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Title: The old Worcester jug;

or, John Griffin's little maid

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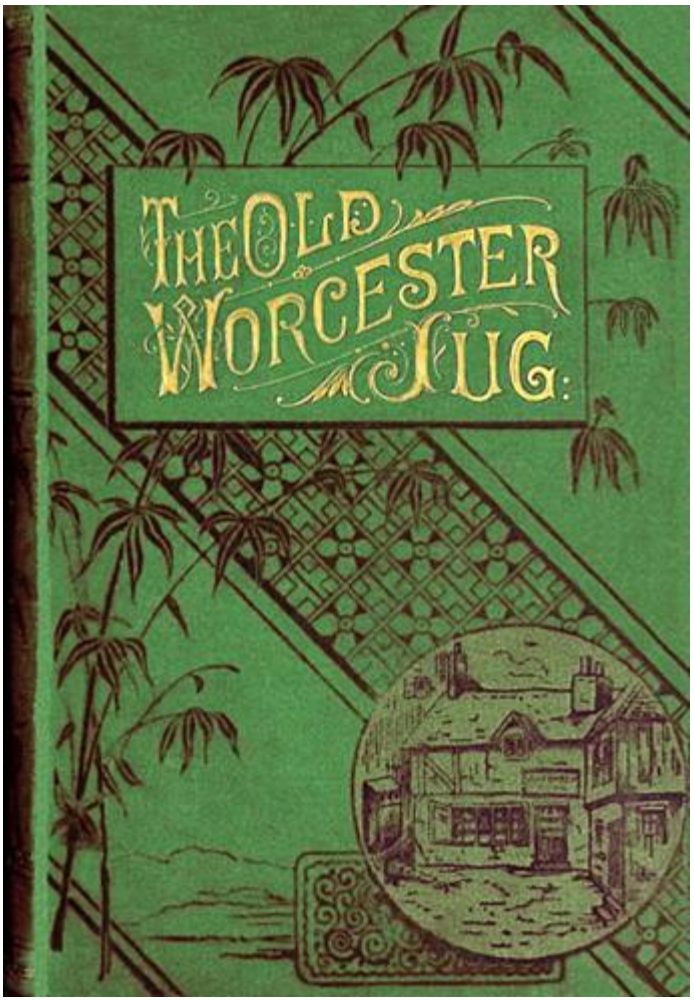
Release date: March 12, 2025 [eBook #75600]

Language: English

Original publication: London: The Religious Tract Society, 1882

Transcriber's note: Unusual and inconsistent spelling is as printed.


THE OLD WORCESTER JUG.

THE JUG SOLD.

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THE

OLD WORCESTER JUG;

OR,

JOHN GRIFFIN'S LITTLE MAID.

BY

EGLANTON THORNE

AUTHOR OF "IT'S ALL REAL TRUE," "AS MANY AS TOUCHED HIM."

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY

56, PATERNOSTER ROW; 65, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD;

AND 164, PICCADILLY.

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THE

OLD WORCESTER JUG

CHAPTER I.

A Good Bargain.

MIDWAY in a long lane of houses, running east and west between Plymouth and Stonehouse, stood, some years ago, a small whitewashed house with bright green shutters and bright green door. It was hardly more than a cottage in size. The houses opposite were far larger, but the smaller dwelling had the advantage in respectability of appearance. It claimed attention, too, by the announcement painted in large letters over the door: JOHN GRIFFIN'S OLD CURIOSITY SHOP.

The house stood a little back from the lane, and a narrow flagged path led to the door. There was no shop frontage, but the window was filled with specimens of almost every variety of china and glass ware, and both shutters bore the words:

JOHN GRIFFIN,
Dealer in British and Foreign China
ALL KINDS OF OLD CHINA BOUGHT, SOLD, OR GIVEN
IN EXCHANGE.

REPAIRS NEATLY EXECUTED

Small as the shop was, it was perhaps the most important of all in the lane. This fact, however, did not reflect great credit on its owner, since most of the shops in that dingy thoroughfare were pawnbrokers', or second-hand stores of one kind or another, with a disproportionately large number of public-houses. But John Griffin's shop had peculiarities of its own, and his circumstances were certainly superior to those of his neighbours.

Although the lane had a bad character, being the resort of the most degraded characters of the two towns to which it belonged, so that few persons of the gentler classes passed that way, unless drawn there by business or charitable intent, it sometimes happened that a carriage drove up to John Griffin's door; and on rare occasions ladies had been seen to pass in and out the narrow doorway, drawing their skirts closely round them as they stepped through with an air of fastidious caution.

To any one possessed by the china mania, "THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP" offered many attractions. Packed into its limited space were varieties of almost every china ware. The dealer prided himself on his thorough knowledge of his business. He was also a connoisseur of the fragile and costly articles, in which he did a not inconsiderable trade. No trouble was too great for him to take, in order to increase his knowledge or add to his store of curiosities. He would often walk a long distance merely to look upon a rare specimen of antique china.

One cold, damp December evening, Griffin was in his shop, examining some cracked cups and saucers and a venerable teapot, which he had that day purchased at a sale. The place dignified by the name of shop was only the front room of the house. It was scarcely fourteen feet square; but the quantity of goods it contained exceeded all expectation. Not an inch of space was wasted. To enter required the utmost caution, so narrow was the passage left between piles of most brittle ware, and tables and chests loaded with all sorts of curiosities.

The upper part of the walls to the edge of the low ceiling was hung with plates and dishes. Some of these were brown and cracked, colourless and common in appearance; others were prettily painted with landscapes, flowers, or figures. Many of the ugliest and shabbiest articles seemed to have gained places of high honour, showing that in respect to valuable china, it is not wise to judge by looks.

John Griffin did not deal exclusively in china. Standing against the back wall, and well-laden with goods, were three carved oak cabinets, richly-coloured by age; old pictures and quaintly wrought mirrors leaned against them; clocks of ancient form stood on the mantel-shelf; second-hand books lay in piles on the floor, and even a few broken-ribbed umbrellas were stowed away behind the door. The shop always seemed to be in the most hopeless muddle; but there was method in the confusion, and Griffin himself had never any difficulty in finding the article he wanted.

The china-dealer was by no means the terrible personage his name might suggest. He was a short, square-set man, about sixty years of age, with a large head, well covered by curly grey hair, keen grey eyes, made the keener by the round, thick-rimmed spectacles he wore, and the earnest intent expression of a man whose aims in life have all set into one narrow channel. He did not look unamiable this evening as he stood in his shop talking to himself, as was his habit. He had just taken a large, well-thumbed book from a drawer close at hand, and was comparing a mark that his quick eyes had discovered at the bottom of the cup, with one printed on the page before him.

"I thought so," he said, in a tone of triumph; "this is real old Dresden, and no mistake. Pity there should be that chip; but a little china clay and a touch of the brush will soon set that right, and few people will be the wiser. I didn't throw my money away when I bought that."

He gave a low chuckle of satisfaction at the thought. Just then he became conscious of a faint, somewhat hesitating knock at the door.

"Who's there?" asked Griffin; and as there was no response, he put down the cup, went to the door and opened it.

A woman stood in the narrow passage, with a little girl by her side.

"Do you buy old china?" she inquired.

"Yes, I buy it, ma'am, if it's worth buying," he replied, looking wonderingly at her.

She was a tall, slight woman, with pale, emaciated face, lit up by glittering dark eyes. She wore a thin black shawl, and a widow's bonnet, which was at the last degree of shabbiness. Evidently she was very poor, yet Griffin instinctively addressed her as he was wont to address his lady customers. Miserable as she looked, her pure refined speech, and the grace of her manner at once told him that she was a lady. Griffin's dealings with gentlefolks had taught him to distinguish between a real lady and a "would-be-fine" one.

"I have some china here, which I wish to dispose of," said the lady, taking from her child a large bag, which she seemed to carry with difficulty, though she was better able to support its weight than her mother.

"Very good, ma'am; please to walk inside, and I'll look at it," said the dealer; "only be careful how you move, if you please, or your skirts may do a mischief."

The lady advanced a few steps into the room, whilst the child lingered in the doorway, looking on with large dark eyes, preternaturally anxious and shrewd.

"This, I believe, is a Lowestoft bowl," said the widow, taking from the bag a small bowl of pale blue china, embellished with flowers of a darker blue.

"They calls them Lowestoft, but they're really Oriental," said Griffin, carelessly taking the bowl, and tapping it with his knuckles as if to test its soundness. "This ain't real Lowestoft china. You can see it in the book, if you like to look. I get a plenty of bowls like this: they're no great rarity."

"Then you would not be inclined to buy it," said the lady, laying her trembling hand on the table for support.

"I don't say I won't buy it," he returned, in his peculiar, nasal drawl; "but I couldn't give you more than five shillings for it."

"Only five shillings!" said the lady, heaving a deep sigh.

"I couldn't do more, ma'am, it wouldn't pay me," he said; "but you've some other things in your bag; let me see."

The white, wasted hand drew out a plate of pretty blue and gold ware.

"I have three others like this I could bring you, if you would care to buy them," she said.

Pretty though it was, the plate had clearly no attraction for the dealer. His lips emitted a faint sound of contempt at the sight of it.

"No, no, it wouldn't be worth my while to buy that," he said, decidedly, "it's scarce ten year old, and quite a common sort of china. I don't make no account of that. I'd give it to my wife to do what she liked with."

John Griffin could not more strongly depreciate a piece of china than by saying that he would give it to his wife, since he was careful to guard from her touch everything which he esteemed as valuable.

The lady looked discouraged. With reluctance she drew from her bag the last article it contained.

"This I know to be old," she said; "and I have heard my—I have been told that it is of considerable value."

It was a curious old-fashioned jug. The dealer knew its worth better than she did. Though he took it from her with an air of indifference, its appearance excited his warmest interest. He examined the jug carefully.

It was of rare old Worcester ware, and quaintly moulded. Its colour was pale yellow. The rim and handle were wreathed with roses and poppies; whilst butterflies, bees, and beetles were painted below at equal intervals. The spout was shaped to form the head of a man with long, pointed beard, and remarkably red cheeks and lips.

But the chief beauty of the jug was seen in the three exquisite little pictures of country life which adorned its wider circumference. One picture showed some cows in a meadow, and two pretty milkmaids, coquettishly dressed, about to bear away the milk. One girl had her bucket safely poised on her head, whilst her companion was in the act of receiving her burden from the hands of an obliging young man, with long, flowing locks. In the next picture, there was but one milkmaid, who leaned idly against a tree, stool in hand, and empty pails beside her, listening to the talk of a swain who stood near, dressed in the most fanciful of rural costumes; whilst the cows lay on the grass, lazily chewing the cud, and apparently content to await the milkmaid's pleasure. The third picture represented the milkmaid engaged in milking one of the reddest of cows, whilst her swain, resting beneath the tree, charmed her ear with the notes of his flute.

John Griffin did not notice all these details, however. He cast one rapid glance at the pictures, and then began searching with eyes and hands for crack or flaw. None was to be found. The jug was perfect, and a mark well-known to Griffin proved it to be genuine old Worcester. But the dealer was too clever at making bargains to declare unguardedly how

valuable he thought it. He meant to get possession of it; but it would not do to show eagerness.

"It is good of its kind," he said, when he had made his hasty examination. "May I ask what price you've heard put upon it?"

"Oh, I cannot tell," said the lady; "I never thought I should have to sell the jug; for it is an old family possession, which I would not willingly part with. But of course I want to get a good price for it. It is very handsome, I think."

"Oh, it's pretty enough in its way," said the dealer, in a tone of depreciation. "But prettiness ain't everything. You see that jug there, mum," pointing to a plain-looking specimen of no particular colour, and with no beauty of form—"I daresay you wouldn't think it, for it's not what you would call a pretty jug, but I expect to get nine guineas for that jug."

"Indeed!" said the lady, in a faint tone of surprise. "How is that?"

"Plymouth, mum, real old Plymouth, marked so as any one can see,— I don't know where I could find its equal," said the dealer, in a tone of enthusiasm.

"But what sort of jug is mine, and what would you give me for it?" asked the widow, anxious to get her business over.

"It's Worcester, mum; and as it's without a crack, I can give you fifteen shillings for it."

"Only fifteen shillings!" she said; in a tone of disappointment, for his mention of the price of the other jug had made her think that he could not offer her less than a pound for this, and she had hoped he would say more.

"Fifteen shillings, and five for the bowl; and if you like to bring me the other plates I'll give you twenty-two shillings and sixpence for the lot. I'll take them to oblige you, for it's not my custom to buy such common china."

"Thank you," said the widow, after a moment's hesitation; "I agree to it."

Griffin put his hand in his pocket, and drew out a leathern bag, from which he extracted a sovereign and half-a-crown, and handed them to the lady.

"Shall I take all this now?" she said. "Will you pay for the plates before you get them?"

"It's no difference, mum," said the old dealer, "bring me the plates whenever you like: I know what it is to deal with ladies."

"You are very good," said the lady, faintly; "my little girl shall bring them to you to-morrow morning. We are living close by."

Till now Griffin had hardly been aware of the presence of the child, who stood still as a little statue in the doorway; but at these words he turned his gaze on her. He was conscious of a strange inward thrill as he met the full deep glance of her large brown eyes, which looked the larger for the tears that stood in them.

They would come—those tears—in spite of her resolve to be a good girl and not mind parting with the jug, which seemed like a part of her little life, for she could not remember the time when she had not loved to look at the pictures upon it, and hear her mother tell stories about the pretty cows and prettier milkmaids.

The child looked very different from the children Griffin was accustomed to see playing in the lane. Her face was small and pretty, though the sad, anxious look it now wore was not such, happily, as is often seen on children's faces. Her dress was threadbare, but perfectly clean and neat, and there was a delicacy and refinement in her bearing only rendered the more striking by her shabby clothing.

John Griffin noted all this as he looked upon her, and the child's unusual demeanour made him uncomfortable, for it seemed to him that her large dark eyes had power to read his thoughts, and she divined that he was taking an unfair advantage of her mother's ignorance. Griffin had a strange sense of being found out as he looked away from the child.

Yet he had never before thought it wrong to drive as good a bargain as he could. Since he began his trade it had been his endeavour to buy as cheaply as possible, in order to sell again at the highest price. It was absurd that this child's open, innocent gaze should make him feel as if he had done a mean action.

"Come, Maggie," said the child's mother, giving her the bag, "we must be going."

But as she turned to go, a violent fit of coughing seized the poor woman. So severe was the attack, that she staggered back against the wall of the passage, faint and panting for breath.

"Oh, mamma," cried little Maggie, running to her, and taking her hand; then turning to the dealer, she fixed on him a distressed, beseeching glance.

"I'll get you some water; it's dreadful, a cough like that," said old Griffin, with an alacrity strange to him where china was not concerned.

"No, thank you; I am better now," said the widow, slowly recovering breath; "it's nothing, I'm used to it."

"Poor mamma is so ill," said Maggie, addressing the old man with the easy confidence of childhood; "and she has eaten nothing to-day."

"Hush, Maggie!" interrupted her mother, in a sharp, quick tone. "Come along. Good night."

As she spoke she passed out into the cold, dark night. A delicate woman should not have been abroad on such a night. The keen wind which blew in at the open door made even old Griffin shiver.

"Who ever was that coughing so?" asked his wife, looking out of the inner room as he closed the door.

"A poor lady that came to sell some china," he replied.

"She must be very ill. I can't bear to hear a cough like that; it's what I call a churchyard cough," remarked Mrs. Griffin. "Did you buy any of the china?"

"Yes, I did; and a nice bit I've got too," returned her husband.

"What is it?" asked his wife, coming to the door of the shop.

Mrs. Griffin felt little interest in old china save as a means of making money. To her taste modern china seemed far preferable to most of the old cracked ware which her husband took such pains to mend and preserve. But the jug which Griffin was now holding up to view struck her as being a nice purchase.

"Why, that's a real pretty jug now!" she exclaimed. "What may you have given for that?"

"Fifteen shillings," he replied.

"And what do you expect to sell it for?"

"I hope I may make five guineas by it," he said.

"You don't mean it! Come now, that is a good bargain," she exclaimed, in a tone of delight; "and what about that bowl, did you buy that too?"

"Oh, that isn't good for much," he said; "and I bought that plate too, and three others that are to come. I don't know what made me buy them, for they're poor stuff."

"The plate is very pretty, I think," said Mrs. Griffin, examining it. "When are the others coming?"

"The child is to bring them to-morrow morning," said her husband, rather absently.

"What child? You surely haven't paid for them before you've got them?" she said.

"Yes, I have," he returned; "and you need not look as if you thought me foolish. She was a real lady. It'll be all right, I know; but if not, I sha'n't lose anything."

"Well, I only hope you'll get the plates," said his wife, in a tone expressive of strong doubt, as she retreated down the passage; "but anyhow, as you say, you'll have made a good bargain."

But John Griffin had ceased to feel pleased with his bargain, although the more closely he examined the jug the more he admired its perfections. As he turned it round in his hands he found himself actually wishing he had given more for it. It was little Maggie's influence which made him feel thus. He was haunted by the memory of her mute, appealing glance of childish sorrow. Nor could he forget the simple words she had uttered. Why had her mother eaten nothing that day? Was it because she had not had the money to procure food till she had sold her china? He felt uneasy at the thought that he had taken advantage of—he would not say cheated—a poor lady reduced to such straits.

