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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DRIFTED
ASHORE; OR, A CHILD WITHOUT A NAME ***



FRONTISPIECE.

DRIFTED ASHORE
OR,
A CHILD WITHOUT A NAME

BY
EVELYN EVERETT-GREEN

AUTHOR OF "LENORE ANNANDALE," "THE MISTRESS OF LYDGATE," "HER
HUSBAND'S HOME," ETC.

"Thy will be done."

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHARLES WHYMPER

BOSTON:
BRADLEY & WOODRUFF



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CHAPTER I.

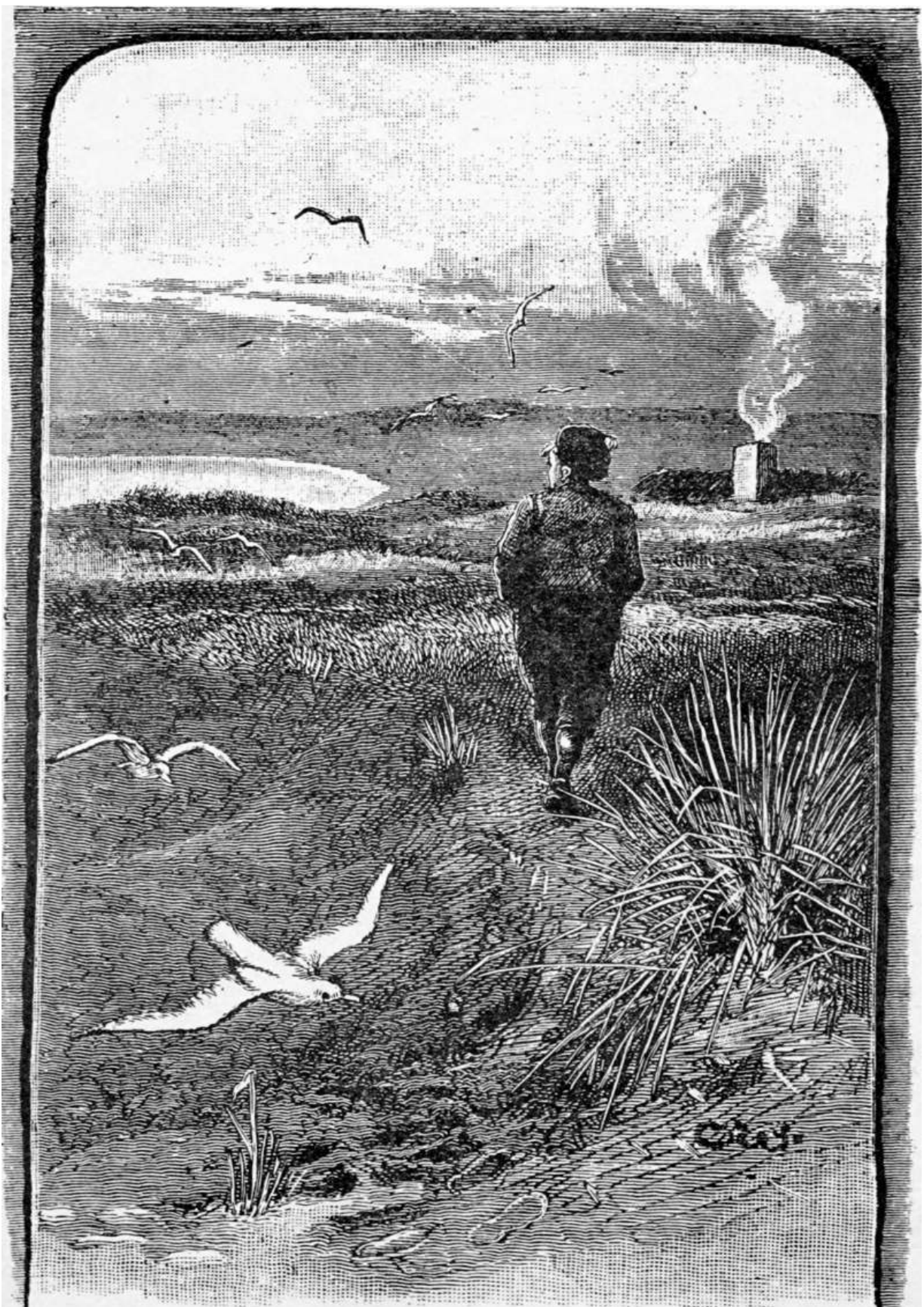
THE FISHERMAN'S HUT.



HE fitful light of a showery April day was shining upon the level expanse of pale yellow sand, and upon the heaving plain of the sullen, angry sea. Great waves came racing in upon the beach, as though nothing would stay their impetuous course; and yet, as they approached that invisible limit against which was traced in unseen characters "Thus far and no farther," their proud crests fell with a grand crash, and with a sullen and subdued sound, as of resentment and wrath, they drew back again into the seething waste of water they had for the moment seemed to leave behind.

When the dark clouds, heavy with rain, drifted over the sun's pale disc and blotted out his watery smile, the face of the ocean looked very grim and black; but when the driving shower had passed, and the sunlight shone out clear and bright, turning to powdered gold dust the last of the retreating raindrops, then it seemed as if the great waves were laughing and rejoicing in their play; and even the dreary wastes of sand looked bright and almost beautiful, and the level country beyond, bare and bleak, and in many places almost treeless, put on an aspect of quiet, smiling contentment that might almost be taken for beauty.

A little boy had been sitting for many hours beneath the shelter of an old boat drawn up upon the shore. He was protected from the driving showers, and seemed quite contented with his position, for it was long since he had moved. He sat very still, nursing his knees with his clasped hands and resting his chin upon them, whilst he gazed unweariedly out over the tossing sea.



His coarse clothing and sun-browned face and hands proclaimed him a fisherman's son. He looked about ten or twelve years old, and had a gentle, thoughtful, although not an intellectual cast of countenance. He did not appear very robust, despite his indifference to raindrops and chilly sea-breezes, and his placid inactivity betrayed a nature more prone to contemplation than to the toils of the life to which he was evidently born.

The sun began to set behind the sandhills, whose shadows slowly lengthened, whilst the thin, coarse grass which grew sparsely upon them turned golden in the radiance of departing day. The hoarse cries of the seabirds grew more frequent as they flew hither and thither, as if in search of their night's quarters; and the little boy, rousing himself at last from his reverie, rose slowly from his sitting posture, stretched his cramped limbs, and began slowly making his way in a diagonal direction across the sandhills.

He had not proceeded far, before a wreath of pale blue smoke curling up from a little hollow indicated the presence of some dwelling-place; and a few more steps brought him to the door of a tiny cabin such as fisher-folk often inhabit.

The door stood seawards, and was as usual wide open, and upon the threshold sat the boy's mother, busily engaged in mending a broken net.

She looked up as the child approached, and smiled. She had a round, motherly face, and her person, as well as the interior of her diminutive abode, was far more clean and neat than is usual with the dwellings of people of her class.

"Well, David," she said, "where hast thou been all the day, honey?"

"Oh, down by the sea, mother," he answered; and then, glancing quickly up into her face, he asked, "Be he woke up yet?"

The woman shook her head.

"Nay, nay, that he has not," she answered. "Sometimes I be afeared he'll never wake no more, for all the doctor says he will."

A look of distress clouded David's face.

“Oh, mother, don’t say that! He’s sure to wake up soon—the doctor must know best. May I go and look at un?”

“Ay, do so, child, if thee wants.”

And David stepped over his mother’s net and went into the inner room of the little low-roofed cabin.

Upon a low pallet-bed, beneath the little west window, through which the sun was now pouring a flood of golden light, lay a child about eight years old, a little boy, with dark soft hair lying in heavy waves across his forehead, and his white face very set and still, more as if in unconsciousness than in sleep. A glance at the delicate features of the child upon the bed, the blue veins showing through the transparent skin, the short upper lip, broad, intellectual brow, and small, well-shaped hands, showed plainly enough that he was no relation to the little brown-faced fisher lad who stood beside him, looking down at him with such interest.

What then had brought him to that humble abode? Who was he? and how came it that he lay there so still and motionless, untended save by the hard though motherly hands of the fisherman’s wife? Where were the boy’s own friends and kindred, who would be the most eager to be with him at such a time as this? Where was the mother, who would be first to fly to her darling, could she but see him lying there, on that hard pallet-bed, with no luxuries around him, and only strangers to minister to his need?

Where indeed? That was a question that entered many minds; but none gave voice to it, for all knew how vainly it would be asked. The little white-faced boy had been cast up by the stormy sea at the good fisherwife’s feet three days ago now, but not a single clue could be found by which to identify the child, or even the vessel from which he had been swept. Probably he was the only survivor of some ill-fated ship; probably he had been washed ashore alive only because a life-belt had been tied about him and had floated him to shore. Not a single plank or fragment of wreckage had been cast ashore with the little waif; and, unless he awoke to give an account of himself, it seemed likely that he too would have to lie in a nameless grave, as his companions now did beneath the waves of the pitiless ocean.

The doctor of the nearest village, who had been every day to see the boy, was still of the opinion that he would awake to consciousness in time. He detected traces of a heavy blow upon the head, that was evidently the cause of this prolonged unconsciousness, some concussion of the brain having probably taken place; but consciousness would return in time, and then they would be able to learn who the child was, and communicate with his friends.

Meantime, as the fisherwife's "goodman" and big boys were out on a fishing excursion, there was room in the cabin for the little waif, and the dame's motherly heart was filled with compassion for him, and prompted her to "do for him" as if he had been a child of her own.

Little David had taken from the first an immense interest in the nameless stranger. He thought he had never in his life seen any face half so beautiful as that of the white-faced child who lay motionless upon the bed, and he wove round him the web of romance that always seems so dear to children, especially when they are of an imaginative turn. He believed that he would prove to be at the very least a prince, although what a prince was David had only the vaguest of ideas.

He was never tired of standing beside the bed and looking at the white face upon the pillow, of watching his mother feed the unconscious child, and observing the face and movements of the doctor as he made his daily examination. He would have been pleased to stay all day in the quiet room, did not his mother insist on his going out for some hours every day; but the moment he felt at liberty to return he did so, and his first question was always the same—Had the little boy awoke yet?

And now, as he stood gazing down upon the little white face, suddenly his heart began to beat more quickly and his breath came thick and fast, for he saw that the long black lashes resting upon the waxen cheek were beginning to tremble and to slowly lift themselves up; and the next moment a pair of large, dark, soft eyes were looking straight into his. There was no meaning in that gaze, no surprise or inquiry. It was like the expression in the eyes of a little child just awakened from sleep, before any consciousness of its surroundings has dawned upon it; but David uttered a smothered cry that brought his mother hurrying up.

The great dark eyes turned upon her then, and she laid her hand upon David's shoulder.

"Run for the doctor, quick, Davie boy!" she cried in an excited whisper. "Don't thee linger by the way now. Fetch him as fast as thee can."

No need to tell David not to linger. He was off like a shot almost before the words were spoken.

Fortune favored him that day. The doctor, whose experienced eye had that morning detected an approaching change in his little patient's state, had already set out upon a second visit to the fisherman's cottage, and David encountered him about a quarter of a mile away from his home.

The boy imparted his news with breathless eagerness. The doctor quickened his pace, and in a very few minutes he was standing beside the pallet-bed.

The sick child had turned his face away from the light and had closed his eyes again; but when the doctor laid a cool, firm hand upon his head, he started a little, and the dark eyes unclosed once more and fastened upon the doctor's face.

"Well, my little friend, and how are you?" was the kindly inquiry; but the child only looked hard at the speaker and said nothing.

"Can you tell me your name, my boy?" was the next question; but still there was no reply.

"Perhaps he is a foreigner," thought Dr. Lighton. "His eyes are dark enough;" and, summoning up first French and then Italian, he tried if he could make himself understood.

The child's dark eyes had never left his face for an instant. Their glance was curiously intent, expressive of some feeling that it was impossible to define, full of a wistful perplexity that was akin to pain, which filled the young doctor with a sort of compassion he did not altogether understand.

Quite suddenly the child's lips unclosed, and he said, very distinctly and softly,—

"I understood you before, thank you; but I can speak French too. Is this France?"

“No, we are in England, my little man. You are in your own country, and we will soon find your friends for you. What is your name?”

A look of distress and perplexity clouded the child's face.

“I don't know,” he answered.

“Don't know!” repeated Dr. Lighton, kindly. “Well, it will soon come back to you.”

There was a long silence in the little room. David almost held his breath, for fear he should disturb the current of the little prince's thoughts. His mother shook her head sympathetically and murmured, “Poor lamb, poor lamb!” whilst the doctor's eyes were fixed with keen professional scrutiny upon the child's face.

The look of bewildered distress had deepened there. The dark eyes began to burn with strange intensity, and with a sudden little frightened cry the boy pressed his two hands upon his head.

“I can't remember—I can't remember! It's all gone!”

Dr. Lighton laid his own hand upon those of his little patient.

“Never mind,” he said, in kindly, reassuring tones; “it will all come back in time. Do not try to think, or you will only hurt yourself. Take some of this milk, and go to sleep. When you wake up again you will remember all about it, I dare say.”

The child was docile and obedient, as well as exceedingly weak. He took what was offered from the doctor's hands, and fell asleep shortly afterwards—the sleep of exhausted nature.

“Let him sleep; see that he is not disturbed,” said the doctor to the fisherman's wife, as they stood in the outer room together. “He wants rest more than anything. He must not excite himself by talking.”

“He'll remember all about himself by and by, doctor?” questioned the good woman, compassionately. “I be main anxious to let his poor mother know he's safe. She must be fretting sorely.”

“Perhaps, perhaps,” answered the doctor, glancing over the sea, thinking to himself that the mother might in all probability be sleeping beneath the waves; “time and rest may work wonders for him; but don't press him,

don't try to force his memory. Let it come of itself by degrees. I'll look round early to-morrow."

And with that the doctor took his departure, nodding a kindly adieu, and muttering, as he walked over the soft sandhills,—

"A curious case, a curious case. I wonder how it will end."

The opinion of the kindly fisher-folk of the neighboring hamlet was that the child would be able to give an account of himself, as soon as he had recovered a little more strength, and grown used to his surroundings; but day by day passed by, strength and spirit both began to revive, and still the little boy remained utterly silent as to his past history, and when the doctor questioned him (he had forbidden any one else to do so) as to his name, his parentage, his antecedents, a look of bewildered distress would cross his face, he would press his hands upon his head, and say,—

"I can't remember. It's all gone. Oh, I don't know anything about it!"

Dr. Lighton never pressed him. He always turned the talk, with a smile or a kind word; but as day by day passed on, and still no memory returned, he began to wonder how it would all end, and how long a time must elapse before the shaken faculties could reassert themselves.

The boy grew better and stronger every day. He played with David unweariedly for many hours upon the bed, and when he was able to get up and be dressed in some of the elder boy's clothes,—he had been washed ashore in a little nightdress and a rough blue pilot coat,—they wandered out upon the sandhills together, and enjoyed themselves after a peculiar fashion of their own.

They were a very quiet pair, but not on that account unhappy. David was in a state of quiet and ecstatic delight. It was enough for him to be with the stranger, to watch his every movement, wait upon him, talk to him, love him as only children can love their own kind, and to bask, as it were, in the light of his countenance.

