DR. WISEMAN'S FAMILY.

A Story of the Second Advent.

THERE were ten of them, including the doctor himself; Robert, the only son; Priscilla and Prudence, the twins; Lettice, Sylvia, Charity, Hope, Uncle David,—nine! Ah! but Bobo makes the tenth. He was far too important a member of the family to be forgotten, especially as he was the only one of them all with a nick-name, except Charity, often called Chatty, and considered to be fully described by the union of the two names.

Dr. Wiseman, rector of the Church of St. John the Beloved, was often pitied for having such a large family to support, particularly after Uncle David's coming to the Rectory; though as the Rectory was large, and Uncle David small, one really had to try very hard to understand the pity of it. And indeed the Rector did not pity himself.

Bobo was a grandson, and Robert, his father, was a widower, an infidel too, which was much worse, according to the unanimous verdict of the ladies of his father's congregation. He was an ardent politician, a lawyer, and an honest man,—a rare combination, perhaps, yet perfectly possible.

For my part, I felt sorry for Robert as soon as I looked into his eyes; for, to those who could read it, all the story of his life was written there; his despair of the loss—the eternal loss, as he believed—of his sweet young wife; and the courage with which he had thrown himself into any sort of work that came to hand, using it to crush down the grief that always threatened to rise up again and overmaster him. The Rectory was not a very congenial house for Robert, for each of his sisters had, as he expressed it, a different fad, and room in her head for nothing else, except condemning him, and petting Bobo. It was for the sake of the petting that he endured

the condemnation. Bobo was his idol, indeed his love for the child almost frightened himself; for what should he do without his baby, his only one? and a child's life is such a fragile thing! So Robert endured the perpetual arguments which seemed as essential to a meal at the Rectory as a tablecloth; and even took pains to be present at family prayers, when he found out that his father wished it on account of the example to the servants.

Priscilla was as careful of the boy as his own mother could have been, and perhaps loved him little less. Robert trusted her judgment all the more however, because she alone of the sisters never blunted it by argument. She was a homely body, much the oldest of the family, with apparently few thoughts beyond her housekeeping and her knitting. Robert said she rested him, as a contrast to Prudence, who, as a lecturer and expounder of sound doctrine was equal to her namesake in the Pilgrim's Progress. She was quite in her element as a teacher of the parish school, with a small salary, most of which found its way back into the parish alms-basin. Lettice was an artist, and gave lessons in modelling at the Decorative Art Rooms. Sylvia was a beauty and belle, but filled up the rest of her time by teaching music; and Charity was a salaried agent of her namesake's Organization Society; so, in spite of the pity expended on the doctor, his family were all earning something for themselves, except Hope, who was a Christian Socialist, and who had only just left school.

But then again, there was Uncle David.

Uncle David was—so people said when they pitied the doctor—"one of those persons who never get on in the world." He had had—"oh my dear! *such* an expensive education, at a Poly—Polyglot—no—Polytechnic Institute, and every one thought he would make a fortune as an inventor or something; but instead of that he just settled down as a mining engineer in some out-of-the-way, heathenish place, and was never heard of again until he had some sort of fever, about a year ago, and came back on the doctor without a penny in his pocket, to be taken care of. Oh! of course they *call* it a visit, but he'll never be fit for work again. Good?—no, I never heard that he

did very much *good* among them. They've a Church there, and schools and things, but the clergyman does all that, you know. Oh! I *did* hear that those great, brawny, black-faced miners cried like children when he resigned his position, and that it is understood that his successor is to make way for him in case he is ever able to go back; but I think he is just that sort of person you know, dear, who wins hearts without deserving it half as much as others who don't get any sympathy or appreciation at all. They fairly worship him at the Rectory."

"That sort of person" came very slowly down the wide, shallow Rectory stairs one crisp, sunny spring morning, and stood for a moment at the open hall door, drinking in the sweet air. The Rectory, as I have said, was a large, roomy old house, with a wide hall running through the centre. It was on a hill, rather apart from the very quiet street, and Uncle David stood for several moments on the great, flat door-stone, before, with a slight shiver, he turned back into the house, and opened the door of the breakfast-room, on the right of the hall. There was a soft-coal fire in the grate in this room, on which account it was a special favorite of Uncle David's, and indeed of all the family; but it was now so long before breakfast-time that there was no one in the room but Robert, who sat reading the paper in a great chair before the fire, and who jumped up briskly to offer the old man a seat.

