute before.

The train was a slow one, and it stopped at all the stations. When we had gone by a good many we came to a biggish town, and there we waited longer than usual. My husband got out to stretch his legs, and we all thought somebody was sure to get in. The children didn't want this,

for they knew I wouldn't let them chatter and move about, if it would be a bother to other people. I've no notion of letting my children be a plague and trouble, so that everybody must dislike them. I mean I hadn't in the days when they were children.

Up till just the last moment nobody came; and when the bell was rung, and the guard was slamming the doors, we thought we were safe. But just at that moment a young gentleman came rushing along the platform, full speed, with a porter after him, carrying a bag. "Anywhere! third-class will do," says he; and the porter opened our door, and he came in with a leap, just as the whistle sounded, and the train began to move; and Jervis helped to pull in the bag.

So we weren't alone any longer, and I can remember how disappointed the children looked, and how quiet they got, all of a sudden.

Nobody spoke at all at first, except that the young gentleman said "Thanks" to my husband. I think that was all he could say, for he seemed to have had a desperately hard run, and he just sat panting for breath.

It comes back to me how he looked that day—the first time I ever set eyes on him; little thinking he and we should have so much to do with one another. He didn't seem older than Miles, though he really was near two years older; and he had the brightest blue eyes, all ready for a laugh, even when he could hardly draw his breath. A lot of curly light hair peeped out from under his cap, and there was a colour in his cheeks that I shouldn't have liked to see in my children's cheeks—such a bright pink patch, and all round his lips as

white as a tablecloth, with the run and the breathlessness. I wondered if his mother felt anxious about him. The panting lasted longer than it ought to have done, though he tried to hide it; and I could see that he didn't like to be noticed.

Presently he seemed better, and I saw him looking at the children, and they at him. Then he fixed his eyes on Bessie, and tried to get her to smile. She always had a smile ready, so he got what he wanted; and then she turned shy, and hid her face on Jervis' shoulder.

"You're not afraid of me, are you?" says the young gentleman.

"She isn't used to strangers, sir," said my husband.

"Then we won't be strangers," said he. "Look here!"—and he pulled a toy out of his pocket, a thing with legs, and when a string was pulled it whirled round, and the legs flew out like mad. He made Bessie pull the string, and soon she was laughing, and as pleased as anything. "You'd like to have it for your own, wouldn't you?" said he. "I meant to take it to my little sister, but I'll get something else for her, and you shall have this." Then he put the toy into Bessie's hand, and he looked up at Jervis in that frank easy way of his, and asked,—"Where are you all going?"

"Just for a day's pleasuring, sir, on the shore at Ermespoint," says my husband.

"Ermespoint! Why, that's my home,—only I haven't been there yet," says he.

He should call a place his home when he had not seen it; and I suppose we looked puzzled, for he went on to explain. His father was just made Rector there, and the family had

gone down a week or two before; but the young gentleman himself had been staying with friends for the first few days of his holidays. So now he was on his way to "make acquaintance" with his new home.

"My father's name is Kingscote," says he—"The Rev. Philip Kingscote. And if you're down on the beach, I dare say I shall find you out by-and-by. I always go to the shore, one of the first things, when I am near the sea. Won't it be jolly to live there always?" says he.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE WAY.

MRS. MURCHISON'S STORY—(continued).

IT was funny how we seemed to get to know Master Bertram in the next hour. I can't help calling him "Master Bertram," though we did not know his name then. He talked away to the children, and gave them chocolate drops till I thought he'd make them ill; and then he talked to my husband, and he tried to make Miles talk too, but Miles was too shy. By-and-by I saw the white look come back round his mouth, and he didn't say anything, but just moved off into the corner, and went sound asleep with his head against the window.

When he woke up he was all fun and talk again, and he pulled out a bag of cakes and buns, and would have us share with him all round. I told him we'd got buns, but he said that didn't matter. "You'll want them all, down on the shore," says he; "and you don't think I can eat all these, do you?" said he. I couldn't help noticing that he ate hardly any, and he kept picking out the nicest cakes and offering them to little Bessie, who I could see took his fancy—she was so pretty and so sweet. But presently, in the very middle of a joke, he stopped and said—"Oh dear!" and dropped his head down on his hands.

"You're not well, sir," I said; and he got up a laugh, and said,—"Oh, only a little;" and then he got whiter and whiter, and couldn't hold himself up. So I just saw to him as if he'd been one of my own. I made him lie on the seat, and asked Jervis for some water, which we'd brought with us in case the

children should be thirsty. Then I wetted his forehead, and after a minute he gave a sort of gasp, and opened his eyes, and laughed. If I hadn't kept him back he would have started up.

"Don't move yet, sir, please," I said. "It'll make you bad again."

"So very stupid of me," said he. "Thanks—you're so good. It was only that run, you know."

"I'm afraid you're ill, sir," I said.

"Ill! no!" says he. "I was ill in the winter, but that's ages ago. I'm all right now."

"Maybe the sea 'll make you stronger, sir," says I.

"Oh, I'm all right enough," said he again; and then he shut his eyes, and lay still, which didn't seem of a piece with his words.

"What a kind creature you are!" says he, all of a sudden; and he spoke quite brisk, and a streak of colour had come to his cheeks. "It's too bad, though, to bother you like this. I can get up now;" and he was up before I could stop him; but the streak of colour died away in a moment, and he just dropped back again, and I heard him say— to himself, like—"Oh dear, I do feel bad!"

After that I wouldn't let him stir nor talk, and I kept wetting a clean pocket-handkerchief and laying it on his forehead. He let me do as I liked; and presently he went off sound again, and slept like a top for ever so long. And when he woke up he did look better.

"There! I'm all right," said he, just as he had said before. "How stupid I've been!" And he sat up, and looked me in the

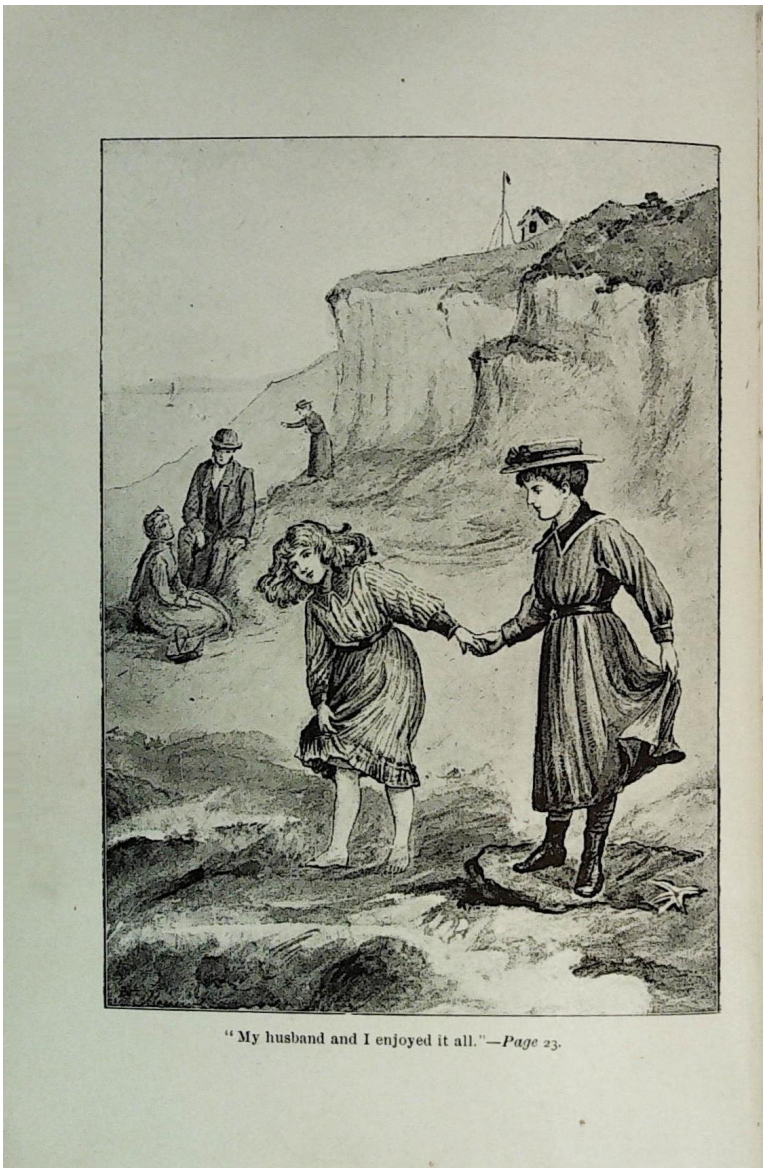
face, smiling, with such a pleasant look. "You are a good kind creature!" said he. "What makes you so good to me, I wonder? You're exactly like our dear old nurse—only she's three times as old as you are, you know." I wondered if he meant that really; for three times thirty-six would make her a very uncommon age; but I thought perhaps he was joking.

Very soon after that we got to Ermespoint; and Master Bertram jumped out first, in such a hurry that I only wondered he didn't tumble down. He was rushing across the platform, but he stopped short, and came back, to lift down little Bessie. "Here, porter, bring my bag," said he; and then he rushed off again, and I saw a young lady, rather bigger than my Louey, kissing him, and he kissing a lady. I could hear his voice too, saying—"The nicest woman, mother, you ever saw!—and the very jolliest little girl!"—and they all three came across to us, and the lady thanked me so prettily for my "kind care" of "her boy," as she was pleased to call it. And Master Bertram said—"I shall find you all out on the shore by-and-by. Mind you don't go out of reach."

"After lunch," the lady said. "He must rest a little first,"—though nobody could have guessed from his merry face how bad he'd been an hour before.

What we had to do was to make our way down to the beach, and that was easy enough, Ermespoint being but a small place. We soon got to the Parade, where two or three donkeys stood about, and one little goat-carriage. The first thing my husband couldn't resist was to give Rosie and Bessie a ride in the goat-carriage. I did think the shilling might have been better used: and yet it was such a pleasure

to them both! I've always been glad since to think our little Bessie had that ride.



"My husband and I enjoyed it all."—*Page 23.*

My husband and I enjoyed it all.

So for an hour we walked or sat about on the Parade, while the children were driven up and down; and after that we went on the sands. Louey made a collection of sea-weed; and the two youngest hunted for shells; and Miles scrambled about on the low rocks; and my husband and I enjoyed it all—the quiet and the breeze, and the sunshine, and our children's delight, and the tiny waves which kept rolling in and breaking. Not big waves, like those Jervis had talked of; but then, as he said, big waves don't come without a big wind to make them; and that wouldn't have been half so nice for a long day on the shore.

The day didn't seem long; at least the morning did not. It was wonderful how the hours slipped by, and how happy we were! Nobody came near us; and I couldn't help thinking how much nicer such a day was, than to go out from home when everybody goes, and when every place is crowded, so one can't find a quiet corner anywhere.

Between twelve and one we had our dinner, and right glad we were of it. The children were just ravenous. After our meal it was nice to sit quiet for awhile. Jervis told stories to the little ones; and Louey arranged her seaweeds; and Miles kicked his heels about, lying on his back to stare up at the sky. All at once I heard a merry voice close behind, saying—"So here you all are!" and when I got up in a hurry, and turned about, there was Master Kingscote, and two young ladies with him—Miss Ellen Kingscote, who was two years older than Louey, and little Miss Rosamund, who was just the same age as our Bessie, and a sweet little lady too, though to my thinking there never was so pretty a child as my poor little Bessie.

"Isn't she jolly, Ros?" said Master Bertram pointing at Bessie. "And I've told my father and mother all about you," said he to me; "and you're all to come to tea in our house at five o'clock. You'll have the big basement-room." Ah! how little he thought, as he said the words, what way we should have the use of that basement-room! "You'll come; won't you?" said he, with that smile of his, which was like nobody's I'd ever seen before.

Well, I thanked him, and I asked him to thank Mr. and Mrs. Kingscote, and I said I was afraid it would be a trouble,

more especial as they were just settling into a new house: but to that he wouldn't listen. Then I asked how he was, and he said, "Oh, I'm all right!" and I saw Miss Kingscote gave a little shake to her head, as if she didn't think so, no more than me.

Then Master Bertram asked us what we'd done, and where we'd been; and he said we must come along with him to see the very prettiest part of all, under the west cliff. "I've not been there yet," said he; "but everybody talks about that bit of beach, and I'm going now with my sisters. So you'd better all come along too. Now, Ros, you've got to act showman," said he to the little one, who kept holding on to his hand, and looking up in his face, as if she did love him so. She was like him, with blue eyes and a bright colour; and her hair was short and curly.

"The tide's going out now, so we can walk round under the cliffs, into the cove beyond," said he. "When the tide's high, you can't go that way. You see I know all about it," said he, laughing; and he kept running ahead, to jump from one rock to another, or to make his little sister jump. I couldn't help seeing, though, how quick he lost his breath, and how his colour came and went, and how often he seemed to stop, just to pant quietly, not making any fuss, and trying to hide it.

"I wouldn't go so fast, sir, if I was you," I said.

"Wouldn't you?" said he; and then he asked Miles, "Do you know what it is makes the tides come in and go out?"

"No, sir, I don't," said Miles. I could see Miles was wonderfully taken with the young gentleman, though he was too shy to say much.

"It's the moon," said Master Bertram; and I made sure he was joking; but he wasn't. "I'm not talking nonsense," said he. "It really is the moon and the sun; but most of all the moon. I'll tell you more— some day!" And I knew he hadn't breath to say much, walking over the shingles and the wet sand; and I wondered if we should ever see him again after that day.

We got to the cove at last, with great high cliffs rising up behind; and it was pretty, there's no denying. I think I noticed directly how the waves seemed to have eaten into the rock down below, digging out a hollow all along, so that the cliffs hung right over. But nobody thought of danger. It wasn't likely we should, being new to the place; and Master Bertram was as new to it as we were, and his sisters had been only there a few days. There were no danger-notices up, as there ought to have been. We heard later that there had been boards, warning people, till a year or two back; but they had been taken away, nobody could say why; and though one or two gentlemen had spoken out, and said how wrong it was, nothing had been done.

So we all went close up under the cliffs, never dreaming of danger; and if we'd all sat down and stayed there, nobody knows how many mightn't have been killed on the spot. But presently we scattered about. Master Bertram was amusing Bessie. He seemed to have taken such a fancy to her; and the dear little thing did look so pretty and smiling, while he built

her a house of pebbles, and then wound a big ribbon of sea-weed round her hat. He said she was to take it home with her—little thinking! But none of us knew what was coming.

Presently Master Bertram left Bessie with my husband near the cliffs, and he strolled down the beach half-way to the sea, and got into a talk with Miles, which pleased me; while Jervis sat on a small rock, with Bessie on his knee, not following Master Bertram. Miss Ellie and Miss Rosamund were down near the water, with my Rosie; and I was just going to them, fearing Rosie might be a trouble. And Louey stood alone, not far from me.

I suppose she was the only one free to look-out; for all the rest except me were talking and busy; and I was thinking about Rosie. Louey always had been uncommon sharp to notice things: though she wasn't given to talk. She was not far from me, and about even on the beach with Master Bertram and Miles; and she had her face turned towards the cliff, looking up—watching the sea-gulls, she said after.

All at once, such a shriek came from her. I'd never heard my quiet Louey shriek before. I could not hear what she said; but others told me later that it was something about the cliff tumbling. I only knew the shriek meant something dreadful; and my head went round, for I didn't know where the danger was, nor who needed help, nor where I ought to turn. I saw Louey begin to rush down the beach, towards the sea; and I saw Master Bertram start off the other way towards my husband and Bessie. And I don't rightly know what happened next; only it seemed as if the whole top of the cliff was

coming down in a great crash, and as if everybody must be killed.

CHAPTER III.

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED.

MRS. MURCHISON'S STORY—(continued).

THEY say it's a common thing enough—cliffs getting worn away underneath by the washing of the sea, and then hanging right over above, so that great pieces must break off and tumble down now and again. And they told us—afterward, you know—that heavy falls had taken place in this very cove, only not for a good while; and that everybody living in Ermespoint knew it to be dangerous. It did seem so cruelly wrong that not one word of warning should be put up for strangers, to keep them from walking into such a trap. But of course nobody could blame Master Bertram for taking us there, because he was just as new to the place as ourselves and knew no more about how things were.

Such a quantity of rock had never been known to fall before as came down that day. As I've said, it looked like the cliff giving way, though it only was a part from above. A great shower of sand and earth came with the rock, and big blocks rolled and bounded down the beach, which meant danger to us all.

But the worst was to know that underneath that pile lay my husband and little Bessie.