The little new boy was very silent and quiet. He answered when he was spoken to, but seldom volunteered a remark. His eyes were always dreamy, and wore a look of wistful bewilderment and sorrow that was very expressive of the confused state of his mind. He would sit for hours gazing over the sea, with a strangely rapt expression of countenance, and when

David spoke to him he would start and flush as if his thoughts had been very far away.

He seemed to cling, in an abstract way, to the gentle-faced boy who watched him with such undivided interest and devotion; but so far the conversation had been limited to a very few remarks, and even the games they played together were of a peculiarly silent description.

The boy had a marked preference for the sandhills and the shore, and an increasing distaste for the low cabin that somewhat distressed David and his good mother.

This distaste was not expressed in words, but was manifested in a marked reluctance to come in, in an intense eagerness to get out, and in a quiet determination not to eat his food until he had carried it into the purer air without.

The food, too, as soon as he had advanced beyond the “slop stage,” seemed very unpalatable to him. He was too thoroughly the little gentleman to complain, but it was plain that he would never thrive on such coarse fare; and the doctor was once more appealed to.

He looked with a smile at the slight and graceful child, as he sat beside David on the sandhills, and said,—

“It is plain something must be done, Mrs. Wickham; he cannot go on much longer like this. You have done your share, and more. I must see to matters myself, I think.”

CHAPTER II.

THE SQUIRE'S HALL.



THE Squire sat in his library, surrounded by his books and papers; and Dr. Lighton sat opposite to him in earnest conversation. The Manor House of Arlingham was a fine old mediæval house, picturesque both without and within. It was built of red sandstone, and its irregular outline, mullioned windows, and an air of peaceful antiquity, delighted all lovers of bygone days and their relics, whilst the interior of the old house was just what would be expected from the appearance it presented from without. The rooms were low, rather dim and dark, irregular in shape, yet delightfully cosey and comfortable. The stairs were of polished oak, as were the floor and walls of the panelled hall. There was nothing new in that house, nothing bright, staring, or incongruous. The stained glass windows admitted a rich, dusky light, and the peculiar stillness and peaceful hush that often rests upon old houses whence all young life has fled pervaded all the rooms and corridors of the Manor House at Arlingham to an unusual extent, and no one could step within the shadows of the hall without being instantly conscious that they had entered a place whose life was rather a memory of the past than an active present.

The Squire had lost his wife and all his children many years before. Arlingham still spoke with bated breath of that terrible year when cholera visited them, and, whilst the Squire and his lady were doing all that money and skill and benevolence could accomplish to succor their poorer neighbors, the awful visitor entered their own doors, and within a week the sweet lady all had learned to love was lying dead, as well as her two eldest

boys—fine lads, the pride of Arlingham; and before the death angel had stayed his hand, mother and five children—all her little ones—lay sleeping in the quiet churchyard, and the Squire, a hale man of but forty summers, was left quite alone in his desolated home.

In one week his hair, which had been black as the raven's wing, had turned as white as the driven snow; but otherwise no great outward change had fallen upon the Squire, and he had taken up the duties of his position with a strong hand and resolute will, only betraying the depth of his wound by his increasing distaste for any kind of society save that of his own people, with whom his duties brought him in contact, and his increasing shrinking from partaking in any of the amusements and social relaxations common to those of his position and standing.

It was fifteen years now since the date of the fatal year that had cost him so terribly dear,—fifteen years, and yet the memory of his loss was still green in his heart, and, although he never spoke of it, his servants, and indeed all Arlingham, knew that he had not forgotten, and never would forget. He had lived his life alone, true to the memory of those he had loved, and he would live it alone to the end.

He had many friends, but few intimates. He was universally liked and respected in the county, but distances were long, his habits those of a recluse, and visitors were rare at the Manor House. Young Mr. Lighton, who had lately settled in the neighborhood, was a distant connection of the Squire's, and partly perhaps on that account, partly from a similarity in some of their tastes, partly because the elderly man was sincerely kind-hearted and knew that the place was very dull and quiet, the young physician had been made more welcome at the Manor House than any one else had been for many long years; and he had grown to understand thoroughly the nature and character of the white-headed, keen-eyed Squire.

He often dropped in after dinner for a little chat, as he had done on this occasion.

The library was a very comfortable room, with its walls warmly lined with books, its two great oriel windows, and the wide hearth, where in the evenings, for the greater part of the year, the great logs blazed cheerily, sending out showers of sparks that were whirled upwards into the dark cavern of the huge, old-fashioned chimney.

Dr. Lighton liked this room, with its flickering lights and shadows, and its central object of interest, the stalwart figure of the Squire, with his snow-white head, his fine, handsome face stamped with the indelible lines of a great sorrow heroically borne, and his commanding air that had lost but little of its youthful strength and firmness, notwithstanding the years that had rolled over his head.

The young physician enjoyed his evening talks with the Squire as much as any part of his day's work, but on this particular occasion his thoughts were less engrossed by his host than was usual, for he had another more pressing matter on his mind.

"Undoubtedly a very interesting case, I should say; and a remarkable one, too," observed the Squire, after hearing the doctor's story. "What do you imagine will be the end of it?"

"The end, if the child is left in his present surroundings, will be that he will pine away and die," answered the young man, with a little impetuosity. "It is plain as daylight that he is a gentleman's son, and has been reared up in every luxury. Every day proves more clearly how utterly unfitted he is for his life; and of course the poor woman cannot keep him always. The money you kindly sent down has kept her so far from feeling any loss by her goodness to the child; but she expects her husband and sons home shortly, and then she must turn out the little stranger. The cabin is barely large enough for the family as it is; besides, it would be unreasonable to expect her to adopt the little waif. She is not in a position to do it."

"Decidedly not. What is to become of the child? I suppose the parish will be responsible for him."

Dr. Lighton looked quickly at the impassive face of his interlocutor.

"It would be absurd to send a boy like that to the workhouse," he said, in the same slightly impetuous manner. "He is a gentleman's son, every inch of him. His voice, his manner, his appearance, all show it. Any day he may be able to recall the past,—it may all come back like a flash, although I admit that the process may be much more tedious,—and it would be sheer cruelty to have turned the child into a pauper and made him rough it with a lot of lads no more like himself than chalk is like cheese. If you were only to see the child, Squire, you would understand my meaning."

The Squire turned his gaze full upon the young doctor's face.

"And why do you tell all this to me? You have some reason. What is it?"

Dr. Lighton knew by the expression of the Squire's face that the time had come to speak out and say exactly what he did mean.

"I will tell you," he said, frankly; "you may think I am taking an unwarrantable liberty, but, if so, I can only crave your pardon. You are the great man of the place here, the Squire, and the friend of the people. A little waif has been cast up almost at your doors, and, until he is able to remember his past history and assist in his own identification, somebody must in common humanity give him a home and look after him a little. He is obviously of gentle birth, and wants the gentle treatment to which he has been used. You are the only wealthy man in the place, the only friend to whom I can plead my cause, for you know what Lady Arbuthnot is like. I thought you might be willing to take an interest in the boy, to let him come here for a time perhaps, and give him a temporary asylum until his own home could be found. Rather than he should go to the parish, I would take him myself; but a bachelor in small lodgings is at a great disadvantage; whereas this house is large, and the staff of servants in all ways adequate to the wants of more than a solitary—"

A quick spasm of pain contracted the Squire's face. The young man saw it and paused.

"I hope I have not taken an unwarrantable liberty in making the suggestion," he said.

A few minutes of silence ensued before there was any answer.

"You have surprised me a little, I admit," answered the Squire; "but there is force in what you say. I believe I am the right person to see after this waif. Legally, of course, there is no claim upon me; but I admit the moral claim."

Dr. Lighton's eyes brightened.

"You are very good to say so."

"Not at all. I do not profess I want the child here; I shall not see much of him if he comes. I have no disposition to look at the case sentimentally; but you appeal to my sense of justice and hospitality. A small atom of humanity

has been cast up at our doors, and I, as the Squire of the place, admit that my door is the one that should open to him.”

“I confess I hoped you might see it in that light,” admitted Dr. Lighton. “I trust you will not consider I have been intrusive in saying so much.”

“Not at all. You have only done your duty promptly, whilst I have been inclined to be slack in the performance of mine. You consider it probable that the boy’s memory will return shortly?”

“I should be quite inclined to think so, and all the sooner for a return to civilized life. Some chord can hardly fail to be struck, and at any moment a flash of memory might bring the whole past back. Nobody can pronounce a decided opinion in such cases; but my own feeling is that such a state of mind will only prove a temporary phase, and that he will soon be able to give a rational account of himself.”

“Very good,” returned the Squire; “the sooner the better for me; but until that time comes he shall have a home here. I will send for him to-morrow.”

“You are very good,” answered the young man; “I feel personally grateful.”

The Squire smiled a little.

“You seem to take an interest in the child.”

“I do. The case is interesting professionally for one thing, and there is undoubtedly something interesting in the boy himself, as you will see for yourself when he comes.”

The Squire’s face had put on an expression not easy to read.

“I shall hardly be likely to see much of him myself,” he said, with an odd intonation in his voice. “Children are not in my line.”

And then he turned to his table, leaned one elbow upon it and his head on his hand, turning over some papers with an air of deep abstraction.

Dr. Lighton knew by instinct that he was a good deal moved, little as he betrayed it, by the revival of some memories of the past. He judged it advisable to take his departure, and he did so at once, the Squire, who still appeared abstracted and unlike himself, offering no remonstrance to this

early move. Indeed, he hardly seemed to notice his guest's departure, and returned his farewell with unusual brevity.

When he found himself alone, he rose from his seat and began pacing the room slowly backwards and forwards with measured tread.

Presently he paused, and rang the bell with a certain force and decision of touch, and when the gray-haired butler appeared in answer to the summons he merely said, briefly,—

“Send Mrs. Pritchard to me.”

Mrs. Pritchard was the housekeeper now. She had been nurse to the children in bygone days, and had served in the family ever since she was a slim girl of fifteen. She was a stout, buxom woman now, with a pleasant face and a respectful manner. Her master trusted her implicitly, and she never betrayed his trust.

“Mrs. Pritchard,” he said, quietly, “be good enough to be seated for a few minutes.”

The Squire was sitting himself now in his customary chair. Mrs. Pritchard did as she was bid, and sat down facing him.

“No doubt you have heard, Mrs. Pritchard, of the little boy at the fisherman's cottage, who was washed up after the storm the other day, and can give no account of himself?”

“Ay, sir, I have, poor lamb! I saw him on the shore the other day with David. My heart fairly ached for him, that it did.”

The Squire smiled a little.

“Your heart was always tender, Mrs. Pritchard. Well, what did you think of the child?”

“A little gentleman born, if ever there was one,” answered the worthy housekeeper, with some warmth. “He was dressed just like the other boy, in old patched clothes, but the difference between them! Why, the little one was on his feet almost before he knew I was speaking to them, and took off his cap as pretty as could be, and answered so gentle, and quite like as if he'd been used to company all his life. Poor lamb, it isn't fitting he should

stay in such a place. The look in his eyes fairly haunts me, it does. I can't get it out of my head."

"Well, Mrs. Pritchard, I have been hearing the same story from other quarters. What should you say to having him here to take care of, until he can tell us where his own home is?"

The housekeeper's face brightened visibly.

"Do you really mean it, sir?"

"Certainly. Dr. Lighton has spoken upon the subject, and I agree with him in thinking that this house should be the one to shelter him until we can discover something about him. Are you prepared to put up with the trouble of having a child about the place for a few weeks?"

"Oh, sir," cried the good woman, clasping her hands together in a sudden outbreak of feeling, "if there is one thing would make me happier than another, it would be to have a child to tend and care for again!"

The Squire turned his face slightly away; he took out his keys and began fumbling in the drawer of the table before him.

"Very good, Mrs. Pritchard," he said at length, after rather a long pause, and speaking with manifest effort. "Then you had better make all necessary arrangements, and get the nurseries ready for him by to-morrow. He had better live there entirely, except when he is out of doors. You will arrange all that; but understand that I do not care about seeing him all over the house."

"Yes, sir, I will take care of that," answered Mrs. Pritchard, with ready comprehension.

"And you must get him whatever he wants in the way of clothes," continued the Squire, handing across a crisp bank-note. "You had better have the dog-cart, and get William to drive you both in to Twing to-morrow morning. Buy whatever is needful for the present, and order what you cannot get at once. The child must look as he should whilst he stays under my roof."

Mrs. Pritchard rose and curtsied and took the money held out.

“Thank you, sir,” she said; “I will see that your wishes are carried out to the best of my powers.”

She withdrew, and the Squire was left alone with his books and his dying fire. The night was merging into day before he roused himself from the reverie into which he had sunk, and extinguished the lamp that had grown pale in the feeble glimmer of coming dawn.

CHAPTER III.

A LITTLE INTRUDER.



HE Squire's study had a westerly aspect and as evening drew on the sunset rays streamed into the quaint, quiet room and flooded it with golden light. The old calf-bound books upon the long rows of shelves took all manner of rich hues, and the picture over the fireplace, representing a beautiful woman with two fair children beside her, seemed to awake to a new and smiling life.

The Squire had been a little less self-possessed than usual upon this particular day. Work seemed irksome to him. He had not been able to give undivided attention to his bailiff's accounts of the farm and stock, and shortly after he had finished his lunch he ordered his horse and set out for a ride over the estate, feeling that air and exercise would be more congenial to him in his present mood than any sedentary work could be. He did not examine into his state of mind, nor ask himself why it was that he was disturbed and unlike himself; but he recognized that such was the case, and accepted it without comment or question.

He returned home as the sun was slowly sinking in the west, and went straight to his study as usual, but when he stood upon the threshold he stopped suddenly short and stood perfectly still, his eyes fixed with intent scrutiny upon something in the room that appeared to give him the keenest surprise.

Nothing very remarkable to other eyes was presented by the spectacle of that quiet room bathed in the golden sunset, only upon the cushioned seat of

the great oriel window sat a little boy with a delicate-featured, pale face and a pair of wistful dark eyes.

The child leaned his head against the window and gazed intently out upon the western sky, painted with all the gorgeous hues of sunset; and he was evidently entirely unconscious of his present surroundings or that his solitude had been invaded.

The Squire stood for some minutes gazing fixedly at the little intruder. A frown had quickly clouded his face when his eyes had first fallen upon the childish figure; but as he stood there in the shadow of the doorway, and noticed the perplexed and settled sadness of the boy's expression and the hungry, unsatisfied longing in his earnest gaze, the frown slowly faded and a more gentle look came into the weather-beaten face. Still, discipline was discipline, and orders were orders; the child had no right to be there, and the Squire was too much the master in his own house not to feel a passing sense of displeasure at this direct infringement of his commands.

He walked forward into the room and settled himself in his usual chair, without taking the least notice of the child perched up in the window-seat.

Minutes flew by, and still the silence remained unbroken. The Squire turned over his papers, but he did not master their contents in his usual rapid way. His ears were keenly alive to the faint sounds that proceeded from the window behind him, and an impatient wish that Mrs. Pritchard would come and claim her little charge rose more than once in his mind.

This ignoring of the child's presence in the room seemed even to himself strained and unnatural; and yet he had no business to be there at all, and the Squire knew that it would never do to encourage such a breach of discipline.