Uncle David accepted it with a smile, but declined the paper. "I have all day for that, and my eyes are rather troublesome, too, this morning," he said; "such a beautiful morning, Robert!"

"I suppose it is," said the young man; "but I was so busy reading about this sewer, Uncle David."

"Yes?" said Uncle David with interest. He warmed his small, thin, brown hands at the fire, and listened with bright attention, while Robert explained how this sewer in particular had been contract work, and badly done at first; how it had given way and been patched up, time and again; how it was a fruitful source of disease, and how the City Council, having been solemnly pledged to remedy the evil, had as yet taken

no steps in that direction, and must be pushed and prodded accordingly; to all of which Uncle David assented cordially.

"To build a new one would give work to those who need it," said Chatty, thoughtfully. She had come in quietly, early in the narration, and had been followed, one by one, by all the members of the family.

"Give work!" said Hope indignantly; "the laborers would give *that*. What the City would give would be about the thousandth part of the workers' real earnings!"

"A nice thing to give men like that a lot of money all at once, as you would like to do," said Chatty scornfully. "You'd demoralize them!"

"Music would be a great thing for the working classes," said Sylvia, "if you could get that into the heads of your City Council, Robert — music, I mean, in all the public squares; and real thorough musical instruction in the schools. That would be really elevating."

"And drawing," said Lettice, "that is one reason I approve of Kindergartens. They train a child's eye and hand, and if their teaching could be continued in the public schools—"

"How can any good work be done in schools where religious instruction is prohibited?" asked Prudence with a sigh. "If you, Sylvia and Lettice, would bring your talents to the Church and dedicate them to her service—"

"I'm sure I sing in the choir," said Sylvia, indignantly.

"Ah! but I mean such service as training the children of the Church to use the talents God has given them."

"The Church isn't such a *very* good pay-mistress," replied Lettice laughing.

"Because she hasn't her rights," said Hope quickly. "In the days of the Apostles when all things were in common, and the very office of a deacon was to see to the public tables,"—

"Instead of hanging decorations at the risk of his precious neck, at Christmas-time," said Robert sarcastically.

"Breakfast is ready, children," said Priscilla.

They gather around the table, Bobo being already in his high chair at his father's right hand at the foot of the table, for Dr. Wiseman was temporarily absent.

When grace had been said, Uncle David shook out his napkin, slowly laid it across his knees, and remarked, that he had never seen such rolls and coffee as Priscilla's anywhere in the West; and that really, for cookery, one must come to Maryland anyhow. "And that suggestion of yours about the parish school, Prudence, my dear, was well put; extremely well put, if our artists had time for it," he said. "Though of course I agree with you, Lettice and Sylvia, that if every child in the country could learn music and drawing, that would be best of all; but still if only twenty children learn, it is so much gained."

"Of course," said Lettice; "and as far as that goes, I'm not so overrun with pupils but that I could spare an hour or so a week,"—

"If it were to improve the Sunday singing," said Sylvia, "I suppose"—

"Individual effort won't do much," put in Hope; "but still"—

"No, it takes the City Council to keep you from being poisoned by sewer gas,"said Robert.

"And they won't try," replied Hope. "Though I will say for you, Robert, that you are going about the thing in the right way, although you do not know where you are going, or see the drift of your own actions."

"The drift of the sewer is what bothers me," said Robert, breaking Bobo's egg into a cup.

"All of us are going about the thing the right way, if we do the best we know how," said Uncle David. "If you are an anvil, bear; if you are a hammer, strike! That's pretty good Socialism, Hope, and the essence of individuality at the same time."

"All the members joined together, by that which every joint supplieth," said Hope, smiling. "But oh! Uncle David, if our Lord would only hasten His Second Coming!"—

"Gracious me, Hope! you're not a Second Adventist!" cried Prudence.

"Our Lord is here all de time," said Bobo with dignity.

They had not supposed the child to be attending, and every one looked at him in surprise; but the round rosy face was

quite calm, and he went on with his breakfast as if nothing at all unusual had been said.