It was for their sake that Master Bertram started off to rush to the cliff, the moment he heard Louey shriek: and most likely he'd have met his death, only Miles saw in a moment he could do no good, and sprang and seized hold of him to stop him. In the moment's struggle, I suppose, or somehow, Master Bertram fell; and a great block of stone

came bounding towards them both, as the top of the cliff crashed down; and Miles didn't rush off, only to save himself, as so many would have done. He gripped Master Bertram quick as lightning, and gave him a great drag to one side. You see, Miles was a strong lad, and Master Bertram was thin and light. And he was just in time—for the block rolled and dashed past over where Master Bertram had been, and close to them both, and it was big enough to have killed a man outright. So my Miles saved the life of Master Bertram at the risk of his own. I think it's not every boy of fourteen who'd have done so much, nor been so sharp.

I'm telling this because it happened then, and others saw it beside the boys themselves; not because I saw it. I couldn't see aught at first, except that great pile of fallen rocks, where my husband and Bessie had been. I didn't notice Louey go down near me; and though a sharp bit of rock struck me, I didn't so much as feel it.

A lot of people came hurrying up—sailors and other men I hadn't seen to be near, but yet they must have been. The children were made to move away to a distance as fast as possible; but I couldn't stop to think of them, for I was wild to know about Jervis and Bessie. They say I spoke pretty quiet, only I didn't feel myself to be quiet. The next thing was, I found Miles close by me, and he was saying, "They'll get 'em out, mother, and I am going to help."

I couldn't bear Miles to go near, for I thought there'd surely be another fall of the cliff; and I tried to hold him back, but it was no use. A lot of men were hard at work, and Master Bertram was with them; and they had need of

courage, for nobody could say if any moment they mightn't be buried too. But still they kept on, as brave as could be, clearing away the rock and the rubbish, hoping that it mightn't be too late.

Somebody tried to make me go farther off, and I wouldn't be made, not even when a policeman came and ordered me back. I just gazed in his face, and stayed where I was. "Want me to go, when my husband and child are there!" said I. And he looked pitying, and said no more: and maybe I was wrong, but how could I help it?

The time seemed so slow, I didn't know how to bear myself. Sometimes everything turned black, and I couldn't have told where I was, nor what had come to me.

It must have been just after one of those turns that I saw a man carrying something down the beach—carrying a child, and I knew it must be my little Bessie, though I could not properly see. I cried out for Bessie, but somebody stepped between; and I tried to meet him, but I could hardly walk, and he went off and away too quick; and I asked no questions, for my husband wasn't out yet, and I had to wait for him. The blackness came again, and the next minute somebody had hold of my hand, and I jumped up, and cried out, "Is it Jervis?" And then I knew from the feel of the hand, with a glove on it, that it wasn't a man, and I saw the face of Master Bertram's mother, that I had seen on the platform.

"Come with me," she said, and she held me, as if she meant to be obeyed.

"But my husband and Bessie!" said I.

'I cried out for Bessie, but somebody stepped between."—*Page* 34.

"Yes, they are both taken away," said she. "You must come home with me now."

She led me, for I couldn't see rightly, and I kept stumbling over the pebbles: but she held me up, and somebody helped me on the other side, and not a word was said. I couldn't speak either for a time, I felt so strange: and then I had a pain in my left shoulder, and I suppose I put my hand there, for the lady said, "Does it hurt much?"

I cried out for Bessie, but somebody stepped between.

I think I looked at her, wondering how she knew, for she said,— "A piece of rock has struck you, and I am afraid you are badly bruised."

I hadn't felt it before, but the pain got worse, till I didn't know how to walk. The rock must have been jagged, for it had torn my dress.

Then all of a sudden we were at the Rectory. I didn't dare to ask any questions, and I was sick with the pain: so Mrs. Kingscote made me sit down, and she loosened my dress and bathed the shoulder; and my arm below the shoulder was all swelled up. And then she made me drink something hot; I couldn't say what it was. After that I must have turned sleepy or stupid, I don't know which, nor for how long; for when I woke up wide in a fright, and longing to know more, it would be a good hour later. Mrs. Kingscote was gone, and only Miss Ellie sat by me, keeping watch; and I was on the sofa in the little workroom where the Rectory maids used to sit. I couldn't think how I'd come on the sofa, nor why I wasn't with my husband, and I sat up in a hurry and said, "Oh, I must go!"

"Wait, please, till my mother comes. Just one moment," said Miss Ellie.

"I can't wait," said I, all in a fever.

"But you don't know where anybody is," said she. "Wait just one moment;" and hardly was she out of sight before Mrs. Kingscote came in.

"Are you a little better now?" said she, and she sat down by me.

I couldn't answer, for it didn't seem to matter how I was. I wanted to hear about them, you know. I just looked at her hard, and I said—"Then they're killed!"

Mrs. Kingscote's blue eyes, which are every bit like Master Bertram's,—were, I ought to say, for eyes alter as people grow older— her eyes filled up with tears, and her soft hands took tight hold of mine, as if she did want to comfort me.

"Only—one," said she.

I think I cried out sharp at this, and I said, "Oh, not Jervis! Not my little Bessie!"

She didn't speak again directly, but one big tear after another came dropping fast, and her eyes kept filling up and filling up, and her hands wouldn't let mine go.

"Not Jervis!" I said again, and before I could go on she said—

"No, not your husband."

"Then—Bessie," said I; and I began to shake, like as if I had got the palsy.

"Think," said she, and she spoke soft—"think how much happier it is for your little Bessie there—there, in sweet Paradise with our Lord! Try to think of that most. Bessie will never have any more trouble to bear. She is safe for ever and ever in His keeping. Isn't that wonderful?" said she; and it did seem so. Her words took hold of me. "And by-and-by you will meet again, won't you?" said she. "It isn't very long to wait. Only a few years, and soon you will be able to feel glad, though I know how hard it is, for I have two little ones there."

Then there came up the thought of my Bessie's sweet look and loving ways, and how our home wouldn't be like home without her, and I did feel as if I couldn't bear it.

"I want to go to her," I said, and my voice sounded strange, like somebody else speaking. "I want to see her, please. Where is Bessie?"

"In Paradise, with our dear Lord," said she. "She has gone there just a little while before you."

But I wanted the little body that I loved; the little face and hands that had so often kissed and held and clung to me! And when I would not be persuaded, she took me into the big basement-room, where we were all to have had our tea together that afternoon. Little we'd thought of the use that room was to be put to.

There my little angel was, looking as if she was asleep, only so cold and pale. There was a great dented blow on one side of her forehead, where a cruel rock had struck and slain her. Only it had come so sudden, she had had no time to feel fear or pain, and the little lips were smiling still.

They had dressed her in a frilled nightgown of Miss Rosamund's, and had laid her on a small mattress, her little hands outside the sheet; and somebody had scattered a lot of white flowers all over and around her, and a white rosebud was in her fingers.

"You see, she did not suffer. It was all in a moment," said Mrs. Kingscote. While I stood looking, she stooped down to kiss the little thing, and I have always loved her since for that. It seemed to comfort me, and it made me able to cry; and the dear lady cried with me.

"It isn't for very long, you know," she said again. "Only a few years. And they will take such care of your little darling in Paradise. For our Lord Himself is there,—and the holy angels,—and so many who have gone away from earth. They are all full of love and kindness in Paradise, and she will not be lonely. And by-and-by she will be so glad when you go too."

I wondered if she thought I was sure to go, and why she should think it. But I could not speak nor ask questions. I could only cry and let her comfort me.

By-and-by I thought again of Jervis and my other children; and then she led me back to the workroom.

"Miles and Rosie are not hurt at all," she said. "And Louey will soon be better, I hope." She seemed to know all the names quite well "Miles was so good and brave—he saved my boy's life. We shall never never forget that."

She went on to tell me about my husband's state, breaking it gently. It seems that just before the fall of the cliff, Bessie had got off my husband's knee, and gone a few yards out from the cliff—not far enough to save her life; and yet it might have been, but for that one blow on the head, for she was covered over chiefly with earth and sand, and wasn't much hurt in any other part. My husband hadn't moved; and he was terribly crushed by the fall of the rock, though just so far sheltered by the overhanging cliff as not to be buried under the heaviest part; and so he was not killed. But it couldn't be known yet whether he would recover. He had not opened his eyes, nor made any sound, nor given any sign of sense, since first he was found.

Near the Rectory was a tiny little house, hardly bigger than a cottage, where a nice woman lived, named Mrs. Coles. She was the very same that Master Bertram meant when he talked of "Old Nurse;" though I never could see what he meant by saying she and I were alike. She'd been years in service to Mr. Kingscote's mother, and had had the care of him all through his childhood; and when Mr. and Mrs. Kingscote came to live at Ermespoint, nothing would content them but finding a home for Mrs. Coles there too. She'd been settled in near a month; and she'd got three little rooms which she was to let as lodgings to somebody or other, only she hadn't found any lodgers yet. So, by Mr. Kingscote's order, Jervis and Louey had been taken straight to her, Mr. Kingscote knowing she'd do well for them both. Mrs. Coles was a good nurse, and had had a deal of experience; and though she was getting oldish, she had plenty of work in her still.

Miles was gone with his father, and Rosie was in the Rectory nursery.

It did seem to me I'd ought to have been with Jervis all this while; but Mrs. Kingscote told me I was too ill at the first. She said I should go now as soon as I liked, only I must have some tea first; and she didn't think my shoulder would let me do much for a day or two. Which seemed likely enough, for when I moved the pain turned me sick, though the doctor had seen me and said there wasn't any bones broken.

While I drank my tea Mrs. Kingscote sat and talked with me, as kind as could be. Going back to Littleburgh couldn't

of course be thought of yet, she said. Jervis couldn't be moved, and I shouldn't wish to leave him. If I liked, her husband would write for me to Jervis' employers.

Those weren't such days for clubs as these; but my husband belonged to a "Benefit" Society, and I knew we should have fifteen shillings or so coming in weekly while he was disabled—at least for a certain time. Still, I didn't see how we were to get along; and the lady seemed to understand my thought. "We shall help you," she said, "and I think we can find some work for your boy. We will look after you all," said she, "just as you looked after my boy when he needed it. I don't forget that!—or Miles saving his life!" and her eyes filled up again. "Don't you see, it seems as if you and we were bound together?" And I couldn't but thank her, and say how good she was to talk so. I won't say I wasn't proud of Miles in all my sorrow.

"There's just one thing more, Mrs. Murchison," said she. "I want you to say a kind word to my poor boy before you go. It's asking a great deal, just now when you are so tried, but he is almost heart-broken, because it was he who led you all under the cliffs, and he seems to feel as if in a way it lay at his door. But he had no idea of the danger. If he had, he wouldn't have taken his own sisters, you know."

"Nobody could blame the young gentleman, ma'am," said I. "It was just his kindness; and he was as ignorant as we were."

"I knew you would feel so," said she. And then she said, "It was my boy who put all those flowers. He is so upset. You will speak to him while I go to get my bonnet?"

As soon as she was gone Master Bertram came in, and, dear me, he was altered. He had grown as pale!—and all the fun gone out of his eyes. He just dragged himself in, as if he was so tired he could hardly walk, and he stood by me, and he said, "I didn't know there was danger, Mrs. Murchison. I'd have cut off my right arm sooner than—"

"I'm sure you would, sir," said I. "It wasn't your fault, no more than mine."

"If you'll believe me," says he—just as if I was accusing him. "And poor little Bessie—" says he. But he couldn't get on, and his face went as white as paper, and he sat down and dropped it on his hands, like he'd done in the train.

"She's better off, sir," I tried to say, though it was all I could do.

"If only I could have saved her," says he, fetching a long breath.

"I know you would, sir," said I, and the tears were running down my cheeks. He didn't cry, but I could see his chest heaving up and down with the struggle not to give in. "I'm afraid it's made you ill again, sir," said I, for he did look bad.

"Oh, that's nothing," says he, sighing. "If only—Don't tell mother. She's going with you. And if your husband—" But all at once he couldn't stand any more. There was a sort of sound like a sob, and he jumped up and was gone before I could say a word. Master Bertram never was one who could bear to be seen crying; and I suppose he wouldn't have cried, whatever he felt, if he hadn't been in a weak state of body. It's wonderful how ashamed young gentlemen are of it's

being known they ever shed a tear. It's a sort of pride with them to seem not to mind. Master Bertram always was such a one for carrying everything off with a high hand, so to say; but that day he was knocked down, and no mistake.

Then Mrs. Kingscote came in, and she didn't ask any questions, but just set off with me for Mrs. Coles' cottage.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW.

MRS. KINGSCOTE'S STORY.

I HAVE persuaded my friend, Mrs. Murchison, to put down on paper certain recollections of certain events which happened a few years since—not easily, since she is diffident, and not aware of her own unusual powers. But at last she yielded, and a beginning is made which she has shown to me. My impulse, thereupon, is to fill up certain gaps in her story; adding particulars, for my own pleasure, which she has omitted.

"Friend," I call her; and why not? Though we occupy different positions in life, that need be no bar to friendship. Somebody has defined friendship to be "a strong and habitual inclination in two people to promote the good of one another"—an inclination springing, of course, from mutual love. Well, I love Mrs. Murchison, and Mrs. Murchison loves me; I would do aught I could for the good of Mrs. Murchison, and she would do aught she could for my good. Moreover, I trust Mrs. Murchison, and Mrs. Murchison trusts me. I understand Mrs. Murchison, and Mrs. Murchison understands me. What does all this mean, if not friendship?

It is a true and tried friendship also; not an affair of last week. Years have passed, and many things have happened since the day when Mrs. Murchison, with her husband and children, came down for a few hours from Littleburgh to Ermespoint, fully intending to return the same evening. How powerless we are to carry out our intentions, unless God wills that we should! How seldom, as we go through life,

have we the least idea of what lies ahead! A precipice may be just three steps in advance, yet we often do not see it until we are on the brink. All this would be very terrible, if we did not know that our steps are guided and guarded by a Father's Hand. If He conducts to the precipice-edge, then all is well. Nay, even if He bids us plunge over— to death—what is it but a swift and sure passage Home? I mean, with those who know and love and obey Him.

We had not been long at Ermespoint, and the house was still in confusion. My boy, Bertram, was expected home that day; and Ellie and I went to meet him at the station. He was just sixteen, and very delicate, from the effects of a severe illness some months earlier. He came rushing to us, out of the train, full of spirit as usual, and poured out a hurried jumble about having been "taken rather" on the way, and somebody having been "so good" to him.

It was difficult to make out exactly what he meant; but I followed him across the platform to the little group of excursionists.

"You've got to thank her, mother," Bertram whispered energetically.

The picture comes back to me now, as I recall that day. A strong broad-built working-man, respectful and respectable, in his Sunday suit, holding by the hand one of the prettiest little children I have ever seen—poor tiny Bessie! She had the sweetest face, so shy and smiling. Two other children and a biggish boy were there; but after Bessie, I noticed chiefly the mother. She was young-looking still,

though over thirty-five in age; and remarkable for her extreme neatness and sobriety of dress, together with a gentle placid anxious face—placid and anxious together. That was curious. A rather thin face, but not too thin, not long or bony; with high cheek-bones, and deep-set tender wistful eyes; while the mouth was quiet, yet disposed to be tremulous. Something about Mrs. Murchison won my trust and my liking on the spot.

Only a few words were exchanged between us then; but Bertram said he would find them later on the shore; and he gave me no peace till I promised to have the whole family in to tea in the basement-room. We were still so busy, unpacking and arranging, and the house was in so much confusion, that I confess I did hesitate for a few minutes. It seemed to me that the maids had enough to do. However, I knew they never minded anything if it were for Bertram,—he was always such a favourite,—and I gave way, though only on condition that he would stay quietly indoors till after lunch.

Then he went out with Ellie and Rosamund; and what follows Mrs. Murchison has to a great extent told—better, I am sure, than I could, for she has an extraordinary memory for conversations. I could not repeat one tenth part of what I said to her that sorrowful day; but she says it is all correct. Sometimes I tell her she makes up out of her own head; and then she smiles and shakes the said head, and answers only, "You know better, ma'am." So I do: she is true to the backbone, and her memory is as true as herself.

We had been so short a time in Ermespoint, and so busy while there, as to have had little leisure yet for learning much about it. Ellie and Rose had been down to the beach several times, but only near at hand—except just once, the day before, when old nurse and they went along the shore under the west cliff; and they came back full of the beauty of the place. My husband took a stroll the same way in the evening; and he spoke, on his return, of the remarkable overhanging of the cliffs. But still he had no thought of danger. No warning-boards were up; and it seemed inconceivable that people should be quietly left to run into such peril, without a word being said to hinder them.