Suddenly he was aware that a small soft hand was laid upon his own, and a sweet little voice said, in accents of eager, tremulous surprise,—

“Grandpapa!”

The Squire turned quickly in his chair to meet the pleading, earnest gaze of those liquid brown eyes fixed upon him with an almost pathetic intensity.

“Grandpapa!” said the child again, but this time with more of distressed uncertainty in his tone, and the delicate little lips began to quiver as the boy

glanced up into the unresponsive face before him.

“Why do you call me that, little boy?” asked the Squire, gravely.

The child’s hand was pressed to his forehead, his eyes brightened unnaturally.

“I don’t know,” he answered, slowly, and a tear gathered upon the long lashes.

After all, the Squire was a father, and, although that very fact made the sight of the boy painful to him, he was not on that account hard-hearted, nor could he look with an unmoved countenance upon the distress of a little child.

He drew the little fellow gently between his knees, and it seemed as if there was something in the fatherly touch that went home to the heart of the lonely child in some overpowering way, for he suddenly laid his head against the Squire’s shoulder and burst into convulsive weeping.

There was something very touching in the nameless sorrow of the little lonely child, who was so utterly forsaken in the great world, without home or kindred or even a name to call his own. His partial realization of his anomalous position gave a pathos to his distress that raised it above the level of ordinary childish grief.

The Squire could have found it in his heart to wish that he had not been the recipient of this burst of sorrow, but he could not for a moment refuse to comfort the child, who clung to him as to a natural protector. He put his arm round the sobbing boy, and by and by said, in kindly accents,—

“There, there, my little man, there, there! Do not cry so bitterly. What is it all about? Let us see if something can’t be done to make it better.”

The tone rather than the words seemed to soothe the agitated boy; his sobs were slowly checked, and, although he did not lift his head from its resting-place upon the broad shoulder, the little frame ceased to tremble so convulsively and gradually became still.

When the child’s tears seemed fairly conquered, the Squire put him a little farther away and looked at him steadily, with an intent expression upon his fine, commanding face.

The little boy looked up timidly, but he did not seem alarmed by the glance he encountered. Children have a marvellous instinct in distinguishing between the sternness of an inflexible yet just and kindly nature and that of harshness and tyranny.

His wistful glance travelled upwards till it rested upon the snow-white hair that gave to the Squire a more venerable appearance than his years indicated, and again a little smile shone out from the sad eyes, and the same word sprang in a whisper to the lips that quivered yet with the past fit of weeping,—

“Grandpapa!”

“So that is to be your name for me, is it?” questioned the Squire, kindly. “Very well, it will do as well as any other. And what am I to call you?”

The child’s hand went up to his head.

“I don’t know,” he said, pitifully.

“Well, then, I must think of something for myself. You have given me a name, so I must give you one. What shall it be, I wonder? Shall we say Bertie? That gives us a certain license, you see, and does not commit us to anything very definite, eh, Bertie?”

The child smiled a little uncertain, tearful smile. The name did not appear to arouse any associations; but still it was something to have a name again.

“And now, Bertie, tell me why it was you came here at all? Where is Mrs. Pritchard?”

“She is having her tea. She left me in the nursery, and said she should soon be back. I came down-stairs to go into the garden, and then I saw the door open, and the books, and I came in to look. I like a library; I always used”—but here the look of bewilderment swept over the boy’s face again, and he concluded, confusedly, “I mean, nobody was there, and it all looked nice and quiet, and so I came in and sat there, and then you came back, and I thought—”

“Never mind, never mind what you thought,” interposed the Squire, hastily, for the look in the child’s eyes was painfully bewildered and strained. “Tell me if you know who I am.”

“You are the Squire,” answered Bertie, promptly, looking more natural and childlike again. “I saw you ride out on your big brown horse to-day; and yesterday I saw you walking in the garden and telling the men what to do. Mrs. Pritchard says that all this big house belongs to you. Are you ever lonely living here all by yourself?”

The Squire looked down into the child’s upturned face, and a curious shade passed over his own.

“What do you know about being lonely?” he asked, in an odd, muffled voice.

Bertie put his hand over his eyes; and then, after a moment’s pause, looked up again smiling.

“I was lonely down by the sea with David. He was very kind, and I liked him, and so was his mother. But I was lonely with them. It isn’t half so lonely here with you.”

“You are not lonely, then, with Mrs. Pritchard in the nursery, I suppose?”

Bertie hesitated.

“Mrs. Pritchard is very kind,” he said, with a little courtly air that was almost amusing,—“very kind indeed; but, somehow, this feels more *natural*, you know.”

The Squire, as he found the child grew more composed and quiet, began to return to his former state of mind as regarded his position in the house.

“But you must understand, Bertie, that the nursery is your room, and that this is mine. You must not come here without leave.”

The child’s face put on a look of distress and perplexity.

“Isn’t this a library!” he said.

“Yes; this is my library.”

“I always used to sit in the library when I wanted to,” he said, appealingly. “I never did any harm. I like the smell of the books, you know. Ours used to smell just the same.”

“Yours?” interrogated the Squire, hoping to elicit some further intelligence.

“Grandpapa’s,” was the prompt response; but there Bertie stuck fast. The moment he *tried* to recollect anything, everything fled away in painful confusion; reminiscences sprang unconsciously to his lips, but eluded him pitilessly the moment he tried to arrange his ideas and seize upon a memory of the past. The tears again stood in his eyes, and he put up his hands, crying piteously,—

“Oh, why can’t I remember? Why does it all run away so fast?”

The Squire had to turn comforter again.

“Never mind, little chap, it will all come back of itself some day. Don’t you worry your head over it; that will make matters worse instead of better. Ah! and here comes Mrs. Pritchard, looking for her lost lamb. She will wonder what has brought you here.”

Mrs. Pritchard’s face expressed a good deal of alarm and confusion as she appeared in the doorway, guided there by the sound of voices.

“Indeed, sir, but I’m truly sorry!” she exclaimed. “I had no idea the child had left the nurseries. I truly am most—”

“Never mind, never mind, Mrs. Pritchard,” answered the Squire, quietly. “Children will stray, and I do not expect you to alter your usual routine on his account. Take him away now; but if he is a good boy, you may dress him and send him down to dessert. He will be all the better for a little more change, and will have less time to think.”

Mrs. Pritchard looked deeply gratified, and thanked the Squire as if he had been conferring some personal favor upon herself.

“We have settled upon a name for him, Mrs. Pritchard,” continued the Squire. “He is to be Master Bertie, until we know any better. He will be wanting his tea now; you had better take him away.”

Bertie followed the housekeeper obediently, and the Squire was left alone to his own meditations, and as he turned to his papers he sighed once or twice.

“Poor little fellow!” he said; “poor little fellow! Well, I suppose it will all come right some day soon. Very odd turn of affairs altogether.”

Meantime Bertie was silently discussing his substantial nursery tea, whilst Mrs. Pritchard sat by, busy with her needle.

By and by the little boy spoke.

“Was it naughty of me to go into grandpapa’s library, Mrs. Pritchard?”

The good woman started visibly.

“The Squire’s library, you mean, dearie?”

“Yes, I know he’s the Squire; but he seems like grandpapa, you know; and he said I had found a name for him, and then he found one for me. Grandpapa is a nicer name than Squire, you know. I don’t think I ever knew a squire before.”

“He did not mind you calling him so? Well, to be sure, he is always kind and good. But, Master Bertie dear, you must not go there without leave. It’s only the nurseries that belong to you.”

Bertie looked perplexed and sorrowful, but said nothing. The look upon his face touched his kind friend, and she added, reassuringly—

“It isn’t anything as has vexed him with you, dearie, but he’s had a deal of trouble has the Squire, and there’s some things as it hurts him to talk of, and one of them is children.”

Bertie’s eyes were very wide open now, brimful of eager intelligence.

“I don’t understand, please, Mrs. Pritchard. Why do children hurt him?”

“Because, dearie, he once had five little ones of his own; and there came a dreadful sickness here one year, and they all five died within a fortnight; and the Squire has never been the same man since, and no child has ever set foot inside the house, till you came three days ago.”

Bertie’s gaze was very intent.

“Did they *all* die?”

“Ay, that they did, and the mother too; and he was left all alone.”

Bertie looked dreamily out of the window.

“What is dying?” he asked.

Mrs. Pritchard hesitated how to reply; and Bertie gave the answer to his own question.

“Isn’t it when God takes people away with Him that people say they are dead?”

The ready tears had started to Mrs. Pritchard’s eyes.

“Ay, indeed ’tis so, Master Bertie dear; but we’re sadly given to forget that.”

“I haven’t forgotten that,” said Bertie, slowly, “but I can’t remember who told me.” He looked hard at Mrs. Pritchard and asked, earnestly, “Do you think God knows all about me?”

“Ay, my dearie, I suppose He knows everything.”

“I wish He would let me remember,” said the child, wistfully. “Do you think He will?”

“Yes, dearie, I do. He is very good to us, for all He sends us trouble sometimes. You can ask Him, you know, when you say your prayers to-night; you can ask Him any time.”

Bertie’s hand was pressed to his head, his eyes glowed strangely.

“Somebody said—” He paused, and then went on again, “Somebody said that we must not choose ourselves, only ask God to choose for us. I can’t remember just what it was. But it was like Jesus, you know, in the garden, when He said “Thy will be done,” to everything. I must say “Thy will be done” too, mustn’t I, about remembering things again? I know they said that—I can’t have made it up.”

He was growing distressed, as he so easily did when the vanished memory eluded his grasp; but Mrs. Pritchard took him into her motherly embrace and soothed and quieted him. Very soon the child was himself again, and looked at her with a smile.

“I’ve got ‘Our Father’ left still, you see, Mrs. Pritchard,” he said, with a sort of quaint gravity that was very touching in its way. “He is my Father, isn’t He? even if I’m quite lost, He knows where I am, and He takes care of me, I’m sure. I don’t think He’ll ever quite forget me, and p’raps He’ll let me find my real home some day; but I’ll always say ‘Thy will be done’

about it.” Then, looking quickly up into the kind face above him, he asked, “Perhaps grandpapa will explain it all and help me. He had to say ‘Thy will be done’ when God took his little children away, and I suppose that was very hard.”

CHAPTER IV.

QUEENIE'S HOME.



DO hate term-time!" cried Queenie, stamping her little foot and looking altogether fierce and out of sorts. "I hate all the boys to be away! Why do boys have to go to school? I'm sure they don't learn so very much; I believe I know more than most of them. Boys ought either to stay at home or else take their sisters to school with them."

And Queenie, who was standing in the middle of her big nursery surrounded by piles of books and toys, looked triumphantly round her, as if she had uttered a very fine sentiment indeed. Her nurse, who was quietly working by the window, smiled a little at this outbreak.

"Perhaps young gentlemen might not care about taking their sisters with them," she suggested, mildly; but Queenie tossed her head with a supercilious air.

"My brothers always like to have *me* with them," she answered. "It's perfectly horrid when they all go away. Nothing is any fun without boys."

"You won't think so long, Miss Queenie. It's only just at first that it seems dull-like."

Queenie stamped her foot. I am afraid she often did so, being a very excitable young lady, and without much control over herself.

"It isn't!" she cried, angrily; "it's all the time, every bit of it—a whole horrid three months nearly! I hate people who try and pretend things aren't what they are. It's very stupid and very unkind. You know I'm always

miserable when the boys are away, and it's not a bit of good pretending I'm not!"

Queenie turned defiantly upon her nurse as she made this challenge; but the wise woman, knowing well the disposition of her little mistress, held her peace.

Queenie sat down suddenly in the middle of her toys and stared about her disconsolately.

"It is horrid to live in a place where there isn't a single boy."

"There is a boy now at the Manor House," remarked the nurse, threading her needle afresh.

Queenie looked up, all interest and vivacity.

"A boy at the Manor House!" she repeated. "Who is he? I didn't know the Squire had any boys."

"Neither he has, Miss Queenie. Poor man, he lost them all. The little boy he has with him now is the one, you know, who drifted ashore after the last storm, who doesn't know who he is nor where he came from, poor little fellow."

"Why doesn't he?"

"He can't remember; he's forgotten it all. His head was hurt somehow, and when he got better he'd forgotten everything he knew about himself."

"How funny!" cried Queenie. "I wonder what it feels like to forget everything like that."

The nurse shook her head, and Queenie went on with her own train of thought.

"I think it would be rather nice to forget everything and begin again quite fresh. It would be so funny. I should like to forget all my lessons, and to go on forgetting them, so that by and by people would say it was no good teaching me any more, and I should do just as I liked all day."

"You would soon be very glad to go back to your lessons again, Miss Queenie," answered the nurse, quietly. "There is nothing in the world so dull as having no regular employment."

This wise remark did not provoke any ridicule from Queenie at this moment, as it would usually have done. She had other things to think of now.

“Why has the little boy gone to the Manor House?” she asked.

“I suppose the Squire asked him there. You see he has no friends to take care of him—at least he cannot find them yet. The Squire is a very kind man.”

“Mamma doesn’t like him,” remarked Queenie. “She tells people he is very unsociable, and does not treat her with proper respect. I think he looks a nice old man. I met him once when I was out on my pony, and had run away from William and lost him. He picked up my whip for me because I’d dropped it, and when I thanked him, he smiled and looked quite kind, though in church he is always so grave and solemn. But I can’t think why he should take a little fisherman’s boy to live in his house.”

The nurse smiled a little.

“Who told you he was a fisherman’s boy, Miss Queenie?”

Queenie tossed her little curly head with the air of one who half resents such a question.

“Why, of course he is! everybody knows that. He lived ever so many days in that dirty little hut with the Wickhams. I saw him one day on the sands, playing with David. Only quite a common boy could possibly think of doing *that!*”

The nurse smiled again.

“Well, Miss Queenie, however that may be, there are other opinions about the little boy. Anyway, he is living at the Manor House now, and Mrs. Pritchard does not think it beneath her to wait upon him,—fisherman’s boy or no.”

Queenie listened with interest to this account of the little stranger; but she would not admit that she could possibly be mistaken in her estimate of him.

“I’ve seen him,” she said; “he was dressed in horrid old clothes. I’m quite sure *he* can’t be a gentleman’s son. It’s quite ridiculous!”

“And I suppose, Miss Queenie, if you happened to get lost some day, and were found by poor people, and dressed in poor clothes, you would not be a gentleman’s little daughter any longer?”

Queenie flushed indignantly, and drew up her little head.

“I am Sir Walter Arbuthnot’s only daughter,” she said, in her most stately way. “Nothing that could happen could make any difference to *that*.”

Nurse smiled again.

“Oh, I thought it was all a matter of clothes.”

Queenie made no reply. She began to see that there was something more than that to be taken into consideration; but she was not going to make any rash admissions to her nurse, whose ideas upon some subjects did not at all commend themselves to the little lady.

But she thought a good deal about the little boy who had come to the Manor House, and wove several romances about him. She wondered whether she would ever make his acquaintance, what he would be like if she did, and whether he would prove worthy of the notice she half resolved she would take of him should the opportunity present itself.