CHAPTER II.

A Sudden Parting.

LEAVING the old curiosity shop, the pale-faced widow and her child passed slowly up the lane. Maggie held her mother's hand, not for her own protection, but in order that she might guide the invalid's feeble steps, which faltered from time to time as her strength threatened to give way.

"Was that a good old man, mamma?" she asked, as they went along.

"I hope so, dear. I trust he has dealt fairly with me, for I can ill afford to be cheated out of a single penny," said her mother, with a weary sigh.

"What will he do with the jug, mamma?" said Maggie.

"He will sell it, I suppose," her mother replied.

"And will he give you the money, mamma?" asked the child.

The simple question brought a faint, sad smile to the widow's face, as she answered, "Oh no, dear; he has given me all the money I shall get for it."

"Has he given you a lot of money, mamma?" asked Maggie. "Will you be able to buy cakes and jam again?"

Her mother shook her head. "Ah no, my poor child," she said, sadly. "I cannot give you cakes and jam. If only we can get bread for the next week or two, till I am strong again, we may be thankful. God grant I may soon be fit for work!"

Little Maggie looked disappointed. She had hoped that the happier days she had known when she was younger were about to return, but she held up her head, and said bravely: "I don't mind much, mamma. I can do without jam; and God will take care of us, won't He, mamma?"

"Bless you, my little comfort," said her mother, wondering if any other child of eight would have borne want so well. "Yes, I must trust in God. He has never failed me yet. He is far kinder than man. But oh, my heart is very heavy to-night."

They went on slowly till they came to a baker's shop, which they entered, much to Maggie's satisfaction, for the talk about jam had made her painfully conscious of a craving for food. The widow gave her child one of the large brown rolls which lay on the counter, and then asked for some milk.

"We don't sell milk," said the woman in charge of the shop. Then, touched by her customer's look of suffering, and the sad little face of the child, she added, "But I have a little I can give you, if you like."

Maggie was eyeing the roll with hungry eagerness; but ere she began to eat it, she said, pleadingly, "You will have some, mamma, won't you?"

"Yes, dear child," said her mother, "I will try to eat for your sake." And she broke off a piece of the roll, and dipping it into the milk the woman had brought, she put it to her lips. But she could only swallow a few morsels.

"You look very bad," said the shopwoman, meaning to be sympathetic; "have you been ill long?"

"Yes, a long time," said the widow, wearily; "but I am better, I am stronger to-day."

When Maggie had eaten the last crumb of her roll, and drained the cup of milk, to her now an unwonted luxury, her mother paid for their repast out of the money she had received from the china-dealer, and rising from the chair on which she had sunk exhausted on entering the shop, prepared to go on her way. The rest and refreshment seemed to have revived her somewhat. She was able to walk more quickly and steadily as they went out of the shop.

"Are we going home now, mamma?" asked the child.

"No, not yet," said her mother; and she walked on in the same direction as before.

They approached the end of the lane, where it widened out into a more respectable street. The shops here were gaily lighted, especially those where sweets and toys were sold, at which Maggie looked with a child's interested gaze, keeping close to her mother's side the while, in spite of the jostling she got from hurrying passers-by.

Presently they turned into a narrow, quiet street, which brought them out into a wider thoroughfare, where there were tram-cars and omnibuses passing to and fro, and larger, grander shops attracted the little girl's attention. They crossed this bustling street, and left its turmoil behind as they began to ascend a wide road, almost deserted at this hour. The wind now blew full in their faces. A scent of the sea came with it.

"Are you taking me to see the waves, mamma?" asked Maggie, remembering that she had come that way once before, and had then been gladdened by a sight of the beautiful waves breaking on the rocks beneath the Hoe.

Her mother replied by a shake of the head. She had no breath to spare for speech. It was all she could do to struggle against the strong breeze as she made her way up the hill. Yet Maggie, catching sight of her mother's face as they passed beneath a lamp, wondered to see how bright her eyes were, and how flushed her cheeks. Her mother must be much better, she thought, to be able to walk so far, after having been for weeks too ill to leave the house.

They had nearly gained the top of the hill, when the widow's steps slackened, and she stood still before a large house with many windows looking down on the road. The house seemed alive at this hour. Every window was lighted; and in the lower rooms the venetian blinds were half turned, revealing many figures flitting to and fro in the large, well-decorated rooms. As the widow stood on the pavement, panting for breath, and grasping the railings for support, a strain of merry music floated out on the night air.

A low moan of anguish broke from her at the sound. She had meant to knock at that closed door, and ask to speak with the master of the house. But how could she intrude now, when

he was entertaining company? Besides, there might be some there who would know her, though surely the sorrows of the last few years must have aged her beyond all recognition. Her heart sank within her. It had cost her much to come there to-night, but for her child's sake she had nerved herself to the effort. And now it was in vain. Her courage failed her. She could not seek an interview to-night; and to-morrow it might be too late!

She shivered and moaned again.

"Mamma! mamma! what is the matter?" cried the child by her side. "Are you ill? Why do you stand here so long?"

Her mother did not reply. She was hardly conscious that the child spoke. Her mind was in the past; she was thinking of other days when she too had danced within those walls to the very tune that was now being played. Yes, she had once danced there, as lightly and gaily as any girl there to-night; but what a change had come! The contrast was too bitter.

"Mamma," said little Maggie, "won't you go home? It's very cold standing here."

The mother, heedless of her own bodily sensations, became aware of the bitter wind that was sweeping round the childish form, so ill-clad for such weather. She took the tiny hand upheld to her, and turned to go; but a fit of coughing arrested her. Again she leaned against the palings, weak and trembling, and struggled for breath.

"My good woman, with such a cough as that you have no business to be out to-night," said a voice near her as she began to recover from the paroxysm.

The speaker was a young gentleman in greatcoat and scarf, one of the guests invited to the party, who had paused for a moment, with his hand on the gate, to give the warning which his medical instincts prompted.

"Thank you: I am going home," said the sufferer, hurriedly, and taking her child's hand she passed on.

The light of the street lamp fell on her as she went by; and as the young doctor's observant glance read her face, he murmured to himself, "Past all help now, poor thing!"

She was dimly conscious of that truth at times, though for Maggie's sake she still clung to the hope of getting better. For how could she bear to think of leaving the child? What would become of Maggie, if at her tender age she were left alone in this pitiless world? The thought had weighed on the mother's heart through nights of wakefulness and pain.

As she felt her weakness increasing, her fears for Maggie grew stronger, till at last pride yielded, and she had resolved that for her child's sake she would make one more appeal to the parent who had vowed that he would never forgive her. This was the purpose that had

brought her out to-night; but she had failed to accomplish it. No matter; she would not give way to despair, faint and discouraged though she felt. She would come again to-morrow. For Maggie's sake she would make another attempt, whatever it might cost her.

It was hard work to get home. The excitement which had sustained her as she ascended the hill was gone now, and the despairing reaction made her tremblingly aware of failing strength. More than once she was obliged to stand still whilst the cough shook her feeble frame; but at length they reached the lane again. Here the widow's staggering gait attracted attention. Rough girls and lads, mistaking its cause, jeered at her as she passed.

She, poor soul, was scarce conscious of their mockery; but little Maggie, young as she was, understood the meaning of their derisive looks and coarse pleasantry. The child's cheeks burned with indignation, and hot tears came into her dark eyes. The memory of the intense pain and shame of those moments was branded on her mind. She never forgot that walk through the lane.

But at last they had passed the old curiosity shop, and gained the turning into the quieter street where they lodged. A few steps brought them to the house in which the widow had hired a room. They had reached it not a moment too soon, for as she crossed its threshold, the invalid was seized with a fit of coughing worse than any which had preceded it. She leaned against the door, coughing violently.

Suddenly the sound ceased, and Maggie uttered a cry of horror, for her mother had fallen back against the wall deadly pale, and blood was flowing in a stream from her mouth.

Maggie's shrill cry brought the landlady and many of the lodgers to the spot. There followed a scene of confusion and dismay. No one knew what should be done. Everybody seemed to ask questions, which no one answered. They dragged the now senseless woman into the nearest room; and after some delay, one of the neighbours went in search of a doctor.

"She's struck with death, I reckon," said the landlady, a slatternly-looking woman, whose unhealthy countenance revealed but too plainly her liking for the gin-bottle; "it was ill-luck my taking her for a lodger."

Maggie heard her words. Already the fear that this was death had come to her. She had seen her father die, and now she knew that her mother too was going from her. With a loud and bitter cry, she threw herself on the ground beside her dying parent.

The despairing cry of her child seemed to penetrate the stupor in which the sufferer lay. Her heavy eyelids were lifted for a moment, and her dying gaze fell on her child.

"Maggie," she gasped out in broken utterance; "the house—you'll not forget—your grandfather."

The last word died away unheard as the deadly faintness stole over her anew.

"What's she saying?" asked one of the women.

"Something about the House," said the landlady; "she knows that's where the child will have to go to, for she's got no one belonging to her, I fancy."

No other words passed the white lips. The eyes closed again, the pallor of the face increased.

Maggie held her mother's hand, but the cold, stiff fingers could not respond to the child's clinging touch—mother love could shield her no longer. When, a little later, the doctor entered, impatiently pushing aside the women, who pressing round the patient kept back the air which was so precious, he found that his services were not needed. Death had been before him, and had given everlasting release from pain and sorrow.

CHAPTER III.

Maggie's Second Visit to the Old Curiosity Shop.

ON the following day the china-dealer looked in vain for the plates which the widow had promised to send him. On the morrow, too, they were not forthcoming, and it vexed him to have to own the fact to his wife, when she asked about them.

"Oh, you'll not get them now," she said, in a tone of undoubted assurance.

"Oh, I don't give them up yet," replied the dealer; "maybe the lady's ill, or something else has happened to prevent her sending them before."

"Well, I shall be very much surprised, if they come," returned his wife, provokingly.

Griffin did not in the least care about having the plates. He was satisfied to have secured the old Worcester jug. But he did desire to have it proved that his strange customer was what he had judged her to be—a real lady, who would deal honourably with him. When we are interested in persons, and inclined to think highly of them, it is painful to discover that they are not all we have imagined them.

Griffin was none the less disposed to resent the widow's betrayal of his trust because he was conscious that he had not acted fairly by her. We are always ready to claim that others shall regulate their actions towards us by the golden rule, however often we ourselves may have failed to do unto others as we would they should do unto us.

As the hours of the second day passed, and the plates did not appear, Griffin felt himself to be an injured man. He grew so cross and irritable that his wife wondered what could ail him. Surely he must have something more on his mind than the absence of those plates. But watching him with wifely anxiety, she soon saw that his irritability arose from a physical rather than a mental cause. She feared that the cold, which he had caught two days before by getting wet through, and then standing in his wet clothes during the course of a long sale, had laid sharp hold on him. Mrs. Griffin soon knew that her fear was not unfounded. In a few hours her husband became so ill that he was obliged to go to bed; and in bed he lay for many days, smitten with an acute attack of inflammation of the lungs.

Great was Mrs. Griffin's distress when the doctor told her that her husband was dangerously ill. She was a small, slight, sickly-looking woman, with the expression of one inclined to take a dark view of human affairs. Such had indeed come to be the habitual attitude of her mind. There was much excuse for her melancholy, poor woman. Constant ill-health, and the bitterest grief and disappointment a woman can know, had made her the soured-looking mortal she was. She had had seven children, and not one of them had lived. Most of them had passed away in infancy ere they had learned to call her mother; but one—a pretty, delicate little girl—had struggled through her infantile ailments, and lived for

nine years the darling of her home, only to fall a victim to scarlet fever, just as the parents hoped that she was beginning to grow strong and healthy.

It was a sore grief to Griffin and his wife when the little one was taken away. Griffin got over it in time as men do, by losing thought of his trouble in the absorbing interest of his daily pursuits. As his trade grew, he gradually ceased to miss the sound of little feet moving so lightly amidst his treasures, and the accents of the soft voice which had called him father. He forgot his little daughter, and gave more and more of his heart to his rare old china and costly curiosities.

But the wound in the mother's heart had never healed. Though twenty years had passed since her child died, the memory of little Polly was fresh as ever to her. She could still recall the sweet tones of her darling's voice, and fancy she heard again the patter of the restless feet which used to trot to and fro in the old house. The sight of a child brought her an aching sense of loss. In night visions she saw again the little face that she loved, and often would she murmur in her sleep the name of the child. As growing years added to her weakness the infirmities of age, making the burden of life heavier, Mrs. Griffin felt a deeper and deeper yearning for a child's love and aid.

Never had she felt her desolation more keenly than now, when she saw her husband laid low by alarming illness, and the thought thrust itself on her, that he would be taken first, and she left alone in the world. Her heart sank within her at the first hint of danger. It was easy for her to believe the worst. Her hopes had always been disappointed.

Mrs. Griffin made a sorry attempt to hide her distress from her husband. She did not want to frighten him; but he knew his wife's nature too well to be deceived by her assumption of cheerfulness. He knew that her smiles were forced, for what could be more mournful than her gaze as it rested upon him? Whilst her eyelids were red, and she sighed each time that she turned away from the bedside. He tried to cheer her.

"Don't ee take on, old wife," he said, speaking with difficulty, "I'm not going to die just yet. I shall be up and about again in a few days."

"I hope you may be, John, I'm sure," said his wife, lugubriously.

And, unable to keep back her tears; she slipped out of the room and went downstairs, where she could indulge her emotion without restraint. The deserted look of the shop and the little room behind, where lay Griffin's cement pot, his tools, and the piece of china he had been trying to mend when the attack of pain came on, gave fresh intensity to her grief. Sitting down on the first chair, Mrs. Griffin covered her face with her apron and sobbed aloud.

She had been crying thus for some minutes when she became aware of a dull, monotonous sound, which seemed as if it might have been going on for a considerable time. She raised her head and listened. Some one was tapping on the door of the shop. Hurriedly wiping her eyes with her apron, Mrs. Griffin went out to attend to the customer.

A little girl stood just within the shop, a slight, delicate-looking child, whose pale face and large dark eyes had a scared, nervous look. She was holding something carefully rolled up in her little apron. She started and almost dropped what she held as Mrs. Griffin came quietly upon her.

"What do you want, my dear?" asked the woman, noting with admiration the child's long dark eyelashes, and the pretty rings of hair, which hung over her white forehead.

"I want to see the old man who keeps the shop," said the child, tremulously; "I have brought him the plates mamma said he should have."

"All right, my dear, I know; I will take them for him," said Mrs. Griffin, taking the plates, which the child very reluctantly gave to her.

"Can't I see him?" asked Maggie.

"No, my dear, you can't, for he's in bed; he is very bad," said the wife, looking almost as if she expected sympathy from the child, who gazed at her with such grave, sad eyes; "but I'm his wife, and I'll take care of the plates for him. Have you anything else!" For she saw that the child still held something rolled up in her apron.

"Yes, they're mamma's books," said the child, in a tone of deep sadness; "I wanted to ask him to keep them for me. Mamma said he was a good old man, and I don't want Mrs. Cook to get them."

"Are you living at Mrs. Cook's?" asked Mrs. Griffin, wondering more and more at the child's strange appearance and manner.

Maggie nodded.

"And your mamma, is not she with you?"

"Mamma is dead!" said Maggie, dropping her voice to a whisper. "She died on Monday night, and I've no one belonging to me now, and they say I must go to the workhouse."

Large tears had gathered in the child's eyes; but, with a self-control far beyond her years, she checked the sobs that strove to rise.

"Your mother dead! Oh, my poor dear!" cried Mrs. Griffin, her motherly sympathies stirred into new life. "On Monday night, did you say? Why wasn't that the evening she was here, and brought the jug? Are you sure it was Monday night?"

"Oh yes; it was when we got home," said the child, beginning to sob as she read the kindness and pity in Mrs. Griffin's glance.

"Then 'twas very sudden?" said Mrs. Griffin.

"Yes, she broke a blood-vessel, the doctor said," replied Maggie.

"Poor soul, no wonder with such a cough," sighed Mrs. Griffin; "I remember it made me shudder to hear it, and I asked my man who it was coughing so. Dear, dear! And so she died that very night! How sad, to be sure!" And Mrs. Griffin sighed again as she thought what the mother's anguish must have been at the prospect of leaving this sweet child alone in the world.

"What is your name, my dear?" she asked, putting her arm lovingly around the child.

"Maggie," was the reply.

"Maggie what?" asked Mrs. Griffin.

"Maggie Knight," said the child.

"And have you really no one belonging to you?"

"No one," said the child; "and Mrs. Cook says I must go to the House. What is the House like? Will they be kind to me there?"

"Not very; and it's a dreary place," said Mrs. Griffin; "I would not like any child I cared for to go there."

"Mrs. Cook says that before mamma died she said I was to go to the House," said little Maggie, on whose face the look of distress had deepened.

"Did she? Then it must have been a sore grief to her, poor soul," said Mrs. Griffin, feelingly; "but there's my man knocking for me; I must go. I declare if I hadn't forgotten him for the moment."