We did not know till later that warning-boards had once been up, and had been removed,—nobody could precisely say by whom or for what reason. No doubt it was for the interest of certain bathing-machine owners, that people should not be frightened away; yet if that were all—! One finds it difficult to believe in such selfishness—such recklessness of human life!

However—so things were, and remonstrances had been made by one or two gentlemen living at Ermespoint without avail. My husband's predecessor tried to rouse people to a sense of the danger; but nobody would listen, or at least nobody cared to act. I suppose it was hopeless, until somebody's life should be forfeited, and poor little Bessie was the victim. It might have been all the Murchisons, and all my children, if the landslip had come just half-an-hour earlier, when the whole party were close up under the cliff.

I never can look back to that day without a shudder; thinking how Philip and I might have been left childless. We had lost two little ones already; and if the three others had been taken—But mercifully we were spared!

I don't know how I told Mrs. Murchison of little Bessie's death. It was one of the most terrible things I have ever had to do. She seems to remember all I said, but I do not. I only remember her look,— the sad despairing certainty that one was gone; the longing and the dread to know which; the bitterness of that sorrowful cry,—"Oh, not Jervis! Oh, not my Bessie!"—then the strange quiet with which she listened to my poor attempts to comfort; and the patient begging to go to her child. Perhaps that did her good! the little one looked so unutterably sweet.

And then she was enough herself to be able to try and comfort my poor broken-down Bertram. The boy had been in such an agony, blaming himself for taking them all to that part of the beach, talking as if the little one's death lay at his door. I sent him to her when I was not in the room; but he was gone again before I returned.

Nurse Coles' new little home was very near; not a hundred yards from our garden gate. If it had been more, Mrs. Murchison could hardly have walked so far.

We had had Nurse Coles near us for years, ever since she had been out of a place, and we thought then that she would remain near us always. She was devoted to my husband, and to all of us; a good faithful servant of the old type. She belonged to us, and we to her; her interests were ours, and ours were hers.

My husband was on the beach almost immediately after the fall of rock took place: for the news spread like wildfire, and he happened to be passing near. He thought of Nurse Coles' rooms the first thing, and when Murchison and little Bessie were dug out, he had poor Murchison taken at once to Mrs. Coles, as well as Louey; while I think it was my thought to have little Bessie's body brought to our basement-room. But everything at first seemed in such a strange confusion.

Murchison was still unconscious when we reached the cottage, and the doctor was only just gone, and Nurse Coles was tending him.

"It was a bad case," she whispered to me; "the poor fellow was so frightfully crushed and hurt all over; two ribs and one arm broken, and both head and back injured—nobody could say how much."

"Is there any hope for him?" Mrs. Murchison asked; and I saw that she had overheard every word.

Nurse Coles shook her head dubiously.

"The doctor didn't say. She didn't suppose he could tell yet. It was a bad case, any how, and they'd got a long bout of nursing before them."

CHAPTER V.

RESULTS.

MRS. KINGSCOTE'S STORY—(continued).

IT was only under the first shock of the accident that Bertram was so entirely overcome as to show fully what he felt. I hardly knew what to do with the boy; he was so overpowered with remorse, for having unwittingly guided the poor Murchisons into danger. Yet nobody could justly blame him. The little talk with Mrs. Murchison, from which I had hoped so much, seemed rather to add to his distress. Her look of patient sorrow impressed him, I suppose, as it had impressed me.

When I reached home, after leaving her with her husband at Mrs. Coles', Ellie told me that she had seen nothing of Bertram meanwhile. He had gone straight to his room, she said, and had not since come out. "And I thought he mightn't like me to go to him," she added.

No; he would not like that, if he were overcome, I knew well. In a general way he could not endure that even I, his mother, should see him shed a tear. He had always such a spirit of his own. So I told Ellie she was right; and I went upstairs, not without hesitation.

But the door was not locked; and when I tapped, he at once said, "Come in." I found him on the bed, pale and restless, tossing to and fro, the picture of misery.

"I'm only seedy. It's nothing, mother," he said, with a husky attempt at a laugh. "Just a little—like what I was in the train."

"Poor Bertie!" I said.

"Oh, it's nothing—only stupidity," he declared again. "I shall be all right by-and-by,"—and then he could hardly get out the question—"How are they?"

"Louey is better," I said. "Murchison much the same. Not conscious yet. I fear he may not be—perhaps for some days. And Mrs. Murchison—"

I suppose my voice expressed the pity I was feeling; for Bertram turned his face away, and buried it in the pillow. I could see him shaking with the sobs that he would smother down; but I knew I must not make him give way. He would not like afterward to remember that he had done so: and presently he looked at me again, outwardly composed, only much flushed.

"Mother, why do such things happen?" he burst out.

My sunny-tempered boy had never asked this question before. He had always had a happy spirit, and a happy home; and I do not think bodily suffering on his own part would ever have drawn it from him; though he had known, off and on, much ill-health. But so far he had seen little of sorrow; he had not been brought face to face with the great realities of life and death—the great underlying mysteries of our present existence. I knew what it meant, when he broke into that passionate question, "Why do such things happen?" and I answered him slowly—

"I don't know, altogether, Bertie. Some reasons are beyond our reach. But it is partly because men are selfish and thoughtless. If proper warning had been given, nobody need have been hurt."

"If we had known," he said.

"But others did know; and they are responsible."

"I wouldn't be they!" he muttered. "It's bad enough as it is."

I tried to make him see that, while he could not but feel distressed, no real responsibility attached itself to him. As a complete stranger to the place, he could not possibly have known or guessed the danger. Even my husband, after one walk under the cliffs, had not thought of forbidding the children to go there. He had only noticed as curious the remarkable overhanging of the rock. I suppose, if Philip had been a scientific man, he would have read more clearly the state of things; but then he never was scientific. Whatever there is in Bertram of a scientific tendency, he inherits from my family, not from his father's. But I am wandering from the point.

I did my best to make poor Bertie see this,—how completely he was himself free from blame in the matter; how entirely blame belonged to those who did know of the danger, and who omitted to warn others off.

"You mean that poor little Bessie was killed, because they didn't care?" he said.

"Yes, I mean that," I said, "for one side of the question. Only one side. There is another!"

He asked listlessly, "What side? I don't see it."

"Perhaps our Lord wanted little Bessie in Paradise," I said softly. "And perhaps it was better for her not to be left longer on earth."

"I don't see why," he murmured.

"No need that we should see why. We have not the settling of it," I said. "We know so little about the real reasons of things; or about the future of those we love. It is enough to trust the love and wisdom of our God. Even though some are to be blamed for her death, it may still be the very best and happiest thing for her to have been called Home so early."

"Wouldn't it be best for everybody, if you look at it in that way, mother?"

"No," I said; "certainly not. Not even though it is 'far better' to be 'with Christ,' and though Paradise is far better than earth. God has work for most of us here, and it is not good for us to go until that work is done. For some it may be that He has work there, and not here."

All this comes back to me with the help of a few written notes jotted down at the time. It has been a habit of mine to keep memoranda of certain conversations,—generally with my children only. If I had not done so, this talk, like many others, might have faded quite out of my memory.

Bertram seemed to be a little comforted; and then I told him of a plan for Miles,—that he should be, for a time at least, our under-gardener.

"How good of you and father! That's capital!" he said. "Miles is a jolly boy!"

"You and we owe him much," I said.

"Yes, it was so plucky of him. I wonder we didn't both get killed,— it was such a thundering big rock, you know," declared Bertram, oddly trying to seem indifferent the moment he was able to master himself. And then there was a

sigh. "Doesn't it seem horrid that he should have saved me from being hurt, and that I should have brought all this upon them!"

So then we had to go through it all again, and I had to comfort him afresh.

However, I think the idea of Miles working under old Nichols did him most good, by diverting his thoughts into a new channel. He was able soon to wonder what old Nichols would say, and to laugh at the thought of our aged retainer's probable grumpiness.

Not that Nichols was really so old. I suppose he was under fifty-five at that time, though anybody would have taken him for sixty-five at least. He was stooping and slow, grey and wrinkled. He had been a member of our household for twelve years, and of my father's household for fifteen years before that; so Nichols was entirely one of us, and he never hesitated to show what he thought.

The possibility of his "grumpiness" had occurred to me already. Nichols knew that we intended to get help for him; and he was not at all gratified, even while perfectly well aware that he could not do all the work alone. Our Ermespoint garden was more than twice as large as our former garden, and Nichols was becoming each year less capable of hard work. Still, having done alone for us during so many years, it was perhaps not surprising that he disliked the notion of any interloper.

My husband was so busy next day that I undertook to explain to Nichols about the new arrangement. He listened

solemnly, his under lip protruding, and his shaggy eyebrows drawn together.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, when I stopped, and he said no more.

"I am sure you will find it a great comfort in a little while," I said. "Miles will be here distinctly to help you, and to do whatever you tell him. I think you will find him quick and willing."

"Can't abear boys," growled Nichols. "More trouble than they're worth."

"Still, the work has to be done," I said, "and you cannot do it alone. I doubt if you would care to have a man to help you, even if we could undertake the expense."

No, indeed; Nichols would have objected to a man far more than to a boy, and I knew this well. He mumbled something about "bother of teaching."

Of course it would be a little bother; but then Nichols was not lazy, and I told him so. No doubt, a boy already trained in gardening and in the care of a pony, would be less trouble than a boy who knew almost nothing of either. But there was the question of the Murchisons' need— the pressing necessity that Miles should find something to do. Even if he should, later on, go into his father's trade, which I then thought probable, he had to do what he could for the moment to bring in something; and he would be none the worse in the end for a short training under Nichols. I explained all this, adding, "Besides, think of the boy's courage in saving Master Bertram. That ought to make you willing to take a little extra trouble."

Not even Nichols' love for our Bertram would make the old fellow acknowledge himself in the wrong. What he had once said, that he would stick to, with the obstinacy of an unreasoning mind. However, he understood that, whether he were willing or no, the thing had to be. I wondered privately how the two would get on together. Some patience would be needed on the part of Miles, for Nichols could be surly.

During the first two or three days, matters were not as I wished. Nichols insisted on doing everything himself; and Miles could be seen standing about, unoccupied and rather unhappy. If he offered to do this or that, he was sharply desired to "mind his own business." Once I said to the boy, "Patience, Miles. It will all come right." Further than this I would not at once interfere. Things are sometimes best left to settle themselves.

Bertram was indoors for nearly a week after the accident, thoroughly unwell, but no sooner was he able to go out again, than affairs took a new aspect. If Miles were for a moment unemployed, Bertie was sure to rush up, exclaiming, "You don't want Miles just now, I see, so he can come and do something for me."

"I suppose he isn't here, sir, for nought but play," Nichols would retort, immediately setting Miles to work; and very soon Miles had as much to do as he could manage. He proved himself so apt and obliging, that Nichols speedily learnt his value, and the two became firm friends.

Still, I think that even then the real strength of Miles' affection went out towards Bertram. Everybody loved Bertie, and Miles was no exception. If Bertie wanted him, and

Nichols was in a mood to make no objection, the boy's face would gleam with delight. Bertie liked Miles greatly; and the two boys drew together, much after the same fashion that Mrs. Murchison and I drew together; belonging indeed to different positions in life, yet none the less each loving and trusting the other.

But I must speak now of poor Murchison, lying helplessly on his bed. A few days brought him back to clear consciousness; and though his head was weak still, from the blow it had received, improvement in that direction was pretty steady, and the broken bones were slowly mending. In other directions matters were less satisfactory. There was a marked powerlessness of the lower limbs,—whether likely to be permanent no one could or would say. Dr. Wray seemed reluctant to give a decided opinion; yet I thought from the first that he was not very hopeful.

Murchison had two devoted nurses—Mrs. Coles and his wife. My husband took care that Coles should be no loser; and indeed for many weeks we undertook nearly all the expense of rent for the lodgings. This could not, of course, go on indefinitely. Our purse had many and heavy calls upon it, and we were paying Miles beyond his real due, so far as his powers of work were concerned.

Happily, the little home at Littleburgh had found a tenant, otherwise I do not know how the Murchisons would have managed to get on, despite our help and Miles' earnings.

For a while it seemed to me that Mrs. Murchison hardly realised how the days were slipping by, and how slight was

the improvement in her husband's state, until one particular afternoon when the whole appeared to come upon her sharply, like a fresh blow. I had seen her in the morning, anxious, yet placid, able to smile and be pleased when I told her how we all liked Miles. Later in the day I went again, to find her alone, seemingly overwhelmed. I cannot forget the hollow look of misery in her eyes, as she stood gazing at me.

"He will never get well, ma'am," she said quietly, with the quiet of despair, "never! Jervis asked the doctor himself, and I was there. The doctor didn't say just that, you know, but he meant it. He said it would be long—long—and he bid my husband not look forward."

"No," I said, "I don't think either of you ought to look forward too much just now. 'Day by day' must be your motto."

"But if it's to be always?" she said.

"You cannot tell that it is to be always," I answered. "Don't be sure that you know what the doctor meant, beyond what he said."

"I couldn't help knowing, ma'am, and Jervis knows too," she said. "Dr. Wray is a kind man. He's young, but he's uncommon kind. He said he made no doubt my husband would get better; only he couldn't promise he'd ever be up to hard work again. He said he wouldn't be the man he had been. And Jervis says to him, 'Shall I be able to walk?' and the doctor said he couldn't promise; time might do a deal, but he couldn't promise. And when the doctor was gone, Jervis says, 'I know what that means, Annie. I'm a cripple for life,' says he. And then he groaned, like as if he'd break his heart,

and he says, 'I'd better have died; a deal better,' says he. And I came away, for I couldn't stand it, ma'am. If the trouble's got to be, it's got to be borne; but, oh, it's hard! He's been a good husband to me; God bless him!"

I don't know how much more she said, but she came to a stop suddenly, and hid her face, rocking to and fro. I heard her whisper, "My husband's all alone."

"I will go to him," I said; and before I went I said just a few words of sympathy,—something about how God loved them both, and would care for them still, and how she must try to rest her troubles on Him. Then I passed on to the room behind.

He looked up at me, poor fellow, in his helplessness: a kind of sad protesting look, yet braver than hers, not so crushed.

"My poor little woman is terrible upset, ma'am," he said. "The doctor's let it out at last. Not but what I've been pretty sure."

I sat down by him, and said—

"I could wish you had not asked yet."

"Think so, ma'am? I don't know as it's any good not knowing." Then he said, in almost his wife's words, "If a thing's got to be—"

"If God wills it for you, then you will be willing too," I said.

"Ay, that's a better way of putting it," he said. "But I won't deny it's hard to bear. It is hard!" and his face showed what he felt. "Me, that's always been so strong, and maybe I've thought too much of my strength; me to come down to

this, and be a burden on them I'd ought to work for! It is hard."

"But you do not really know that it will be so always," I said. "The doctor did not say that."

"He said he couldn't promise I'd ever be up and about again."

"No," I said, "he cannot promise that. Still, he did not say positively that you never could or would. He only spoke doubtfully. You must try to leave the matter as he left it. There is room for prayer and for hope."

"And hope's a wonderful help," Murchison said, almost cheerfully. "Yes, thank you, ma'am, I'll try to hope." Then he added, "But my poor little woman!"

So he thought most of her in this trouble, and she thought most of him. I could but wish that all husbands and wives were like-spirited.

CHAPTER VI.

A STEP ONWARD.

MRS. MURCHISON'S STORY.

AFTER once I got to Mrs. Coles' cottage that first day, I don't seem to have but a dim memory of what came next. Looking back to those weeks, is like looking at a lot of trees ever so far off, which all run and mix together, so that one can't see them apart. Ever so many things happened, but I can't rightly piece them out.

I know Louey got better soon, and was up and about again. And I know one day my little Bessie was taken away, and laid to rest in the Churchyard. And I know Miles began to work at the Rectory under old Nichols, which wasn't the manner of life I'd expected for my boy, and yet it seemed we'd no choice. And I know I had a deal of pain in my shoulder, before I got over the blow I'd had. And I know how good and kind Mr. and Mrs. Kingscote were, coming in and out, and giving me a lot of help that I was ashamed to take it.

It wasn't many days before my husband's sense came back, and I know what joy it was to be told that his head wasn't much hurt; not near so much as we'd feared at first. I thought he'd get well fast, and everything would soon be all right again.