Queenie, as will be seen from what has gone before, was a little lady with a great idea of her own importance. It was not altogether her own fault that she had this exalted opinion of herself. She was an only daughter, and had been spoiled ever since she was born. The youngest of the family and the only girl, it was no wonder she had been made much of, and her beauty, her self-will, and her quickness all helped to increase the dangers and difficulties of the position. Her father gave way to her whims in everything, whenever she appealed to him, for he was much entertained by her vivacity and delighted in her fearlessness and high spirit. He secretly countenanced those acts of insubordination and defiance of authority that shocked Lady Arbuthnot’s sense of propriety, and cared nothing at all about her “tomboy tricks” so long as she was always ready to amuse him by her sharp sayings when she came in to dessert or was sent for into the drawing-room. The mother, on the other hand, disliked all this tendency to frolic and careless deportment, and sedulously cultivated what she termed the graceful side of her little daughter’s character. In plain words, she tried hard to instill a great deal of vanity and foolish pride into Queenie’s youthful mind, and had it not

been for the child's healthy love for play and natural freedom from petty follies of this kind, she would in all probability have become before this time a little woman of fashion instead of a happy, careless child.

As it was, in spite of many drawbacks and many dangers, the child was a child still,—proud, self-willed, and passionate, it is true, yet on the whole generous, well-disposed and merry, satisfied with herself and with most things about her. She was not spoiled yet, whatever she might be later, and she undoubtedly owed much to the kindly and judicious treatment of her nurse.

Queenie thought a good deal more of her nurse's opinion than she was at all aware of; and as nurse had said that the little boy who had been received at the Manor House was a gentleman's son—or seemed so—the small lady at the Court began to think a good deal about him, and to wonder if she should ever be allowed to make his acquaintance.

Queenie's parents had not lived for more than a year at the Court, and they hardly knew the Squire at all. He did not pay calls in a general way, and although he had broken through his habitual seclusion to pay his respects to Lady Arbuthnot on her first arrival there, he had not repeated the visit, and she had taken offence at what she considered a lack of proper respect. They were very near neighbors, and yet almost strangers. Sir Walter would say in his careless fashion that the old Squire was a good fellow enough, only growing very rusty with being so shut up in his dismal house all alone; but no intercourse existed between the neighbors, and Lady Arbuthnot took somewhat an exaggerated view of the old man's unsociable disposition. A vain woman in a small neighborhood, with little to occupy her thoughts, is likely to get into a silly way of making much out of little, and her annoyance with the Squire was out of all proportion to the supposed affront.

Queenie knew a great deal more of her mother's opinions than was at all advisable; and so she felt considerable doubt as to whether any friendship would be permitted between her and the little strange boy who had drifted ashore by the storm. Still she was not a child who was easily daunted by opposition, and she was quite convinced in her own mind that, if she liked the looks of the new-comer, she would soon find a way of making his acquaintance.

When Sunday came round, Queenie was conscious of a little sense of excitement as she allowed herself to be dressed for church. She knew that the Squire was never absent from the great square pew just opposite their own, and that, if the little boy were there with him, she could not fail to have an excellent view of him.

Lady Arbuthnot was not very well that day, so that Queenie would have the satisfaction of going alone with her father, which always pleased her very much, for she could chatter to him the whole time during the double walk, sit in her mother's corner at church and use her beautiful velvet-bound books. The little girl always stood upon the high footstool during such parts of the service as it was possible, and indulged secret hopes that strangers in the church would take her to be Lady Arbuthnot.

To-day she had herself dressed in excellent time, and coaxed her father into his light overcoat quite five minutes before he was disposed to start, in order to be sure to be in time to see the Squire's entrance.

Sir Walter was very good-tempered and very fond of his little daughter. Queenie looked particularly bright and pretty to-day, her blue eyes beaming with excitement and pleasure, her golden curls straying out from beneath the brim of her little velvet cap, and her pretty spring dress, warm yet light, all fresh from the hands of careful nurse. She was a dainty little maiden as regarded her clothes, despite her active "tomboy" nature, and Sir Walter was pleased to take her hand in his and listen to her merry chatter as they walked through the copse and over the fields together.

She did not speak of the thought uppermost in her head. Some instinct of caution sealed her lips until her own mind should be made up on the subject. She must see the little boy herself before she could possibly tell whether she wished to take any step towards forming his acquaintance. She was not at all sure, in spite of nurse's vague hints, that he would prove to be worthy of the honor she proposed to extend to him in bestowing upon him her friendship.

The Squire had not yet arrived when the Arbuthnots took their places. So far so good. Queenie settled herself with dignity in her seat, and prepared to wait for him.

She had not to wait long; the Squire was always in excellent time, and very soon she saw the familiar white head passing in through the open door.

Was he alone? No, surely not! In another moment all doubt was at an end. He had entered, leading by the hand a little boy in a suit of black velvet, and in another moment or two the children were sitting quietly in their places immediately facing one another.

Queenie's gaze immediately fastened upon the little boy's face, and fixed itself there with the unconscious interest and frankness only possible in childhood.

"How pretty he is!" was her first thought; her second "But, how sad!"

She had certainly never seen any one quite like him before. She could not tell what it was made him so different from other boys she had known; but she was quite aware that there was a difference.

No boy she had ever seen before had ever looked dreamy and sorrowful and bewildered, as this little boy did almost all through the service. The wistful sadness in his great dark eyes stirred Queenie's sympathy as much as it quickened her imagination.

All her doubts as to the little boy's "fitness" to be her friend vanished, she knew not how. All that seemed of any importance now was that he seemed lonely and unhappy, and that *of course* she must make friends with him and try to comfort him. She caught herself wondering again and again what he could be thinking of, as he sat so still in his corner, his eyes sometimes fixed upon the clergyman, sometimes wandering dreamily towards one or another of the stained glass windows. Did it all seem very strange to him? or did he remember what a church was like and feel at home there? His deportment was quite correct, but that might be imitation. How much did he remember, and how much was forgotten? It was a question that affected her imagination keenly and quite occupied all her thoughts.

She was glad that the little boy was younger than herself, though she could hardly have said why. He did not look a bit more than seven or eight, whilst she was nearly ten, and he did not look at all strong. She would be able to patronize and protect him, which was of all things what she loved best to do.

Fortune favored Queenie that day, for, as the congregation left the church, Sir Walter said to his little daughter,—

“Don’t be in a hurry; I want to speak to the Squire.”

Queenie was delighted, and eagerly waited by the little gate till the Squire should appear. He was a little time in coming, as several of the poor people had something they wished to say to him.

But he came at length, the child close at his side, at whom Sir Walter cast one curious glance, and then drew the Squire a little on one side in order to talk at his ease.

The two children were thus left confronting each other. Queenie of course spoke first.

“What is your name, little boy?” she asked, graciously.

“They call me Bertie here,” he answered, gently, lifting his cap when the little strange lady spoke to him in a way that raised him many steps higher in Queenie’s opinion.

“Well, they call me Queenie,” responded she, laughing, “though it isn’t my name, so we’re something like one another, you see. How old are you?”

He shook his head.

“I don’t know. Mrs. Pritchard and the tailor said I must be about seven or eight.”

“I thought so!” cried Queenie, quickly; “I always guess people’s ages nearly right. I shall be ten pretty soon. We live in the nearest house to you—next door, we should say in London; but people don’t talk like that here.”

Bertie looked up with a little start.

“Next door,” he said, quickly, and then stopped short.

“What about next door?” asked Queenie.

“I don’t know,” he answered, slowly. “I thought I did; but I didn’t.”

“I want us to be friends,” said Queenie; “would you like to be?”

“If grandpapa likes,” answered Bertie, without the animation Queenie looked for.

Yet he spoke so gently that she could not be offended, and the wistful look in his eyes touched her, she could not tell why.

“Why do you call him grandpapa?” she asked, with interest. “Do you mean the Squire?”

“Yes,” answered Bertie. “He lets me call him that. It seems more natural, somehow.”

Queenie looked at him curiously.

“You must feel very funny, don’t you? I should worry all day to remember things.”

Bertie’s eyes were troubled and sad.

“That does no good, it only makes my head ache; but I like being in church.”

Queenie was aware that her father was shaking hands with the Squire. A sudden impulse came over her to speak whilst she had the chance.

“I want us to be friends,” she said again. “Do you know the big oak tree down by the sunk fence at the end of the Squire’s park, near the lodge?”

Bertie thought a little.

“I think I do.”

“If you’ll come out there to-morrow afternoon, I’ll come too. One of us can climb over, and we’ll play together. Don’t forget, and do come.”

Bertie had no time to reply. A quick smile passed between the children as they parted to go their several ways.

CHAPTER V.

SUNDAY.



It was very easy to make it a rule that Bertie should not leave his nurseries without permission, except at stated hours; but it was a rule that appeared impossible to enforce.

It was not that he was defiant, or passionate, or even, as it seemed, wilfully disobedient; but nevertheless he was perpetually slipping away at odd moments to the library window-seat, where he would remain quietly perched up, gazing intently over the stretch of level country and well-timbered park, and when discovered and reproved he would glance up with troubled eyes into the grave face of his nurse, and say in faltering tones that he did not mean to be naughty, but he liked being there.

It seemed, indeed, as if some power more strong than that of mere liking drew him to that spot. It almost appeared that an instinct which he could not resist drove him to the place, and when Dr. Lighton heard of it, he advised that he should be given way to in this matter.

“It is evidently some train of association that attracts him—some link with the past that may in time prove of great value. I should let him alone, Squire, unless he is in your way. He may find out what we want to know, if he is allowed undisturbed leisure for thought in the spot of his own choosing.”

“He does not disturb me,” answered the Squire. “He is the quietest child in the world. He never talks, and he hardly moves. He is welcome to stay, if you think it will be productive of any good results.”

“Well, I hope it may, that is all I can say. The case is an odd one, and perplexes me, I own, but the experiment is worth trying.”

So the order was issued, and Mrs. Pritchard found her duties considerably lightened, for Bertie troubled her with little of his society, and was nearly always to be found perched silently upon the library window-seat, sometimes with a book on his knees, but more often merely resting his chin on his hand and gazing intently either at the Squire in his leather-covered chair before the writing-table, or else out of the window.

His daily walk was always the same—to visit David and the sandhills by the sea, whilst his days were spent in quiet contentment in the old library. It was an odd life for a little child to lead, as odd as the whole strange chain of circumstances that had led him to this new home.

Things were in this state by the time Sunday came round; and the brief interview with Queenie in the churchyard was the first incident that had occurred to rouse the child out of the dreamy state in which he had been sunk ever since his return to conscious life.

His eyes were brighter as he walked home beside the Squire, and he looked about him with more of natural, childish interest than he had ever evinced before.

When they stood together in the hall, the child looked up in the Squire's face with the first smile that had been seen as yet in those wistful dark eyes.

“May I have my dinner down-stairs to-day with you?” he asked. “Because it's Sunday, you know.”

The Squire looked meditatively into the child's face, and asked in his turn,—

“Why should I be more troubled with you on a Sunday than on any other day?”

Bertie smiled once more quite fearlessly. It had been observed from the very first that the child had never appeared in the least afraid of the Squire, whose rather rough manner and sharp way of speaking often made him appear a formidable being to those who did not understand his truer nature.

“I won't be any trouble,” answered Bertie, in his frank and serious way, “but I should like to come. Please will you let me?”

“Very well, I will allow it to-day, since your heart seems set upon it; but you must not take it as a precedent.”

“Oh no, of course not,” answered Bertie; “it’s only on Sundays that I want to stay with you for dinner.”

And then he mounted the stairs, to tell Mrs. Pritchard of the arrangement he had just made.

The housekeeper was less surprised than she would have been four days ago. She had observed how readily the child’s presence was tolerated in the library, and she began to indulge the secret hope that the companionship of the little boy might beguile the Squire out of his long-established habits of sorrowful reserve and gloom.

She brushed his short, dark, curly head till it shone in the sunlight, washed his face and hands, and tied afresh the little crimson bow that contrasted well with the black of his velvet jacket. The new brightness that had not yet left his face gave to it quite a new expression, and there was in the child’s whole bearing a sort of courteous yet commanding air that had not been observable before. He seemed suddenly to take it for granted that he belonged to the house, and had a certain right to a voice in its affairs.

He walked boldly down-stairs as soon as he was released from Mrs. Pritchard’s hands, and made his way into the dining-room, where the butler was laying the table.

The butler was no other than Mrs. Pritchard’s husband, and shared her compassionate interest in the little waif who had been thrown upon their hands. He smiled as the child approached, and said,—

“So you will take your dinner with the Squire to-day, Master Bertie?”

“Yes; and please don’t put me at the side of the table, Pritchard. I should prefer to sit opposite to him here at the end.”

Pritchard was by no means certain how the Squire would like this arrangement. It was seldom indeed in the years that had passed since her death that his wife’s vacant place had been occupied by any one else; but it is a weakness with elderly people, and especially with kind old servants, to give way to the fancies of a child, and Pritchard did as Bertie directed, and

laid the two covers, one at the foot and the other at the head of the long table that seemed meant for a merry family party.

Bertie was standing gravely by his chair when the Squire came in and the latter cast a keen glance upon the little figure outlined against the sunny window behind.

“Shall I say grace?” asked the child, with the composure of manner that showed this to have been an old habit in the forgotten life of past days. He folded his hands and repeated a brief formula, and then he took his seat at the table and arranged his napkin with an air of perfect familiarity with the situation.

The Squire watched him with more interest than he had done before. Certainly there was something rather attractive in this little nameless boy who knew nothing about himself, yet betrayed his gentle birth and breeding in each unconscious word and movement.

“Grandpapa,” said Bertie, looking across the table, “who is the pretty little girl who sat opposite in church, and talked to me afterwards?”

“That is little Miss Arbuthnot. She lives in the big white house next to ours.”

“Yes, I know; she told me so. She asked if I would play with her sometimes. May I?”

The Squire smiled a little.

“Oh dear, yes! as far as I am concerned you may; I have not the least objection for you to play with her. Whether she will be allowed to play with you is quite another matter.”

Bertie made no response. He was not quite sure that he understood the drift of this remark, and so he took refuge in silence.

After dinner he asked leave to go out alone. He wanted to go and see David, but he did not wish to disturb Mrs. Pritchard.

“You see she will like to have a quiet nap on Sunday afternoon,” he concluded, gravely, as if well acquainted with the habits of the elderly housekeeper.

The Squire’s eyes twinkled a little.

“Who told you that, young man?”

Bertie looked a little perplexed.

“I don’t know,” he answered, slowly. “I seemed to know it.”

“Well, I don’t suppose you are far wrong. Yes, you may run along alone; you’re too big a boy to have a nurse always dangling after you. Don’t wander too far and lose yourself; but you may go and see David by yourself whenever you like.”

“Oh, thank you!” answered Bertie, eagerly; and he ran off to fetch his cap, much elated by this permission. Certainly he was beginning to awake to life in a remarkable way.

It was a mild and sunny day out of doors. The air was still and sweet, and the scent of spring was everywhere, as well as its signs and sounds. Primroses and anemones made a starry carpet beneath the great oak and beech trees of the level park. The buds were swelling visibly overhead, and the sycamores and horse-chestnuts had already shaken out some little tufts of delicate green. The birds sang overhead as they only sing in the sweet spring-time, and Bertie’s eyes grew dazzled with trying to follow the flight of the soaring larks, who rained down upon him the liquid melody of their joyous songs.

Flat and bare as was the country round, the Squire’s park was well timbered, and the trees were tall and old and grand.