"Will you take the books?" said Maggie, unrolling her apron, and showing a Bible and prayer-book, whose handsome bindings and gilt clasps bore signs of age and wear. "They were mamma's, they were all she had left; she sold the others; but she would not sell these because her mother gave them to her. Mrs. Cook has taken all the rest of our things to pay for the rent. She says the money mamma got for the jug won't half pay her for the expense

and trouble she's had. I hid these and the plates where she could not find them, for I knew mamma had promised the old man the plates, and I thought he looked kind and good, and perhaps would take care of the books for me, for I was afraid they would not let me take them to the workhouse."

"BE SURE YOU COME AGAIN."

"BE SURE YOU COME AGAIN."

"Bless you, child, we'll take good care of them for you," said Mrs. Griffin, touched by this mark of childish confidence. "You may trust us to do that. And come and see me again soon, will you? Tell Mrs. Cook she must not send you to the House till she has seen me. Tell her Mrs. Griffin of the Old Curiosity Shop says so."

Maggie nodded, and a more hopeful look came to her white little face.

"Good-bye: you are very kind," she said; and with a sudden movement of gratitude, she held up her face to be kissed.

All the mother in Mrs. Griffin awoke at that moment. She drew the child close to her, and kissed her fondly, uttering gentle words of pity as her hand stroked the soft dark curls. But the renewed sound of knocking overhead reminded her of her wifely duty.

"Good-bye, my darling, I must not stay now," she said; "be sure you come again."

But still she lingered for a moment to watch little Maggie pass down the lane.

"Dear little child," she murmured, "how my heart goes out to her! She's just about the age of my little Polly. To think of such a child being sent to the workhouse! And the poor mother! I must tell Griffin about her."

CHAPTER IV.

John Griffin makes a Vow.

HURRYING upstairs with many prickings of heart for having left him so long to himself, Mrs. Griffin came breathless to her husband's bedside. She found him looking flushed and uneasy.

"Who have you been chattering to down in the shop?" he asked, very crossly. "I should think you might have cut short your gossip for once."

John Griffin was far from being ill-tempered; but even the most good-humoured of men are apt to get rather bearish when enduring severe pain.

"It was such a dear little girl," began Mrs. Griffin, scarcely heeding his irritable tones in her eagerness to tell the news; "she's brought your plates, and oh, John, her mother's dead!"

"What do you mean? Whose mother's dead?" he asked, his tone sharper than before.

"Why, you know that poor widow who sold you the jug you was so pleased with," said Mrs. Griffin; "and the plates we thought you wouldn't get, the child has brought just now. The reason she did not bring them before was because her mother died that very night."

"What night?" he asked.

"Why, Monday night, of course, after they got back from here," said his wife; "the poor soul was lodging at Mrs. Cook's. Her death must have been awful sudden. The child says she broke a blood-vessel. You noticed that she looked very ill, and you remember how she coughed. The poor little girl says she is to be taken to the workhouse, for she's left all alone in the world with no one to look to."

Mrs. Griffin's words were checked by a deep groan from her husband.

"What's the matter?" she asked, anxiously. "Is the pain worse?"

"Mortal bad," he replied; "it cuts me like a knife."

"Dear, dear," said his wife, full of pity; "I'll get you another hot poultice; p'raps that 'll ease it."

And as she hurried about to attend to his wants, she said no more of the widow or her child. Griffin could not have heeded her words had she spoken. All his powers of mind and body were held captive by acute pain. But his wife's words had had their effect on him. The news of little Maggie's sudden bereavement had suggested to him the possibility that death might be near for him also.

The doctor looked grave when he came that evening, and found old Griffin worse; graver still the next morning, when the patient's temperature was higher than before, whilst his strength was diminished by a restless night of pain.

Dr. Thornton was a young and handsome man, but with the thoughtful, quiet demeanour which befitted his profession. He was very kind-hearted, and his straightforward manner quickly won the confidence of his patients. He had not been long in practice, and his work lay mainly amongst the poorer classes; but he did not think it beneath him to give poor people his best attention, nor to employ for their advantage every alleviation which his knowledge and skill could devise. He cherished an enthusiastic belief that his profession was the finest one in the world, and he shrank from no self-denial which its pursuit might demand. Leslie Thornton's friends often spoke of him as a "good fellow," and never was the epithet more justly applied.

When he had carefully examined his patient, and given the wife every instruction she needed, he stood silent by the bed for a few minutes, his face wearing a look of grave deliberation. He had sent Mrs. Griffin away, that he might feel free to speak as he would to

his patient; but still he hesitated, debating with himself whether it would be better to tell the old man what a critical point his malady had reached, or to leave him unprepared to meet death, if death should come. Whilst he hesitated, old Griffin's voice decided the question for him.

"I be very bad, doctor," he said feebly; "I never felt anything like it before. I'm as weak as a baby. But I suppose you're going to set me up again. I haven't got to the end yet?"

His last words were uttered as a question, and the doctor could not meet them with equivocation.

"I don't give up hope for you, Griffin," he said; "I've seen men pull through worse illnesses than this; but at your age such an attack is a serious thing. It is only right I should tell you that it may be beyond my power to save you."

The change which passed over old Griffin's face was very slight. His eyelids drooped, his lips quivered for a moment, that was all.

"Perhaps, if you wished it, it would be well for you to see a clergyman," suggested Dr. Thornton.

"No, no, I want no parsons," said the old man, with sudden fierceness; "I've done very well without them all my life, and I'll do without them to the end."

"Then you're not afraid to die?" asked the doctor.

"No, I'm not afraid," said the old man, doggedly; "what would be the good? If I am to die, I must die. It'll be hard for the poor old wife; she's had a sight of trouble in the past with losing her babies and little Polly, and she won't like to lose me too. But sending for a parson wouldn't make it any better."

"Have you no sins to repent of?" asked Dr. Thornton.

"Repent?" repeated the old man, feebly. "Why should I repent? I've been no worse than other people. I've always worked hard, and supported myself honestly. I've done nobody any harm."

But even as he spoke there came to the old man's mind a vision of the pale, sad-looking widow, and her little dark-eyed girl. Could he say he had done no one any harm, when he remembered how he had dealt with them? And the poor woman was dead. Perhaps he would meet her in that other world of which he had some dim notions.

"Do you believe in a God?" asked the young man, presently, curious to know whether this strange old fellow had any religious belief whatever.

Griffin made a slight movement of the head, which seemed to signify affirmation.

"Do you ever pray?" asked Dr. Thornton.

"Not since I was a boy," was the reply.

"You have heard of the Lord Jesus Christ?"

"May be, I dare say I have; but I don't know much about Him," said old Griffin, dully,—"religion was never in my line."

His words startled Leslie Thornton. It seemed marvellous that in a town notorious for the number of its Christian sects, living within sound of the bells of many churches, and with several places of worship of different kinds only a short distance from his door, one could be found so ignorant of spiritual things as this man appeared to be.

There was silence in the room for a few minutes. The young doctor was conscious of a painful sense of embarrassment. He asked himself whether he ought not to make an effort to enlighten the dull, dark spirit of this man, who lay on the borderland of death. But never had speech seemed so difficult. A sense of his own ignorance and uncertainty kept him silent.

"I am not fit to talk to you about these things," he said, at last, very awkwardly; "but you ought to hear about the Lord Jesus, who died for us sinners. I wish you would send for a clergyman."

"No, thank you, sir," said the old man, stolidly; "I am much obliged to you, but I shall do very well as I am; I want no parson."

And so the doctor left him apparently undisturbed by any qualms of conscience. But Dr. Thornton's words had made more impression than he imagined. Old Griffin was not so stoically indifferent to the possible approach of death as he had chosen to appear. A vague feeling of uneasiness had been awakened, which grew more clearly defined as his thoughts wandered back into the past, and many an incident of bygone years came to mind again.

He fought against the fear of death. He was not going to give up hope yet. The doctor had said that he might recover, and he did not mean to die if he could help it. But still he could not banish from his mind the thought of that solemn possibility.

The doctor had asked him if he had not sins to repent of. Certainly he had sinned; he could not deny that; but his sins were not worse than the sins of most people. Would God remember them against him? Would He punish him for his sins? Weak and worn though he was, Griffin tried to examine himself concerning the evil he had done. He had not always been strictly honest in his dealings; but then what man of business was? There were tricks

in all trades. He had sometimes told a lie in order to further a sale; but there had seemed no great harm in that. The sin which lay most heavily on his conscience, as he reviewed the past, was his dishonest transaction with regard to the old Worcester jug. It was mean of him, he owned to himself, not to have given its full value to the poor widow who was evidently sorely in need of money. Could the same thing happen again he would certainly act differently. He wished it were possible now to make amends. But the poor woman was dead; he could do nothing for her. Still there was the child; could he help her? He would thankfully do it if he could, and so get rid of this burden, which pressed so heavily on his mind.

And thinking thus, John Griffin made a vow—a solemn vow—which he hoped that God would hear and approve. If his life were prolonged, and he rose from this bed of sickness, he would early make it his business to inquire into the little orphan's state, and befriend her, if he found that she needed a friend.

"Old woman," he said to his wife, a little later, "do you think I've been a bad man?"

"A bad man, John? By no means," said Mrs. Griffin, emphatically; "you've never drank nor swore, nor done anything very bad that I know of. You've always worked hard enough for two men; and I'm sure you've been a good husband to me. What makes you ask that?"

"There's things I could wish undone," said old Griffin, feebly; "if I get about again I'll try to do different."

"Don't ee talk like that, Griffin," said his wife, beginning to cry; "it cuts me to the heart."

"Don't cry, old wife," said her husband, gently; "if I should go, you won't be left so badly off. I've saved a nice little sum. There's money in the savings bank, and money invested in the funds, and the stock of old china in the shop is worth a good round price."

"Oh, John, what good would money do me, if I was left all alone?" sobbed the poor woman. "I hope I should soon follow you. I couldn't live long without you, I know. If little Pally had lived, it would have been different perhaps but now—"

Her words were lost in a choking sob.

Griffin drew a weary sigh, caused by pain, both bodily and mental. What had been the good of his toiling and saving all these years, if this was to be the end? The rare old china and antique ornaments below could give him no comfort now. They seemed worthless, like everything else in this short, vain life. He knew that his wife set no value on them. She would have been happier as the wife of a poor man with a house full of children.

He closed his eyes, and sighed again. Presently he sank into an uneasy doze. His wife sat by his side, and watched him anxiously. By-and-by he began to murmur in his sleep.

Bending close she caught the words, "the little maid."

"He's thinking of our Polly," said the mother to herself. But she was mistaken. The little white face, with sad, beseeching eyes, which haunted the sufferer's dreams, was not the face of little Polly.

CHAPTER V.

Maud Platten and Leslie Thornton.

IT was on a Sunday evening that Dr. Thornton had that serious talk with the old china-dealer. John Griffin was the last patient that it was necessary to see that day, and when the doctor left his house, he was about to attend the evening service at church. As he walked quickly up the lane he was pondering the old man's case, and trying to weigh the probabilities of life and death.

He was anxious about this patient, in whom he felt much interest. He had before attended him for a slighter ailment; and being somewhat of a china fancier, had occasionally lingered in the shop to examine Griffin's curious wares, and listen to his description of their age and value. He liked the quaint bluntness of the old man's speech. He had been little prepared, however, to find him in such a state of darkness in regard to spiritual truth.

The discovery shocked Leslie Thornton; for whilst deeply versed in medical knowledge, he was not one of those who try to ground everything upon the verities of their science, and think to prove their high intelligence by refusing to believe all truth which lies beyond the range of natural law. Leslie had been trained in childhood by a Christian mother, whose gentle life had taught him better than her words the glory of righteousness, purity, and

truth. He had a deep reverence for the Christian faith, although he had not known how to explain its truth to the ignorant old man whose earthly course seemed so nearly run.

But Dr. Thornton ceased to muse upon old Griffin's ignorance, as turning from the lane, he crossed the busy thoroughfare, and made his way up the hill, which the weary widow and her child had ascended on that last sad day of her life. He was going to church, but he was not going alone, and thoughts of one who was waiting for him made him quicken his footsteps as he heard the church bells begin to ring. He walked quickly till, almost at the top of the hill, he paused before the large many-windowed house at which the widow had lingered on that bitter night. He rang the bell, and when the servant opened the door to him, entered the house with the air of one who felt himself at home there.

"At last!" cried a bright young voice, as he opened the door of the dining-room. "I began to think that some horrid patient was keeping you, and that I should have to give up church for to-night. Not that I should have minded very much, for Mr. Wright does get most dreadfully prosy, and the curate is even worse. Still I am glad you have come."

The speaker was a young girl of most attractive appearance. As she came forward elegantly dressed, her dark eyes shining with pleasure, and her face wearing the prettiest blush and smile, the look of pride and joy which lit up the young man's countenance could be easily explained.

"Thank you, Maud," he said, as he pressed her hand; "you knew I should come if I could, did you not? Where are the others?"

"Oh, papa would go on. You know what a dreadful fidget he is about getting to church in time," said the young lady, laughingly; "but my gloves refused to button, so I thought I would wait for you to do them for me. You are so clever at such things, you know."

No one seeing Leslie as he bent to button the glove across the tiny wrist, need have asked in what relation he stood to the fairy-like little beauty beside him. She was Colonel Platten's daughter, and from many suitors had chosen the handsome young doctor for her future husband. Her father, a proud, stately man of the frigid, unbending temperament which makes few friends, and is often judged more harshly than it deserves, was of opinion that she might have done better, but he did not oppose her choice. He liked Leslie Thornton, who was of good family, and a gentleman in the highest sense of the word, and having had painful proof in the past of the deplorable consequences that may ensue from crossing the will of a high-spirited girl, the colonel had judged it best to allow Maud to gratify the inclination of her heart.

Maud was not the colonel's only daughter, though by many of her acquaintance she was supposed so to be. There had been another, the only child of his first marriage; but she had

left his home long since, and marrying in defiance of his will, and under very unhappy circumstances, had been disowned by her father. It was the old story of a high-spirited, self-willed girl rebelling against the rule of an unwise, unloving step-mother. Margaret, or, as she was generally called, Maggie Platten, was twelve years of age when her father married his second wife, quite old enough to prove a most intractable charge to her step-mother. As an only child she had been much indulged and petted, and having loved her gentle mother with all the warmth of a passionate, impulsive temperament, she keenly resented her father's marrying again only a year after the decease of his first wife.

The father and daughter had never learned to understand each other. He loved his child, and believed that he was consulting her interests in marrying again. She judged him hard and unfeeling for so doing. Unhappily, the lady he had chosen for his wife was not of a temper that could smooth matters in the home. It was soon clear that she and her step-daughter would never get on together. So Maggie was sent to a distant boarding-school, and during six long years saw scarcely anything of her home, for, by the influence of her step-mother, it was generally arranged that she should spend her holidays with relatives, or that her father should pay her a visit instead of her returning to form one of the family circle.

But when Maggie was of an age to leave school, it was impossible to banish her longer. The young lady came home in no placable mood. She resented the injustice which for so long had kept her from her place at home, and was determined to visit it upon the head of the chief offender.

A little sister and two baby brothers had been added to the home since she left it. Maggie could have loved them, for she was naturally of a warm, affectionate nature; but in her anger towards her step-mother, she tried to steel her heart against her children. There were constant storms in the house after Maggie's return. It was the common talk of their acquaintance how ill Mrs. Platten and her step-daughter got on together. Many sympathized with Maggie, amongst them Mrs. Allen, her father's widowed sister, who was then residing in the town. Maggie was a beautiful girl, very popular in society, and Mrs. Platten hoped that she would soon marry and go to a home of her own.

But Maggie was in no hurry to give up her maiden freedom. The suitors whom her father approved were not to her taste. At last, however, Maggie's wayward heart made choice of a lover; but it was a choice which appalled her father. The young man was only a banker's clerk, and though of gentlemanly and pleasant appearance, there were rumours abroad affecting his character, which would have made the colonel deny him his daughter had he not deemed him so vastly beneath her in social position. The colonel forbade the match positively and contemptuously, as something too preposterous to be considered for a moment.

But his wilful, deluded daughter was determined to have her own way. She was now twenty-one, and in possession of some small property which she had inherited from her mother. She resolved to assert her independence of parental control, more especially that exerted by her step-mother. With this object in view, she hired rooms in the house in which her aunt was lodging, and taking advantage of her father's temporary absence from home, removed thither, taking with her all her possessions, and many things which had belonged to her mother.

The colonel's pride and affection were alike wounded by his daughter's action. He never forgave his sister for having encouraged Maggie to take this step, and he held her in a great measure responsible for all that followed. For after a few months of estrangement had passed, the foolish girl put the crowning stroke to her defiance by marrying the young man of whom her father so highly disapproved.

That his disapprobation was not unfounded was soon manifest. A few weeks after the marriage, strange discoveries were made at a certain bank. A long course of embezzlement practised by one of the clerks had suddenly been brought to light in the most surprising manner. The fraud was traced to Maggie's husband, and he only saved himself from the hands of justice by absconding in hot haste.

Colonel Platten's proud spirit was tortured by the shame and disgrace thus brought home to him, and his anger burned fiercely against his daughter. He had no pity for her sorrow. He vowed that she should be nothing to him from henceforth. He wished never to see her or hear of her again; he desired to forget that he had ever had such a bad, ungrateful child.

And he had his wish. He had never seen her since that day, when in passionate, bitter words he thus upbraided her.