Then, as time went on, it seemed odd he didn't get back strength in his legs—for he didn't. He had no more strength in them than a baby; no, nor near so much, for he couldn't stir either. He wasn't able to lift his head from the pillow, for all it was grown sensible again, and he'd little enough power in the arm that wasn't broken. It was natural he should be

weak, and I wasn't surprised; but it did surprise me that when he began to seem better in himself, there was no manner of change in the helplessness.

I didn't see what it meant, though Jervis did, till one day, all of a sudden, he put the question to the doctor, whether he would ever be able to walk again.

Dr. Wray was young still, and a kindhearted gentleman as ever I saw. He didn't like to trouble us, that was plain. And yet he wouldn't say what wasn't true. But I seemed to know what he meant, and Jervis was sure.

It was like a great black cloud coming down, and shutting off all joy in the rest of our life,—like to the blackness that came while I was on the beach watching for my husband and child to be dug out. I couldn't see any lightening of it, nor any hope.

Jervis to be a cripple for life! That was what seemed so terrible to me. I didn't scarcely know how to face the thought. He'd been always so good, and taken such care of me and the children. And now he had to be cared for like a baby. And it would be so always! It never could be anything else! I made up my mind to that, and it weighed me down. Mrs. Kingscote tried to make me feel I couldn't be sure. She said Dr. Wray hadn't said so much, which was true; and she said nobody could tell, which was true too. Doctors know a wonderful lot more than common folks, but they don't know everything, and they'd be the first to say so.

I couldn't take any comfort, though. It was worse to me than losing my little Bessie. For I could think of her as always happy and cared for; but if Jervis was to be a helpless

cripple, he'd be miserable, and I should be miserable, and there was no knowing what would become of us all.

I suppose there's hardly any sort of trouble that folks don't get in a manner used to as time goes on. Even if it's a trouble that changes everything, still one gets used to the change after a time, so as to bear it patient; and even if it's a burden always pressing, one learns to bear up better under the burden. Looking back, I could think it was a very long while before I was able to fit in with this trouble, and yet it couldn't have been so very long. The summer weather hadn't begun to fade before I was feeling almost as if he'd been years and years like that, and as if we'd never been used to depend on him.

And the wonderful thing was that Jervis didn't seem miserable, as I'd thought he would be. He didn't fret, or fuss, or worry, but just lay and looked happy. And for a good while I couldn't make it out. A strong active man like him, struck down all at once, and made as helpless as a baby; why, one wouldn't have been surprised if he'd broken his heart over it, or been cross, and fractious, and complaining. But he didn't; not he! There was never a word of grumbling, and never a sign of fretting. And it only came to me slowly that he wasn't so of himself, but that he was being taught and helped, and put through what Mr. Kingscote called "a school of patience."

It was wonderful how manly and thoughtful Miles grew, all of a sudden, after that first day at Ermespoint. Though hardly fifteen yet, he was growing tall and big; and I'm sure

he might have been twenty, by the way he cared for his father, and tried to save me trouble.

I won't say but what it was a grief to me that he shouldn't go into the trade. When he had talked of wanting a country life, I had sometimes wanted it too for him, but not anything of this sort. I hadn't looked for my Miles to be, so to speak, in service. Yet there didn't seem to be anything else we could do. He was earning more than he could have earned any other way; and the boy himself said it was right. I wondered sometimes what Jervis thought, for I had asked no questions, not liking to worry his head while it was weak.

But one day, after many weeks, when he was getting better and stronger every way, except that he'd little or no power yet over his legs, he said to me—

"So Miles has his wish, after all. Are you pleased, Annie?" says he.

"No," says I; "it isn't what I'd have chosen for the boy. And you know that," says I.

"Maybe the boy wouldn't choose it for himself now," says he.

"I didn't know," I said. Miles was happy enough I could see. He liked flowers, and he liked the pony; and he would do anything in the world for Master Bertram.

"Well, it don't seem we've much choice yet awhile," says Jervis. "They'd have him in the works at Littleburgh; but he wouldn't earn what he's earning now, and you couldn't do with less."

"And you don't mind?" says I, wondering to myself. He had such a peaceful sort of look.

"It don't do no good to worry," says he; "only makes other folks wretched. I'm laid here, and I've got to lie here, just as long as God tells me to. That's where it is, Annie," says he. "Seems to me, I've learnt a deal lying here, and I shouldn't wonder if I've got more to learn."

"More of what?" says I.

"More of God's love, and more of God's will," says he. "It's uncommon little I've known till now. And I'm sure of one thing," says he; "I'm sure God will take care of my little woman for me, now I can do nothing."

Then he wanted to know what I was thinking of doing; and the wonder had been often enough in my own mind. For of course we couldn't go on much longer in these lodgings, letting Mr. Kingscote pay so much for us. He had spoken of doing it three months, and the three months were running fast away.

I'd some thoughts that we might get a little cottage, I said, quite a small one, and farther back from the sea, where rents were lower. And there, with Miles' earnings, and what I could make by fine needlework, we should get on. At least I hoped so. I didn't speak out my doubts and fears, and Jervis seemed to have none.

"It'll be all right," says he. "Shouldn't wonder if the cottage is waiting for us."

But I'd got the burden of it all on me, and I was tired with long nursing, and I didn't feel near so hopeful.

I couldn't see the way to our getting on at all; and sometimes, when I was alone, I had a good cry, thinking of what lay before us.

CHAPTER VII.

A PLACE FOR MILES.

MRS. MURCHISON'S STORY—(continued).

IT must have been one day not much later that Mr. Kingscote came in, as he often did come in, and sat down for a chat. He was rather a short gentleman, not quite so tall as his wife, and thin, and very quiet. And though he wasn't like Master Bertram in face, he'd got a way of laughing like Master Bertram.

"I don't want to see your husband yet," said he, "I want a few words with you first." And then he asked the very question Jervis had asked,—"What was I thinking of doing?"

"For I suppose it is time we should face matters," said he. "Don't you think so, Mrs. Murchison? We can't expect to see your husband a great deal better at present, I'm afraid."

I know I got very red and flustered, and felt ashamed; for it seemed to me he thought I'd been taking his help too easy, and going on too long without talking of a change. And I tried to say so, and couldn't get out the words, for I was near crying. And when I looked up, his eyes had the funniest look—like Master Bertram in a mischievous mood.

"Now what does all this mean?" said he.

"I thought," said I—and the tears began to come again—"I—"

"Oh yes, you thought," said Mr. Kingscote, smiling. "You thought what?"

"I thought, perhaps, I'd let you help me too long. But, indeed, sir—"

"Quite a mistake," said he. "Three months was the time I named for paying part of your rent, and it isn't three months yet. I would be glad to make it six," said he, "but I must think of others who need help, for I haven't a very deep purse. And perhaps it would not be quite right for yourselves. There's plenty of time, and you needn't think I'm going to throw you overboard," said he. "But it's best we should come to some conclusion, eh?"

I said "Yes;" and I tried to look cheerful.

"That's right," said he. And then he told me—what was news to me—that Mrs. Coles didn't want to go on living in this little house. A nephew of hers had come home unexpected from abroad, and he wanted to have her to live with him, and Mrs. Coles was minded to go. She didn't like to part from Mr. and Mrs. Kingscote, but the nephew was a favourite nephew, and her own flesh and blood, and he'd had a lot of trouble, and wanted her. So when she'd talked things over with Mr. Kingscote, she took his advice, and settled to go.

Then the question was, Would we like to stay on in the little house and do as she'd meant to do? The rent was more than we should have to give for a cottage further inland, but then we could let well in the summer months, and make more than enough to pay our whole year's rent. I knew this, because again and again people had come to ask, and if we hadn't been there Mrs. Coles would have let the rooms easily. And if I made people comfortable, and the house got a good name, why, we might be full pretty near all the year round, except just in the depth of winter.

Of course it would mean a lot of work, and I had my husband to see to. But then I never was one to mind work, and Louey would soon be able to give me ever so much help. Even Rosie, though she was only nine, could dust a room as nice as possible, and answer the bell, and wash up, when she wasn't at school.

Mr. Kingscote put the matter before me, and said he'd like me to think it over. He didn't want me to settle in a hurry, and he didn't want to decide for me, but he did think it sounded a hopeful plan.

"And you may be sure, Mrs. Murchison," said he, "well do our best to find you lodgers."

I was sure of that, and in my heart I'd no doubt the thing was to be, though I only thanked him, and said I'd see what Jervis thought.

"And now there's something else," said he. "I'm rather thinking of dismissing Miles, and getting another boy in his place."

Well, that did startle me; and if it hadn't been for Mr. Kingscote looking funny, I should have been in a fright. But I saw he meant something or other that wasn't bad, and I said, "Yes, sir;" not a word more.

"You don't mind that, do you?" said he.

I didn't know what to say, except that I couldn't think Miles had done anything so very wrong; and I didn't see how we were to get on without his earnings.

"No; that's the thing,—just what I told Mr. Laurence," said he.

Then he asked me if I had ever seen Mr. Laurence, and I couldn't say I had not. Miles had told me of the old gentleman who was often in at the Rectory, and who seemed so fond of Master Bertram—as who wasn't?—and he had pointed him out to me in Church. And though I said, "Sh-sh," and told the boy after I did dislike to have people whispering and looking about in Church, when they'd ought to be occupied with better things, still I couldn't help seeing Mr. Laurence, for he was just in front of me, and uncommon-looking, and I'd noticed him before, not knowing his name. And I felt an interest in seeing him too, because he'd been kind to my Miles, and had asked him a lot of questions, and told him things he wanted to know. He lived in a biggish house, all alone; and he had a beautiful garden, and he was very clever, and he wrote learned books, and he had telescopes and microscopes, and all sorts of wonderful things.

"Yes, sir; I've seen him," said I.

Then Mr. Kingscote told me that Mr. Laurence had taken quite a fancy to my Miles. "He is struck with the boy's intelligence, and with his nice modest manners," Mr. Kingscote said, and anybody can guess how pleased I was. "He has been looking out for some time for a boy, to be trained as his helper,—a really careful trustworthy lad,—and he thinks Miles might be the very boy."

I asked what sort of work it would be, and Mr. Kingscote said he could hardly tell. It would mean the cleaning and handling of instruments and telescopes, needing a lot of care, and helping in some sorts of experiments, and

having to do with books, and any sort of thing that was wanted. If the boy worked well, he might rise to a trusted position, and be of great value to Mr. Laurence. Everything would depend on how he took to the work. Mr. Laurence was getting elderly; and he wanted some young fellow to be a help to him when old age should come.

He had talked this all over with Mr. Kingscote; and Mr. Kingscote had told him how quick and clever and attentive Miles was. He told him, too, how much we depended on the boy's earnings: so Mr. Laurence had offered to give the same for the first year, and to raise the sum at the year's end, if Miles did well.

"I cannot think you would be wise to refuse," Mr. Kingscote said. "Mr. Laurence is in a position to help your boy on, and he likes him. Partly, no doubt for Miles' own sake; partly for his courage in saving my son from injury. Mr. Laurence is godfather to Master Bertram, as perhaps you know. It is quite a different line of life from your husband's, but I imagine that it is one for which Miles is well adapted. However, you must consider the matter, and let me know your decision."

It didn't take a great deal of considering after all, and Miles was wild to go. "Mother, I'll be able to learn everything there," he cried. And I wondered where he got his love of learning from: for Jervis, though a first-rate workman, was no such great scholar. But then, to be sure, I always did love books, and wish I'd more time for them.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TALK WITH MR. LAURENCE.

MILES' STORY.

MOTHER seems to have come to a stop in her writing. She says she's too busy, and I don't see why I shouldn't take it up instead, till she gets the inclination again. I should like to tell how Mr. Laurence came to think of having me in his house.

Though it's years and years ago, I can remember so well the very first day I ever saw him. Most likely I'd passed him in Ermespoint before that, and hadn't noticed. It wasn't a large place, and he was always going about. But anyhow, I hadn't remarked him particularly.

It was one day, when I was working in the garden under Nichols. I had been watering some beds, and I saw Mr. Bertram coming along the path with an old gentleman. Not that he was old, really, only he had grey hair, and a great many wrinkles; and even middle-aged people seem old to a boy of fifteen. They came close to where I was, and Mr. Bertram said, "This is the boy, Mr. Laurence."

Mr. Laurence repeated the words,—"This is the boy!"—slowly. Then he said again, "This is the boy that saved your life."

I always do say too much was made of that. I hadn't a moment to think, one way or the other, and to pull somebody else out of danger was the natural thing for anybody who wasn't a downright coward. I don't think I ever was a coward. But in my eyes it wasn't so brave a deed as if I'd had time to

consider, and to know that I was putting my own life in danger. Not that I suppose I didn't know after a fashion, one thinks so quickly; but still, as I say, it was the natural thing to do for any lad of courage.

However, I suppose it's natural too that Mr. Bertram's friends should think more of it than I did, and I know they've never forgotten that moment. As for paying back, it's been paid back in kindness a hundred times to me and mine.

Well, when Mr. Laurence spoke so, Mr. Bertram said, "Didn't you, Miles?"

"It was a biggish piece of rock, sir," said I, for I didn't know what else to say.

"Thundering big," said he, in his quick way.

I don't know what there always was about Mr. Bertram that made everybody love him, but I know everybody did. When he was near, I couldn't keep my eyes off him.

Then Mr. Laurence came close, and he fixed on me a pair of bright eyes from underneath such shaggy eyebrows, and he said, "Why didn't you run away and save yourself, my boy? You might have been killed, trying to help my godson."

I'm not sure that I didn't laugh,—it seemed such a question to ask,— and I made an uncommonly stupid answer. "Mother wouldn't have liked it," I said.

"Ah!" said Mr. Laurence, with a curious look. "That's a wonderful check, isn't it? Quite right always to think of what your mother would like. And I'll tell you what, Somebody else wouldn't have liked it either. God wouldn't. We ought to be always ready to put ourselves in danger, if it's for the saving of somebody else."

Well, I saw Mr. Laurence any number of times after that. When Mr. Bertram was at home, he was often coming in; and even when Mr. Bertram was at school he never let a week pass without a call. Now and then, if he was walking through the garden, he would stop where I was, and would ask me a lot of questions, and sometimes he would get me to ask him questions, and he would answer them.

I never saw anybody who seemed to know such an amount about everything as Mr. Laurence. You couldn't ask him a question that took him by surprise. If he didn't know exactly what you wanted to hear, he would say so; but he always knew something about it. He had been reading hard, and studying hard, all his life, and this was the outcome. Not reading books only, but studying the things around him, and looking into Nature for himself, till it was wonderful the lot of knowledge that he had got together.

All my life I had been fond of books and of learning. I think I had that from my mother, and she often said she'd like to make a "scholar" of me. But it was seeing and hearing Mr. Laurence that first made me feel how little people in general know, and how much there is to be known, if only we would take the trouble to learn.

For the world around us is full of beautiful and extraordinary things, and the more we examine into them the more we see how beautiful and extraordinary they are; and yet ninety-nine men in a hundred walk through life blind and deaf to all they might see and hear.

One day, Mr. Laurence bade me look at the clouds,—white fleecy clouds,—scurrying over the sky, driven by a

sharp breeze; with little firm white clouds between, not seeming to move at all. I had not been noticing them, but when I began to look I saw all at once how beautiful they were, with the blue sky beyond.

"What are those clouds made of?" Mr. Laurence asked.

Of course I didn't know; how should I? Nobody had ever told me. I had never even heard the question put before.

"Those lower clouds, moving so quickly, are made of fine mist," said he; "mist like a thick fog, or like the thick white mist which cools out of the hot steam leaving the funnel of a steam-engine."

I had always thought that was smoke, and I said so.

Mr. Laurence shook his head, smiling. "People often make that mistake," he said. "It is not smoke, but mist, or cooled steam. It is made of fine floating particles or specks of water. Smoke is made of little floating particles of charcoal. Quite a different matter, you see."

He had a short clear sort of way of saying such things, which stuck firm in one's mind; and I used to think over his words afterward, and not forget them.

"But all those clouds may not be made of mist," he went on. "Those little white streaks, far beyond and not seeming to move, are most likely made of snow. Yes, even in summer," said he, as I couldn't help showing how astonished I was. "So high up in the air as that is always intensely cold. There can scarcely be a doubt that those little clouds are frozen."

Another day he came into the garden with a little stone in his hand, hard as rock, but marked like a shell. He showed it me, and said it really was a shell, only very very old, and

turned into stone. He called it a "fossil," which was a new word to me then.

"Where do you think I found this, Miles?" asked he.

"I don't know, sir," I said.

"Not on the sea-shore, but on the top of the cliff, buried deep. How do you think it came there?"

I couldn't tell, of course.