His ancestors had laid out this place hundreds of years ago, had planted trees when they built the house, and had cared for the one as much as the other. The consequence was that the grounds of Arlingham Manor House looked like an oasis of green woodland amid the flat monotony of the fen country, and gave an air of picturesque well-being to the estate which it could not otherwise have possessed.

Bertie looked round him as he walked down the wide carriage road with a newly awakened interest in his surroundings. The painful confusion of his mind had given place to something of natural and healthy curiosity and pleasure. There was still a sorrowful consciousness of loss in the child’s head and heart, a sense as if a black curtain had been suddenly let down across his life and had shut him off from the light and warmth he dimly knew to be behind; but he had begun to turn his thoughts away from the

blank vacancy behind, and to look out with a certain dawning hopefulness into the new life that was opening out before him.

Bertie could not have put the sensation into words, but what was happening to him was simply this. The faint recollections of a forgotten past that had wearied and confused his brain during the first days of his return to consciousness were fading away in the stronger light of an actual, tangible present, and, save in certain places and under certain conditions, the painful sense of bewildered perplexity was gradually giving way to a more healthy frame of mind.

The park, with its voiceless language of coming spring, awoke no associations within the child's breast. He walked on quietly, enjoying it all very much, but haunted by no illusive visions that refused to be defined; troubled by nothing worse than a sort of anxiety lest Queenie, the pretty little girl whose name Mrs. Pritchard had told him, should not be able to keep the appointment she had made for the following afternoon.

But he had soon left the park behind, and came out upon the low sandhills that stretched away for at least a quarter of a mile towards the margin of the sea. The sun shone very bright and warm here; the soft sand crumbled beneath his feet; and the sea-gulls walked tamely about, and looked at him with a sort of impudent assurance before they took wing. Bertie was fond of this spot; he could not have said why, for something in its level desolation always made him a little sad; yet the sight of the boundless waste of heaving water and the arid stretches of pale sand had an odd fascination for him, and he would have felt sorrowful had a day passed without his visiting at least once the scene that exercised a powerful sway over his imagination.

As he wandered down towards the margin of the sea, a little black figure jumped up from a recumbent position upon the sand, and David and Bertie stood face to face.

They looked very different indeed now, the two children who had once been almost like little brothers for a few brief days of their life: David, with his pale blue eyes, straw-colored hair, indeterminate face, and coarse clothing, and Bertie, dark-eyed, dark-haired, clad in velvet, and with that nameless air about him that bespoke birth and breeding as no costliness of apparel could do. The boy's face was aglow with intelligence and eager

welcome, and its expression was so utterly different, in its refinement and sweetness, from the awkward, clumsy pleasure painted upon that of the fisherman's boy, that it was no great wonder, perhaps, if David himself had some dim perception of it.

He stopped short and gazed at Bertie for a full minute in silence, and then said, heaving a great sigh,—

“Eh, but thee is so beautiful! I do love thee!”

Bertie smiled and took both of David's hands in his.

“I love you too,” he answered. “What are you doing, David?”

“I be learning my Sunday lesson. I goes to school mornings before church; but I don't go afternoons. I come out here and learns my lesson. Does anybody give thee Sunday lessons to learn?”

Bertie's hand went up for a moment to his head.

“Not here,” he answered, after a moment's hesitation. “I should like to learn yours with you, David.”

The fisher lad's face brightened.

“Would'ee now? Eh, but that's prime! I'll learn un twice as fast with thee.”

They sat down together upon the sand and laid their arms over each other's shoulders. David produced a card upon which the words of his lesson were printed in large type:

“I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”

Together the children read the words, and repeated them again and again until they were quite familiar. David had almost mastered them before, and Bertie had no trouble in impressing them upon his memory; but after this was done, and David considered the matter at an end, his little companion looked straight at him and asked,—

“What does it all mean, David?”

David stared hard for a few seconds at his questioner, and said, slowly,—

“Teacher said as it was what God said to Joshua after Moses had gone and died, you know.”

Bertie’s chin rested meditatively in his hand, his eyes were fixed upon the shining sea.

“Did He say it only to Joshua?” he asked, with a certain wistfulness in face and voice.

David’s brow drew itself into perplexed wrinkles.

“Teacher said as He says it to everybody; but I don’t understand about that. Maybe you do.”

Bertie’s face brightened.

“That’s just what I wanted to know. You’re sure she said so?”

“Certain sure I be,” answered David, gravely. “She said as God loved us all alike, and wouldn’t forsake none of us any more than Joshua. Only we’ve got to trust Him, you know, like Joshua did.”

Bertie’s face was very thoughtful.

“It seems as if He’d forsaken me,” said the child, dreamily. “It seems as if I’d forgotten everybody, and everybody had forgotten me.”

David looked perplexed and distressed for a moment, and then his brightest smile shone over his face.

“I don’t believe God’s forgot thee after all,” he said. “I don’t believe He ever would.”

Bertie’s face was very grave. He was not equally sure of this.

“I’ll tell thee what to do,” cried David, with a sudden flash of inspiration. “Thee’d best tell God all about it, and ask Him to remember thee again, if He’s forgot. I’m main sure He would then. He couldn’t choose but love *thee*.”

“I wonder if He’d listen,” said Bertie, slowly.

“Teacher says He will,” answered David, with modest confidence. “She says as He’ll hear the likes of us, so I know He’ll hear thee.”

Bertie looked down at the words upon the card, and repeated them aloud.

“I’ve got to be strong and of good courage,” he said. “Well, I’ll try. I’d like to be that—boys ought to be brave and strong. I’ll ask God to help me, and not to forget me much longer”—the child’s hand was pressed to his head now, and he added, with a strange glance at his companion,—“only we must always say, ‘Thy will be done,’ too.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST INTERVIEW.



O you have come at last, have you?" said Queenie, tossing her curly head and speaking with a sort of disdainful pride. "I thought you had most likely forgotten all about it."

Queenie had been waiting for some time by the old oak tree near to the sunk fence, and during that time she had mounted her "high horse," and was by no means disposed at once to quit her exalted position. A very imperious and exacting young lady could little Miss Arbuthnot show herself when she had a mind to do so.

"You didn't say any particular time, you know," answered Bertie, gently.

"I said afternoon," returned Queenie, with dignity. "That means after dinner, of course. I came as soon as I could get out after dinner, and if you had been what people say you are, you would have done the same."

"What do people say I am?" asked Bertie.

"They say you are a gentleman," answered Queenie; "but *I* don't feel so sure about it. Do you think you are?"

Bertie shook his head.

"Oh no! I'm only a little boy."

"*That* doesn't make any difference," cried Queenie, impatiently. "What a stupid little boy you must be! I'm only a little girl; but then I'm a lady too, as you can see for yourself."

Bertie's eyes opened wide.

“Are you?” he questioned, innocently. “I don’t think I should have known.”

Queenie drew herself up for a moment, as if she were going to walk away in a pet; but, as Bertie did not in the least understand his own enormities and showed no disposition to follow and humble himself, she stopped short and began to laugh instead.

Bertie understood that sort of thing, and he joined in the laugh, without quite knowing why.

“You’re such a funny little boy,” said Queenie. “You’re not a bit like my brothers; but I like you. I think we shall be friends, don’t you?”

“I should like it,” answered Bertie; “only—”

“Well? Only what?”

“Only the Squire didn’t think you’d be allowed to play with me.”

“Did he say so? When?”

“At dinner-time yesterday, when I asked if I might play with you. He said I might; but he didn’t think you’d be let to play with me.”

Queenie laughed and tossed her head.

“I think the Squire is a very clever old man; but you see I’m cleverer still.”

“How?”

“Why, because I do things without asking leave. It saves *such* a lot of trouble.”

Bertie looked rather scandalized.

“Do you mean you wouldn’t be allowed to play with me if people knew about it?”

“Papa wouldn’t mind,” answered Queenie, quickly; “he lets me do as I like. It’s only mamma who is so tiresome. Mamma wanted me never to go out alone, even in the garden, but papa said it was all nonsense, and that I might. I love papa twice as much as mamma. He’s just given me a pony to ride—such a pretty little pony, brown, with black legs! Would you like to come and see him?”

Bertie's eyes were shining with a strange light.

"Yes," he answered. "I should like it very much. I think—I must have had a pony—once."

"Did you?" questioned Queenie, eagerly. "Oh, if you can ride, we can go out together sometimes. I'll get papa to say we may. Now come and see my pony. Mamma is out, and papa won't mind a bit if he does see you."

Queenie had climbed the sunk fence once before Bertie had joined her, and had put the great trunk of the oak tree between herself and the chance of pursuit by nurse or any other attendant; but now she was eager to retrace her steps, and to display to her new companion the possessions of which she was most proud.

Bertie followed her willingly enough. He felt sure, after what the Squire had said, that he would not object, and as for Queenie's odd statements regarding her relations with her parents, the little boy did not profess to understand them, nor did he, at the present stage of their acquaintance, feel called upon to interfere or criticise. Queenie's fearless gaiety of manner exercised a certain fascination upon him, and he was quite ready to let her take the lead, whilst he humbly followed in her wake.

They climbed the sunk fence together, and then Queenie took his hand protectingly and led him up the meadow towards the back of the house.

"We will go round by the farm first," said Queenie. "I will show you my chickens."

The farmyard was certainly an attractive spot, and the little mistress was evidently a great favorite with all the men employed there. Hard, stolid faces smiled kindly upon the two children, and rough hands were eager and willing to do their bidding, whatever it might be.

Queenie talked to the laborers with her little air of stately affability that impressed Bertie very much. He was inclined to be shy and silent himself; but the little girl did not know what shyness meant, and chattered away to him and to every one who came near them in a way that evidently made her an immense favorite.

The chickens were very sweet indeed, little fluffy balls of yellow and black. Bertie was delighted with them, and the children spent a good half-

hour in the poultry yard, feeding the fowls and laughing at their funny ways.

“I’ll give you some chickens if you like, when they’re big enough to leave the hen,” said Queenie, who loved to patronize.

“I think the Squire has plenty of his own, thank you,” answered Bertie. “I don’t know if he’d care for me to have any more.”

“Do you like his yard as well as ours?” asked Queenie, rather jealously.

“I don’t know. I’ve never been there.”

“Never been! Why not?”

“I don’t know. I never thought of it. I’m not sure that he’d like me to go.”

“You could go when he was out.”

But Bertie shook his head resolutely.

“Why not, pray? It would do no harm.”

“I shouldn’t like to go if he hadn’t given me leave,” answered Bertie.

Queenie tossed her head.

“Who taught you to be so strait-laced as all that? Mrs. Pritchard?”

“No,” answered Bertie, slowly; “Mrs. Pritchard never said anything about it.”

Queenie looked at him, and he looked at her, his eyes dreamy and wistful.

“I think you must have been very strictly brought up,” she said, gravely. “That sort of thing would not suit *me*. You would have much more spirit if you were less particular. You should see *my* brothers. They don’t care about anything.”

Bertie did not seem convinced by this argument, but he held his peace, as he always did when not quite sure of his ground. Queenie thought she had won a victory, and said graciously,—

“Now we will come and see my pony.”

When Bertie found himself in the stable, he seemed more at home than he had done in the farmyard. He went boldly up to the pony in his box, and stroked and caressed him as if he had known what it was to be on friendly terms with a horse before. The creature responded to his advances and Queenie looked on with a gracious air of approval.

“Why, here is papa!” she cried, suddenly; and Bertie turned round in time to see the gentleman who had stopped the Squire on Sunday entering by the stable door.

“Hullo, Queenie! what are you doing here?” was the quick inquiry; “and what would mamma say?”

“I am showing Bertie my pony,” answered Queenie, running up and taking her father’s hand coaxingly. “I didn’t come alone. I had Bertie with me. You know who Bertie is, don’t you, papa? The little boy who lives with the Squire now.”

Of course Sir Walter had heard the romantic story, and he looked at the child with kindly interest. Bertie took off his cap and gave his hand to the baronet with the gentle courtesy characteristic of him.

“Well, my little lad, and how do you like your new home?” he asked.

Bertie’s eyes grew vaguely sorrowful.

“Everybody is very kind,” he said; adding after a short pause, and rather inconsequently, “Your little girl has been showing me her chickens and her pony.”

“That is right, that is right; and have you enjoyed yourself?”

“Yes, thank you, sir. I like horses. I think I used to ride on one once.”

That look that always shone in the child’s eyes when he spoke or thought of the vanished past touched the baronet’s kind heart.

“Well, well, you will soon know all about it, no doubt; and meantime, you must come and talk to my little girl as often as you can, and play together and enjoy yourselves. Now run off, Queenie, and take your little friend with you. You can ask Bennet if he has any strawberries to spare for you. Keep in the garden, children. You know, Queenie, mamma does not like your being in the yard or the stable.”

Queenie knew this quite well; but she did not care always to remember such prohibitions, and she knew that her father never enforced discipline with any great authority.

She looked at him with a saucy laugh.

“Mamma would like me to live in a glass case, wrapped up in cotton wool; but I don’t think she’d keep me there long.”

Sir Walter laughed too.

“Now run away, puss, and take Bertie with you; and try to keep out of mischief for one day of your life, if you can.”

Queenie stood on tiptoe to make her father bend down whilst she whispered in his ear,—

“And you’ll make mamma let Bertie come here often? He’s a nice little boy, and has nobody to play with; and it must be so dull for him living all alone with the Squire.”

Sir Walter smiled at his little daughter’s way of pleading her cause.

“It isn’t that you want a playfellow yourself, I suppose?” he questioned. “It’s all for Bertie’s sake, of course. Well, well, I’ll see about it. Yes, certainly, I have no objection to your playing together.”

So Queenie led Bertie away in triumph, saying as she did so,—

“There! I knew papa would let us be friends. Now you will have somebody to talk to when you are dull.”

If Miss Queenie had expected Bertie to be very much impressed by this favor, she was certainly doomed to be disappointed.

“I have somebody to talk to now,” he answered.

“Yes, but not anybody who is any fun,” answered Queenie, quickly. “Grown-up people are so dull.”

“I wasn’t thinking of anybody grown up.”

“Who were you thinking of then?” asked the little girl, regardless of grammar.

“I was thinking of David,” answered Bertie. “I go to see him every day.”

Queenie drew up her head in a very lofty way.

“David!” she repeated, superciliously; “and pray who may David be?”

“He is the fisherman’s boy,” answered Bertie, simply. “He lives in that little cottage on the sandhills down by the sea. I lived there a few days before the Squire took me. David was very kind to me then; and I am very fond of him.”

Queenie’s head was held up very high.

“Very fond of a fisher lad!” she repeated, very slowly and clearly, as if such an idea as that required careful investigation. “Well, perhaps in that case you had better go to your dear David. You will find him much more entertaining than me.”

“No,” answered Bertie, with great gravity; “he isn’t so amusing; but I think he is a good boy. He cares about being good much more than you do.”

Queenie turned round upon Bertie with an air of outraged pride and with eyes that flashed angrily. She pointed imperiously towards the boundary fence that divided the Squire’s property from her father’s.

“If you are going to compare *me* to your precious David, you need not trouble to come *here* again. Go to your dear fisher people, since you are so fond of them. It is very plain you are not yet to be *my* friend.”

And Queenie marched away with her head held very high in the air, and Bertie, after gazing after her very much astonished for some minutes, quietly turned away and wandered home, not at all disturbed by the outbreak, only regarding it as a new development of the odd disposition of his little new friend.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FUGITIVE.