"Who told you that, my son?" asked Robert.

"Untle David," said Bobo; "and I know it my own se'f," he added.

Then everybody looked at Uncle David. He was not at all a handsome man,—just a little withered, sun-dried engineer; but there was a strange light in his eyes as he answered, that made his face as the face of an angel.

"Why, of course everybody knows that," said Uncle David.

Yes, every one had always known it; but it seemed to them all that they had never heard it before. A hush came over the table. But presently Robert said, not irreverently, "Well, for His own sake, one would hope not; for to see the sort of a world we've got would break His heart, if He was the sort of man we hear that He was."

"But He *is* here," said Bobo once more, startling them by his grave, positive manner.

"There is much to be done, but there are many to do it," said Uncle David.

They took leave, each in his or her turn, of the old man, before they went their several ways. This was a custom they had: it pleased Uncle David, and in some dimly felt way sweetened and hallowed the day for them.

"You won't be lonely, Uncle David?" asked Hope.

"My dear," he answered, "I am never lonely."

"Is it because of what Bobo said?" she whispered.

"My dear child, what Bobo said all of us have known all our lives," he replied.

Robert pulled his chair into the warm sunshine, and Priscilla placed the bell-pull within reach of his hand, while she went to her housekeeping duties. The girls kissed him, and Robert held up Bobo to do the same; for they all felt unusually fond of Uncle David this morning.

"There, run along to your lessons, children," he said playfully,—"lessons and work. When you are my age, you will have time to rest, and"—

"And what? Uncle David."

"And converse," said the old man.

They knew quite well what he meant, and as they left him sitting there in the sunshine, with a happy smile on his face, it was with the feeling that he was less alone than any of them. And yet for each one, it was very strange how those few words, and the look on the dear old brown face, had made quite another thing of the world and their familiar occupations.

Hope deposited Bobo at his Kindergarten on her way to the Business College, where she was studying book-keeping. The child was to be fetched home at noon by Uncle David, who delighted in the task, and was already well-known to all the children, and of course as well loved by them as by everyone else. Hope's columns of figures looked quite different this morning. She had been accustomed to vex herself over her imaginary notes and bills, and to ask how the text "Owe no man anything, save to love one another," could ever be lived up to, under such a system of inflated credit as ours. But to-day, there was another Teacher in the Business College, and in a dim sort of way, Hope understood the secret of His infinite patience; and that though our business system may be blundering and wasteful enough, a great deal of love can be conveyed in a check, or a "promise to pay."

Robert, too,—even Robert—at work upon his refractory Councilmen, found himself wishing that there *were* such a Presence in the world as Uncle David believed in, and feeling a warm glow at his heart with the thought that if it were so, He would approve anything that would better the condition of the poor, whom He had loved so well when on earth.

For there was this strange thing about the thought which the old man and the child had brought before their minds, that while it brightened their hope for the world, it made each more diligent in his or her particular calling. Likewise each was more ready to admit the necessity for other people's callings. Robert found himself seriously considering how his sister's suggestions as to the teaching of music and drawing could be materialized; and Lettice and Sylvia met, without premeditation, at the parish school, and offered their services to Prudence. In becoming talents, their gifts had ceased to

be fads, of which latter word I for my part do not know the etymology, unless it be the German Pferd, in which case it is intelligible enough, as also is the difference between a hobby and such a roadster as that upon which journeyed aforetime the Good Samaritan.

When they returned in the evening there was an unspoken dread in every heart lest Uncle David should have proved to be too good for this world, and so should have been translated to a higher sphere; but when they found him looking rather better and brighter than usual, they were secretly ashamed, because they had forgotten the Eternal Presence, for which, if the world be not too bad, it is surely good enough for any other. And after dinner a strange thing happened; that is to say, a thing which seemed very strange at the time, and ever after, when the memory of it first re-awakened in their minds; yet which was as simple and natural as any occurrence out of Heaven; and so always, when they had thought of it for a while, the wonder grew to be that it had not come to them long before.