"Once upon a time, ages ago," said he, "those cliff-tops were under the waves. Not that the sea was higher, but that the land was lower. Once upon a time all England was deep under the sea, and the ground rose up very slowly to its present height. So you see how easily sea-shells can have become embedded in the highest rocks."

I had been doing a good deal of cloud-gazing for many days, picturing to myself how strange it was that all those wonderful shapes should be made of mist or snow. The next thing I did was to spend my spare time wandering about the cliffs, hunting for fossils above, or looking up from below and trying to fancy how all those heights had been once under the sea.

One day Mr. Laurence found me on the beach, busy in this way; and when he learnt what I was after he did seem pleased. "That's the way to get on," he said, "to study Nature for yourself, my boy." Then he pointed out to me the lines of old old sea-beaches, high up on the front of the cliff; where, as the land slowly rose, one part after another had been level with the sea. And he showed me how the cliffs were actually built up of tiny sand grains, once dropped upon the ocean's

floor, and gradually pressed into hard rock, ready to be heaved up into the big cliffs I could now see.

You may fancy how wonderful all this was to a boy who really loved to be taught, but who had never been in the way of any such learning before.

I used to go home, and tell it all to my mother, whenever she had time to attend to me; and of course she told Mrs. Kingscote what a lot I thought of all Mr. Laurence said, though I didn't know it at the time; and Mrs. Kingscote told Mr. Laurence. So he knew his words were not quite thrown away.

The next thing he did was to lend me little books on such subjects, which I could read to myself, and I got so full of them, that it was hard never to neglect my work. Old Nichols had a sharp eye on me, however, and my mother kept me up to the mark; so I wasn't allowed to fall into careless habits.

One other day, I can remember, about the same time, something had brought to my mind what Mr. Bertram had said about the tides, the very afternoon of the cliff-accident. I hadn't thought of it again since, and Mr. Bertram was gone back to school, so I could not speak to him; but next time Mr. Laurence offered to lend me a book, I scraped up courage to ask if it might be "something about the tides."

"What do you know about the tides?" he asked; and I told him what Mr. Bertram had said.

"If it isn't giving you trouble, sir," I said.

"No; no trouble," said he; "only it's a difficult subject for anyone to understand, without knowing a few other matters

first. But I'll try to find something readable for you." Then he asked: "What is it keeps the ocean in its bed? Why doesn't the sea pour all over the land?"

I had never thought of putting that question before; and I had to think. "Doesn't water always run downhill, sir?" said I; "and isn't it downhill into the ocean?"

"Good!" said he; "I like to see that you can think. And what makes water run downhill?"

"Isn't it—because it's heavy?" said I. "And what makes it heavy?" said he. There I was posed, and had no more to say. Mr. Laurence picked up an apple and let it drop.

"What makes that apple fall downward? Being heavy, you will say. But what makes it heavy? I will tell you. Because the earth attracts or draws it downward. The earth attracts everything to itself. The force of that attraction holds the ocean in its bed."

I asked him a lot of questions, and he told me a good deal more to make this clear.

"But the moon has power to attract as well as the earth," he said. "The moon cannot attract so strongly as to draw the ocean out of the bed; but it attracts strongly enough to draw up a great wave of sea-water which travels round and round the earth. Also, by drawing the body of the earth away from the other side, it makes another great wave there. Where these waves are it is high tide, and between them it is low tide."

All this comes back to me, the more clearly, I suppose, because of what followed. For before I could ask any more

questions, Mr. Laurence said suddenly, "You would like to spend your life studying these questions."

"I can't, sir; I've got to work," I said.

"My boy, there is no harder work than headwork," said he. "But you mean that you have to work so as to earn money for your parents, and you are right." Then he stood and thought. "I don't see why not," he said; "it's what I have been looking for."

"I don't understand, sir, please."

He laughed and said, "No, I dare say not;" and he didn't tell me any more that day. But a few days later, it came out what he'd been thinking about. He talked things over with Mr. Kingscote first, and Mr. Kingscote spoke to my mother, and then it was put before me.

Mr. Laurence wanted to find a boy to help him in his studies and researches; a quick and thoughtful boy, he said, really interested in such things as interested him. He wanted a boy whom he could trust to help clean his microscopes and telescopes, and other instruments; and to dust and arrange his books; and to keep in order his museum of curiosities; and to do all sorts of things that he wanted done. But also he meant such a boy to have time for study, and he meant to teach him; and he said that if he could find the right sort of boy, he might even some day train him into a sort of "secretary" to himself. That would all depend on what the boy was, of course.

"I had pretty nearly given up the hope of finding him," he said; "but if Miles is willing, I think Miles would do."

To make matters easy, he offered to give me for the first year exactly the same wages as I was receiving from Mr. Kingscote, and at the year's end, if I was growing useful to him, he would give me more.

Mother didn't seem to know what to think of the matter at first. She said I mightn't like it when I was there; and she didn't see that I was going to be trained for anything. But Mr. Kingscote told her she needn't be afraid, for Mr. Laurence knew what he was about, and he would not let me be a loser. He had helped forward many young fellows, Mr. Kingscote said, though without taking them into his house, which was what he wanted to do with me.

Mother thought a lot of what Mr. Kingscote said, and my father seemed to be willing, and I had set my heart on going: so it was soon arranged. I only had to wait till a boy had been found to do my work at the Rectory.

CHAPTER IX.

TRUSTWORTHINESS.

MILES' STORY—(continued).

IT was settled that I should make my home altogether at The Myrtles— which was the name of Mr. Laurence's house—because he wanted to have me always within call.

The first evening I got there, things did seem strange. The house was so big and quiet, and I seemed to belong to nobody. The servants' hall and kitchen were lively enough, no doubt, but I was told I had no business there, and I could see that the maids looked upon me with no friendly eyes. They didn't see what on earth I was come for, one of them said; and another muttered something about "one of master's new freaks," which was not over respectful.

However, I was not likely to interfere much with them, or they with me, since my work lay upstairs. I had a cosy bedroom all to myself, nicely fitted up—the first time I had ever slept alone in my life. My meals I was to take with the housekeeper, Mrs. Crane, in her sitting-room, and not in the servants' hall. Mr. Laurence had settled all this, in a way he'd got, which did not allow anybody to question his will. He always spoke very quietly, and never raised his voice; but nobody in the house dared go against him, when once he said a thing was to be.

Mrs. Crane made no complaint; but it was easy to see she didn't like the arrangement. She was tall and stout, and she commonly wore black silk, with a pile of red ribbons on her head. She moved about in a very slow dignified sort of way, and she had a pair of cold eyes which made me feel

uncomfortable whenever she fixed them on me, which was pretty often. I dare say it was a bore to have a strange boy set down at her table: though I can say one thing for myself, and that is, that I knew how to behave there, thanks to my mother, who'd always been so particular to teach us nice ways, and to cure us of ugly tricks. Everybody knew that if Mr. Laurence said a thing he meant it. Mrs. Crane was not obliged to stay, but if she stayed she had to do what Mr. Laurence chose, which was only fair and just, seeing she received his money, and ate his food, and was sheltered by his roof. She was much too wise to want to leave, and so she gave in; but all the same I could feel I wasn't welcome.

There were no indoor men-servants, for Mr. Laurence disliked the bother of them. The maids could all be under Mrs. Crane, but a man he would have had to manage himself. As it was, he just gave all his orders to the housekeeper, and held her responsible for what went wrong.

But with me he made a difference, having me with him, and giving me his orders direct from the first, which Mrs. Crane objected to.

I suppose I was in a rather difficult position—difficult because it was uncertain. I was not exactly one thing or the other—neither fish, flesh, nor fowl. I had to make my own standing as it were, and this could not be an easy matter for a boy of fifteen, brought up hitherto in a busy crowded little home, where all were on a level, and all knew and loved the rest.

After tea with Mrs. Crane—and a silent tea it was, scarcely a word passing between us—I was sent for to the

study, where Mr. Laurence commonly sat. It opened out of the great library, which was lined with books; and the museum, a biggish room, full of all sorts of curiosities, was on the other side of the library. The dining-room was beyond the hall, and so was the drawing-room, not often used. The little observatory was up at the top of the house.

Mr. Laurence was at his writing-table when I came in, and another table in the bow window had microscopes on it, under glass cases. He looked up and said—

"How do you do, Miles? Had your tea?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Ready for work?"

I said "Yes" again.

Then he stood up and wiped his pen carefully, and laid it down, for he was always neat, and never in a hurry. After that he took me through the library, into the museum, which I had not seen before. There was matting over the floor, and a chair and table stood near the farthest window, while all round close to the walls were glass-fronted cases, with stuffed birds, or insects, or curiosities from foreign parts, arranged in them. Other odd things lay about on tables, or were fastened to the walls.

"This is to be your especial charge," Mr. Laurence said. "I hope I shall find you capable. We must begin slowly. I have never allowed anybody to handle my specimens or to dust my books; but I am beginning to feel the need of help. You will have to learn—gradually."

He pointed out to me a great bone, lying on the top of a case, and he said it was part of an animal which had lived

long long before the time of Adam. "The bone has turned into stone now," he went on, "so it is a fossil."

"May I come in any time, sir?" I asked wonderingly.

Mr. Laurence gave me a look, and asked—"Would you like it?"

"I should like to learn all about everything here," I said.

"So you shall—as far as I can put you in the way of learning. No man alive knows 'all' about any one thing; but some of the little that can be known you shall learn. You will have a key, and when you are not here the door is always to be locked. By-and-by I hope you will be able to copy out things for me. I know that you write a clear hand. Remember, if you wish to be of real use to me by-and-by, you must study and read steadily. When the bell in the corner rings, you will know that I want you."

Then he pointed out a glass case full of weapons from distant countries.

"Some day these things must all be turned out and cleaned or dusted," he said; "but not just yet." He stood still, looking at me. "Do you know what the first thing is that I have to find out about you, Miles?"

"Whether I won't break things?" I asked. "But I'll take care, really, sir."

"I am sure you will. That is important; yet not the most important. What I want to know is whether you are fully and utterly true in all that you say and do—whether I may depend, not only upon your honesty, for that I do not doubt, but upon your absolute truthfulness and trustworthiness."

"I wouldn't tell a lie for anything," I said.

"I don't think you would. I hope not. Your mother says the same. But I want more than just the absence of direct falsehood. I want to be able to place entire confidence in you. Now how is that to be brought about?"

I understood in a measure, yet I was at a loss what to say.

"I will tell you," he said, and he spoke slowly. "If anything goes wrong—if anything in your charge is injured or broken—mind you never attempt to hide it, but come at once and tell me. Sooner or later you would be found out, and then I could never be sure of you again. Be brave, and speak out always. Never try to shield yourself from just blame. Then again you have to be obedient. When I am absent, just as when I am present, do what I tell you to do. You have leave to come to the museum yourself, but not to admit others without asking me. Remember that! No matter who asks, you have to say 'No'!"

"Yes, sir, I will."

"That is right. Now about the matter of your going home. I do not wish for incessant running to and fro; but you may see your people reasonably often—once a week, at all events. When you wish to go, ask me, and if possible I will arrange it. If I send you out on an errand for myself, don't spend the time in going to your parents, but be back as sharp as you can. If I send you out for an hour or two to amuse yourself, then you may do as you choose. But do not go out without asking my leave."

"No, sir, I won't," I said.

"One more thing, Miles. When you are in my study, among my books and papers, remember that I am trusting you. Nothing is to be read, except what you know that I intend you to read. And what you do see, or read, or hear, is not to be talked about elsewhere—either among my servants or out of this house. Do you understand me? Can I put confidence in you?"

A rush of pride swept through me, as I thought that he should do so— that I would make myself worthy of his confidence. It was my first real glimpse of what is meant by "honour." He was "putting me on my honour," and he should not be disappointed.

"It will do, I see," said Mr. Laurence, smiling. "You understand."

I was so busy, thinking, I hadn't said a word, but only just gazed up in his face.

CHAPTER X.

WISE COUNSEL.

MILES' STORY—(continued).

THE next few days passed smoothly, so far as my work was concerned. Not that I wasn't often clumsy and stupid, doing things awkwardly enough from want of practice; but I tried hard, and Mr. Laurence was wonderfully patient. He saw at least how anxious I was to learn. If I forgot, he told me again, and if I blundered he made me try a second time. He showed me exactly how he liked his books dusted—so many shelves every week, and each shelf by itself, and every volume put back into its own place. He stood by while I did it, over and over again, till he was sure I knew how.

I had not leave to take away books for my own reading, of course, but he lent me one at a time, choosing those I could understand, and he was always pleased if I asked him questions. Sometimes he would come into the museum, and give me quite a lesson on the things there.

It was wonderful how much bigger and wider the world grew as I listened to him. Every day I grew more eager to learn, and more fond of Mr. Laurence, and more bent on serving him rightly.

He did not yet allow me to go alone into the observatory. That was to come later. "A careless touch might do such harm," he said; though he was pleased to add that he did not count me careless. "But it would not be fair yet to you, my boy," he said in his kind way.

The one real trouble in my new life was the way the maids looked askance at me, and most of all the way I was

disliked by Mrs. Crane. To be sure, Mr. Laurence did not want me to have much to do with the maids or with the servants' hall, and he told me so plainly; but still I'd rather have been on pleasant terms, and I couldn't think why they must all treat me as if I had no right to be in the house.

Of course I know now well enough that the feeling sprang from jealousy, because I was favoured by Mr. Laurence, and was made free to go in and out where none of them might venture. Besides, they did not like me being put to meals with Mrs. Crane, instead of in the servants' hall.

If I had been of a surly or an ill temper I should have found it hard not to be unpleasant again; but as it was, I only felt uncomfortable, and wondered what it all meant.

It was a good thing my mother had not trained me to be dainty in my eating, for Mrs. Crane never asked me what I would like, but always gave me the worst that was on the table. She had plenty of nice things for herself, and I shouldn't have minded a little of them too; but all the same I ate what she put on my plate, and I made no fuss, which was best, of course, in every way. She would soon have used against me any manner of grumbling on my part, and it is good for everybody to learn not to mind what one eats. I do despise daintiness! Mr. Laurence never seemed to care what he had on his plate, and as often as not he just ate without knowing what he ate. Everybody can't be like that, I suppose, because everybody hasn't such a mind as he had; but I do think it contemptible when a man's happiness and good temper depend on his victuals being to his taste. Or a

woman's either—which perhaps isn't quite so common, though I'm not sure.

The only person about the house who spoke kind words to me, beside Mr. Laurence, was Andrews, the head gardener—a big slow man, who knew what he was about. He had been used to come in once a week to dust out the museum, because Mr. Laurence wouldn't trust anybody else among his treasures. But Andrews didn't seem to mind seeing me there instead. He always had a pleasant smile.

The very first Sunday after I got to The Myrtles, Mr. Laurence asked if I would like to go home for the afternoon and evening: and right glad I was to do it. Weeks might have passed, instead of only days, since I'd seen them all.

There was plenty to hear and plenty to tell, though I was mindful of what Mr. Laurence had said, and I wouldn't let myself gossip about things I'd no business to repeat. Mother saw I was careful, and then she grew careful too, and wouldn't ask many questions, and I knew she thought me right.

Before I left home it had been all settled about Mrs. Coles' little house being taken on by my parents, and now Mrs. Coles was gone, and our house at Littleburgh was given up, and our furniture was on the way down. The furniture in our new home did not belong to Mrs. Coles, but to Mr. Kingscote; and as Mrs. Coles would not need the things where she was going, Mr. Kingscote was going to let mother have the use of some of them for the present—enough to furnish nicely the rooms for letting, as we shouldn't have had enough of our own.

So it was all settled, and mother hoped to have all straight in a week or two ready for lodgers. Two or three people had been already to ask about lodgings.

I did not think my father seemed better, but he was as good and patient as could be, and he had begun to have a little feeling in one of his legs, which the doctor said was a good sign.

The wonderful thing to us all was that he should lie, day after day, so quiet and contented, not worrying or fretful. It is bad enough for anybody to be cut off from work, and laid on a bed for nobody can say how long; but with a strong active man like my father, always used to be busy, it must have been especially bad, and yet he didn't fuss or grumble. It often seemed as if, when God laid him there, He gave him a spirit of quiet willingness; though I didn't understand this till long after. When father sometimes said with a little smile, "I'm learning lessons, Miles!" I could not see at all what he meant.

It was before dinner that I went home that first Sunday, and afterward father had to be left quiet, and Louey and Rosey went to Sunday-school. I'd been used to go too from Mr. Kingscote's, as he liked me to belong to the class of big boys; but I could not know yet how it would be from Mr. Laurence's house; and this day I wanted most of all to have a talk alone with my mother. She saw I wanted that; and when the children were gone, she began by asking if I was happy.