QUEENIE was very much surprised when she found that Bertie had taken her at her word, and had not tried to follow her or coax her out of her fit of temper. As soon as her pride would allow her, she turned to look back, and saw Bertie quietly climbing the fence and pursuing his way home again, without a single lingering backward glance at his offended companion.

Queenie was so much astonished by this unexpected display of spirit, that she stood quite still for several minutes, and then suddenly began to laugh. It occurred to her that Bertie was only doing exactly what she would have done in his place, and she was sensible enough as well as generous enough to see that she could not reasonably take offence at conduct so very like her own.

“After all, it was my fault,” she said to herself. “I told him to go, which wasn’t quite polite, as he was my guest. I hope papa will not come after me and ask where he is. He would not like me to be rude. Bertie was rude too; he had no business to speak of me and David as if we were anything to do with one another—and to call him *gooder* than me!” Queenie often became ungrammatical when she was put out. “I’ll soon show him that I’m not going to put up with that sort of thing.” The little girl tossed her curly head, and her face assumed its expression of greatest dignity, which was, however, soon replaced by a look of regret and sorrow. “But I wish he had not gone, all the same. I do like having a boy to play with, and he was a

nice little boy, I think, although he's not a bit like any one I've ever seen before."

Queenie pursued her way to the house in rather a melancholy mood, feeling as if a promising beginning to friendship had suddenly been nipped in the bud. She was afraid to stay in the garden, lest her father should see her and ask what had become of Bertie, so she wandered rather aimlessly into the house and up the staircase to the corridor where the nurseries were situated. These were shut off from the rest of the house by a red baize door, and as Queenie heard this swing to behind her this afternoon, and saw the row of doors belonging to the "boys' rooms," which were never banged now, and only shut in cold emptiness and vacancy, she said once more softly to herself,—

"I do hate term-time. It is quite horrid when all the boys are away."

Then Queenie stopped short suddenly, for she saw something that puzzled, and for a moment rather startled her.

The door of one of these empty rooms moved, and opened quite slowly a very little way. The sun was shining upon the panels from the window at the end of the passage, otherwise her attention might hardly have been attracted by anything so slight as the movement of the door; but as it was she stood quite still, gazing with all her eyes, and wondering in a half-fearful fashion what could have opened it.

The next thing she saw was an eye cautiously applied to the chink of the door. She was quite certain that it was an eye, although the chink was so narrow that she could see nothing else, and only a glimpse of the eye.

Queenie was not a timid child. She did not shriek or rush screaming away; but she was a little afraid, for she could not imagine who could be hiding in the empty room, and she did not much think that her nurse was up-stairs.

But as she stood there quite still, wondering what she should do, a head was suddenly popped round the door, a smothered, laughing voice cried, "Queenie!" in a sort of whisper, and the head was instantly withdrawn. Queenie uttered a little shriek of ecstasy, and made a dash at the door.

"Phil!" she cried, with breathless eagerness.

The closed door opened suddenly, she was pulled in with unceremonious haste, and the door was closed and bolted behind them in a moment of time.

Queenie was so bewildered by this mysterious appearance of her favorite brother, that she was absolutely tongue-tied. She could only gasp out,—

“Phil!”

And the curly-headed lad, his eyes full of laughter and his face brimming over with fun, caught his little sister round the waist, and executed the wildest of war-dances without speaking a single word.

At last, when both were fairly exhausted, he flung himself upon his bed and burst into a fit of tumultuous yet noiseless laughter.

Queenie’s eyes were quite round with astonishment. She was too much perplexed and surprised to join in her brother’s mirth.

“Phil,” she said at last, in her little imperious way, “do tell me what it is. I don’t understand. Why have you come home now?”

The boy sat up on his bed and laid his finger on his lips. His eyes were sparkling with mischief, yet his face wore a look of preternatural gravity.

“Hush!” he said, in a tragic whisper; “if any one hears us I am lost!”

“What do you mean, Phil?”

Queenie, however, lowered her voice to a whisper. If she did not believe in danger, at least she scented mischief, and her eyes began to shine like Phil’s with the anticipation of coming fun.

“Is anybody about?” asked Phil, cautiously.

“I don’t know. Shall I go and see?”

“Yes, do; and bring me something to eat if you can. I’m half famished.”

Queenie asked no more questions for the moment; but, after listening intently at the door, to make sure there was nobody outside, she glided out into the corridor and dashed across to the nursery. Nobody was there. She had announced her intention of spending the afternoon in the garden, so that her nurse had left her usual domain and had gone elsewhere. She might, of course, be back at any moment, as the child well knew, and she did not waste a moment in the fulfilment of her task.

Queenie was quite the spoiled darling of the household, and all the servants vied with each other to do her pleasure, and give her everything they thought she could want. The cook made her cakes of every description, of which she had quite a collection in the nursery cupboard; the butler gave her more figs and plums, almonds and raisins and crystallized fruits than she could possibly consume; and, as a natural consequence, Queenie could provide a feast for herself or anybody else at a moment's notice, and in less time than it has taken to explain all this she had filled a little basket with all sorts of good things, and had rushed back to Phil as silently and swiftly as a bird.

The schoolboy's eye sparkled as the contents of the basket were emptied upon the bed. He snatched up the most substantial of the cakes and set to work upon it with ravenous eagerness.

Queenie saw at a glance that it would be hopeless to expect him to speak until he had satisfied his hunger. She sat down upon the bed also, nibbled at a date, and tried to hazard a guess as to what could possibly have happened.

Phil was the youngest of the boys, and had not yet gone to Eton, being still at a preparatory school. He was nearly thirteen, and in September he was to join his brothers, and become a public schoolboy, which was the summit of his present ambition; this therefore was his last term at Dr. Steele's school, where all the Arbuthnot boys had received their early education; and what made him suddenly turn up at home, when the first month of term-time had not expired, was more than his little sister could imagine. She knew he always professed to hate Dr. Steele's establishment; but by his own account he always managed to have plenty of fun there.

Phil was not long in making away with all the good things his sister had brought him. When the last mouthful had been consumed, he heaved a sigh and said,—

“Ah, now I feel rather better; but I've had no dinner, and hardly any breakfast. Queenie, you'll have to hide me somewhere for a few days, and feed me secretly, like people used to do in the olden times. I'm a fugitive, you know, in peril of my life.”

Queenie's eyes dilated slowly.

“Oh, Phil!” she said, in awestruck tones; “what have you done?”

“I’ve run away,” he answered, the gravity of his face belied by the mirthful twinkle of his eye,—“I’ve run away, Queenie, to save Dr. Steele the pain and trouble of sending me away.”

“Oh!” breathed Queenie, her mouth growing as round as her eyes as she began to understand a little. She had often heard it said that Phil would undoubtedly be expelled some day, if he could not conquer his predilection for playing pranks, and she had secretly wished that he might. “So you have been getting into a row, have you, Phil?”

She spoke in an eager whisper, for she delighted in Phil’s natural bias towards mischief and bravado. She never felt more entirely proud of her brother than when listening to accounts of his reckless disregard for rules and his calm defiance when detected. I am afraid Queenie is not the only little girl in existence who shares in this admiration for lawlessness and mischief; and perhaps those of us who have not grown too old to remember how we felt when we were young may understand this naughty feeling, and perhaps sympathize a little with it. After all, if boys never got into mischief, the nursery would be a duller place than it is; and so long as they can be manly and truthful and honest with it all, it is not so very hard to forgive a little “kicking over the traces,” which is common and natural to two-legged as well as four-footed creatures, when first they begin to run in harness. As a rule, they do no great harm, and steady down to the collar in due time.

“Do tell me all about it, Phil,” pleaded Queenie, very eagerly. “Have you got into a very bad row this time?”

Queenie must be forgiven if she used slang words now and then. With four brothers to teach her, she could hardly have escaped.

Phil looked at his sister, and winked his eye in a very knowing way.

“I’ve not got into a row at all. I just cut and ran before there was time for the explosion. I’m a fugitive, Queenie! I’ve run away! and now you’ve got to hide me!”

“Oh, Phil! Why!”

The boy showed his white teeth in one of his own merriest smiles.

“Hush! that’s part of the plan. I want to give them a good scare, and then they’ll be so glad to get me safe home they’ll never think of putting me into

disgrace; and we'll just have a jolly summer together, Queenie, you and I, until September comes and I go to Eton. You'll help me, won't you? and then we'll have the best times we ever had in our lives."

Queenie's eyes sparkled.

"Oh, Phil, how splendid! But won't they send you back to Dr. Steele's?"

"Not they! Besides, he would not have me at any price, the old buffer. He says I'm worse than all the rest of the four dozen put together. Oh no, trust him! He'll not have me back; and if we only manage to give them a scare at this end, I shall be received with open arms, and they'll be so glad to get me home safe that they'll never remember to scold."

"But what have you done, Phil?" asked Queenie. "I want to know all about it."

Phil grinned from ear to ear.

"Oh, it was such a lark! I'd do it again to-morrow if I had the chance. I do love to rile old Higgins! You know who old Higgins is, don't you?—the under-master next to Steele himself,—a horrid old curmudgeon whom we all detest. Steele is bad enough, but Higgins!—such a name too!—Higgins! It's enough to put any fellow's monkey up to be bullied by a creature with a name like that! Well, this is how it was, you know. Steele had to go away for a day or two, and of course Higgins was left boss of the place, and began his usual bullying tricks, keeping us twice as strict as the Doctor does, and giving us twice the punishment we ought to have if ever he caught us at anything."

"What a horrid creature!" interposed Queenie, with sympathetic indignation.

"So he is; but we weren't going to be done by him, you bet. I'm not the fellow to sit quiet and be bullied, and there were plenty of fellows ready to join with me. You know, on the 1st of May every year, there is a big fair at Blexbury, three miles away, and of course we're not allowed to go. It's long out of bounds, and then a fair's considered an awful bad sort of place. I'm sure I don't know why, for there's nothing but fun, and gingerbread, and merry-go-rounds, and shooting-galleries, and things that couldn't hurt anybody. Anyhow, of course, we weren't allowed to go, and of course lots of us do go every year."

“Do you?”

“Why, to be sure we do; and this year there were to be fireworks in the evening too, and we meant to go twice, first in the afternoon, and then at night. It was a half-holiday, you know,—Saturday,—so nothing could have been better; and old Higgins gave out after morning school that no boy was to go beyond bounds that day, on pain of—I don’t know what—unheard-of penalties.”

Queenie drew a long breath.

“But you went?”

“Of course we went—a dozen of us at least, and old Higgins too, and we dodged him about up and down the fair, and led him such a dance. Oh, didn’t he get wild, and didn’t the people laugh at him! And didn’t the little boys throw mud, and the women tell him he ought to be ashamed of himself, chasing about the lads who only wanted to enjoy themselves and get a little fun. Some of the fellows kept out of sight, but I didn’t care; I let him see me fast enough, and, as he always hated me, he pretended he only saw me, and only really tried to catch me.”

“And did he?”

Phil laughed uproariously and kicked up his heels with joy.

“Catch me! I should just think he didn’t. I’d like to have seen him do it. Everybody was on my side. The men hid me in their tents and the women in their stalls, and wouldn’t let him come in at any price; and the menagerie-man—he *was* a jolly fellow—he beckoned me to come up into his circus place, and when old Higgins came rushing up after me, he just opened the cage of a big monkey, who sprang out at old Higgins, whipped off his hat and chawed it up, and gave him *such* a scratch all down his nose! He’ll carry that scratch to the end of time, I know. After that he thought he’d had enough, and went home without his hat in such a sweet temper. And that night we screwed him up in his room, after all the servants had gone to bed, and let off fireworks under his window.”

Queenie’s delight knew no bounds. Phil was more of a hero than ever.

“Go on! go on!” she cried. “What happened next day?”

“Next day was yesterday, and Sunday, you know; and old Higgins was so used up with rage that he could not appear all day. I was ordered to my room; but I said, ‘In for a penny, in for a pound,’ and went a walk instead. I knew it was all up with me by that time. The Doctor was coming back on Monday morning,—to-day you see,—so I didn’t trouble to wait for him, but just bolted before any one was astir. I didn’t go to the town or station, where we’re pretty well known, but cut across country for ten miles to a big junction, where I was not likely to be noticed. I’d just money enough for my ticket and some rolls, and that’s all I’ve had to eat since morning. You must manage to give me a good feed somehow, soon, and to look after me for a few days; for I mean to give Higgins and Steele a good fright before I’ve done with them.”

“Did nobody see you get in?” asked Queenie, excitedly.

“No, not a soul. I took good care of that. I managed beautifully, for I didn’t mean anybody but you to know. You’ll keep the secret, won’t you, Queenie? It will be *such* a lark having the whole country raised after me, and me here all the time.”

Queenie’s eyes sparkled.

“Like Cassy in ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin.’ Oh yes, Phil, I’ll hide you if I can! only—only—won’t papa and mamma be frightened too?”

“Oh no, I don’t think so—not for a day or so. They know I can take care of myself well enough. I want them to be just frightened enough to be very pleased to see me back, and we’ll not let them get more frightened than will be just right.”

Queenie was satisfied with this compromise. She was eager to carry out Phil’s scheme, for she had a keen love for adventure and romance, and it seemed to her a delightfully romantic thing to hide away her fugitive brother whilst his cruel and inhuman schoolmasters hunted high and low for him. Her zeal was great, and Phil knew he could trust both her courage and discretion, and the main difficulty was to know how and where to dispose of himself.

“You had better stop here for to-night,” said Queenie, with her little air of command; “nobody will come till the housemaid goes round in the morning; I don’t know if she comes every day when you are all away. There

is the wardrobe cupboard you could hide in, if you heard anybody coming, but I'll take care nobody does to-day. To-morrow morning early, I think, you'll have to get out of the window and down by the ivy and hide somewhere in the garden till we can settle something. If I were you, I'd get over the fence and hide in one of the Squire's shrubberies, and I'll come to you as soon as ever I can."

Phil nodded his head approvingly.

"That's the sort of thing, Queenie, that's the sort of thing;" and after ten minutes' animated discussion their plans till the morrow were all carefully laid. Then Queenie had to effect her escape unseen, for nursery tea was imminent; and then there was the difficult and delicate task of obtaining some substantial supplies and conveying them to Phil. Queenie, however, proved herself equal to the occasion. She wandered innocently down to the housekeeper's room, where she was always welcome, and paid a visit to cook in the larder, and admired very much a row of meat pies that she had lately taken from the oven.

As she was wandering about in the aimless way that children do when they find themselves amongst indulgent old servants, who are pleased to see them about their premises, she was aware of a commotion in the servants' hall.

"Cook!" cried a voice from thence,—“only think, cook, a telegram has just come from the master to say that Master Phil has run away from school, and can't be heard of anywhere!"

Cook threw up her hands in dismay at the news, and hurried away to learn all particulars. Queenie was sharp enough to know that for the next few minutes all the servants would be congregated together to hear the news and discuss it with keen interest and wonder. She therefore acted with care and deliberation, took down one savory pie from the shelf, rearranging the rest so that it was not likely to be missed, and stole quietly and coolly away with her prize, no hurried movement or undue excitement hindering her from carrying out her design in the best possible way.

Bread and all other additions were easily obtained from the nursery table, and Phil supped sumptuously that night.