They were sitting in the dining-room where, as I have said, there was an open fire. There was a lamp on the table, around which the sisters were grouped, knitting, sewing, or drawing, while Sylvia tinkled sweet, silvery notes upon her beloved zither. Robert had gone out of the house on some business errand, and Dr. Wiseman, as I have also said, was absent; but his arm-chair stood in its accustomed place across the hearth from Uncle David's, with a footstool drawn before it; and upon the rug sat Bobo, playing with his tin horse and wagon. The child was unusually quiet, and when he laughed, as he did very often, it was a soft, hushed laugh, though a very happy one.

Sylvia, whose eyes and attention were freer than those of any one else, was the first to observe this; also that—to the child at least—the great chair did not seem empty; for though he played quite close to it, he did not touch even the footstool; but he often held up his toy, as if to draw to it the attention of the occupant of the chair. Yet Sylvia could see no one, but she noticed that each time Bobo looked across at Uncle David; and that Uncle David smiled, as one who well understood.

A strange awe came over the girl, and her fingers moved over the silver strings almost without her own volition. She never knew, or could remember afterwards, what she had played; but as the melody stole out softly into the silent room, it seemed to her that, in the wide embrace of the great chair, she traced the outlines of a Form. And, although she looked not around her, she knew in some strange way that every one else in the room saw it too; yet no one paused in her occupation a moment. Lettice's pencil moved swiftly as if of itself, for her eyes also were upon the Form. She said afterwards that she was trying to draw what she saw; but all that she found upon her block was a tall gracious lily encircled by a garland of heartsease.

The zither's magic melody grew purer and sweeter, and the Form became very clear; and yet not one of them all could have described a fold of His garment, or a feature of His face. Only the eyes they could never forget; but neither could they repeat the language of them. And it was very strange, too, that there was not in any one's mind a thought of sin or of repentance; yet surely they had, all of them, cause for repentance. It was as though His Presence filled them utterly, quite to the exclusion of self, so that they did not even remember whether they needed to repent or no.

And all the while He sat there, quite calmly and naturally; not as a stranger, but as if the place were familiar to Him, as if He had been there always, and it was they who were in fault, because they had not sooner recognized Him. There was no reproach in His look; there was only a still sweet smile; yet each one felt with a sense of loss quickly absorbed in one of infinite possession, that He had been a long time with them, and yet until now they had never known Him.

They wondered, too, that Uncle David should take this strange event so quietly; for his eyes were not like theirs, fixed on that Form; he was watching *their* faces and smiling, as he saw the light on each, as *they* will smile who welcome us when we wake to find ourselves in Heaven. "You did not know that Heaven was so very near you," is what that smile will mean!

But when I say that the sisters thought these things, I do not mean that the thought could have been crystallized into words, any more than the music of Sylvia's zither.

How long that strange sweet melody floated out upon the silence, how long those loving eyes looked into theirs, they did not know; but with the sound of a step at the door, and a hand upon the latch, each became conscious that she had been wishing, yet dreading, for Robert to come in. For he who did not believe, how could *he* perceive that life-giving Presence? and if he should *not* perceive, if he should scoff—yet the Form remained, unchanged in look or manner!

Robert came in very quietly; it may be that he had felt, even from without, the influence of that holy hush; he advanced to the middle of the room, and then paused, suddenly looking down upon the child, who had grown bolder now, and sat with his golden curls nestled quite against that gracious Figure. The father's eyes, perhaps, at first saw only the boy; then, it may be, that the outlines of the Form, on which the child leaned, grew, as they had done to the sisters, clearer and firmer, until at last the Eyes looked into his own.

Then with a low joyful cry, he fell upon his knees and laid his forehead upon that footstool. He had not believed; poor Robert, he had not dared to believe; but now he came closer than any one of them, except the child.

They dared not look longer; each one covered her face and wept; when at last they raised their heads, Bobo had climbed into the great chair, which, but for him, seemed quite empty again, and Robert was standing, talking to Uncle David.

"It was only a vision, Uncle David; it could not have been real?"

"Is not a vision real, Robert, my boy?"

"You saw him, then, as I did?" he said, "truly in that chair?"

"He is everywhere," said Uncle David; "we see Him, now here, Robert, and now there. That is the fault of our eyes; for His presenceis with us always, 'even to the end of the world.'

THE AUTHOR OF "METZEROTT, SHOEMAKER."