"Yes," I said, "Mr. Laurence was so good;" and I told her all about what he had said to me the first evening.

"Right too!" said she. "You can't be too careful, Miles. If Mr. Laurence is to trust you, there's no other way."

"Only I may speak out to you, mother," I said.

"No," said she; "not one single thing to do with Mr. Laurence's ways or habits, nor with his work. Not a single thing that you don't feel sure he'd wish me to know. If you've troubles of your own, you may tell them to me."

"Well, I don't know if I ought to call them troubles," I said, and I laughed. "Not quite so bad as that; only I don't think the servants like me being there."

"Which servants?" said she.

"Why,—all of them," I said, "except the gardener. Mrs. Crane, the housekeeper, and Mrs. Perkins, the cook, and the parlour-maid and the housemaid and the under-housemaid. I don't think any of them like me."

She asked one or two questions, and when I told her I had my meals with Mrs. Crane, and was allowed in rooms where they mightn't go, she said, "That's it!"

"What is?" I asked.

"It might have been wiser the other way," said she slowly, as if thinking aloud. "I mean if you'd had your meals for a time with the rest. But then there'd have been difficulties later, if—And Mr. Laurence has a right to settle it as he will."

"I don't know what you mean, mother," I said.

"No," said she; "never mind; it's all right, Miles. You've just got to do what Mr. Laurence tells you, and you mustn't mind a few cross looks."

"Mr. Laurence doesn't want me to be much in the servants' hall," I said. "He told me so."

"Then you're quite clear as to what you've got to do. Mind, Miles, you're there, taking Mr. Laurence's wages; and you're there to do what he bids you. Your time is his, not your own."

"But if they don't like it?" I said.

"Well, then they must do without liking it," said she. "You're not a coward, Miles. You can stand a few hits, if it's in the way of duty, I hope. Only don't give them cause to be vexed,—not any real cause, I mean. Don't you give yourself airs, or be rude. You're only the son of a working-man; and it's as likely as not that some of their fathers are better off than yours. That's neither here nor there, for Mr. Laurence has a right to settle his household as he will. And if anybody don't like it, why they've got the remedy in their own hands, and they can go. But all the same I dare say it's a grievance, seeing you put to your meals with Mrs. Crane, so you've got to be doubly careful to give no offence."

CHAPTER XI.

A DIFFICULT MOMENT.

MILES' STORY—(continued).

THE advice my mother gave me that afternoon was uncommonly wise advice, and the very best that could have been given, I do believe; and yet it isn't always possible to follow out to the letter what seems wise advice.

I went back to The Myrtles that evening, fully resolved that I would do my best to keep smooth with everybody, and would give no offence; and after all I had to give great offence, only the very next day.

On second thoughts, though, it was not going contrary to my mother's advice: for what she had said and fully meant was that I should not give real cause for offence, not just cause, and this could not be called just or real cause, for my duty to Mr. Laurence had of course to stand first.

On Monday evening Mr. Laurence had an engagement which would keep him away till past ten o'clock. When he was starting he gave me a long list of names that he wanted to have copied out. "They are hard names, and so you will have to be very careful not to make mistakes," he said. "Let me see how well you can do it, Miles." Then he told me to sit in the museum if I liked, and to spend part of the time in reading the last book he had lent me. I had been in the afternoon for a good walk on an errand for him.

I was never a boy who minded being alone and quiet, and I think the love of quiet was growing with the love of study.

After he was gone, I took my things to the little table in the museum, and worked steadily at the copying, which was not very easy, because all the words were new to me, and I had to, spell them carefully. I spoilt one sheet and began over again; and I was half-way through, when there came a smart rap at the door.

In a moment I jumped up and went to see who it was; but before I could reach the door it was thrown open, and the housemaid, Rose, came in, giggling, with the under-gardener, Will, behind her.

"I told you he'd be here," said she. "Look! isn't it a concern! What a lot of old bones!"

It took me by surprise her walking in so suddenly, for I knew well that nobody was ever allowed there without leave; and almost before I knew what I was going to say, I asked, "Did Mr. Laurence say you might come?"

Rose turned round and mimicked me, with her head on one side. She was a pretty girl; and Will, who was a great lanky awkward fellow, roared with laughter.

"Did Mr. Laurence say we might come?" said she, in an affected voice. "O dear me! the innocence of the youth! Just hear him, Will! Why, dear me, no!" she went on, when Will had roared again. "Who ever would think of asking Mr. Laurence, while the mighty Mr. Miles Murchison was sitting here in state! It is enough to ask him, any day!" She dropped a mock curtsey as she spoke. "Please, Mr. Miles Murchison, will you let your humble servants take a look round?"

"I can't do it, Rose," I said, straight out, though I was worried. "You know I can't; I'm put here in charge, and Mr.

Laurence forbids any one to come in without his leave. I can't give it."

"Hear him. Will! The innocent child! 'I can't give it.'"

She mimicked me again, cleverly enough, and my face got as red as fire, for Will shouted afresh.

"Come, we'll take a look," said she, in a daring sort of voice, and she walked to the middle table and picked up a fossil bone that was lying there. "What's this?" said she. "We're poor ignorant creatures— ain't we, Will?—don't know nothing at all about such things! Couldn't the learned Mr. Miles Murchison teach us?"

It was a great temptation to me to give in. No boy of fifteen likes to be laughed at; nor to make enemies; nor to have to stand alone. For one moment I was tempted. Mr. Laurence was away for another hour or more, I thought, and if I did let them stay a few minutes they would not do any mischief, and nobody would know. It was not likely that they would tell of themselves.

But I am glad to say this temptation had power only for one moment. Then I remembered that I was in charge, and that I was upon honour; that I had to do my employer's will, and to prove myself trustworthy. Whether they liked it or did not like it made no difference at all. They were in the wrong, and if I yielded to them I should be in the wrong too.

I went after Rose, and I said—

"Rose, if you and Will stay, I shall have to tell Mr. Laurence."

"You will!" said she, turning sharp round to face me.

"I shall have to," I said.

"Then you're a pitiful miserable sneak!" said she. "Take that!" and she gave me a smart box on the ear with her hand, which was not by any means a soft one.

My ear tingled, and my temper tingled more, for I hadn't been used to that sort of thing; but still the main thought with me was how to get rid of them both, and to prove myself trustworthy. Almost without thought I found myself saying again—

"If you don't both go this minute, I'll tell Mr. Laurence as soon as ever he comes back."

"Very well; we'll go," said she. "You sneak! I'll never speak to you again!"—and she looked as if she meant it. "Come, Will, 'tisn't worth staying for, after all."

She turned round with such a whisk, in her anger, that she bounced up against Will, and sent him staggering against the nearest case of stuffed birds; and between them they gave it such a shake that a small plaster head, standing on the top, fell with a crash and broke across at the neck.

"Bother!" said she. "That's like your clumsiness, Will. What a plague!"

Before I could stop her she picked up the two pieces and set the head on the neck.

"Oh, that's all right! It doesn't show. Mr. Laurence won't see it for weeks, you may be sure. Come along, Will," and she went off, not giving me a look. But just outside the door she turned back and glared at me, and her eyes didn't look pretty then. "Mind," she said, "if you let slip one word of this to Mr. Laurence, you won't stay long in the house. I'll see to

that, I promise. If you tell one tale, Will and I'll tell another—and that will be two to one. So you just take care."

She was gone before I could answer, and I shut and locked the door, but I heard them talking loudly in the passage for some minutes.

Well, I cannot say I was not angry too as well as puzzled and dismayed. Should I, or should I not, tell Mr. Laurence about the breakage? If I'd done it myself I would never have thought of hiding it; but I didn't see how I was to tell without blaming others. Yet if I said nothing, and he found it out late; as he was pretty sure to do, how could he ever be sure of me again?

As for Rose's threats, I gave little thought to them. Of course I knew that anybody has power to harm anybody else if bent upon it; but I minded much more being called "a sneak." Still, if it came in the way of my duty, better far to be called "a sneak" than to be untrue.

My hand was not steady enough for writing for some minutes, for I had been not a little flustered. It was the first time I had ever had in my life to make such a stand against people older than myself; yet I was glad I had made it, and had not given in. I finished the copying by half-past nine, and then to my surprise the bell rang, which showed me that Mr. Laurence was in his study. As I was going I took down the broken plaster head, carrying the two pieces with me.

Mr. Laurence looked up from his desk, and when he saw what was in my hands, he said—

"I am very sorry, sir," I said, thinking that I wouldn't tell more than was needful.

He took both pieces from me and examined them.

"How did it happen, Miles?"

"The case had a shake, sir, and it tumbled down."

"You must be more careful. Quite right to let me know at once."

Then, just as I thought all was straight, he asked—

"Did you do it yourself?"

I made no answer, and he looked straight at me.

"How did the thing happen, my boy?"

I felt myself getting as red as fire again.

"Something not explained yet, eh? Have you been doing anything you are ashamed of, Miles?"

"No, sir."

"That's decisive, at all events. Then has somebody else?"

"If you wouldn't mind, sir—please—not asking me," I said. "It was an accident, and I don't think it will happen again. I'll take care. I will really."

"Yes, I think you will," Mr. Laurence said slowly; "I am sure you will. If you had done as Rose told you, and not mentioned the breakage, I should not have felt so confident as now. But you have done well all through; first, in refusing them admittance; then, in not concealing the accident. You have proved yourself trustworthy, Miles."

I was so amazed to find how much he knew that I could take no pleasure in his words of praise; and I must have stared. He did not smile; he only said—

"I came home earlier than I intended."

Then he must have seen or heard with his own eyes and ears. Well, it was not my fault; but I knew I should be blamed, and I couldn't help being sorry.

Mrs. Crane was out that evening with friends, and I had had my supper early, for somebody's convenience. I didn't see the rest till prayer-time, and then I only had askance looks. Coming out I overheard Matilda, the parlour-maid, say something about Mr. Laurence getting home early, and Rose said, in a scared tone—

"What time? Why didn't you tell us?"

"Why should I?" Matilda asked. "Mr. Laurence just let himself in with his latchkey and went straight to the study. Some time between half-past eight and nine."

I knew what that meant, and Rose knew too; but all the same, she tossed her head with a sneer when I went by.

Next morning Mr. Laurence had Rose and Will into his study, an uncommon thing, as he left the maids to Mrs. Crane generally, and the under-gardeners to Andrews. Mrs. Crane was present, but he spoke himself to them, and he dismissed them both, with a month's wages each. He'd been actually passing outside the open door of the museum, at the moment that Rose boxed my ear; and when they talked so loud afterwards in the passage, he was in the library, and could hear every word. He told them all this quite plainly: and he told them too that he had questioned me, and that I had not let out about them. Then he rebuked them strongly for their deceit and disobedience, and their trying to lead me astray; and he said he wouldn't have them in the house another night. Rose cried her eyes out, and Will looked

wretched; but nothing could move Mr. Laurence. He could put up with dulness and stupidity, but the one thing he never would stand was deceit, or a person doing differently behind his back from before his face.

They were both gone before night: and it was long before I heard of them again. All these particulars leaked out slowly. Mr. Laurence did not refuse to give them some sort of a character, but he said he must explain about what had passed, and would advise any future master or mistress to keep a sharp look-out upon them both. Seems to me, he couldn't honourably do anything else.

My position in the house was, in some respects, better after that evening. I had shown that I would do my duty, and that I could hold my own; and nobody dared to meddle with me. But I couldn't help seeing how I was dislike by Mrs. Crane and Matilda; and if it had not been for Mr. Laurence's great kindness, I should have felt sometimes very dull and even unhappy.

CHAPTER XII.

LITTLE MISS ADELA.

MILES' STORY—(continued).

NOTHING particular happened, that I can remember, through the early part of that winter, up to Christmas, except that my father got on perhaps a little better than was expected, and was able to sit up and use his hands, though he could not stand, and his legs still had little or no power in them. We all knew well enough by this time that he never could be an able-bodied man again; though, as years went on, he might slowly improve. The wonderful thing still was how quietly he took it all.

I suppose, where great trouble is sent, strength to bear it is sent too; at least it was so in his case. And my mother was just her old self; always busy, and always a little anxious, but happy in her own way, and thinking of everybody before herself.

I had a week at home at Christmas and New Year, and didn't once see Mr. Laurence the whole week through.

Mr. Bertram came back, of course, for the Christmas holidays, and he was growing tall and thin, and not looking over well; but he was full of fun and high spirits. He used to come in and talk nonsense, till we were all in such fits of laughter we didn't know what, to do with ourselves. And through all the fun, he was so kind and gentle to my father. Well, I never did see any one quite like Mr. Bertram, and for the matter of that I don't think I ever shall.

When I went back at the week's end, there was a visitor at The Myrtles—Mr. Laurence's only grandchild. I knew he

was expecting her for the New Year, and I wondered how that quiet house would seem with a child in it. Children do make such a difference where they are, and, to my mind, no home is perfect without children.

I got there after dark in the afternoon, and I was told that Mr. Laurence had gone out on business. So I went straight to the museum, thinking I'd take a look round there the first thing. I found the door unlocked which rather startled me, as it was so uncommon; and when I first opened the door I saw nobody. So I shut it, and stopped to take a look at a side-table, where a new piece of red granite was lying which had not been there when I went away. Mr. Laurence was always getting fresh things to add to his collection. And then I went on a few steps, and to my surprise, all at once I saw somebody sitting in my chair, sound asleep.

She was the prettiest little lady, and I always did say she had a look of our poor little Bessie, who was killed by the falling of the cliff. I don't know how it was, but she had a look of her, somehow. I saw it in a moment, though little Miss Adela was very fair, with rosy cheeks, and blue eyes, and short flaxen hair. The blue eyes were fast shut when I saw her first, and her head was dropping over to one side, and one little round white arm lay over the table where I always wrote.

I was so taken aback, I stood and looked at her, not knowing what to think. And then she suddenly woke up, and looked at me without moving.

"How d'you do?" she said sleepily. "What o'clock is it?"

"It is getting on for half-past five, Miss," I said.

"Oh, to be sure. I've had my tea," she said, and she got up slowly. I saw she was about as tall as our Rosie, or taller, though I found later she was only eight years old. "Grandpapa's gone out," she said. "And they told me the museum-boy was coming back, so I thought I would be here to see him. Are you the museum-boy? And is your name Miles?"

"I'm Miles Murchison, Miss," I said; "and I've got to look after the museum."

"Oh yes; I know all about it," said she. "And the housemaid and under-gardener tried to get in, and you wouldn't let them. That was like a soldier doing his duty;" and she held up her head. "My papa is a soldier, so I know all about it. And he told me a story once—about the private and the Duke, you know."

"No, Miss; I don't know the story," I said.

"Don't you? Why, I thought everybody did," said she. "Let me see, how did the story begin? There was a private soldier put at a door to keep people from going in, except those that had got a written order— at least, I think that was it. The soldier was told to turn back everybody else, you know; and of course he had to turn back lots. And presently a duke came up, at least, I think it was a duke; and I believe it was the Duke of Wellington, only I'm not sure. But anyhow, the Duke hadn't a written paper to show, and he wanted to go in without it, and the soldier wouldn't let him. And of course the soldier was right, because he only just had to do as he was bid. And the Duke gave up, and went away quietly; and when the soldier heard who it was he had turned back, he

was rather frightened, because he thought the Duke would be angry. But instead of that, the Duke saw the soldier afterward, and praised him for obeying, and said he was perfectly right. Wasn't it nice of the Duke? And I think," Miss Adela went on, "it was a wee bit like that, when you turned Rose and Will out of the museum; only not quite the same, because there wasn't any Duke."

"But Mr. Laurence doesn't mind you coming here, does he, Miss?" I asked.

"Me? Why, of course not. I am his grandchild," said she. "Of course I may do what I like in his house. He is the dearest old Grandpapa, isn't he? And he likes you ever so much, I know, because he told me he did. He said you were such a trustworthy boy."

I was glad to hear this, even though I knew pretty well already what Mr. Laurence thought.

"And I made him give me his museum-key before he went out, so that I might come here after my tea," she went on. "It's such fun—nurse can't come after me when I'm in the museum, because nobody must come in without Grandpapa's leave. She can only rap at the door, and call. Now you are going to tell me about all these things;" and she waved her hand toward the cases. "I want to know about every single thing."

"I'm afraid I can't tell you much, Miss, because I have only begun to learn," I said.

"Well, then, you can tell me the beginning, just as far as you have learnt," said she. "Come, what is this big round stone? Look how it is marked."

"That's an ammonite," I said, glad to know the first thing she asked.