The little girl was told nothing about her brother, for which she was glad, in case her face might betray her; but when she went down to dessert that evening, she fancied her mother seemed rather nervous and put out, and she was a little troubled at first; but as she left the room, she was reassured by hearing her father say,—

“Of course I will go over to-morrow and see about it, but you may trust Phil for looking after himself. He’ll come to no harm, you may be sure; he’ll be turning up like a bad halfpenny somewhere before another day is out. You see if he doesn’t.”

And Queenie laughed quietly to herself as she ran up-stairs to her nursery, very full of importance and delight.

CHAPTER VIII.

BERTIE AND PHIL.



BERTIE was not at all angry at being ordered home by his imperious little companion, neither was he indisposed to obey the mandate. He liked Queenie, she amused and interested him, but he found her a little overwhelming, and he was not altogether sorry to quit her presence and be alone once more.

Several new impressions had been made upon him during the past hour, and a little of the aching sense of bewilderment, now slowly leaving him, had been awakened by his visit to the stable and the appearance of Sir Walter Arbuthnot. He could not tell why some things seemed to hurt him in an odd, inexplicable fashion, whilst others made no impression upon his mind. Yet undoubtedly such was the case, and, as the dim and undefined sense of familiarity was always followed by a sort of reaction of sorrowful bewilderment and distress, Bertie was rather glad to be left alone to pursue his way unmolested and in peace.

His little face was pale and sad as he paused at last beneath a great beech-tree and sat down upon its gnarled roots to think. He looked down at the primroses growing at his feet, and put out his hand as if to pluck them; but he drew it back again, and then instead began stroking their leaves with gentle, loving touches.

“Poor little pretty things!” he said, half aloud; “I won’t take them away; I’m sure they’ll be happier here.”

Bertie looked up from the flowers to the blue sky overhead, and, as he looked, sudden tears glistened in his eyes.

“I wish I was a primrose, growing in a nice quiet place like this. Everybody is fond of flowers; but nobody wants me.”

The child’s lip quivered. A wave of desolation was sweeping over the lonely little heart. With the greater clearness of perception that was coming to him by degrees, was coming also a clearer understanding of the peculiar isolation of his position. He had less and less hope of remembering the past—its fleeting memories grew rather less than more defined, and eluded his grasp with even greater pertinacity than at first. He was not old enough to realize to the full the curious position he occupied; but he did begin to understand something of the situation, and to feel his loneliness and friendlessness with the acute sensibility peculiar to childhood.

“Nobody wants me,” he said, slowly; “I don’t belong to anybody in the world; I haven’t even got a name. The Squire is very kind; but he doesn’t want me. He would rather I was somewhere else.”

A tear rolled slowly down each of the child’s cheeks and fell upon his little thin hands. Bertie looked meditatively at them as they sparkled in the sunshine, and then he slowly wiped his eyes.

“I mustn’t be a baby,” he said, shaking his head. “That won’t do any good, and people will think I am naughty and ungrateful. I wish I could be happy like Queenie; but she has a papa and mamma and a home of her own, and I have nobody.” He put his hands up to his head again with the old perplexed look, but that faded in time, as the blank of the present closed him in.

“I think I’ll go and see David,” he said, slowly; and, rising to his feet, he wandered down to the shore.

David was always more or less on the look-out for his beloved companion. His tender admiration for Bertie had in no wise diminished; indeed, it seemed rather to increase as time passed by, though he gave it little expression.

He ran up eagerly to meet Bertie as he approached, but all he said was,—

“I do be glad thee’s come.”

Still these simple words of welcome were sweet to Bertie at this minute.

“David,” he said, as they wandered down to the margin of the waves, hand in hand and with slow, lingering steps, “I’m afraid He’s forgotten me—I am indeed.”

David’s eyes opened wide.

“Who?” he asked, briefly.

“God,” answered the child, with deep gravity and a sort of settled sadness that was not without its effect upon his companion. “I think He must have quite forgotten me.”

“Why?”

“I feel forgotten,” answered Bertie, and his lip quivered. “I feel as if everybody had forgotten me, and God too. If He hadn’t, why don’t I remember?—He might let me, I think.”

But Bertie couldn’t get on any further than that, and David stood staring over the sea, as if to glean inspiration from the ever-changing, tossing sheet of water.

When his answer came, it was spoken with a sort of modest diffidence, as if he hardly knew whether it would be accepted as an answer at all.

“He don’t forget easy, I don’t think, lovy. He don’t never forget to stop the sea when he’s come up high enough. It don’t matter whether it’s nights or days, He’s always watching, and sends it back again. If He forgot only once, our cottage would be drowned, it would, but He never do. Father’s lived there all his life, and his father afore him; that’s ever so many years, and He’s never forgot once all that time. It do seem as if forgetting wasn’t much in His way.”

This was such a very long speech for David to make, that when it was done he seemed almost afraid of his own boldness; but Bertie made no answer, only stood quite still, looking dreamily out over the water.

After a long silence David took courage and spoke again.

“I don’t see as He could forget thee,” he said, with a certain finality in his tone that was comforting in its assurance,— “specially when thee’s so much down by the sea here. He must see thee when He looks down to make the waves go back.”

Bertie looked up into the sunny sky, and a little smile broke over his face.

"I didn't think of that," he said, slowly. "I wonder if He does."

"I'm main sure He must," answered David, with an increase of confidence. "I ain't no scholar, but I know teacher said as them words on my card were for everybody as would take un. Teacher knows all about it; I know she'd tell you as He doesn't ever forget, and I can kind of understand it too, because He don't forget the sea, you know."

Bertie's face looked a little less sad, though still very grave and thoughtful. He seemed to have a purpose in his mind, which he proceeded to confide to David.

"When will it be high tide, David?"

"In half an hour about."

"Then I'll wait for it," said Bertie. "Let's sit down just above high-water mark."

David obeyed readily, and when they were seated upon the loose dry sand he looked at his little companion as if awaiting instructions.

Bertie rested his chin in his hand, in one of his favorite attitudes, and when he spoke it was with great deliberation.

"You're sure it's God who makes the tide turn, David?"

"Yes, quite sure. Mother says so, and father and teacher and everybody. Besides nobody else *couldn't* do it."

"No," answered Bertie; "there was a king once who tried to—no, let me think how it was. His servants told him he could, because he was such a great king; but he knew he couldn't, and did not like the people to say such things. So he came down and sat on the sand one day when the tide was coming in, and told it to go back, and of course it wouldn't; and the silly men who had pretended to think the sea would obey him were made ashamed of themselves. Somebody told me the story once—it was a lady—we were sitting in a big room with red curtains, by a fire—"

Bertie stopped suddenly; the flash had gone and left him in darkness; he could see nothing more. David had listened with deep attention.

“That’s a nice story,” he said, adding, after a moment’s pause, “I knew there wasn’t nobody but God as could stop the sea.”

Bertie gave himself a little shake and brought himself back to the present.

“Do you think God looks down out of heaven every time to send it back?”

“I think He must. It do all go so regular like; don’t see how it could if He didn’t look after it well.”

Bertie turned his answer over, and seemed convinced.

“Then, if we go on sitting here, He can’t help seeing us too?”

“No, I don’t see as He can.”

“Very well,” said Bertie, with an odd look of purpose on his face, “we’ll sit and wait. You tell me when it’s high tide.”

Upon that level shore each wave seemed to advance upon the last, and the distance between high and low-water mark was very great. As a natural consequence, the turn of the tide was more easily defined along that coast than upon one more steep, and the practised eye of the habitual watcher could distinguish with considerable accuracy the moment at which the tide might be fairly said to “be on the turn.”

The children sat very silent during the space of time that elapsed before this turn should occur. David’s face had caught some of the awe from Bertie’s, and he felt as if an impending crisis were approaching with the advancing waves.

At length David said, in a low voice,—

“It be turning now.”

And Bertie suddenly rose and knelt down, baring his head as he did so, whilst David copied every movement and clasped his hands together, as he saw his little companion do.

Side by side upon the warm sand the two children knelt for many long minutes. A look of awe was upon Bertie’s face. He felt, as he saw the advancing waves gradually begin to retire, as if the great God of heaven were very near to them, looking down from His holy place, bidding the

great ocean keep its appointed limits. Surely He must see the two little children kneeling before Him; and surely He would listen to their prayers.

Bertie's prayer took no articulate form. He could not put into words the strange longing that was in his mind—a longing to be remembered, helped, comforted—not to be left so utterly alone. It was more a cry than a prayer that arose from his heart, and yet he felt that he had been heard.

He knelt for many minutes beside the receding waves, and when he rose his face wore a look of calmness and serenity very different from its troubled expression half an hour before.

“David,” he said, “I do think God was very near us then. I think He heard.”

“Ay, ay, He'd be sure to hear thee. What did thee say?”

“I don't quite know,” answered Bertie, gravely; “but I'm sure God understood.”

“I be sure too,” returned David, with absolute confidence.

“I should like to come here every day when the tide turns,” said Bertie.

“I wish thee would. I'd always be here too, I would.”

Bertie pondered for a few moments.

“I'll come as often as I can,” he said; “but I can't be sure of coming every day at the right time. If I'm not here, David, will you do just as we did alone, and ask Him not to forget us ever, and to let me find out some day the things I can't remember? I don't want to be impatient; I know He knows best; but I do want to remember some day.”

“And I'm sure He'll help thee some day,” answered David, with some fervor. “I'll ask Him every day for thee, that I will; and He'll be sure to answer when He's ready. All good folks say so, and they must know best. I'll come here every day when the tide turns, and then He's sure to see me.”

So Bertie went away comforted, a sweet sense of fatherly love and protection seeming to overshadow him. It might be true enough that nobody wanted him, that he was of no use to anybody, but perhaps, if he tried to love and trust God more, to be “strong and of good courage,” to have faith in Him and wait quietly for His will to be done—perhaps then God would

help him to be of some little use, to win some of the human love he felt to be lacking in his life, perhaps he might be able to fill the blank of which at times he was so painfully conscious.

When he went down to dessert with the Squire that evening, he was quite bright and conversational, and the Squire unbent as the child chatted away to him, and was betrayed into telling some stories of his own boyhood, a thing which he had not done for fifteen long years.

Bertie was immensely interested, and wanted them all told over again, after the fashion of childhood. As he went to bed that night, he detailed them with great accuracy to Mrs. Pritchard, who nodded her head several times and uttered oracular speeches to herself afterwards.

Bertie, like many children, awoke early in the morning, and hated lying in bed awake. The sunshine seemed to tempt him out into the glad world of spring-time, and he was generally out and about by six o'clock. No objection was made to his morning rambles, and some of his happiest hours were spent among the dewy trees and flowers of garden or park.

No adventure had ever befallen him so far during his early walk; but to-day it was destined to be more eventful than usual.

He was wandering through a secluded shrubbery path, when he suddenly heard a quick rustle amid the laurels just around the next corner, and quite expected to see either a gardener at work, or else one of the dogs hunting amid the bushes. Nothing less than a large animal could have made so much noise, yet when he turned the corner not a sign of any living thing was to be seen.

Bertie looked about him rather puzzled. He wondered if he had made a mistake; but he was quite sure he had heard the noise, and he began to peer about in curious fashion for the cause of it.

Suddenly his eyes encountered the laughing glance of another pair of very blue ones. Bertie quite jumped as this happened, and he pushed aside the wet laurel leaves to obtain a better view of the intruder. For one moment he had fancied it was Queenie's face, but he saw directly that it was a boy who had forced his way into the midst of the laurel hedge, and had tried to conceal himself there. Yet the boy did not appear in the least abashed at

being caught. The merry, laughing look upon his face disarmed Bertie at once.

“You will get very wet in there,” he remarked, by way of a beginning.

“I can’t be wetter than I am; I’m about drenched,” was the cheerful answer.

“Why don’t you come out, then, and get dried?”

“Because I’m a fugitive—in mortal peril of my life!” answered the boy, his whole face beaming with fun. “You can’t think what a funk I was in when I heard you coming.”

Bertie was rather puzzled.

“I shan’t hurt you,” he said.

“Nor betray me?”

“No, of course not. I don’t know what you mean.”

Phil laughed merrily.

“Well, then, I’ll come out, and chance the rest. It’s jolly uncomfortable in there;” and the boy pushed his way out amid fresh showers of dew, and stood before Bertie all wet and dripping, his curly hair bright with sparkling drops, his merry eyes brimful of fun.

The little boy stared at him in great surprise.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“I’ve told you once—a fugitive, a despairing and desperate character—so beware! And pray who are you, if I may make so bold?”

The child hesitated a moment.

“I’m Bertie,” he said, slowly.

“Bertie what?”

He shook his head.

“That’s all—only Bertie. I live with the Squire now.”

“You do, do you? You’re a little chap anyhow. I wonder who you are?”

“I don’t know myself,” answered Bertie, with great gravity; “and nobody else knows either. But I know who you are; you must be Queenie’s brother, you are so like her.”

Phil’s face put on a look of horror.

“Gracious goodness! I am betrayed! What will become of me now?”

Bertie was extremely puzzled; but he had a composed manner that concealed his bewilderment very well.

“What do you mean, and what are you doing here? I wish you’d tell me.”

Phil loved to talk better than almost anything else in the world, and he gladly plunged headlong into his tale. Bertie did not understand it all; but he understood enough to be immensely interested and to give Phil all the encouragement necessary to make him exceedingly diffuse and circumstantial. Only towards the close did Bertie’s face grow grave.

“But why don’t you go and tell them you’ve run away? Why does only Queenie know?”

“Oh, they know I’ve run away, only they don’t know where I am.”

“Why don’t you tell them?”

Phil explained his reason; but Bertie shook his head gravely.

“It looks as if you were afraid,” he said.

“Afraid of what?”

“Of being scolded or punished. Are you afraid?”

Phil’s face flushed.

“Afraid indeed! If you’d seen all the lickings I’ve had at school, you wouldn’t think I was.”

“Well, it *looks* as if you were then,” persisted Bertie, who knew his own mind when it was once made up.

Phil looked a little vexed; though it was not in his nature to be easily put out.

“That’s all rubbish! I only hide for the fun of it. You don’t suppose I’d funk anything really?”

“I didn’t think so till just now. I was thinking how brave you were.”

Phil was mollified by the compliment.

“Well, young un, you’re a pretty cool hand, I must say. Pray, what do you think I’d better do, under the circumstances?”

“I’d go straight off to your father and mother and tell them all about it,” answered Bertie, gravely. “I don’t think they *could* be very angry,—it was so funny, you know, especially about the monkey and his hat. I should say I didn’t want to go back to school any more at Dr. Steele’s, and I expect they’ll let you stop at home with Queenie, and they’ll see you’re not ashamed or afraid. If you hide here, perhaps somebody will find you, and then everybody will think you were afraid. I like people to be strong and of a good courage, and speak the truth always,—”

Bertie stopped suddenly. It seemed to him as if he were repeating words he had heard somebody say long ago, and the feeling puzzled him and made him stop short.

Phil was standing quite still now, thinking more than he often did. Thoughtlessness was his failing, and he was often and often led away by his high spirits; but he was not in the very least a naturally deceitful boy. Indeed, he had never for a moment considered that there was any deceit or cowardice in hiding away from his parents until it pleased him to show himself.