Denounced and cast off, Maggie fled from the town where she was so well-known. She could not bear to live on there in disgrace and misery. What became of her no one knew. Some thought that she had gone to join her husband in his retreat on the Continent, others whispered that she had been seen in London. But the mystery was not explained, and soon people forgot to wonder about her. The excitement of the scandal died out in a comparatively short time, and those who had once been proud to boast the acquaintance of the beautiful Miss Platten, no longer mentioned her or even thought of her.

The colonel recovered from the wound to his pride. What the wound to his affections had been, his cold, stern demeanour suffered no one to judge. He never named his elder daughter, nor permitted any one to speak to him about her. She was as one dead, nay, worse than dead, for the memory of the dead is cherished, whilst he desired to forget that such an one as Margaret had ever existed.

The unhappy affair at the bank was hushed up, the bank managers, out of consideration for Colonel Platten, refusing to prosecute. Now, after nine years, the whole sad history was forgotten save by those intimately concerned, and a few busybodies who kept mental registers of all events affecting the lives of their acquaintance. Even Leslie Thornton, in his close connection with the family, was not clearly informed as to the unhappy circumstances which had severed the elder Miss Platten from her relatives.

Maud herself could not have given an accurate account of the matter. She had never troubled herself about the fate of the half-sister whom she could faintly recollect as a tall and beautiful being who had attracted her childish admiration. She was content with her own happy lot as the only daughter of her home. Her father was never demonstrative in his affection towards her; but he treated her with kindness and indulgence, and after her mother's death, which happened when she was about seven, she had things pretty much her own way.

Maud Platten was a lovely, winsome girl, though a few of the colonel's oldest friends, who remembered the beauty of his elder daughter, whispered that Maud was not to be compared with her sister. But Leslie, who had had no opportunity of making such a comparison, thought himself a happy fellow to have won the love of this brightest and fairest of girls. He had already taken a house at a very short distance from the colonel's, to which in a few weeks' time he hoped to take his bride. His heart beat high with hope of future happiness. He had many things to say to Maud about the new home and their new life as they walked to church together on that Sunday evening, and for the time he forgot old Griffin and his anxiety concerning him.

But the old man's words had made a deep impression on him, and they returned to haunt his mind during the course of the sermon, which Maud found so prosy. It was in truth a discourse not calculated to hold the attention or interest the minds of the congregation; and it was little wonder that its young and restless members looked about, and let many thoughts pass through their minds, which the preacher would have judged unsuited to the time and place.

"Maud!" Leslie startled his betrothed by saying, as he walked home with her after the service. "I want your advice about one of my patients; I want you to tell me how I ought to deal with him."

"Leslie! What an idea! What ridiculous thing will you be saying next?" asked Maud, merrily. "As if I could advise you about your patients! I know nothing of medicine."

"I was not going to consult you about medicine, dearest," he replied; "with all due respect for your abilities, I think I can prescribe for him without your aid. But this is a case of

ministering to a mind diseased, or rather to a mind that is in darkness. What would you say, Maud, to a poor old fellow stricken with an illness that may end in death for aught that I can tell, and who knows no more than the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and seems in utter ignorance of the religious truth that you and I have learned from our childhood?"

"Oh, Leslie! How can I tell? What a strange question to ask me!" said Maud, in an uneasy tone. "You should send Mr. Wright to talk to him. I don't see that it is your business to trouble about it."

"But the old fellow refuses to see a clergyman," returned Dr. Thornton; "he has evidently a strong prejudice against 'parsons,' as he calls them. I feel as if I were responsible for his state, somehow. I don't like to leave him to himself, without trying to say a word that may help him. I wish you would tell me what to say to him, Maud. Women understand these things so much better than men. If my mother had been living, she would have been the one to send to him."

He was silent, waiting for her to reply.

But Maud was silent too. Her lover had never before spoken directly to her about religion, and she felt vexed with him for introducing so distasteful a subject. Neither did she care to hear any of the details of his profession. She thought that it showed want of consideration on his part to speak to one so young and charming as herself of so doleful a thing as an old man's death-bed.

Moreover, Maud was inclined to feel jealous of Leslie's frequent allusions to the mother whom he had loved so dearly. She could almost fancy at times that he deemed his mother to have attained a higher standard of feminine excellence than herself, and wished to hold his parent up as an example to the girl whom he had chosen for his wife. Maud resented the comparison. She felt sure that she could never be good after the pattern of Leslie's mother, and she had no great wish to attain to such goodness. Accustomed all her life to be spoiled and flattered, it would have gratified her vanity to know that Leslie believed her to be absolute perfection, and to hear him tell her that there never had been and never could be a woman to be compared with herself. But, warmly as he loved her, it was not Leslie's way to deal in extravagant compliments.

"What sort of old man is he?" asked Maud, presently, when the silence had lasted some minutes, and she felt oppressed by the sense that she was expected to say something.

Leslie at once began to describe the peculiarities of the old man's home and circumstances.

Maud listened with amusement to his description of the funny old curiosity shop, and made no objection when he suggested that he should like to take her there some day to inspect the old man's store, and judge if he had any bric-à-brac suitable for their new drawing-room. But she was dismayed when he said suddenly: "I suppose you would not like to go and see the old man whilst he is ill, dearest?"

"Certainly not," she replied, hastily; "you frighten me by mentioning such a thing. I have the greatest horror of seeing sick people. I wish you were not a doctor, Leslie, to have to go to such horrid places, and see such horrid sights. I am sure they prey upon your mind, and you are getting—morbid—is not that the word? Yes, you are getting morbid, or you would not talk as you did just now."

"Nonsense, I am not morbid," said Leslie, with a smile; "but a doctor cannot help taking a serious view of life."

"Then don't try to make me take it," said Maud, playfully, though with meaning in her words; "I hate taking serious views of anything. I do not mean my life to be serious; I mean it to be bright and gay. So mind you are not to talk to me about death-beds and sicknesses, or I will not marry you after all."

Of course it was only a joke. Maud laughed merrily when she had so spoken; but her words had a sting in them for Leslie.

"I would not sadden you for the world, darling," he protested, earnestly; "it shall not be my fault if your life is not bright and happy, but you must not say again that you wish I were not a doctor. I don't like to hear you say that."

"I am sorry; I will not say it again if you do not remind me too forcibly of your profession," she promised; "and now I have something very nice to tell you. Papa has agreed to take tickets for the next ball at the Assembly Rooms, and of course you must go with us. I am so delighted, for I want to have another good dance before I become a sober matron."

"Do you think you will ever attain to that dignity?" asked Leslie, lightly.

"I am afraid not," she returned, with a silvery laugh; "but about the ball; you will go with us, will you not?"

"I shall be most happy, if it is possible," he replied; "you do not think I should like you to go without me?"

By this time they were again at Colonel Platten's house. Dr. Thornton would have entered and stayed an hour or two, as his habit was on Sunday evenings, but, unfortunately, a messenger was awaiting him there with an urgent summons to one of his poor patients.

"How tiresome!" murmured Maud, as he hurried away, having lingered to the last moment in saying his farewell: "I wish he were not a doctor." And she went into the house feeling vexed and disappointed.

Leslie, too, as he went on his way, carried a weight of disappointment. He was pained by the manner in which Maud had received his confidence regarding old Griffin. He had counted on finding in his betrothed a friend to whom he could always speak freely about his patients, and who would sympathize with his anxieties on their behalf, and comfort him under the many harassing cares and vexations inseparable from the career of a medical man. He was unprepared to learn that Maud did not like his profession, and did not care to hear any mention of the work to which he gave his time and strength. Would it always be thus, he wondered? Would she always love pleasures and gaieties better than all else, and try persistently to shut her eyes to the serious side of life? No, he did not believe it. Love would not long allow him to think critically of his beautiful Maud. He would not have her other than she was. She would grow wiser in time. When they were married, he felt sure that he should find her all that he could possibly desire, and a far sweeter wife than he should ever deserve.

CHAPTER VI.

How John Griffin kept His Vow.

JOHN GRIFFIN'S illness was not to end in death. At his next visit the doctor saw a slight improvement in his patient's condition. The favourable symptoms continued, and in a few days Dr. Thornton, much to his satisfaction, could pronounce the old man out of danger.

Mrs. Griffin's joy at thus being relieved from her terrible dread was unbounded. She overwhelmed her husband with tokens of her affectionate solicitude; and though she was

often repaid with scant thanks or impatient words, and found old Griffin in his time of convalescence more irritable and difficult to please than she had ever known him, she took his crossness in very good part. It was but natural, she argued, that, after all he had endured, he should be rather fractious, when he at last began to get well. Griffin was not the first man who had found the slow, tedious process of recovering health and strength more trying to his patience than the acute suffering which had preceded it.

How was it now with John Griffin's vow to befriend little Maggie? Did he forget it, as so many forget the resolutions made in sickness, when the dreaded stroke is removed and the blessing of health restored to them? No, he did not forget it; it abode in his mind as a resolve to be carried out when he was strong and well again, and found a convenient time in which to attend to it. But his conscience did not trouble him so keenly concerning the purchase of the Worcester jug, now that death, which seemed so near, had again receded into the distance.

Still, Griffin truly meant to make inquiries about Maggie, and to do what he could to make reparation to her for the wrong done to her mother, only in his present weak and languid state he did not feel that he could hurry himself about it. He shrank from speaking to his wife on the subject. He fancied that she would not understand his remorse concerning the good bargain he had made, and that she would wonder at his taking such interest in a child of whom they knew nothing.

So he said not a word about little Maggie, though he kept wishing that his wife would mention her again. He would have liked to know if she had heard any more of the child. Yet he did not put any questions which could draw forth the information he desired; and, little guessing what was in his mind, Mrs. Griffin said nothing on the subject for some time.

But though she was silent concerning her, Mrs. Griffin had not forgotten the little orphan. The child had indeed passed from her mind during the worst days of her husband's illness, when his state demanded her utmost care and attention. But as soon as he began to mend, and became less dependent on her, her heart, set free from its painful suspense, had leisure to dwell upon little Maggie, and wonder how she was faring. She said nothing to her husband about the child, for the simple reason that she did not wish to recall to his mind his business affairs, for she saw that Griffin was disposed to fret and worry over the loss of trade which resulted from his illness. He had always managed his shop without aid, save such as his wife could give him. A jealous dislike to teaching any one the secrets of his trade had kept him from taking an apprentice.

So, whilst he had been laid aside, the business had been almost at a stand-still, except so far as his wife's interposition had been able to meet the customers' requirements. John

Griffin felt an eager longing to get back to his shop again. He was sure that things must be getting into a terrible muddle there, and feared that some of his treasures might get broken during his absence. But Dr. Thornton laid such stress on his taking care, and not exposing himself to cold, that the old man dared not hurry out of his sick room.

Mrs. Griffin was hoping from day to day that little Maggie would come again as she had promised. But she did not come, and Mrs. Griffin began to fear that the child was already lodged in the workhouse. She longed to put on her bonnet, and slip round to Mrs. Cook's lodgings to make inquiries about Maggie; but she could not get away from home even to go that short distance. It was impossible to leave the shop in the day-time, and towards evening Griffin usually grew so weary and fretful that he could not bear his wife to be out of his sight for five minutes.

Thus it happened that, without their exchanging a word on the subject, similar thoughts were often passing through the minds of husband and wife. At last, however, they came to an understanding.

It was a Sunday evening, and Mrs. Griffin was free from all cares respecting the shop. Griffin had taken a fresh start on the road towards recovery. He had come downstairs for the first time, and was sitting in an arm-chair by the fire, having just partaken with good appetite of a meal of tea, bread and butter, and salted herring. He was looking more like himself, as his wife told him, than she had seen him look for many a day, and some of the bright content which had returned to his countenance was reflected on hers as she sat and watched him. She really might leave him now in safety for a few minutes, if only he would not think her unkind for proposing such a thing.

"John," said Mrs. Griffin, suddenly, "Thursday will be Christmas Day!"

"So it will," returned he; "dear, dear, what a long time I've been ill. It's quite time I got about to look into things again."

"You'll soon be able to now, I hope," said his wife, brightly; then, feeling that there was no longer any need to keep silence, she added, "I do wonder what sort of a Christmas that poor dear child will spend. Did I ever tell you, John, about her bringing her mother's books for us to keep for her?"

"What child do you mean?" asked her husband, though he fancied he knew.

"Why, you know," returned Mrs. Griffin, "the dear little girl who brought the plates, and said that her mother was dead, and that she was going to be sent to the workhouse."

"Yes, I remember," he said, shortly; "but what about her mother's books?"

"I'll tell you," said his wife; and at considerable length, and with much circumlocution, she told him of Maggie's visit, and repeated all that the child had said. "And I asked her to come again, and to tell Mrs. Cook not to send her to the workhouse just at once; but she's not been near the place since, so I suppose they've sent the poor child away. She's a good-for-nothing woman, that Mrs. Cook. I doubt she has misused the dear little thing."

"And so she said that I was a good man," observed old Griffin, musingly; "well, she made a mistake there."

"Nonsense, Griffin," said his wife; "what a queer notion that is you've taken into your head. If you're not a good man, I don't know where I should find one."

Old Griffin shook his head, and was silent.

"I should like to have a look at those books that the child brought," he said, after a while; "fancy her trusting us so, poor little maid."

He sighed as he spoke, for he felt that he was unworthy the child's innocent trust.

"Yes, and such a sweet little girl, as she is too," said his wife, warmly; "she reminded me of our little Polly, John. It made my heart ache, to think of her being sent to the workhouse. But I'll fetch you the books."

She went away in search of them, and her husband was left alone, with many strange and unwonted thoughts working within his mind.

"I wonder if it would be a very foolish thing to do," he said to himself, musing over an idea which had occurred to him; "the old woman would like it. I reckon she would say 'yes,' in a moment, if I asked her."

But whatever project Griffin was pondering, until his own mind was decided on the subject, he would not venture to lay the proposal before his wife, whose feelings regarding it he could so well divine.

Mrs. Griffin soon returned with the books. She placed them before her husband—a Bible bound in faded purple morocco, with rims and clasp of tarnished gold, and a rather smaller prayer-book of similar appearance.

Griffin turned the books over in his hands ere he opened them, examining the bindings as if he were trying to appraise their value.

"We shall see what the child's name is here, I reckon," he said, glancing at the writing on the fly-leaf of the prayer-book. "Can you find me my glasses, wife?"

"She said her name was Knight—Maggie Knight," remarked Mrs. Griffin, as she handed him his spectacles.

But the name John Griffin read on the fly-leaf was not Knight. "Margaret Platten, the gift of her mother," were the words written in faded ink, and below was added a date now more than twenty years old.

"Platten!" said the old dealer, thoughtfully. "I've never heard that name before, that I know of. Have you?"

His wife shook her head, saying, "The child said the books were her mother's,—that may have been her maiden name," she observed.

"I tell you what, old woman," said Griffin, in the tone of one who stated an indisputable fact; "these are the kind of books that gentlefolks use, and depend upon it I was right when I said that that widow was a real lady. I knew it as soon as I saw her. There was a way with her that only the quality has."

"But she must have been very poor," objected his wife; "the child was miserably dressed, and I'm sure Mrs. Cook's was a wretched place for a lady to live at."

"That may be," returned her husband; "I'm not saying she wasn't poor; I know well enough she was that; but still I hold that she was one who had known better days. She was a lady who had come down in the world."

"Poor soul!" said Mrs. Griffin, in a tone of pity. "And to think that her child should be sent to the workhouse!"

Griffin had taken up the Bible, and was looking at it. He knew what the book was, for Bibles came to him occasionally in the way of business, but with its contents he was unacquainted. He knew, however, that it was the Book of God, and that teachers and preachers of righteousness founded their denunciations of evil upon its doctrines. As he now carelessly opened it, his eyes were arrested by certain words, which struck home to his conscience like an arrow sent by a sure hand. He felt a thrill of fear as he read them:

"To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of My people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless! And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? To whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory? Without Me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still."

What strange words were these? He had never read any like them. He could not understand what they meant; but none the less did they fill his soul with vague dread, and revive the sense of sin which had disquieted him as he lay on his sick bed, but had become less vivid with the return of health and strength. One thing was clear enough. God was angry with those who ill-treated widows or "robbed the fatherless." And he had done it! He was guilty of this sin before God. The threatening language of the Book was such as he deserved. He trembled with the fear of judgment. But he meant well. He had repented. He had vowed that he would make atonement to the child for the wrong he had done her mother, and he must do it without delay, for did not God Himself require it at his hands?

"Whatever is the matter, John?" asked his wife in alarm, for he had uttered a heavy groan as he closed the Bible, and pushed it from him.

"Matter enough," he returned; "wife, what is a man to do, when he has made a great mistake, and done something very wrong?"

"Why, the best thing he can do is to try to set it right, I should say," replied his wife, in surprise; "but you've done nothing very wrong, John."

"Yes, I have; I've done a great wrong," he said, firmly; "and I want you to help me to set it right."

"Whatever do you mean?" she asked.

"It's that child I'm thinking of," he said, hurriedly, in a voice that betrayed agitation; "I cheated her mother shamefully over that Worcester jug. Yes, I can't call it by a fairer name, it was downright cheating, and nothing else. The jug was worth at least four pounds, and I gave her only fifteen shillings for it. She was so poor and miserable-looking,—half-starved, indeed, she seemed; it was a shame of me. It's been lying on my conscience ever since."