"An am-mo-nite?" said she. "Yes; go on," and she nodded her head.

So I told her what little I was able, how the ammonite had once been a living sea-creature, swimming about in the ocean; and how it had somehow died out, so that no ammonite was ever found now alive; and how the only ones ever seen were these fossil ammonites, which had lived so very, very long ago, that their remains were turned to stone. I showed her some tiny little ammonites, beside the big one she had noticed first.

For the best part of an hour she kept me busy, either answering questions or saying I couldn't answer them. Sometimes she would murmur, "How clever you are!" and quite as often it was, "What! don't you know that!" So I was in no danger of being made conceited.

All went smoothly enough so far, and the little lady was as sweet and pleasant as she could be; but by-and-by we came to a small glass case, which had Indian curiosities in it, and she stooped over to look at them.

"Oh, what are those funny things?" she cried. "Look! are they stones? What do you call them? 'Catseyes!' Not real eyes of real cats?"

"It's a sort of precious stone," I told her. "They are worth a lot, I believe."

"I like those catseyes better than anything else in the whole museum," said she. "And I mean to make Grandpapa give me one of them. It would make a lovely little brooch,

you know. Oh, what a bother! The case is locked. Where is the key?"

"It isn't meant to be opened, Miss," I said.

"Have you got a key?" said she.

I was glad to be able to say "No," for Mr. Laurence kept the keys himself of the smaller cases; but the next moment she gave a little scream, and lifted up the glass lid. And I saw that the lock had just failed to catch. Mr. Laurence must have turned the key in a hurry, not noticing that the lid wasn't quite closed, and so he had really locked it open. Miss Adela's hand grasped the biggest catseye in a moment; and I knew I had no easy task before me. For it wasn't difficult to see, with all her sweetness, that she was a good deal spoilt, and used to getting her own way.

"We mustn't touch anything inside," I said. "Mr. Laurence wouldn't like it. Put that back, please, Miss."

She opened her eyes wide, and looked at me in astonishment.

"You don't think you've got to tell me what to do!" said she, with a grand air.

"I'm in charge, Miss," I said; "and I can't have the things meddled with."

"I'm going to keep this dear little catseye till Grandpapa comes in, and then I shall make him give it to me," said she.

"If he gives it you, that's all right," I said; "but till he does, it's got to stay here in my charge."

She gave a funny little toss to her head, and said, "Don't you wish you may get it?"

"You wouldn't want to get me into disgrace, would you, Miss?" said I, thinking I'd try persuasion.

"Oh no!" said she; "I shall just tell Grandpapa you couldn't help it."

I knew very well that would do no good. Mr. Laurence would say I ought to have helped it.

"I'm going to show it to Nurse now," said she; and she walked towards the door; but I was there before her, and I had my hand on the key.

"No, Miss; I daren't let it leave the room," said I.

"But you'll have to; because I'm going, and I mean to take it with me," said she.

"No, Miss," I said.

"But I will!" said she.

For all answer I locked the door, and put the key in my pocket; and didn't Miss Adela's blue eyes give a flash!

"You're a naughty impertinent boy," said she; "and I shall tell my grandfather how you behave."

I half thought she would have cried and struggled to get the key; but she didn't. She held up her head like a little queen, and turned her back upon me.

"I'll open the door in a minute, if you'll just give me that catseye," said I.

"No!" said she. "I'm going to keep it."

I thought I'd make one more try. "Miss Adela," I said, for I knew her name already, "you told me a nice story just now about the soldier and the duke. If I let you take away that catseye, shouldn't I be like the soldier disobeying his orders, and letting the duke go in?"

"Well, and I think he ought to have let the duke go in," said she. "He was a rude impertinent soldier to keep the duke out; and if I was the duke, I would be very angry. I think it's a stupid story, and I don't know why I told it to you."

Then she pulled my chair round, with its back to where I was; and she seated herself on it, with her pretty arms folded, and the catseye clasped tight in one little hand.

CHAPTER XIII.

"SPOILT," BUT "SWEET."

MILES' STORY—(continued).

OF course I could have got the catseye from Miss Adela by force, but I knew my place better than to try anything of that sort. The only way before me was to keep the door locked till somebody should come after her.

It seemed a long while before anybody came. I suppose the servants knew that Miss Adela was in the museum, and thought she would be all right with me; and time passed slowly for I couldn't be busy. Miss Adela had my chair, and my table with the lamp on it; and she wouldn't speak any more. So she sat there, and I stood near the door. I was just thinking that I'd try again to reason with her, and to get back the catseye, when I saw her head give a little nod, and one arm slip down over the other. That made me keep silence; for if she fell asleep, I might get the catseye from her without her knowing.

Well, she straightened herself once or twice, as if she didn't mean to be overcome by sleep; but gradually her head dropped over on one side, and the little hand was opening slowly. So I came softly and stood close by; and when it opened wider still, and the catseye dropped out, I caught it on my palm without a sound, and she slept on.

Then I crept to the door, and unlocked it gently; and next I put back the catseye into its right place, and stood over the unlocked case to keep guard.

It wasn't five minutes, I suppose, before she woke. She looked round, and gave a gape and a little laugh; and all at

once she exclaimed, "Oh, it's gone! Oh, where's my dear little catseye?"

"I've got it here, all right, Miss," I said.

"You've got it!" said she, flaming up. "What business have you with my catseye? Give it back to me directly."

She stamped her foot as she spoke, and ran to where I stood. Of course I was prepared; and when she tried with her little hands to lift the glass lid, she couldn't stir it. One hand of mine on the frame was more than enough for all her strength.

"I can't let you, Miss," I said. "Only just wait till Mr. Laurence comes, and then you can ask him anything you like. I must take care of it till then."

Miss Adela went as white as a sheet with passion: for she had a hasty temper, and she hadn't learnt to govern herself, as even a child ought to learn before eight years old. She stood quite still for a moment, looking at me; and then without any warning, she dashed her right hand through the glass, breaking it into bits, and seized the catseye.

I don't know what I said, I was so startled; or whether I said anything; but the next instant I saw that her hand was badly cut, for blood came streaming from it.

"O Miss Adela! how could you? And you've hurt yourself so!"

"I don't care! I've got it!" said she proudly.

"'I can't let you, Miss,' I said."—*Page* 150.

"I can't let you, Miss," I said.

That very moment the door opened, and Mr. Laurence walked in, followed by Mr. Bertram; and didn't they both call out! I expected Miss Adela to break out into accusations of me; and I thought I should surely be blamed. But she didn't say a word at first, not even to answer their questions. She seemed to have paid away her anger, and not to be in a hurry to defend herself. Mr. Laurence sat down and took her on his knee, and Mr. Bertram pitied the poor little hand, and together they looked to see if any glass was sticking there. Then they tied it up in Mr. Laurence's big silk

pocket-handkerchief, seeming satisfied that she wasn't so badly hurt as might have been; and Mr. Laurence said—

"How did it happen, Adela?"

She gave a great sigh, and didn't speak, but put her head down on his shoulder.

"Come, Addie; how was it?" said Mr. Bertram, giving her a kiss. "You poor little mite, did you tumble with your hand against the glass?"

"I think you'd better ask the museum-boy," said she; "and please put this away." She held out the other hand with the catseye.

"My dear, how do you come to have that?" asked Mr. Laurence. "I thought the case was locked."

"It wasn't properly locked," said she, in a shaky voice. "Ask the museum-boy, please."

But I came a step forward, and said I'd ever so much rather Miss Adela should tell.

Miss Adela burst into tears, and said she couldn't—her hand hurt her so much; and indeed the silk handkerchief was showing red even then. So Nurse was sent for in a hurry, and Mrs. Crane came too, and the hand was bathed and seen after, and bound up afresh; and Miss Adela looked very pale and pitiful. Then Nurse asked how it had happened, and Mr. Laurence said gravely, "We don't know yet."

"Some mischief of that boy," I heard Crane mutter. "I told you, Nurse, she oughtn't to be left alone with him so long."

"Miles, have you been to blame?" Mr. Laurence asked; and I saw he was worried.

"No, sir; I don't think so," I said. "I tried to do for the best."

"He's sure to say that," Mrs. Crane put in. "If he wasn't to blame, how ever could the poor little lamb get hurt like this?"

And then, to my surprise, Miss Adela herself spoke up bravely.

"The museum-boy isn't to blame," she said. "He's a brave boy, and he's like that soldier in the story, and I was naughty, and I wanted the catseye, and so he locked the door; and when I was asleep he got it away from me. And then I was angry, and I put my hand through the glass to get it again. And that's how I'm hurt, and it's every bit my fault."

"I know who is brave now," I heard Mr. Bertram whisper; and Mr. Laurence put his arms tightly round the child, and called her "his little darling."

"But I was naughty, because I was in a temper," said she; "and I meant to ask for that catseye, Grandpapa; and now I won't."

Mr. Laurence smiled at the idea. "No, my dear; something else,—not the catseye," he said. "But you are a good child to tell me exactly what has happened, and not to let Miles be blamed unjustly."

"Oh, I couldn't do that, of course," she said, holding up her head. "It would be so horrid, you know. And of course I knew he was right, though I did tell him he was impertinent,—didn't I, museum-boy?"

"My dear, call him 'Miles,'" said Mr. Laurence.

"Why,—he is a museum-boy, isn't he?" said she wilfully. "O Grandpapa! do let me go into your study with you now, and you can tell me stories. And Bertie must come too. And I don't want Nurse any more till bed-time,—or Mrs. Crane."

And then, to my surprise, as she went by she gave me a smile, and said, "I'm sorry I was naughty."

Well, she might be a little spoilt; but anyway she was sweet. I didn't wonder when I saw how fond Mr. Bertram was of her, after that.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE PONY CART.

MILES' STORY—(continued).

LITTLE Miss Adela stayed nearly a month, and I never had any more trouble with her. She was as good as gold always; and she used to come into the museum, and stay there by the hour, and not touch a thing without leave. I grew almost to be as fond of her as Mr. Bertram himself was: and to see her face peeping round the door was like having a gleam of sunshine.

"Museum-boy," said she on the last day before she was to go away; and nothing could cure her of calling me that, or make her give me my proper name; "Museum-boy, what do you think we're going to do this afternoon, directly the minute after lunch?"

I said I couldn't guess. Was it something nice?

"'Course it is! I shouldn't tell you if it wasn't, you stupid boy!" said she, as sharp as a needle; and then she sighed. "Oh, dear me! Nurse says I oughtn't ever to call anybody stupid, and it is so hard. But you're nice all the same, you know."

"I'm glad you think so, Miss Adela," said I. "And what are you going to do after lunch?"

"Why, it isn't only me; it's you too, and it's such fun! Grandpapa is going to lend the cart to Mrs. Crane and Nurse, for us to drive to the town, and buy heaps of things. And Grandpapa asked who else I'd like to have go, and I said I wanted the museum-boy. And he laughed, and didn't mind. So you've got to go; and you must be quite neat, please,

because Mrs. Crane is going to take us to tea with a cousin of hers."

"I don't know if Mrs. Crane will want to have me, Miss Adele," I said; and she gave me one of her astonished looks.

"Why,—I want you," she said. "And Grandpapa says you're to go. 'Course Mrs. Crane will like it."

I could not feel quite so sure as to that; but after all I only had to do as I was told. An hour later I had my orders from Mr. Laurence himself. "You are to go in to St. Ermes this afternoon with Miss Adela, starting at two o'clock;" and then he told me to buy a few things for him, and explained carefully what he wanted, putting five shillings into my hand. St. Ermes was a biggish town, several miles away; and the cart was a funny little concern, not so much used by Mr. Laurence himself, as he preferred the high dog-cart, but often lent to Mrs. Crane, if she had shopping to do in St. Ermes.

I was ready punctually at two, waiting outside the front door; and Mrs. Crane came to the step, wearing her very best bonnet, and not looking specially pleased. "Where's that boy?" I heard her say. "Well, if he's late I shan't wait for him! Such nonsense! As if you and me wasn't enough."

"Miss Adela always gets her own way with her Grandpapa," I heard Nurse's voice answer, close behind Mrs. Crane.

"And with everybody else. Well, I'm not going to take a great awkward boy to my cousin's, I can tell him. He'll have to manage for himself. Oh, there he is!" she said, but I felt pretty sure she had seen me sooner, and meant me to hear what went before.

I didn't care to show that I had heard, though I made up my mind that I would manage for myself, even if managing meant going without tea. Miss Adela came running up to me, full of fun and brightness. "There's a good museum-boy!" she cried. "They said you would be late, but I knew you wouldn't. Now you've got to sit behind, I suppose, 'cause Mrs. Crane likes to drive. I think a boy ought to drive."

Mrs. Crane took no notice of this, but helped Miss Adela in, and seated herself with dignity. It was a sort of governess-cart, with room for two on either side, the couples facing one another, and all going sideways—so the driving had to be an awkward sideways affair; but the last pony had been such a slow-coach, he never would go beyond a walk, and the new pony, only just bought, seemed slower still. Mrs. Crane sat holding the reins, opposite Miss Adela; and Nurse was beside Miss Adela, opposite me; so I was beside Mrs. Crane, who kept turning her back upon me, as she twisted round to drive.

After all, the new pony went better than the old one used, and we got to St. Ermes in a shorter time than commonly. A good part of an hour was spent in driving about there from shop to shop, buying different things. Mrs. Crane was due at her cousin's, I found, about four o'clock, and we were to start for home at a quarter to five. It was a mildish day, and we had lots of wraps in the cart; so Nurse did not mind Miss Adela being out a little after dark, for once.

I made up my mind to do Mr. Laurence's shopping while the rest were having their tea; and though Miss Adela

talked as if I were sure to go with them, making Mrs. Crane purse up her lips, I paid no attention, but just settled my own plans. Mrs. Crane's cousin was the wife of a riding-master, and the pony would be looked after in his stables, but I thought I would offer to drive him there.

The house was a white one, in the middle of a row of white houses, all exactly alike; and when we drove up a boy stood lounging on the pavement. "That's Alick," pronounced Miss Adela. "It's Mrs. Crane's cousin's son, isn't it, Mrs. Crane? Look, museum-boy! And he always takes the pony. Doesn't he, Mrs. Crane?"

I believe Mrs. Crane had meant to use me as I had meant to be used, for she looked rather disconcerted. "There was no need for him to be here," she said. "Miles could just as well have taken the pony to the stables."

"Of course I could," I said. "I'd better go now, to see where they are, and then I shall know another time."

"But then you'll be late for tea," said Miss Adela. "Oh, no,—I know what! I'll show you where the stables are, after tea."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Miss Adela," exclaimed Nurse. "The idea—!"

"Why, it's only round the corner," said Miss Adela.

"The idea—" repeated Nurse, and she seemed as if she could get no farther.

By that time I was out, and they all got down, Miss Adela seizing my hand. "Come, you're to come in," she said. "Mrs. Crane's cousin makes such lovely cakes, and I know you're most awfully hungry. I am."

Well, I won't say driving in that fresh air hadn't given me an appetite, but all the same I shook my head. "No, Miss Adela, I've got business to see to for Mr. Laurence," I said. "I'll be back in time to start."

"But I want you," said she wilfully.

Then she saw Nurse's face, and Mrs. Crane's; and, child as she was, she understood in a moment. She flushed up red, and stamped her foot.

"I shall tell my Grandpapa!" she said; and she turned and marched into the house, just as if she'd been a little queen. I saw Mrs. Crane look at Nurse, and Nurse look at Mrs. Crane; and then I got away as fast as I could.

It took a good part of the time choosing the things that Mr. Laurence wanted, and I had fourpence over in my purse, out of the five shillings. Miss Adela's talking of being hungry had made me feel hungry enough, if I hadn't been so before, and I was sorely tempted to get a penny bun for myself. But I wouldn't, for the money did not belong to me; and though I knew well enough Mr. Laurence would have given leave if I could have asked it, yet I could not ask, and I had not leave, and so I had no right to spend what was not mine. Of my own I hadn't a penny, for all my weekly wages were handed straight over to my mother, and if I had a need I told her, and she bought, when she could, what I needed.

I took good care not to be outside the house till close upon the time for starting; indeed the pony carriage and I got there at the very same moment, and then the little rough servant-girl came out with a big breakfast cup of tea, and a thick slice of bread-and-butter. "The young lady wouldn't

rest without you had something," she said. "I was to ask if you'd like to take it out here or indoors."

I thanked her, but I wouldn't go indoors; and I did feel glad I hadn't spent one penny of the money I had in my pocket on myself; so that now I could enjoy my tea with a clear conscience. Before I was done, Miss Adela came racing out, ready for the drive, with a big slice of plum-cake. "There! that's for you too, museum-boy," she cried. "You're to eat it all up, every bit. I told Mrs. Crane's cousin I wouldn't taste a crumb if I mightn't have a piece for you; and hasn't she cut a lovely big hunch!"