For a few moments Mrs. Griffin kept silence, whilst she stared at her husband in astonishment. His words had brought her sudden enlightenment. Strange to say, she had not till now once thought of looking at Griffin's "good bargain" from the widow's point of view. She deemed it only natural, and quite justifiable, that he should try to depreciate and beat down to their lowest price the goods which were offered for sale. Though she had repudiated the idea that money could yield her any comfort in the event of her husband's death, Mrs. Griffin had acquired a habit of saving and hoarding, and had always been pleased to hear that Griffin's business was prospering, and his gains amounting to a good round sum. But during her husband's illness these selfish tendencies, the natural outcome of her dull narrow life, had been checked.

Little Maggie's visit, awaking the maternal instincts which had long slumbered in the childless mother's heart, had roused Mrs. Griffin's better, truer self. Love for a little child has often had power to change the whole current of a woman's thoughts. It was so with Mrs. Griffin. She saw the circumstances connected with the purchase of the jug in quite another light now.

"To be sure, John, you were hard upon the poor lady," she said, at length; "I never thought of that before, even though I heard the child say that the money her mamma got for the jug would not pay the rent and all they owed. Ah! The poor soul must have wanted money bad enough! It was a pity you gave her so little. It wouldn't have mattered if she had been a rich body. It's only right to get as much as you can out of the rich, I take it; but one shouldn't be hard on a poor widow."

"It's wrong to pay too little, I reckon, whether it's done to rich or poor," said John, whose conscience had received enlightenment during the weary hours of illness; "anyhow, I'm sorry I did it over that jug. I've repented of that sin at least, and now I'm thinking how I can best make it up to the little maid."

"Oh, John!" exclaimed his wife, eager to make a suggestion.

But he held up his hand to stay her words.

"Wait a bit, old woman," he said; "hear what I have to say first, and then we'll see if we're both of one mind. Do you know, I've been thinking many times of our little Polly, since I was took ill."

"Ah, so have I, John, often and often," cried his wife, the ready tears springing to her eyes.

"How many years is it since the little one died; do you remember?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, John; don't you?" she returned, rather reproachfully; "it'll be one and twenty years come next February."

"So long ago as that, is it?" he replied, with a sigh, to think how fast the years of his manhood were vanishing. "And she was nine years old when she died. She would have been a woman of thirty had she lived—old enough to be the mother of that little dark-eyed maid."

Mrs. Griffin looked wonderingly at her husband. She did not understand to what his words were tending. It was impossible for her to picture her lost child a grown woman of thirty. To her mother little Polly would always be—just little Polly.

"Do you see what I'm driving at, old wife?" asked Griffin, speaking with much embarrassment and hesitation. "I'm thinking that if our Polly had died when she was a

woman, and left an orphan child behind her, we should have brought that child up as our own. It might have been just such another as this little Maggie. Perhaps I'm foolish to trouble about the child; but the looks of her took my fancy. It do seem a pity that such a one should go to the workhouse. She's worth taking care of, for she's real good quality, as any one can see, so if you think we could do with her here—"

"Oh, John, John, I see what you mean," exclaimed his wife, eagerly; "you think we could have her here, and bring her up in little Polly's place. No, I won't say that; no child could be like our own little Polly, but you would let her live with us."

"Would you like that?" he asked.

"You know I should like it above everything," she replied; "you know how I love children. But would you like it? Do you really mean it? For I've heard you say sometimes, and it has cut me to the heart to hear you say it, John, that it was a good thing we'd got no children, because p'raps they'd be running in and out of the shop and a-breaking your china."

"Did I say that?" he returned. "Well, well, I hope this little maid wouldn't break things. Any way, we might try the experiment for a week or two; and then, if we didn't like having her, we could send her away. Now, what are you a crying for, old woman?"

"It makes me cry to think of it," said Mrs. Griffin, hastily wiping her eyes; "it's a good thought of yours, John, and I don't believe you'll ever repent of it. But there's no time to be lost. It's full a fortnight since the child was here. Very likely that good-for-nothing Mrs. Cook has sent her already to the workhouse. If you wouldn't mind being left alone for a few minutes, Griffin, I'd run round now and inquire about the child."

"All right, go along with you, the sooner the better," said old Griffin; "I shall be very comfortable here till you come back."

So Mrs. Griffin hurriedly put on her bonnet and shawl, and set off for Mrs. Cook's.

John sat alone by the fire, and pondered the rather hasty decision he had made. Had he done a very foolish thing? It was true, as his wife had reminded him, that he had often of late years thought it an advantage that they had no hungry little mouths to feed, and no restless little hands that might meddle and make mischief amongst his treasures. He had congratulated himself on the saving of expense and trouble which this fact involved.

And now he was about to burden himself with the maintenance of a strange child,—a little girl of whom he knew nothing, save that she was of pretty and winning appearance. A few weeks ago he would have said that it was impossible for him to commit such an act of folly. Yet he could not regret his decision. As he sat and waited for his wife's return, which was delayed far beyond the few minutes of which she had spoken, he felt as eager to take

charge of little Maggie as ever he had felt to secure some rare china cup or antique vase. He wondered at the strength of this new, strange feeling.

Well, he had vowed that if he rose from his sick bed he would be a different man, and this was the beginning of it. He knew not how to turn right round and start on a new course; but he was feebly groping towards the light, and in so doing was in a happier, more hopeful state than when he had walked contentedly in darkness. Though he knew not the Son of God, nor His claims upon his love, Griffin was already about to serve Him, for we cannot lay our hand, whether for good or evil, upon even the least of our human family without touching the Divine Brother of man Himself.

And as he sat by the fire, brooding over the past, and resolving to be a better man in the future, old Griffin found comfort in the words he had read in the Book:

"For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still."

Could it be that the hand of God was stretched out to him—a sinful old man like him?

CHAPTER VII.

Christmas Day.

JOHN GRIFFIN sat long alone, waiting for his wife to return. He grew uneasy as one quarter of an hour after another passed, and yet she did not come. It was but a few steps to Mrs. Cook's lodgings, what could be keeping her so long?

But at last he heard the sound of a vehicle stopping before the door of his house, and in a few moments his wife entered, bearing triumphantly in her arms what appeared to be a large bundle.

"I've got her, John," was all she said, and then she placed her bundle lightly on the hearth-rug, and ran back to dismiss the cabman, whom she had been obliged to employ.

The bundle stirred after Mrs. Griffin had placed it on the rug. A little white hand found an opening in the closely-wound shawl; and as it pushed the wrapping back, John saw a pair of dark eyes looking at him.

"How do you do, my dear?" he asked.

The child smiled faintly, but made no other response.

Griffin now noticed that her face was pale and wasted, and her eyes dull and heavy.

Just then his wife came bustling back.

"Why, what's the matter with the little maid?" he asked. "Is she bad?"

"Yes, poor little darling; and no wonder, you'd say, if you saw the place where I found her," replied Mrs. Griffin, in a tone of indignation; "a nasty, cold garret, John, close under the roof, with the wind coming in through the chinks enough to freeze you. And as for dirt! If you'll believe me, the dust was an inch thick on the floor. All the poor dear had to lie on was a heap of flocks, and a bit of a cobweb of a blanket to cover her. Mrs. Cook says the child has been bad for the last fortnight; but it's my belief that she has half-starved her. I had to fetch a cab to bring her home in, for she was too weak to walk, and I'm not strong enough to carry her so far, though 'tis but a little way. Now, wait a bit, my darling, whilst I get you some nice good beef-tea."

Mrs. Griffin talked fast to keep down the emotion which threatened to overcome her. She now brought a saucepan, and in a few minutes had warmed over the fire some of the excellent beef-tea which she had made for her husband. Then, lifting the little girl on to her lap, she gently fed her with spoonfuls of the warm broth, into which she had crumbled some bread.

Griffin leaned forward in his chair to watch the child being fed. To his joy, Maggie did not refuse the food, but took it with evident relish. She tried to sit up for a moment, and take a

look round the room; but, weak and dizzy, her head quickly sank back on Mrs. Griffin's shoulder.

"Poor little maid!" said old Griffin, tenderly. "Poor little maid!"

"It was well I went when I did, John," said Mrs. Griffin; "I believe Mrs. Cook had forgotten the child's existence, and would have left her to starve. She was in drink as usual, and made high words about being troubled with beggarly brats."

Maggie had opened her eyes again on hearing Mrs. Cook's name, and her face wore a frightened look.

"You won't send me back to her?" she asked, in a feeble voice.

"No, that we won't, dear, you may be sure of that," returned Mrs. Griffin; "you shall never see that horrid woman again, if I can help it. Poor little dear, see how thin she has grown, Griffin. Still I hope that all she wants is good nursing and feeding. I'll take her upstairs now, give her a nice warm bath, and put her to bed."

Maggie nestled in the old woman's arms with an air of intense satisfaction, and pressing her to her bosom with a mother's tenderness, Mrs. Griffin carried her away.

When John Griffin went upstairs, half-an-hour later, he found Maggie snugly established in a little bed in a corner of their room. Polly had been wont to sleep in that cot. It was like a revival of bygone days to see it occupied once more.

"Come and look at her, John," said his wife; "she looks so sweet, poor little darling!"

Maggie already appeared better for Mrs. Griffin's loving ministrations. She had dropped asleep almost as soon as she was placed in bed. Her white face, with dark hollows beneath the eyes, was sad to see; but a faint smile lingered on her lips, and the smooth forehead, over which fell dark rings of hair, curling from the bath, had lost its shadow of fear.

A lump seemed to rise in Griffin's throat as he looked at her. His eyes grew dim.

"It's just as if our Polly had come back to us again," he murmured hoarsely.

"Not quite like our own little Polly," replied his wife, jealous for her child's memory. "But, John, we will be very good to this child for the sake of our own little Polly."

"Ay, ay," he returned; and if ever a man meant what he said he did then.

Mrs. Griffin nursed Maggie tenderly during the next few days, though her care for the child did not make her neglectful of her husband. But he was hourly becoming less and less of an invalid.

Mrs. Griffin was right in her conjecture that all Maggie needed was love and care. Treated with harshness and neglect, and in constant dread of blows, the child had sunk into a miserably low state of mind and body. Crouching for long hours on her comfortless bed in the garret, to which Mrs. Cook, having let all the better rooms, had dismissed her, Maggie had sobbed and mourned for the mother, who whilst she lived had striven so hard to save her child from suffering. Though often faint for want of food, Maggie had preferred to remain there, rather than by going downstairs run the risk of encountering Mrs. Cook, from whom she shrank with the utmost aversion and fear. So low had the child's strength ebbed, that probably she would have died ere long had not Mrs. Griffin come to her succour.

"I am so glad to be here," said little Maggie simply, the next morning, when old Griffin and his wife stood beside her bed, watching her as she took her breakfast of bread and milk. "I think God must have sent you to fetch me. I kept praying to Him; but I thought He had forgotten me, for I was left all alone, and no one came to me. But He had not forgotten me, you see, for you came at last."

"Yes, my dear; and I'll always take care of you,—you need not fear," said Mrs. Griffin, scarce able to understand this childish expression of faith, but feeling more and more convinced that Maggie was the sweetest child she had ever known, except her own little Polly.

Griffin turned away, conscious of a strange humbling sensation. He was learning from little Maggie how poor a man he had been in the past.

It was wonderful how quickly Maggie's child-nature revived under the sunshine of kindness and love. In a day or two she was running about the house, still looking pale and thin, it is true, but bright and happy nevertheless. With the elasticity of childhood, she had already thrown off the memory of her dark experience, and abandoned herself to the enjoyment of the pleasanter circumstances in which she now found herself.

How strange it was to John Griffin and his wife to hear the child's happy laugh ring through the house, and the sound of her feet as they bounded lightly across the floor.

On the morning of Christmas Day, John Griffin was in his shop, taking advantage of the holiday to put his things in order. It was a bright, sunshiny day. There had been a slight hoarfrost at dawn, just enough to remind the world that it really was winter; but now the sun was as warm, and the air even milder than on many a spring day. The church bells rang out with a merry, festive sound, and the streets were already filling with churchgoers and holidaymakers.

The dwellers in the lane were not much in the habit of going to church. On this morn there was more idling and gossiping than on most days; but the men and women who lounged about the doorways looked no whit more respectable than usual, and the rough children

who played in the road were as ragged and dirty as ever. Unhappily, the many public-houses which the lane could boast were already doing a brisk trade.

It was nothing to old Griffin that this was Christmas Day, except that he was glad to have leisure to arrange his shop. How could the day be anything to him, when he was ignorant of the Saviour whose birth it commemorates? But he liked the sound of the merry bells, and they set him whistling as he moved about amongst his precious wares.

Suddenly his wife appeared at the door of the shop. She had an agitated look as she held up her finger to warn him to be silent.

"Hush, John," she whispered, as he was about to speak, "I want you to listen to that dear child. She's singing so prettily, and the very words that our Polly used to sing. Don't you remember her learning them at Sunday-school?"

Griffin came to where his wife stood, and began to listen.

Little Maggie was in the inner room. Mrs. Griffin had given her a doll that had been Polly's. It had cost the bereaved mother some sacrifice of feeling to give into another child's hands the toy which for so many years she had guarded as a sacred relic; but she had her reward in seeing Maggie's joy over her gift. Now, as Maggie hushed her dolly to sleep, she was singing in a sweet, childish treble, the well-known words:

"'Around the throne of God in heaven
  Thousands of children stand,
 Children whose sins are all forgiven—
  A holy, happy band—
 Singing, glory! glory! glory!'"

"Oh, John," cried Mrs. Griffin, when Maggie suddenly ceased singing; "I can't help thinking that perhaps our little Polly is there!" And covering her face with her apron, she burst into tears.

"Come, come, old wife," said John, not unkindly, but with an air of embarrassment, "don't ee take on so over a bit of a song."

"It doesn't make me unhappy, John," sobbed his wife; "don't think that, although I am crying. I'd be glad to know she was there. I've always thought of her dear little body lying in the cold earth; but if I could have been sure that she was up in heaven, singing with the children there, I'd have been more comforted about her this long time past."

"Deary me! Well, maybe it is so," said Griffin, thinking to himself what queer fancies women take into their heads.

"John," said his wife, as she wiped her eyes, "little Maggie says that she would like to go to church. Would you mind if I went for once?"

"Mind? Of course not," he returned, sharply. "You can please yourself about it. You can't say that I have ever kept you from going to church."

"No, but I knew you did not like me to go," said his wife, meekly, as she went away.

It was true, as he said, that he had never forcibly prevented her from going to church, but his influence had been strong enough to restrain her from doing so. She knew with what contempt he regarded parsons and churchgoers. She had had hard work to persuade him to allow their little Polly to attend Sunday-school. Since the child's death, Mrs. Griffin, from fear of incurring her husband's scorn, had scarcely ever entered a place of worship, though before that time she had been accustomed to attend church pretty regularly.

But on this Christmas Day, though she could plainly see that Griffin disliked the idea of her going, Mrs. Griffin took little Maggie to a church at the foot of the hill, up which the child had toiled with her mother on the last night of her earthly life. Maggie told Mrs. Griffin how she had come that way before, and talked to her of the mother whom she had not forgotten, although she was so happy in her new home.

How old yet new seemed that Christmas morning service to Mrs. Griffin! It was strange to hear again, after so many years, the familiar story of a Saviour's coming to redeem the world. The glad tidings had a sweetness for her now that they had lacked in earlier years. There are some who have to learn by hard experience what it is to be weary and heavy-laden, ere they can welcome the gentle sound of the Saviour's, "Come unto Me!"

"I'm glad that I went, John," she said to her husband, when she came back; "it was good to hear the Christmas hymns again. They sang, 'Hark the herald angels sing!' and 'O come, all ye faithful!' Little Maggie was delighted. I think I shall go again, for I do believe there's a blessing comes with going to church."

In the new hope and joy that the child had brought her, Mrs. Griffin felt herself lifted above all fear of her husband's sneers.

Griffin gave a low grunt, the precise meaning of which it would be difficult to define. He would not admit that his wife was right, yet something withheld him from uttering words of contempt.

In the evening, John Griffin again spent some time in his shop; but he did not stay there very long. His treasures had no longer the first place in his life. Little Maggie's society had a greater attraction for him now. He loved to watch her pretty looks and ways; and the more he observed her, the more he admired the child, and felt his heart going out in love to her. He was constantly drawing his wife aside to whisper to her some comment on the child's appearance.

"Do you note what pretty little feet she has?" he would say. "It's only amongst the real gentry that you see such an arched instep. And look at her tiny hands, and those little shell-like ears. She reminds me of a piece of rare old Sèvres. Depend upon it, she's the best porcelain, or I don't know a piece when I see it."

His wife would smile at his words; but she too had her pride in the child, and was determined to keep her as clean and neat as any lady's child could be.

When Griffin went back to the little sitting-room, he found his wife at work altering a garment of Polly's to make it fit Maggie; whilst the child sat by her side, with her mother's Bible open on her knee.

"Oh, John," cried his wife, looking up with a delighted face as her husband opened the door, "Maggie can read so prettily; do come and listen to her."

John sat down and listened. Maggie was reading the old story of the angels bringing the glad tidings to the shepherds in the fields at Bethlehem. To Griffin and his wife the child's reading seemed wonderful. Her mother had taken great pains to teach her to read well, and she pronounced each word so clearly and correctly, and gave such pretty expression to what she read, that it was very pleasant to listen to her.

John Griffin was not much of a reader. The only book he ever studied was the well-thumbed handbook on china, which he always spoke of emphatically as "the book."

He listened now with wonder and interest as little Maggie read of the glad tidings of great joy to which his ears had so long been closed.

"Shall I sing you the hymn that mamma and I always used to sing on Sunday evenings?" said Maggie as she closed the Bible, pleased that her reading had been so much appreciated.

"Yes, do my dear," said Mrs. Griffin.

And in her sweet childish voice, Maggie sang the simple, touching words:

"'There is a green hill far away

Without a city wall,
Where the dear Lord was crucified,
Who died to save us all.

"'We may not know, we cannot tell,
What pains He had to bear;
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.

"'He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven,
Saved by His precious blood.

"'There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin,
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in.

"'Oh, dearly, dearly has He loved,
And we must love Him too,
And trust in His redeeming blood,
And try His works to do.'"

"Do you like that?" Maggie asked, when she had finished, feeling surprised at the silence which followed her song.

"Yes, it is very pretty, my dear," said Mrs. Griffin, in a voice that was not quite steady.

"What does it mean about unlocking the gate of heaven?" asked Griffin, abruptly. "Where is heaven?"

Maggie's dark eyes instinctively looked upward. "Where Jesus is," she said, softly. "Mamma is there now; for she told me that though she had been a wicked woman, she knew that Jesus had forgiven her sins. And oh, Mrs. Griffin, your little Polly that you were telling me about this morning, she must be there too, don't you think? 'Around the throne of God in heaven,' you know."

"Maybe she is," murmured Mrs. Griffin, tears that were not all of sorrow coming into her eyes. "I've been thinking of that."

"Jesus!" thought old Griffin. "The Lord Jesus Christ of whom the doctor spoke to me."

Then aloud, he asked: "Who is Jesus?"

"Why, don't you know?" exclaimed little Maggie, looking at him in astonishment.

"Never mind whether I know, 'you' tell me," returned John Griffin.

"Jesus is the Son of God, who died for us," said Maggie.

"Died for us!" repeated old Griffin, wonderingly. "Who do you mean by 'us?'"

"Us means everybody, of course," said the child: "it means 'you,'" she added, pointing to the old man; "and 'you,'" pointing to his wife; "and 'me,' and all the people that are in the world."

"Did He really die for me?" asked Griffin, with a strange tremor in his voice.

"Why, yes, I tell you so," said Maggie; "and the hymn says so too."

"I knew all about it once," remarked Mrs. Griffin, with a deep-drawn sigh; "but I have not thought of these things for a long time till to-day."

"I wish you would sing that song again, my little maid," said John Griffin, after a few minutes' silence.

So Maggie sang her hymn again, even more sweetly and clearly than before.

Then Mrs. Griffin decided that it was time for Maggie to go to bed, and led her away, whilst Griffin sat alone with the words ringing in his ears:—

"'Oh, dearly, dearly has He loved,
And we must love Him too,
And trust in His redeeming blood,
And try His works to do.'"

CHAPTER VIII.

Maud Platten visits the Shop.

"How very dirty your china looks, Mr. Griffin," said Maggie, coming into the shop the next morning, "why don't you dust it?"

"I've no time to dust the things," said the old man, with a smile; "they come and go too fast to make it worth while to clean them, let alone the risk of breaking them."

"I can dust them for you, if you like," suggested the child; "I know how to dust, for I used to help mamma put the room tidy."

"No, no, thank you, my dear; they're best left as they are," replied old Griffin; "you're like all good women folk, fond of cleaning and putting things straight. But I daren't trust my china in your little fingers."

"I should be very careful," said Maggie, rather hurt that her offer of help should be thus received; "oh, there is mamma's jug!"

She had caught sight of the old Worcester jug, which Griffin had placed in a prominent position in the window. Almost before he knew what she was about, she had it in her hands, and was looking lovingly at the pictures painted upon it.

"Oh, what a pity you have let it get so dusty," she cried; "do let me dust it, Mr. Griffin. I know just how mamma used to do it."

"Very well, let me see how you can dust it," said John Griffin, with a smile; "the wife will give you a cloth, if you ask her."

Maggie bounded away, and soon returned duster in hand, and a look of proud importance on her face.

"Mind you are very careful," said the dealer, who was not without anxiety as he saw the jug in Maggie's hands; "that jug is worth a sight of money."

"Is it? How much?" asked Maggie, promptly.

Old Griffin turned away, and did not reply. There was a flush of shame on his face, for the child's question reminded him of the wrong he had done her mother.

"Mamma did not want to sell the jug," said Maggie, heedless that her question remained unanswered; "she liked it so much, and she had had it ever since she was a little girl. But she had no money to buy anything with, so that she was glad you gave her some for it. She said you were a good old man."

A PLEASANT DUTY.

A PLEASANT DUTY.

"She was wrong there," said old Griffin.

"What do you mean?" asked little Maggie, in a tone of innocent surprise. "Aren't you a good man, Mr. Griffin?"

"No, no," he said, hastily; "I'm far from being good."

Little Maggie looked troubled. "But you mean to be good, don't you?" she said, after a minute. "You'll try?"

"I'd like to be good," said old Griffin, in an undertone.

Maggie seemed satisfied with this admission, and now turned all her attention to the jug, which she was carefully polishing.

"There now!" she exclaimed, presently, holding it up for admiration. "Doesn't it look a deal better than it did?"

"Yes, indeed, you've made it look fine," returned the old man; "now mind how you put it down."

"May I dust it every day?" asked Maggie as she replaced the jug in the window.

"If you'll always be very careful with it," he replied.

After this Maggie never neglected to dust the Worcester jug. She took both pride and pleasure in the self-imposed duty, for the jug was fully as precious to her as to the china-dealer, though she set a different sort of value upon it.

Maggie spent many an hour with old Griffin in his shop, and proved such a pleasant companion that he, who had formerly been so afraid of a child's intrusion into his sanctum, was now never so happy as when Maggie was with him. He taught her to call him grandfather, and treated her in all respects as his grandchild. Strange talks they had together, in which the old man learned many a deep though simple truth from the lips of the little girl.

Sometimes Maggie would sing to him, whilst he was engaged in mending china. Of all her songs, the one which he loved best to hear was that which told of "a green hill far away, without a city wall." Maggie sang it so often to him and his wife, that they soon knew the words by heart, yet they did not grow weary of them.

One day Maggie was with old Griffin in his shop, when a chaise drove up to the door, from which a gentleman got down, and then waited to assist a lady to alight.

"It's Dr. Thornton," said John Griffin, looking through the window, "and he's got a young lady with him."

In another moment the doctor and Maud Platten came into the shop.

"How are you, Griffin?" said Dr. Thornton. "This is not a professional visit. I've brought a lady to see your curiosities. I told her you would be happy to show them to her."

"She's kindly welcome, sir," said the old dealer; "I'm always glad for people to see my things, whether they are going to buy or not. It ain't much that I've got to show, still there's some nice pieces here. Be careful how you walk, please, miss, we haven't much room to spare."

"Why, who is this, Griffin?" asked Dr. Thornton, as his gaze fell on little Maggie, who stood with eyes fixed on the young lady, whose pretty dress and far prettier face called forth the child's strongest admiration. "I did not know you had a little girl."

"She's my grandchild, sir," said old Griffin, shortly; "she has lost her parents, and has come to live with us."

"Oh, indeed! She will be a nice little companion for you and your wife," said the doctor, as he laid his hand caressingly on the child's curly head.

Griffin had determined that he would give no explanation but this to any one who questioned him concerning Maggie. He had adopted the child as a grand-daughter, and he did not see that there was any harm in allowing people to suppose that she really was related to him. Naturally a reserved man in all matters connected with his private history, he was unwilling that any one should know the circumstances which had led him to take Maggie into his home. Mrs. Cook, of course, could tell folks what she knew, but his customers and acquaintance were not likely to come in contact with Mrs. Cook.

"What a dear little girl!" said Maud Platten, turning from the vase to which Griffin had directed her attention, to look at little Maggie. "What lovely dark eyes she has!"

The moment before she spoke, Leslie Thornton had been observing, certainly not for the first time, the beauty of her eyes. Turning now to look at the child, he was struck with a certain resemblance between her and Maud. Both had large, dark, liquid eyes; but there was a serious, almost sad look lurking in the depths of the child's eyes, of which the bright laughing orbs of the woman showed no sign.

Maggie's face glowed with joy as she heard the lady's kind words; and when Maud stooped and lightly kissed her cheek, the child felt as happy as possible. She kept close to the young lady as she moved cautiously through the narrow lane between the piled-up goods, examining one thing after another with a bright, intelligent interest that gladdened old Griffin's heart as, growing eloquent, he discoursed on the merits of his china, and gave her a full and particular history of each specimen which he brought to her notice.

Dr. Thornton bought some rare old plates to adorn the walls of his drawing-room; and then, having stayed in the shop for nearly half-an-hour, the lady and gentleman wished the old china-dealer and his grandchild, "good day," and took their departure.

"Isn't she lovely, grandfather?" said Maggie, standing at the door to watch the chaise drive down the lane. "I never saw any one so pretty. And her voice was so soft and sweet. I'm so glad she kissed me."

"Like to like," said old Griffin to himself. "The child belongs to gentlefolks, and she takes to gentlefolks."

"I fancy that we shall hear before long that Dr. Thornton is married," he said, aloud.

"What! To that pretty lady!" cried Maggie, joyfully. "Why do you think so?"

The old man's eyes twinkled merrily behind his thick-rimmed spectacles—"I saw a many things that made me think so, Maggie," he said.

A fortnight later old Griffin knew that this conjecture was correct. Walking through the streets of Plymouth one morning, he heard the bells of the old church ringing noisily; and when curiosity moved him to inquire the meaning of their merry din, he was told that the bells were ringing because Dr. Thornton had been married that morning to Colonel Platten's daughter.

"Colonel Platten's daughter?" said old Griffin, in a tone of interrogation. "Who may Colonel Platten be?"

"Why, surely you know the old colonel, who lives up at the top of Lockyer Street?" said his informant.

"No, I don't know him," said Griffin; "he has never done business with me. Dr. Thornton has, though, and I think I have seen the young lady who is his bride. Well, I wish them joy,—for he's a good man, the doctor is. I shan't soon forget how he brought me through that illness of mine."

As he went on his way John Griffin said to himself—"Colonel Platten! How strange that the name should be the same as that in my little maid's books. I wish I had asked how it was spelt. There can't be anything in it though, surely."

John Griffin now always thought and spoke of Maggie as his "little maid." The child grew dearer and dearer to his heart. He counted her his most precious possession. Nor did his wife fail to show as much love for the child. Maggie's coming had brought light and joy to

the home of the old couple. Mrs. Griffin's face had lost its melancholy look, and wore quite a new expression as she attended to the child's wants, making and mending for her with an ardour which made the tasks their own reward.

Though Griffin still took a great delight in his old china, a delight which he taught Maggie to share, his life was no longer buried in his business. Sometimes, as the spring advanced, he would close the shop at an early hour, that he might take his "little maid" and his "old woman" for a walk by the sea. It would be difficult to say who enjoyed those walks the most,—little Maggie, who had such delight in seeing the waves break upon the rocks, or in gathering shells and sea-weed, which by diligent search might be discovered on the beach, or the two old people who found their pleasure in watching hers.

Mrs. Griffin generally took Maggie to church on Sunday mornings; and, though Griffin would not accompany them, he said not a word against their going. He would even seem interested in Maggie's childish account of the service and the singing. And he was always willing to hear Maggie read from her mother's Bible, and sing the hymn which her mother had taught her.

Thus, from the lips of a little child, the old man gradually learned to know and love and trust the Son of Man, who died for him, and began to try, though but feebly and imperfectly, to do His works.

CHAPTER IX.

The Worcester Jug finds a Purchaser.

CHRISTMAS was again drawing near. It was almost a year since little Maggie came to John Griffin's home, and he and his wife held her as dear as if she had always belonged to them, when one afternoon Colonel Platten, on his return from a visit to Stoke, passed through the lane in which the old china-dealer lived. What had brought him that way he could scarcely tell; and as he walked along, with his upright, military carriage and proud, stern face, he looked with disdain on the dingy tenements and strange, uninviting shops on either side the way.

Though he still maintained his soldierly bearing, the colonel was beginning to be painfully conscious of increasing years. He felt himself, too, to be a lonely as well as an old man. Since his daughter's marriage, his home had seemed to him a dreary, desolate place; for his boys were often away, and then the large, well-furnished rooms, empty and silent, had a comfortless, lonesome feeling. He had long retired from the army, and without occupation, he found time hang heavily on his hands. He knew that he was sure of a welcome at his daughter's home, but he shrank from intruding too often on the young couple. Besides, young Mrs. Thornton appeared to find a variety of engagements and pleasures in her new estate, and had not much leisure to bestow upon her father.

So Colonel Platten was returning home on this winter afternoon with no pleasurable anticipations. The day was gloomy, and his thoughts were suited to it. He was brooding over the dulness and weariness of his present life, when suddenly his eye was caught by an object which in a moment recalled with startling vividness certain earlier, brighter days lying far back in his history.

He was passing the old curiosity shop, and it was the Worcester jug that arrested his attention, still occupying a conspicuous place amid the many articles in the window. Its appearance struck him as familiar. As he glanced at it, he thought it remarkably like a

certain jug that had belonged to his first wife. It was a family relic which had descended to her, and she had guarded it with care, taking great pride in its beauty and antiquity. He had been wont to see it stand on a chiffonier in his wife's drawing-room, in company with certain Oriental bowls and plates, then just coming into demand as fashionable ornaments. After his wife's death he had allowed his daughter to consider these curiosities as her own property, and to his annoyance the girl had taken with her the greater part of the old china, amongst it the Worcester jug, when she wilfully quitted her father's house, and by so doing incurred his lasting displeasure.

The old colonel felt startled at seeing again, as he fancied, this jug which had belonged to the daughter whom he had cast off and forgotten,—no, not forgotten,—he had found it impossible to forget her, though he had striven to do so. Of late the thought of the child whom he had dearly loved, ay, and still loved—for love will not soon die, though we do our best to kill it—had constantly haunted his mind. He had even secretly endeavoured to find out if she were still living, but his efforts to trace her had proved of no avail. How he would act in the event of his discovering her, he had not yet decided. He would not own to himself that he was ready to forgive her; but he felt an irrepressible longing for some tidings of her. So it was little wonder that he started and grew pale and tremulous at the sight of that old Worcester jug.

He went close to the window and looked at it with an eager gaze. Yes, it seemed exactly the same. But he must examine it more closely. So the tall stately colonel strode into the shop, and by an impatient tap of his cane on the floor quickly brought Griffin to the spot.

"What can I do for you, sir?" asked the old china-dealer.

"I want to look at that jug that you have in the window," said the gentleman.

Griffin reached the jug with alacrity. He was anxious to find a purchaser for it. It had remained on his hands for some time, because he was determined to have his price for it, and had refused several offers which he considered too low. It was not on his own account that he was anxious to make so large a sum by it. He had long resolved that whatever money the jug might fetch should be Maggie's.

"That's the jug you mean, sir?" he said, as he placed it in the colonel's hands. "Real old Worcester, and quite perfect too."

Colonel Platten's hands trembled as he turned the jug round and round, and examined it closely. As far as his recollection served him it might be the very same jug.

"It is strange," he said; "this jug seems to be exactly similar to one which I had once in my possession."

"Did you lose it, sir, or was it broke?" asked the dealer, looking greatly interested in the answer.

"I lost it, or at least it was removed from my house," said the colonel, stiffly. "I am wondering whether this may by any possibility be the same. Can you tell me if it is an unusual thing to find two jugs of this kind of exactly the same shape and pattern?"

"A most unusual thing, I should say, sir," replied Griffin, with the air of one whose opinion was of weight; "you see, this is a very old jug, considerably more than a hundred years old, I should think. These pictures and flowers were painted by hand. It's quite a work of art, as one may call it, sir. There may have been many jugs made after a similar design; but I don't suppose there was ever one painted exactly like it. You're sure the pictures are the same, sir?"

"Yes, I know them well," replied the colonel, with a deep-drawn sigh; "will you tell me how this jug came into your possession?"

"There's the old Worcester mark, you see, sir," said John Griffin, turning the jug bottom upwards, and choosing to ignore for a moment the question for which he was not quite prepared; "do you remember if that was on the jug you had?"

"Yes, I believe so; I seem to recognize it," said Colonel Platten, curtly; "but will you be good enough to answer my question?"

He spoke in the severe, commanding tone of one accustomed to be obeyed. But, though his imperious manner might draw forth words, it failed to elicit the truth.

His resentment of the colonel's tone strengthened Griffin's first impulse to withhold all information concerning the purchase of the jug, and the child, whom it had been the indirect means of introducing to his home.

"You want to know how it came into my possession, sir?" he said, deliberately. "Let me see. I bought it of some one, I suppose; but it's a long time agone now."