Then Miss Adela was called back, and by the time I had done my cake they all came out. "Was it nice, museum-boy? Wasn't it nice?" Miss Adela cried, jumping about in her delight at a drive in the dusk; and Nurse kept trying to catch her, and to wrap her up warmly, while Miss Adela kept slipping away like an eel. "Isn't it delicious cake?" she persisted; and then Mrs. Crane's cousin came out, and I thanked her; and I heard her whisper pretty loud to Mrs. Crane, "What does make you dislike the boy so? He's got the nicest manners!"

It was getting late, and we had to hurry off. We sat just the same as in going, only Miss Adela made Nurse go in front, and she took the seat opposite to me; and how she did chatter, to be sure! I never heard anybody's tongue go like Miss Adela's at that age. All about Mrs. Crane's cousin, and Mrs. Crane's cousin's husband, and Mrs. Crane's cousin's husband's horses, till I'm sure I felt bewildered. Mrs. Crane didn't half like it, and she frowned at Miss Adela once or

twice; but it was no manner of use, so she took to talking with Nurse instead.

Well, I suppose we had got about half-way home, going at a steady jog-trot, and I was listening to Miss Adela, and not paying particular attention to anything, when all at once the pony stopped, and began to back. Nurse gave a scream, and Mrs. Crane did the same; and in one moment the cart was off the road, and nearly up to the axles in a pond full of slimy greenish water.

It didn't take me long to think what to do. At the first sound of the scream I was up and over in the water, with a splash, and at the pony's head—just in time to keep him from backing further. For I knew this pond shelved pretty fast, and about the middle it was deep enough to give anybody a good ducking—perhaps to drown one. Besides, there was some danger of the little light cart turning over.

Mrs. Crane and Nurse shrieked again; and the pony put his ears back and looked wicked, and I could hear Miss Adela begging, "Oh, museum-boy, do get us out!" But that was easier said than done; for the pony had got an obstinate fit, which we found afterward was his way; and he wouldn't budge for anything or anybody. The moment I loosened my grasp he began to back again, and as long as I held firm he kept pretty still; but move forward he wouldn't. It was no earthly use for me to pull.

"What is to be done? O dear me!" gasped Mrs. Crane. "Hold on tight, Miles—do! there's a good boy! Don't let go! I know we shall all be drowned."

"Hand me the whip, please," said I.

"No, no, I can't have him beaten; not on any account," cried she; and she held the whip with both hands. "He will kick, and turn us all over, and we shall be drowned. And I've got my best bonnet on! O dear! O dear!"

"I can't make him stir without the whip," said I.

"I won't have him beaten; I know it isn't safe! Just hold tight on, there's a good boy," begged Mrs. Crane, in a despairing voice. "Perhaps he'll change his mind presently; the horrid little beast! Or somebody may go by. Don't let go, Miles. What a mercy you came, to be sure!"

She had never spoken so politely to me before; and I began to see a dawn of better days. But I had no time to think of myself, for there was no knowing what trick the pony might be up to next; and I didn't want to have them all soused in cold water, on a January afternoon, three miles away from home; more especially Miss Adela, who was given to taking bad colds. I was wondering how in the world to get them out; and, despite all I could do, the pony backed again a few inches. So then Mrs. Crane and Nurse set up another shriek, and Miss Adela looked quite white and shivering, as if she was getting frightened.

"Miss Adela," said I, "you just come to the corner, please—this side—and tell me if you think you could jump into my arms, if I move a step nearer."

"Yes, I'm sure I could," said she.

"Then stand up firm; and when I say 'Now,' you jump as far as you can, and I'll catch you. Don't be in a hurry. Are you quite ready—quite? Now!"

She jumped like a little kangaroo, and the same instant I let go the pony, and held out both arms. I had her safe, and with one bound I set her on the grass, and was back at the pony's head. But he had used his opportunity, and the cart was deeper in than before.

"Now Miss Adela's safe," said I, and perhaps I gave a breath of relief, which wasn't altogether kind to the two who were still in the cart. "If you'll give me the whip, I'll get you both out; and if not, we may have to stay here till midnight. You and Nurse couldn't jump like that; and if you could, I shouldn't be able to carry you."

"No, indeed!" Mrs. Crane said; but all the same she held to the whip, and would not give it up. She was sure the pony would kick, and sure I didn't know anything about horses; and if I only would hold on tight, like a dear good boy—yes, she actually said "dear"—somebody would come by very soon, or else the pony would get tired, and would give in.

I don't know how soon the pony was likely to get tired, but I knew I was getting heartily tired of standing knee-deep in slimy water, lugging at an obstinate little brute who wouldn't move. I was just going to say that if she would not give me the whip, I should have to leave at the pony, and go after other help,—I thought this might have the effect of frightening her into yielding, and it was so bad for Miss Adela, waiting about in the cold,—I was just going to say something of that sort when all at once the pony took into his head to do the very thing that Mrs. Crane was most afraid of. He gave a kick and a plunge, and backed again, spite of all I could do, and one wheel caught in a big stone under water,

and the cart went over, not in a hurry, but quietly and deliberately, in a sort of business-like way.

Those two women did scream, and no mistake, when they felt it going; and I heard Miss Adela's frightened "Oh! Oh! Oh!" joining in from the shore. Nurse held on gallantly to the upturned cart; but Mrs. Crane floundered about in the water loosely, like a great walrus; though of course nobody ever told her so afterwards. Just there the pond wasn't deeper than up to her waist; but she had no presence of mind for finding her feet or standing up; and if I had not been at hand, it is as likely as not that she would have been drowned, out of sheer fright and helplessness.

Well, I pulled and tugged her to shore somehow, she spluttering and screaming as much as she had breath for; and she did look a woeful-looking object, to be sure, all streaming with water and streaked with green slime: and her best bonnet was a wonderful sight. Next I went after Nurse, and brought her out too. She had managed to keep her head and shoulders dry, by not losing all her wits. The question in my mind, as I helped Nurse to land, was, what in the world to do with them next? For there was the cart to be righted, and the pony to be seen to; and Miss Adela was looking like a ghost; and we were near three miles from home; and Mrs. Crane was declaring that nothing in the world should ever make her sit behind that pony again; and yet if she and Nurse couldn't get into dry clothes quickly, it might cost them their lives.

CHAPTER XV.

AN IMPROVED STATE OF THINGS.

MILES' STORY—(continued).

JUST as I got to shore, helping Nurse, and looking down to choose her steps for her, I heard a sort of shout—half laughter, half astonishment. "Oh! I say!"—and then Miss Adela crying out,—"O Bertie! Bertie!" And I saw Mr. Bertram holding Miss Adela, and trying to comfort her; with his face all the time full of mischief, and yet in a way concerned too, as he kept looking away from Miss Adela to Mrs. Crane, who seemed dreadfully ashamed and flurried, and all in a shake, and not far from hysterics. Miss Adela had begun to sob, clinging to him tight.

"But how in the world did it happen?" said Mr. Bertram, after a good lot of exclamations on both sides, for which he wasn't much the wiser. "And how is it you're not wet, Addie? As dry as a bone!"

I told him, quick as I could, about the way things had come about, and asked him what was to be done,—Nurse standing by, pretty patient, while Mrs. Crane kept groaning, "O dear! O dear!" in a way that was interrupting, to say the least. She put in her word, before Mr. Bertram could answer me, which wasn't like her usual respectful ways; but when a woman has been floundering in slimy green water, wearing her best new Sunday bonnet, it isn't a wonder if for once she should forget herself a little. "She wasn't going to sit behind that pony again," she said. "No! never! not if she knew it! A horrid little ill-conditioned brute! He'd be the death of

somebody some day! She wouldn't be driven any more—no, never! She would just walk home,— yes, exactly as she was."

"I say, Crane, you'll catch your death of cold, if you stand there speechifying," said Mr. Bertram. "Nothing is less likely than your having to sit behind the pony again at present, in that particular cart! You and Nurse must hurry off sharp to Brooks' farm—you know the way—it's not half a mile. Be as quick as you can, and get your wet things off, and go to bed, or roll yourselves up in blankets, whichever you like."

"Miss Adela, sir?" said Nurse, shaking.

"Never mind Miss Adela. She's all right with me. We'll come presently. Don't wait for us or anybody. Off with you both, and run, run!" shouted Mr. Bertram, as they took him at his word. "Get warm, if you can; and mind you have something hot to drink, the first thing."

"O Bertie! it has been so dreadful!" sighed Miss Adela.

"I say, Addie, just look at them trying to run," said Mr. Bertram, in a whisper, to make her laugh, for she was sobbing still, off and on. "Don't you mind," said he. "It'll be all right. Nobody's drowned. We've got to unharness the pony now, and then Miles must walk or ride him home and send a fly to the farm. Send dry clothes too for Crane and Nurse. One of the maids, will see to that. Shall I help you, Miles?" said he.

I was at work on the straps already, standing knee-deep in water; and I said I didn't want any help. There was no need for Mr. Bertram to get himself wet too, I thought; besides

Miss Adela couldn't bear to have him go away from her side. So he only waited a few minutes to see how I could manage, and then he walked off to the farm with Miss Adela.

The pony seemed to think he had done enough mischief for one day—as no doubt he had—and he stood like a lamb while I got him free. I could do nothing with the cart by myself; it was right over on one side, and the shafts were snapped in two. So I just led the pony out, and gave him a little punishment for his bad behaviour, which he took as well as possible; and then I got on his back, being used now and then to ride Mr. Kingscote's pony without a saddle. He started off at a canter, and never stopped once till we reached The Myrtles.

I left the pony in the stable, advising that somebody should be sent to see after the cart; while I went straight to Mr. Laurence, only stopping on the way to tell Matilda what had happened, as I thought she might like at once to get together the dry clothes, and to order the fly ready. "Mr. Bertram wished it," I said. I didn't make much of my own share in the adventure. Matilda held up her hands in a startled way, and went off without a word.

Mr. Laurence was reading in his study as usual; and he was much too busy to notice at first anything particular in my look. "Miles—that's right," he said. "I expected you about this time. Something I want done—a little copying. Where is Miss Adela, by-the-bye? Master Bertram went to meet her. Is he—why, Miles!"—as I came nearer the light—"what can have happened? My boy, what a state your trousers are in!"

"Yes, sir; we have been in the pond," I said. "But nobody is hurt."

"Been in the pond!" Mr. Laurence stared at me like one distracted. "In the pond!"

"The pony backed in and overturned the cart," I said, "and Mrs. Crane and Nurse have had a wetting; but Miss Adela is all right. Mr. Bertram and they are gone to the farm near; and Mr. Bertram said a fly was to be sent."

"To be sure! to be sure! A fly! But my child—my little Adela!" he said, too much agitated to take in what I had said; at least, he didn't fully. "My little Adela! To be wet through at this time of year,—and so late!"

"No; not Miss Adela, sir," I said. "I was able to get her to dry ground before the cart turned over."

Nothing would content Mr. Laurence but hearing the whole. He listened and questioned, and wouldn't stir or let me go till he understood exactly what had happened. By that time Matilda knocked at the door, and was told to come in.

"I hope I've done right, sir," she said. "I have ordered the fly to be here as quick as possible; and the clothes are all ready. Would you like me to go to the farm, sir, and see if I can help?"

"Well, yes; I think that might be best, perhaps," hesitated Mr. Laurence. "Stay—I am not sure—" And she had to wait while he stood up and shook my hand warmly. "I owe you a great deal, Miles," said he. "You once saved the life of my godson; and now, it may be, you have saved the life of my grandchild too, by your promptitude. She is a delicate little creature, and a chill is a dangerous thing. I hope

Crane and Nurse will not suffer. Yes, pray go, Matilda; certainly you had better go. And tell Mr. Bertram that I wish him and Miss Adela to return at once. If the others are not ready, the fly can go again for them."

"May I change my wet things, sir, now?" I asked.

"Why, to be sure! You don't mean to say you are standing in damp clothes all this time?" exclaimed Mr. Laurence. "Be off at once, Miles, and don't waste a moment. Get into dry clothes directly, or we shall have you ill."

I did not expect that, for I was hardy, and used to getting wet; but, naturally enough, both Mrs. Crane and Nurse caught bad colds, and Mrs. Crane especially was bad enough to be in bed for a week.

A good ten days passed before I saw her again, and all that time others in the house were much more civil to me than they had yet been. Nurse thanked me more than once for getting her out of the pond, and Miss Adela was always talking about it.

The first appearance of Mrs. Crane was at tea, and I saw directly that I wasn't to be treated any more as an interloper. She gave me the best of everything on the table, and she talked to me politely, and, altogether, she put me on a footing with herself, which certainly she had never done before. It wasn't Mrs. Crane's way to acknowledge herself in the wrong, or to say she was sorry for the past, and I don't think she ever went so far as actually to thank me for pulling her out of the pond; but "actions speak louder than words," and she made a difference in her manner of treating me, which nobody could have mistaken.

I wondered if this would last, and I found it did. Mrs. Crane might not have a graceful way of expressing gratitude, but, at all events, her gratitude lasted. My rubs and difficulties in that way were over, and very glad I was that I had managed to live through them, without giving any real cause for offence, or showing bad tempers in return.

CHAPTER XVI.

LOOKING BACK.

MRS. MURCHISON'S STORY.

My boy, Miles, seems to have come to a stop in his writing, and he says I'm to add something here. If I do, the first thing I'm likely to put down is, how thankful I am to have such children as mine! I don't think I am what is called "fond and foolish" about my children. That is to say, I don't think mine is a blind love, able only to see good in them, and able to see nothing that is wrong. The best and highest kind of love isn't a blind love—at least, I should think not.

Miles has his faults, like other boys; and one fault shows pretty clearly in this bit of our story which he has written. I mean, he has the fault of thinking too much about himself. There is a lot about "I—I," and "what I have done, and what I think," and "what people think of me," and that's a pity always. The more we think about ourselves, the less leisure we have to think about other people.

I wonder whether anybody reading my part of the story—I mean the part I wrote myself —would perhaps say the same of me! I never thought of that before; but things look so different from outside and inside, and it may be so.

Well, anyhow, as I say, I'm not blind to my children's faults, and I'm not blind to this fault of Miles'. But, all the same, I am thankful to have my boy what he is. For I know that he is honest and straightforward and true: that he is hardworking, and diligent, and ready to do a kindness to anybody. And I know that Mr. Laurence thinks a lot of my boy. He told Mrs. Kingscote the other day, that he "would

trust Miles with anything." That was nice for a mother to hear, wasn't it?

As for my other children, Louey and Rosie, they are both as good and affectionate as I could wish. Louey is more and more of a help to me in the house, and Rosie bids fair to follow in her steps.

And my other little one—my sweet Bessie—it is all well with her, I know, though a veil has come between, and I cannot see or touch her more. Yet often I feel that she is even nearer to me than my dear ones who seem so near; for the veil between is very thin, and she and I are both in Christ's keeping. And oh, how safe she is? For the three elder ones I am often anxious, picturing their future in this life, and possible dangers and temptations. But for Bessie, all anxiety is over! she is beyond danger and beyond temptation. If I could have her back again, would I? Ah, that would be a hard question to answer, if put to me! Hard to say "No," and yet how grieved she would be to have to come! It would be like going from the Queen's palace to live in some dark cellar. Oh no! I love her too well to wish it really, even while nothing can ever fill that blank in my life.

Sometimes I think my husband was struck down too, that I might have the more to fill my time and thoughts during the months following. For a long while he improved so slowly, it could hardly be called getting on at all; and though the doctor spoke of a measure of recovery, I knew he never could be a strong man again. We didn't dare at first to hope that he would ever get back his walking-power. And though things were better than we feared, and he did in time

gain strength to move slowly with a stick, yet he has always been something of an invalid, needing a lot of care, and not able to do much in the way of work.

The lodging-house plan was a success. From the time we first began, I never knew for the next three years what it was to have empty rooms in spring, or summer, or autumn; and we were able to lay by for winter months. Miles too earned more, and he brought all his earnings to me. It is wonderful how, one way and another, we were helped.

But isn't that the way? If trouble comes, and we put our trust in God, isn't help sure?

I don't mean just a careless indifferent sort of confidence that things will get right somehow, but a real living trust in the Fatherly love of God, and in the willingness of Christ our Lord always to hear when we pray, and to do for us what we really need. That can never be in vain. The help mayn't come exactly as we should choose; but one way or another it will come.