"Will you try to remember of whom you bought it?" asked the colonel, in a tone of eager earnestness.

"Really, sir, I can't say," returned old Griffin. "I need have the brain of a Philadelphia lawyer to remember all the folks as comes to me with china to sell."

"Then you cannot explain how this jug came into your hands?" said the colonel.

Griffin stubbornly shook his head. He was not going to tell this fine, proud gentleman all about his little Maggie, if he knew it.

The colonel looked very disappointed.

"Will you buy the jug, sir?" asked the china-dealer.

"Yes, I will buy it," said Colonel Platten; "what is the price?"

"Five guineas, sir," said old Griffin; "this sort of china is very rare now, and I cannot ask less."

"I daresay it is worth it," said the gentleman, absently, and drawing some money from his pocket, he paid the sum forthwith. "Send it to my house as soon as possible, if you please,—Colonel Platten's, Lockyer Street."

And the colonel turned and left the shop without seeing the startled, confused look which came to the old man's face as his customer gave his name.

Colonel Platten! The same name as that written in his little maid's books. Then no doubt that jug was the very one which the colonel had missed. But how had it come into the possession of the poor widow of whom he had purchased it so cheaply? Had she stolen it and the books, too, from the colonel's house? No, he could not believe it of her. She was a lady, he was sure of that. He remembered that she had spoken of the jug as a family relic. Could it be that she was related to the old colonel? What a mystery it all seemed, to be sure! Perhaps if he had told the colonel the truth about the jug, he would have claimed little Maggie as belonging to him. As he thought this, Griffin said to himself that he was glad he had kept back the truth. He could not bear to think of losing the child whom he held so dear.

But Griffin could not long congratulate himself on the deception he had practised. His conscience awoke, and began to trouble him. A year ago he would have seen no harm in concealing by evasive words a fact he did not wish to confess. But of late he had been learning of the Son of Man, and trying to do His works. A sense of shame came over him as he realised how readily and unwittingly he had fallen into the power of temptation. He had wronged both God and man by telling a lie.

Unhappily, John Griffin tried to find excuses for what he had done. The colonel's manner had been so unpleasant that he was naturally provoked by it. It was surely well for Maggie that he had kept silence. The little maid was perfectly happy with him and his wife; she would not welcome any change that should remove her from their home.

But though he tried hard to convince himself that he had not after all done anything so very bad, old Griffin could not feel at ease concerning the matter. He was alone in the house, his

wife having gone to Devonport to see a friend, and taken Maggie with her, so he had plenty of leisure to reflect upon what he had done.

At last, he resolved that when he carried the jug to Colonel Platten's house that evening, he would ask to see the colonel, and fully explain to him the circumstances under which it had come into his possession. Having thus resolved to do the right thing, old Griffin's mind was relieved of its burden.

When Mrs. Griffin and Maggie had come home, and the child, sleepy and tired, was being put to bed, Griffin set off to carry the Worcester jug to Colonel Platten's. He had said nothing to his wife about his having sold it, feeling unwilling to hear her discuss the matter that night.

As he went along, Griffin was rehearsing in his mind all he would say to the colonel. But he might have spared himself the trouble, for when he reached the house he was informed that Colonel Platten was not at home; so all he could do was to leave the jug and come away.

"Well, I meant to tell him," he muttered to himself as he went down the street; "it's not my fault if he's not at home." And he tried to persuade himself that he had done enough, and might now let the matter rest.

It was a keen winter's night. The wind blew from the north, and was icy cold. Griffin buttoned his coat tightly around him, but the sharp blast caught his breath and chilled him through and through. As he struggled on, panting and wheezing, he was painfully conscious that old age was coming upon him apace. When he reached home, his wife chid him for going out on such a night without his woollen comforter. She gave him some warm posset, hoping thus to ward off the effects of exposure; but Griffin had caught a severe cold, which rapidly developed, in spite of all her precautions.

CHAPTER X.

Maggie goes to the Doctor's House.

ALTHOUGH when he awoke the next morning he felt very poorly, John Griffin insisted on rising and going about his work as usual. He had not been long in the shop, when little Maggie ran in, duster in hand, ready for her self-appointed duty. But, turning to the spot where the jug had always stood, she was surprised to find its place empty.

"Oh, grandfather," she exclaimed, "what have you done with my jug? I can't see it anywhere."

"Why, I've actually sold it at last, Maggie," he replied; "what do you think of that?" Though Griffin had felt rather doubtful how the child would take this news, he was not prepared to see such dismay as her face now expressed.

"Sold it?" she cried. "Sold mamma's pretty jug! Oh, grandfather, you don't mean that you have done 'that?'"

"But, my dear, you knew the jug was for sale, did you not?" replied the china-dealer. "I put it in the window hoping some one would take a fancy to it and buy it."

"Yes, I knew that; but I did not think you would really sell it," replied the child, inconsistently; "and oh, how could you sell it and send it away without ever telling me? Now I shall never be able to dust it any more." And Maggie burst into tears, and began to sob in the hearty, unrestrained way which gives such relief in childish sorrows.

The sight of her distress made old Griffin miserable. He had never seen Maggie cry thus before, and he felt as if he were a monster of cruelty.

"Come, come, Maggie; don't take on so," he said. "I did not think you would be so silly. Don't you want to know how much money I got for the jug? Look here," he added, opening a drawer as he spoke, "here it is—five bright sovereigns and five bright shillings! And it's all yours, Maggie; I don't mean to touch a penny of it. Isn't that better than keeping the jug?"

"No, I don't care for the old money!" cried Maggie, passionately. "I would much rather have had the jug. I wish the money were all at the bottom of the sea, rather than you should have sold the jug."

"Now, Maggie, you are a naughty girl," said Griffin, losing patience with her as her sobs redoubled in intensity; "you know I did it for your good, and it's very ungrateful of you to

make such a fuss. I can't have you here, if you're going to make that noise; you'll frighten all my customers away."

It was the first time John Griffin had spoken to her so sharply; and, startled by the change in his manner, and not without a dim consciousness that she really was a very naughty girl, Maggie went sobbing to tell her grief to Mrs. Griffin.

Left by himself, Griffin felt almost as unhappy as the child. Many things combined to make him feel ill at ease. His bodily discomfort was considerable, and he had the fear of an illness before him; whilst his mind persistently dwelt on the Worcester jug, and the way in which he had deceived Colonel Platten regarding it. Yet he could not immediately resolve to set the wrong right, for the fear of losing his "little maid" caused him to shrink from telling her story to the colonel.

The sound of Maggie's sobs came to Griffin's ears from the inner room, and as he heard them he said to himself: "Poor little maid, I am afraid I was too hard on her. I did not think her heart was so set upon the jug."

At last the sound of sobbing died away, and there was stillness in the house. After a while Griffin heard a light step coming along the passage; then the door of the shop was pushed a little way open, and Maggie timidly looked in.

"Come in, my dear; don't be afraid," said old Griffin, encouragingly.

Maggie crept gently to his side, and said in a voice still suggestive of tears: "Grandfather, I'm sorry I was so naughty to you just now; will you forgive me?"

Old Griffin bent down and kissed her. "Of course, my dear, of course," he said; "don't think any more of what I said. I'm a cross old man, especially when I feel as I do this morning."

As he spoke, John Griffin thought that perhaps he ought to ask Maggie's forgiveness, for he could not feel sure that he had not wronged her a second time with respect to the old Worcester jug.

"Do you feel very bad?" asked the child, gently.

"Bad enough," returned the old man; "I can't breathe without pain. But there, there! It's no use making a fuss."

But, unwilling though he was to make a fuss, ere evening came old Griffin was forced to give in and own that he felt very ill.

Mrs. Griffin was greatly alarmed to find her husband assailed by a similar attack to that from which he had suffered so severely twelve months before.

"I am afraid he is going to be very ill," she said to Maggie, when she came downstairs from her husband's room, having done everything which her wisdom could suggest to check the progress of the mischief; "I wish Dr. Thornton could see him. I wonder who would fetch him for me?"

"I'll go, granny," cried Maggie, eagerly; "I know where Dr. Thornton lives. Grandfather showed me the house one day, when we were coming from the Hoe."

"Wouldn't you be afraid to go?" asked Mrs. Griffin. "It's getting late. I scarcely like to let you."

"Oh, I am not a bit afraid," said Maggie; "I'll run very fast all the way, and I'll ask Dr. Thornton to come as quickly as possible."

"Well, I don't know what to say," replied Mrs. Griffin, divided between anxiety for her husband and fear for the child's safety; "you'll promise me to be very careful in crossing the roads?"

"Yes, yes," said Maggie, accepting this as consent, and hastily putting on her hat.

Mrs. Griffin hesitated no longer, but pinning a warm shawl round the child, despatched her to fetch the doctor.

Maggie ran quickly up the lane, and in a marvellously short time arrived breathless at the doctor's door.

"Is Dr. Thornton at home, please?" she asked of the servant who opened the door.

"No, he is not," she replied; "but we expect him every moment. Won't you come in, and wait till he comes?"

It seemed to Maggie that this was the best thing to do under the circumstances, so she stepped into the hall, and seated herself on the chair to which the servant pointed.

The interior of the doctor's house looked bright and pleasant to the child's eyes. She observed with pleasure the coloured oil-cloth, the pretty stair-carpet, with its glittering rods, and the cunningly devised lamp that hung from the ceiling. But presently a fairer sight than any of these objects gladdened Maggie's eyes. A fairy-like vision appeared on the staircase—a young lady, dressed in dazzling white, with bright ornaments on her neck and wrists, and flowers in her hair. She ran lightly down the steps; then, startled at seeing Maggie, she stood for a moment looking wonderingly at her.

Maggie recognized her as the pretty lady whom Dr. Thornton had brought to see John Griffin's curiosities. She was looking lovelier than ever now, with a bright flush on her

cheeks, her dark eyes shining like gems, and her coral lips slightly parted, as she stood by the child's side breathing rapidly.

"Why are you waiting here, little girl?" she asked.

"I am waiting for the doctor," replied Maggie; "I want him to come to grandfather; he is very ill."

"I do not think he will be able to come to-night," said the young lady; "won't to-morrow do as well?"

"Oh no! It would be so much better if the doctor could come to-night," said Maggie; "he is really very ill, he can hardly breathe."

Maud Thornton drew a short, impatient sigh. "What is your name?" she asked. "I fancy I have seen you before. I seem to know your face."

"I am Maggie, Mr. Griffin's little girl,—Mr. Griffin of the old curiosity shop, you know."

"Ah, to be sure, 'that' place. I remember now that I saw you there when we bought our plates. And so Mr. Griffin is ill?"

Maggie was about to reply, when the hall door was suddenly opened by a latch-key, and the doctor came in.

Mrs. Thornton shivered and shrank before the breath of cold air that entered with him.

The doctor's first glance fell on his wife, and he exclaimed in astonishment at her appearance:

"My dear! Dressed like that, you are not going out to-night?"

"But I am, Leslie," she replied, in a tone of determination; "have you forgotten Mrs. Thompson's ball?"

"No, dear, I have not forgotten it," he replied, gently; "but I told you this morning that I thought you ought not to go. After being so ill for the last three days, you are running a very serious risk in venturing out this bitter night in that thin dress, and to a ball of all places. I hoped you had given up the idea of going."

"Then you were very much mistaken," she replied; "do you think I can give up so easily a pleasure I have been counting on for weeks? And as for my having been very ill, you know it was only a cough and a pain at my side. But you doctors like to make a grand fuss over nothing. I would never have married a doctor had I known what fidgety husbands they make."

A look of pain crossed Leslie's face. "Don't say that, love," he said, "I can't bear to hear you say it, even in jest. You must go to-night if your heart is set upon it; but pray put on plenty of wraps, and be very careful. If we doctors are fidgety, it is because we know to what serious consequences a neglected cold may lead."

As he spoke, Dr. Thornton turned to put down his hat, and for the first time became aware of Maggie's presence.

"What little girl is this?" he asked in surprise.

"Oh, she waited to see you," replied his wife; "her grandfather is ill. But don't go there to-night," she added, in a whisper; "I want you to get ready at once to accompany me to Mrs. Thompson's."

"If the man is very ill, I must go to-night," said Leslie. Then turning to Maggie, he asked, "What is your grandfather's name, my child?"

"John Griffin," answered Maggie.

"What, John Griffin of the china shop? Is he ill again? I'm sorry for that. I hope it's nothing serious."

"Yes, please, sir, he's very bad," said Maggie, solemnly; "and Mrs. Griffin told me to say that she would be very much obliged to you if you would come as soon as possible."

"I'll come almost directly," said the doctor; "you run home now, I shall be there nearly as soon as you are."

Mrs. Thornton walked into the dining-room with a frown on her pretty face. "It's always thus," she said to herself, angrily; "he never can go anywhere with me! I wish he were not a doctor. But I will go to-night, if I go by myself."

CHAPTER XI.

Colonel Platten receives a Strange Request.

THE doctor found John Griffin even worse than Maggie's words had led him to expect. The old man lay with flushed, anxious face, breathing heavily, each breath costing him severe pain. Dr. Thornton spoke kindly and soothingly to him, and stayed long beside his bed, doing all he could to relieve his sufferings. Ere he left, his patient seemed a little easier, but nevertheless Dr. Thornton went away with the conviction that old Griffin would not struggle through this attack as he had through the former one.

And now, as in that other illness, John Griffin had a burden of sin upon his mind, which he pondered in hours of pain and sleeplessness. Again he resolved that with returning health he would take an early opportunity of setting right the wrong he had done.

But several days passed, and he grew no better.

Fresh symptoms and complications presented themselves, baffling the doctor's skill. He came every day to see the old man, and did his utmost for him; but, after a while, his visits became shorter and shorter, and Mrs. Griffin wondered at the change she observed in the doctor's appearance. It struck her that he was looking almost as ill as his patient, and his manner had grown so quiet, that he scarce said an unnecessary word.

Even Maggie felt the change in him, and shrank back in awe at the sight of his grave, pale face. He never stopped to speak to her now before leaving the house; he did not even pat her on the head if he met her on the stairs.

He came into the house, examined his patient, prescribed for him, and then took his departure with an automaton-like precision. What could have wrought such a change in the kind-hearted, genial doctor?

Ere long, an acquaintance coming in to inquire for the invalid, gave Mrs. Griffin a sufficient explanation. "Have you heard?" she asked. "That Dr. Thornton's wife is very ill, and not

expected to live? They say she caught cold at a ball, and has got inflammation of the lungs. Won't it be sad if he loses her? For they haven't been married a year yet."

When Mrs. Griffin knew this, she could no longer wonder at the doctor's grave, silent demeanour. She thought that it was very good of him to come every day to see Griffin, and do so much for him, whilst he was in sore trouble about his dear young wife.

Little Maggie was very grieved to hear the news. She could not bear to think that the "pretty lady," whose visit to the shop had given her such delight, and who had looked so lovely when she saw her in her own home, should be ill. She prayed every day that God would soon make her grandfather well; now she added to her prayer a similar request concerning the "pretty lady."

At last, one day, Dr. Thornton came to the house looking quite a different man. He entered with a light, quick step; and his face, though still pale and worn, had a bright and happy expression.

Maggie peeped out of the shop at the sound of his entrance, and seeing this change in his appearance, the child ventured to address him.

"Good-morning, Dr. Thornton," she said; "is your wife better?"

"Yes, thank you, Maggie; she is very much better, I am thankful to say," he replied, with a bright smile; "I hope she will soon recover now." And in his gratitude for the child's sympathy, he stooped and gave her a kiss.

"I'm very glad to hear that," said Maggie, smiling; "do you think my grandfather will soon get better too?"

The doctor's look changed. "I don't know, I hope so," he said, and went hurriedly upstairs.

As he entered the sick room, the doctor saw a great change in old Griffin's appearance. He knew then that there would be no getting better for his patient. The end was drawing near.

The old man was sleeping, and Dr. Thornton would not have him roused. Perhaps in this deep sleep, which seemed so restful, he would pass away.

Dr. Thornton beckoned Mrs. Griffin from the room, and tried to prepare her for what might soon happen. She had long felt that thus it would be, yet her grief, when told that all hope was at an end, was bitter indeed. Her sorrow touched Dr. Thornton keenly, contrasting as it did with his own joyous relief from fear and anxiety.

But though she broke down utterly at first, Mrs. Griffin soon recovered herself, and put her grief aside for the sake of the loved sufferer. She went back with a calm though sorrow-stricken face to take her place beside her husband's bed.

Presently little Maggie stole into the room, and sat down on the other side of the bed. She had often sat there during old Griffin's illness. He liked to know that his "little maid" was near him. Sometimes, when he felt a little better, she had read to him from her mother's Bible, or sung him the hymn which he liked so well to hear.

Whilst they sat thus, John Griffin suddenly opened his eyes, and looked round first at his wife, and then at Maggie.

"Both here!" he said, with a smile. "That's right."

"So you're awake at last, John," said his wife, coming forward to give him some nourishment; "the doctor's been here, but he would not wake you because you was so sound asleep."

"What did the doctor say about me?" asked the old man.

Mrs. Griffin knew not how to reply. She shrank from telling him what the doctor had said. But old Griffin saw her hesitation, and could guess its meaning.

"I know, my wife, I know," he said, faintly; "I have not long to live. I don't want the doctor to tell me that. But there is something to be done ere I die. I must repent and forsake my sins, or the Lord will not forgive me. I must try to undo the wrong I have done my little maid."

"You wronged Maggie!" exclaimed his wife, in astonishment. "Why, John, what do you mean? You've been as good to her as if she were your own child!"

"Why, grandfather, what can you be thinking of?" put in Maggie, hastily. "You've always been good to me, so good and kind."

"I've meant to be good to you, Maggie," he murmured; "but I've wronged you nevertheless, though 'twas my love for you led me to do it. It was all along of that Worcester jug. Will you do something for me, Maggie?"

"Of course I will,—anything!" she cried.

"Then I want you to go to Colonel Platten, the gentleman who bought the jug of me. He lives in a large house at the top of Lockyer Street. Any one will show you the house. Give him my duty, and beg him to come to me at once. Say that I have something of importance to tell him. It is about the Worcester jug. Lose no time, my child, for I have little to count on now."

Maggie went without another word, and made all the haste she could. The short December day was drawing to a close as she sped quickly up the lane on her way to Lockyer Street. As she went her heart was heavy with the thought that soon her adopted grandfather must die and leave her, and that perhaps this would be the last errand on which she would run for him.

Maggie had no difficulty in finding the colonel's house. The first tradesman's boy she met in the street could direct her to it. With a feeling of awe she recognized the house as that outside which she had stood so long with her mother on that bitter winter's night a year ago.

Pushing back the gate, Maggie hurried to the front door, and rang the bell sharply.

A servant appeared in answer to her summons, who was about to scold Maggie for startling the house by such a loud peal; but the child's pale, anxious face stayed her anger.

"Please I want to see Colonel Platten," said Maggie, breathlessly.

"Then you can't," replied the servant, "for he is not at home."

"Not at home!" exclaimed Maggie, in a tone of despair. "Oh, what shall I do?"

"Is it anything so very particular?" said the servant, struck by the child's look and manner. "Can't you leave a message with me?"

"Oh, no, I must see him," said Maggie; "it is very important, and it may soon be too late."

"Then you had better go to Dr. Thornton's," said the servant; "the colonel is most likely there. Do you know where the doctor lives?"

Maggie only replied by a nod, as she darted through the gate, and ran at full speed in the direction of Dr. Thornton's house.

"Whatever can she want?" said the servant.

Maggie found the colonel at Dr. Thornton's house, as she had been led to expect. He was sitting in his daughter's sick room, when a servant came to tell him that a little girl was below, very anxious to speak with him.

"A little girl to see me!" he exclaimed, in surprise. "You must be making a mistake. It is surely the doctor she wants."

"No, sir, she asked for Colonel Platten. She says she comes from John Griffin, who keeps an old curiosity shop. She said you would know who he was."

"Oh, I know," said a weak voice from the couch, where Maud was sitting up supported by pillows, "I know the child. She is the sweetest little thing. Let her come up here, papa; I should like to see her."

"My dear Maud, do you think that is wise?" remonstrated her father. "The girl has probably come on some begging errand. Why should you fatigue yourself by listening to her story?"

"It won't fatigue me, papa, and I'm sure she's no beggar," returned Maud; "do let her come. I am tired of lying here and seeing nobody."

Colonel Platten thought this one of the strangest of his daughter's many strange whims, but he judged it best not to oppose it.

"Very well, my dear, it shall be as you wish," he said, and bade the servant bring the child up.

Maggie's appearance as she entered the sick room was not at all such as the colonel expected to see. He saw a pretty, dark-eyed child, dressed in neat, trim style, who came in with a quiet, composed manner, only her flushed cheeks and rapid breathing betraying the excitement she felt. In an instant the colonel's thoughts were carried back over many years, to the days when just such a little dark-eyed girl as this had been the only child of his home. In his surprise he could not speak for a few moments, but stood silently regarding the child with a look of admiration and interest.

Eager as she was to tell her errand, Maggie forgot it for a minute as she gazed sadly at her "pretty lady," now so white and wasted.

"Well, Maggie," said Mrs. Thornton, as she met the child's earnest gaze, "what brings you here to-night?"

"I came to see Colonel Platten," said Maggie.

"Here I am, child," said the colonel, from his place on the hearth-rug; "what have you to say to me?"

"Oh, please, sir, grandfather has sent me," said the child, falteringly; "he is very ill, and the doctor says he is going to die. And he wants to see you first, for he has something particular to say to you. Would you be so good as to go to him, please, sir?"

"What can your grandfather have to say to me?" demanded Colonel Platten, ill-pleased with the strange request. "I know nothing of him."

"Oh yes, you do, please, sir," Maggie hastened to explain; "my grandfather keeps the old curiosity shop, where you bought that beautiful Worcester jug, with pictures painted upon it. It's about that jug that grandfather wants to speak to you."

"About that jug!" exclaimed the colonel, with a sudden start. What could the old man have to tell him? he wondered.

"Yes, sir; you will come, won't you?" pleaded Maggie. "Grandfather is very ill, and he said it might be too late, if you did not come soon."

"Yes, I will come." decided the colonel.

"You will not leave me all alone, papa?" cried Maud, in distress.

"I am very sorry, Maud; but what can I do?" asked the colonel, in perplexity.

"Do not go," urged his daughter; "what does it matter whether or not you hear something about an old jug?"

"Oh, please let him come!" cried Maggie, turning to the lady with tears in her eyes. "Grandfather wishes it so much."

"Well, will you stay with me whilst papa goes?" asked Maud, who had taken a great fancy to the pretty child.

Maggie hesitated. It was hard to stay away even for an hour from her grandfather's bedside; but she felt bound to do all she could to gain the fulfilment of his last wish.

"Yes, I will stay with you," she said.

And without heeding her evident reluctance, Mrs. Thornton bade her remove her hat and jacket, and come and sit beside her couch.

After kissing his daughter the colonel quitted the room, and a few minutes later they heard him leave the house.

CHAPTER XII.

Maggie is Claimed.

"DID you have your tea before you came out, Maggie?" asked Mrs. Thornton, when they were alone.

"No," said Maggie; "but I didn't want any."

In truth she had eaten very little that day, and was beginning to feel faint for want of food.

"You shall have some tea with me," said the lady. "I am just going to have a cup. Ring that bell for me, please, and then Mary will bring it."

In a few minutes a very appetizing meal was placed before the child. But she did but scant justice to the dainties which Mrs. Thornton pressed upon her. Her heart was too heavy for her to care much about eating.

"I have been very ill, Maggie, since I last saw you," said the lady, presently.

"Yes, I know; I was very sorry to hear it," said Maggie. "I asked God to make you well."

"You asked God to make me well," exclaimed the lady, in astonishment; "what could make you trouble yourself about me, child?"

"Because I love you; you are so pretty," said Maggie, with the perfect simplicity of childhood.

The lady smiled and blushed. She thought Maggie's artless words a very nice compliment.

"You really are better, aren't you?" asked the child. "You don't think you will die now, do you?"

"Oh dear no, I hope not," replied the lady, with a shudder; "what a question to ask me! My husband says I am out of danger now, and getting well fast. At one time I was dreadfully afraid I was going to die."

"Why were you afraid?" asked the child. "Didn't you think that Jesus would take you to heaven?"

The lady's face flushed again—this time with a flush of shame.

"No, Maggie," she said, in low, tremulous tones, "I could not feel sure about heaven. I thought I knew all about those things; but when death seemed near, I couldn't feel sure that I was good enough to go to heaven."

"Jesus would have made you good enough, if you had asked Him," said Maggie; and then she repeated in a low voice:

"'He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good;
That we might go at last to heaven,
Saved by His precious blood.'

"That's a verse of my hymn; do you know it?"

"Yes, I have heard the words before," said Mrs. Thornton. "Can you sing that hymn?"

"Oh yes," said Maggie; "I often sing it."

"Then sing it to me now," said the lady.

Maggie hesitated. How could she sing in that strange house the hymn she had lately sung so often beside her grandfather's bed? She felt more inclined to cry than to sing. But she thought it would be unkind to refuse; so with an effort she kept down her emotion, and sang the hymn right through, though in a voice that was sad and tremulous.

"Thank you, dear; you sing very sweetly," said Maud, when she had done.

And then the young lady lay back with closed eyes, and was silent so long that Maggie fancied she was sleeping.

But Maud had but closed her eyes that she might think undisturbedly. She was in truth pondering the words of the child's hymn, and for the first time realizing the preciousness of the truth, that "whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

To little Maggie, sitting beside the couch, the time passed slowly and wearily. Her heart was in that other room, where old John Griffin was awaiting the approach of death. She longed to know how he was. It seemed as if the colonel would never come to release her.

"Are you getting tired, Maggie?" asked Mrs. Thornton, when some slight movement of the child attracted her attention. "You have been sitting there so long, as quiet as a mouse. I love to have you near me. I wish you were my little sister. How should you like now to come and live here with me, and be my little sister?"

Maggie shook her head. "I would rather stay with grandfather," she said.

But then the tears came into her eyes, and her chest heaved with emotion as she remembered that it was impossible for her to be much longer John Griffin's "little maid;" for was he not going to leave her?

Mrs. Thornton saw her tears, and could guess the thought that caused them.

"You are very fond of your grandfather, Maggie," she said, gently; "have you always lived with him?"

"Oh no," said Maggie; "only since last year. He is not really my grandfather, you know. I have no one belonging to me. I should have gone to the workhouse if Mr. and Mrs. Griffin had not been so good as to let me live with them."

"You don't mean it?" said the lady. "How you surprise me! Tell me all about it."

And Maggie told her sad story; and as they talked together another half-hour slipped by.

Then, at last, Maggie heard the front door open, and the steps of men in the hall.

Mrs. Thornton's ears too caught the sound. "Leslie has come home," she said, with a look of delight.

They came upstairs together, the colonel and Dr. Thornton, talking in low, earnest tones as they ascended. They even lingered outside the door for a few minutes to continue their talk. Then the colonel entered, looking strangely agitated, and Dr. Thornton followed.

Colonel Platten walked quickly to where Maggie stood, she having risen from her chair in her haste to be off.

The child was surprised to see that he carried in his hand the Bible and prayer-book which had belonged to her mother. In another moment, to her still greater astonishment, she found herself clasped in the stately old soldier's arms, whilst he kissed her on the forehead.

Then releasing her, he turned to Mrs. Thornton, who was no less amazed than Maggie at this sudden manifestation of affection.

"Maud," he said, "this little girl is my grandchild, the daughter of your sister Maggie. What John Griffin has told me, and these books—which are well-known to me—prove it plainly enough. My poor girl is dead—she died miserably; but she has left me this child to care for. Maggie, I am your grandfather."

"You are not!" cried Maggie, indignantly, as she tried to push him away. "Mr. Griffin is my grandfather, and I want no other grandfather. Oh, please let me go to him! He is very ill, and he wants me, I know he does. I can't stay here another minute."

"Yes, Maggie, you shall go to him," said Dr. Thornton, interposing; "he is longing for you to come. My chaise is at the door, and will take you there in a few minutes. The colonel has come on purpose to fetch you."

And the doctor helped the child to wrap herself up for the drive.

"I would not trouble her with explanations if I were you," he said to Colonel Platten, as they went downstairs. "She will be glad to hear it in time, I have no doubt; but just now she can think only of old Griffin."

CHAPTER XIII.

Old Griffin Falls Asleep.

JOHN GRIFFIN lay with closed eyes, breathing heavily, when little Maggie re-entered the sick room. It seemed to the child's anxious gaze that he was looking far worse than when she had left him. She stole to his side, and laid her little hand tenderly on his. Mrs. Griffin sat on the other side of the bed, holding his right hand. She was quite calm; but her face was very sad as she watched the last moments of him whose life had been linked to hers for more than thirty years.

The child's light touch seemed to awake the old man to consciousness, for he opened his eyes, and casting a glance round the room, murmured, "My little maid; where is my little maid?"

"I'm here, grandfather, close beside you," said Maggie, leaning forward to kiss him.

Old Griffin looked up at her with a bright smile of recognition. "It is you," he said, feebly; "I'm so glad you've come."

Then, making a great effort, he said, as clearly as his failing breath would permit, "Maggie, I've told all—all about the Worcester jug. The colonel knows; you belong to him now. You must be a good girl, and do as he tells you."

"I'll try to be good, grandfather," said the child, with quivering lips.

"You've always been a good little maid to me," he said. "And you'll not forget the old woman, Maggie. It'll be hard for her to be left all alone. And, Maggie, I've tried to undo all the wrong I have done. I've repented of my sins. Do you think the Lord will forgive me? Will He open the gate for me?"

"The gate is open," said little Maggie, scarce knowing what she said; "wide, wide open."

"Say the words again," he murmured.

"What words?" she asked, wonderingly. Then guessing his meaning, she repeated:

"'There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin,
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in.'"

A faint smile stole over the face of the dying man. "Yes," he murmured, "He has paid the price. He died for me."

Presently a slight movement of the hand she held told his wife that he wished to speak to her. She bent over him to catch the low words.

"Old wife, I'm thinking that I shall find our little Polly there. And you'll come by-and-by. It won't be very long."

"No, it won't be long," she responded, brokenly.

He said no more; there was silence in the room, save for the sound of his heavy, painful breathing. At last that grew fainter, and he passed into a doze.

Little Maggie must have slept too, as she sat beside him, for it seemed to her as if but a few minutes had passed, when an hour later she was roused by the sound of Mrs. Griffin's bitter sobs. Then she saw Colonel Platten standing near her.

"Come with me, my dear," he said, as he tried to draw her away; but she resisted his touch.

"Don't!" she cried. "I must stay with grandfather. I cannot leave him now."

"My child, he has left you," said the colonel, tenderly. "His spirit has passed from earth. You must let me be your grandfather now."

And as Maggie glanced at the still, white face, and saw Mrs. Griffin weeping unrestrainedly, she knew that his words were true; and crying aloud in her grief for the loss of her friend, she suffered him to lead her away.

Colonel Platten would gladly have taken Maggie at once to his own home; but the child refused to leave Mrs. Griffin alone in her sorrow. She stayed with her through the sad, still days till John Griffin's body was carried to its resting-place in the quiet cemetery. The house would have been dreary indeed without the presence of the child. Maggie's little arms clinging around her neck, and Maggie's soft kisses pressed against her withered cheek, comforted the old woman more than any words could have done. She shrank from the thought that the discovery of Maggie's parentage, and her relationship to the colonel, must result in her losing the child whom she loved so dearly.

But, after some deliberation, Colonel Platten resolved that he would not separate Maggie from the woman who had been so good to her. He offered Mrs. Griffin a home in his house as Maggie's guardian and friend. Her duties would be very simple, and only such as she would delight to perform.

Mrs. Griffin gladly agreed to his proposal. She was thankful that she might still be near her darling, and have the joy of serving her.

So the business in which old Griffin had taken such pride was disposed of; and his widow removed, with such of her household treasures as she would not part with, to two rooms at the top of Colonel Platten's large house in Lockyer Street.

But ere she settled down to her new life, there another change awaited her. Mrs. Thornton was regaining strength but slowly, and the doctor wished to send her away from Plymouth for a time. So it was arranged that she, Maggie, and the colonel, with Mrs. Griffin as their attendant, should go for a month to Bournemouth.

Dr. Thornton was very pleased to see how well the whole party, and in particular his dear young wife, looked when they returned. He observed in Maud a greater change than the mere return of health as time went on.

She had seen life in its true light as she lay on her sick bed; and after that solemn revelation she could not sink back into her old light, thoughtless self. But she was not a whit less charming or less bright for the change which had been wrought in her. Her beauty shone with a purer lustre under the influence of the womanly graces which gradually crowned it, as she bravely took up her duties as a doctor's wife, and faithfully shared her husband's self-denial and anxiety. Their wedded life knew a fuller, richer joy as together they trod the noble path along-which Jesus has led the way, striving by His help to make their own lives worthy, and the lives of others better and happier.

Though at first she had shrunk timidly from his advances, Maggie's heart soon began to be drawn to her grandfather, who spared no pains to win her love. His heart was thrilled with pain as he learned from the child's simple words what cruel suffering his daughter had known. The idea of his beautiful Maggie dying in want and misery in a wretched lodging-house at but a short distance from his own home was insupportable. He was convinced from what little Maggie told him of her mother's going to Lockyer Street on the night on which she died, that it was a desire to obtain his forgiveness, and to ask him to show kindness to her child, which had induced her to return to Plymouth in her poverty and failing health.

Colonel Platten saw much for which to reproach himself as he looked back on the past; but Maggie's presence in his home brought him comfort. Under her influence, his manner grew gentler, and his face lost somewhat of its proud, stern look. His love for the child deepened every day; and as she responded to it, the bond between them grew to be a strong one.

But Maggie could never forget that other grandfather who had adopted her when she was poor and friendless, and who had always been so good and kind and patient to his "little maid." She often accompanied Mrs. Griffin on her visits to her husband's grave; and when spring came, Maggie took great pains to plant "forget-me-nots" and sweet mignonette upon the mound beneath which lay the mortal remains of the china-dealer.

And as long as she lived, Maggie guarded as a priceless treasure the old Worcester jug, which had played so important a part in her history.

LONDON: KNIGHT, PRINTER, MIDDLE STREET E. C.

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