When, however, Bertie had put the idea into his head, he began to see that other people might not view his conduct in quite the same light that he did. It was possible even that there might be some truth in the little boy’s view of the case.

“Queenie will be awfully sold if I don’t keep to it,” he remarked, ruefully, for the idea was also very attractive to himself. “She thought it was the best fun in the world.”

Bertie said nothing. He was beginning to feel rather shy at having been so ready with his advice to the elder boy—the hero of such an adventure.

At last the silence was broken by Phil, who burst out laughing.

“After all, youngster, I believe you are right. Perhaps it would be rather mean and shabby to let them have all the bother of trying to hunt me down

when I'm here all the time. Mother would be in a fright, perhaps, and father might, too—though it isn't his way. Perhaps I'd best show myself, and tell the whole tale, as you say. I should not like anybody to think I hid away because I was afraid or ashamed, for I'm not."

And Phil threw back his head and looked for a moment very like his father; so much so that Bertie admired him very much.

"Well, that's settled then," remarked Phil, after a pause. "I only hope Queenie won't be in a great way about it. She can be very cross when she is put out, as I daresay you know. I wonder what time it is. My father and mother are never down before nine o'clock at earliest."

"It's a little past seven," said Bertie; "I heard the clock strike just now."

"Well, I can't show myself till I can go to father straight. I must loaf about out of sight somewhere for the next hour or two; but I'm getting jolly hungry, I know."

"Come and have some breakfast with me," said Bertie, hospitably. "Mrs. Pritchard always gets me mine about half-past seven when I've been out—which is most mornings."

Phil's eyes lighted with satisfaction.

"Do you think the Squire would mind?"

"No, I don't think he would a bit. He's very kind always."

"Why, so he is. I think I'll come. I should like some breakfast awfully."

Mrs. Pritchard knew "Master Phil" well by sight; and, though surprised at his sudden appearance, received him hospitably enough, and added a dish of fried bacon to Bertie's simple meal, which was greatly enjoyed by both boys.

Whilst they sat at breakfast, the Squire happened to look in, as he sometimes did when Bertie was at his meals. Phil of course had to explain his presence there, which he did with so much spirit and boyish fun, that, although the Squire drew his thick eyebrows together and shook his head, he could not help giving vent to a gruff laugh; and when the part played by the monkey was told, Bertie could not restrain his delight, but broke into such a laugh as had not been heard from him since his arrival.

“And so Bertie persuaded you to give up your plan and speak out, did he?” quoth the Squire, when Phil had got to the end of his tale.

“Yes, sir,” answered Phil. “I’d never thought it could be wrong before, or cowardly, or anything like that; I only meant it for fun; but I guess the little chap is right.”

The Squire’s hand rested for a moment upon Bertie’s shoulder.

“What made you think of all that, my boy?” he asked.

Bertie got very red.

“I didn’t want him to be afraid,” he said; “I liked him, and I wanted him to tell the truth and not mind being punished.”

The Squire was not a man of many words, and he soon left the boys to themselves, but Bertie felt by a sort of instinct that he had pleased the old man by the part he had taken, and that made him feel glad and happy.

He enjoyed his hour’s talk with Phil, though he hardly spoke a word, for the schoolboy was a tremendous talker, and delighted to find so attentive a listener. To be sure, Bertie was only quite a little boy, but then he had proved that he had some sense and some pluck in him, and Phil was always ready to believe the best and not the worst of everybody he came across.

At nine o’clock he jumped up and said he must go, as his parents would be having breakfast soon. He promised to come back later and tell Bertie how he had fared, and he went off whistling gaily.

Phil possessed an amount of quiet assurance that stood him in good stead on occasions such as the present. If he felt any trepidation or anxiety as to his reception, he did not show it in the least, as he strolled into the dining-room with his hands in his pockets, and he confronted his astonished parents with his broadest and sunniest smile.

Lady Arbuthnot uttered a little shriek and fell back in her chair speechless; Sir Walter looked quickly up from his paper and drew his brows together darkly.

“And pray what is the meaning of all this, sir?” he asked, with his severest manner. “What do you mean by this disgraceful conduct?” and he

laid his hand upon an open letter that lay beside his plate. Phil knew that the hand-writing was that of Dr. Steele.

“I’ve come home,” he answered, with a smile that was almost irresistible; “I really couldn’t stand it any longer, so I came home; and now, you know, they won’t have me back. You can’t think how jolly I feel.”

“Keep your impudence to yourself, Philip,” returned his father, with another frown. “A nice thing for a son of mine to be expelled from his school for gross misconduct!”

“I didn’t wait for that; I expelled myself,” answered Phil. “Please may I have some pigeon pie? I’ve been half starved ever since I left home. You can’t think what a lot of boys have come to old Steele’s lately, father; if you knew, I know you would not like to have *your* son there. That’s one reason why I decided to go, and, of course, when my mind was made up, I had to make the most of the occasion; such an opportunity might not occur again, you know. Mother dear, please let me have some coffee; nobody in the world can make coffee like you.”

And Phil spoke with such innocent sweetness, and drew up his chair with such a complete air of being master of the situation, that Sir Walter suddenly exploded into a laugh.

That laugh told Phil that he had won the day. He always knew—the rascal—that he held a soft place in his father’s heart, and he had presumed upon this when he had resolved upon quitting his school with flying colors.

“You know, father,” he explained, with inimitable gravity, “I really want a rest before going to Eton. I have overworked my brain, I think, and I am certain it will be a great thing for me to have a long holiday before I begin work again. And then, you know, it will be such an advantage to Queenie to have me at home. She gets sadly spoiled in term-time, with being the only child at home and having no brothers to keep her in order. You see, I have taken a very comprehensive view of the situation, and have thought of every one before myself.”

“I see that you are the coolest and most impudent rascal that ever trod shoe-leather,” retorted his father, with a sudden laugh. “Now, be off with you to your own premises; and mind, if I keep you at home, that you behave yourself. A nice state of things, to be sure! You deserve the best thrashing

you ever had in your life. Now, be off sharp; and I must go and answer this precious missive as best I can. What a trouble boys are, to be sure!”

CHAPTER IX.

QUEENIE'S IDEAS.



QUEENIE had slept but restlessly upon the night following Phil's unexpected return. She had been much excited by his sudden appearance, and still more by the weighty sense of importance imposed upon her by the necessity of keeping the secret.

Queenie loved a romance and a mystery better than anything in the world besides; and the task of keeping Phil hidden away for several days, and of secretly supplying him with food and all other necessities, seemed to be the most delightful and romantic occupation that could possibly be desired.

She made many plans and revolved many ideas in her busy little brain as she lay awake in bed that night.

Where was Phil to hide? Where would he be safest? Where could he be certain of remaining undiscovered, and yet near enough for her to have easy access to his hiding-place and be able to visit him at will without attracting attention or suspicion by doing so?

For a long time this problem remained unsolved; but at last a gleam of inspiration burst upon her.

"The ruin!" she cried, speaking aloud in her excitement, though luckily there was no one near enough to hear. "The ruin, of course!—down in the underground part. He will never be seen there, and I can carry him food whenever I like. I often play in the ruin. Nurse will never think anything about it if I go there every day."

“The ruin” was the remains of an old tower that might once have been a large building, but of which only a very small portion now remained.

Children always seem oddly attracted by anything in the way of a tumble-down building, and all the young Arbuthnots were much delighted with their ruin. Queenie thought it would be a lovely place to hide Phil in, never considering in her youthful inexperience how exceedingly cold and damp and uncomfortable would be the accommodation afforded by the ancient cellar of the ruined habitation.

When she had settled all the details of her plan with great exactness, she settled herself to sleep, and awoke in the morning brimful of zeal and energy, longing for their satisfactory accomplishment.

At breakfast-time she watched her opportunity, and conveyed supplies from the table to her own private cupboard, and restricted her own share of the delicacies offered to the minimum, in order that Phil should have plenty. Queenie’s nursery breakfast was a less simple affair than Bertie’s, and she was able to set aside sufficient good things to feel quite comfortable as to Phil’s morning repast.

Queenie did not go out till ten o’clock, as she always had to practise her music and do some reading with her nurse between nine and ten. To-day she found the task sadly irksome. She was so inattentive that nurse had to speak to her again and again; and as for the tiresome scales, they seemed as if they could not go right this morning, and Queenie got so cross that she fairly belabored the poor old piano with two angry little fists, making it give out the most discordant sounds.

“Really, Miss Queenie,” said nurse, looking up from her work in surprise, “I cannot think what has come to you to-day.”

But there was no time to say more, or for Queenie to answer, for outside the door was heard the sound of scampering steps—steps that could belong to no one but a boy, and Queenie turned quite pale and jumped off the music-stool with a little cry.

Next moment the door was burst open, and in rushed Phil like a whirlwind.

“Phil!” cried Queenie, with accents of something like despair,—“Phil, how could you? Don’t you know nurse is always here now?”

But Phil had caught her round the waist, and was executing one of his impromptu war-dances.

“It’s all right, Queenie, all right! I’ve shown up and reported myself, and made it up with everybody; and father says you may have a holiday in honor of my triumphant return; so get your hat and come along. I’m dying to go all over the place. I’ve not seen anything yet.”

Queenie was so utterly astonished by the turn matters had taken, and by the overturning of all her cherished and carefully-laid plans, that she remained quite silent, and let her nurse put on her out-door things without uttering a single word. To tell the truth, Queenie was not quite pleased at Phil’s conduct. She felt that he ought to have consulted her before changing his mind so entirely, and she was a good deal disappointed at being robbed of her share of the romantic drama she had planned.

Phil, however, was in such capital spirits that he was a long time in observing Queenie’s displeasure, and when he did find out the cause of her annoyance, he detailed to her his morning’s adventure and the arguments Bertie had brought forward against the proposed scheme.

But when Queenie heard that Bertie’s counsel had been, as it were, preferred before her own, she felt even more annoyed than she had done before, and tossed her little head with her grandest air.

“So Bertie is to be your lord and master, is he?” she asked, scornfully. “Well, I did think you had more spirit than *that*.”

Phil laughed good-humoredly.

“He’s a nice little chap enough; and I’m glad I took his advice now. It would have been jolly dull and uncomfortable hiding away, and perhaps father would have been more angry than he is now. He’d most likely have thought I was afraid, as Bertie said, and that would quite have spoiled it.”

“You would not have been a bit dull or uncomfortable. I should have hidden you in the ruin, and brought you everything you wanted, and stayed with you ever so long. It would have been just like a game in history; and now you’ve gone and spoilt everything, and it’s all Bertie’s fault.”

“Well, this is much jollier anyhow,” cried Phil, who was of a more practical turn than his little sister.

“Don’t you be cross, Queenie; that will spoil everything. Tell me who Bertie is. I can’t think where he’s come from, and he doesn’t seem to know himself.”

Queenie did not wish to quarrel with Phil, of whom she was very fond; but she registered a mental vow to let Bertie know what she thought of *him*, and to make him suffer for having been the cause of her disappointment.

Phil’s question was answered in very scornful tones.

“Who is Bertie? I’m sure I don’t know, nor anybody else. He was washed ashore one day, and lived at the Wickhams’ cottage for ever so many days. David is his great friend, so I suppose he was a common boy himself once. But the Squire has adopted him, and now he gives himself airs, and sets up for being a gentleman. I don’t think much of him. I shan’t play with him any more.”

Phil laughed. He was always amused when Queenie put on her airs, and rather admired her for it, unless they were directed against himself. However, he made her tell him all she knew about Bertie, and found the curious story very interesting.

“Poor little chap!” he said, kindly; “it must be horrid to forget everything like that. He’s a nice little fellow. I shall go and see him, and tell him how I got on with my father. He’ll like to know that I didn’t get much scolded. Will you come too?”

Queenie was not best pleased at this arrangement, but she preferred to go rather than to be left behind, and so they climbed the fence together and went boldly up to the front door to inquire for Bertie.

Bertie, however, was not at home. He had gone down to the shore, Pritchard thought, and Phil thought he should like to go to the shore too.

“He’s gone to see his precious David, I suppose,” said Queenie, disdainfully. “He likes him better than he likes anybody else, and I don’t admire his taste.”

“Why not?” asked Phil, who did not share his sister’s exclusive views.

“David is a fisherman’s son,” said the little lady, with some scorn.

“Well, he’s none the worse for that, I suppose.”

“I don’t know what you call the worse. I know *I* shouldn’t care to play with him.”

“Well, I don’t mind,” answered Phil. “I like playing with any boys, if they’re jolly and all that; but of course you needn’t if you don’t like.”

Queenie felt rather angry with Phil; but she did not say anything. She began to wonder if after all it would be so very nice having him at home all the summer. He had a way of unconsciously snubbing her that she did not care for at all.

When they reached the sandhills they saw the two boys sitting on the shore, as they often did, not talking much, but enjoying the feeling of being together. Phil rushed forward with a whoop and a bound, and Bertie sprang up to ask him all about what had passed; and as soon as the story was told a regular game of play ensued between the boys, which brought the light to Bertie’s eyes and the color to his cheeks, and seemed at once to transform him into a new being.

Queenie stood a little apart, longing to join in the fun, but restrained by two powerful reasons: first, she thought it beneath her dignity to condescend to play with a poor little boy like David; and, in the second, she did not mean to speak to Bertie until she had shown her displeasure at his conduct in daring to advise Phil to a course of action that had robbed her of much anticipated fun.

Bertie grew tired of the game before the elder boys, who were stronger than he; and then he came and stood by Queenie, who looked, as he thought, rather dull. Queenie did not look at him or speak to him; but Bertie was very straightforward and simple-minded, and did not in the least know that he was in the little lady’s black books.

“Why don’t you play too?” he asked.

“Why should I?”

“I thought you liked playing. You said yesterday you were always wishing you had some boys to play with.”

Queenie’s chin went up into the air.

“*Some* boys,” she answered, grandly. “I did not say *any* boys.”

Bertie was a little puzzled by this rather fine distinction.

“Are we *any* boys?” he asked.

“Rather like it, I think,” answered Queenie, a little put out by Bertie’s simplicity.

“You wanted to play with me yesterday,” remarked Bertie. “I suppose you are rather changeable, aren’t you?”

Queenie looked exceedingly angry.

“I suppose you are a very impertinent little boy, and don’t know your manners.”

Bertie saw now that Queenie was angry. He began to think she was not quite so nice as he had once thought. He judged it wise to change the subject.

“Aren’t you very glad Phil has come home? I think he is *such* a nice boy!”

This praise of her favorite brother soothed Queenie’s ruffled feelings a little. Moreover, she was finding it a little dull to be so cross. She felt that she was spoiling her own fun, without being half as dignified as she could wish.

“Yes, he is a very nice boy,” she answered, with more warmth; “only I think it is a great pity he did not hide away as we intended. It would have been great fun; and I can’t think why you came and spoiled it all.”

Bertie looked a little shy, but he did not offer any excuse for his conduct.

This silence encouraged Queenie, who continued, with judicial severity,

“I think you were a very interfering little boy.”

Bertie was silent for some time, and then he said, slowly,—

“I didn’t mean to interfere. I only wanted him to go on being brave.”

“I should think he wouldn’t want *you* to teach him that.”

“It didn’t sound very brave to hide away and make everybody frightened and miserable. You would have been very unhappy if you had not known

where he was, and so would other people. I don't think it brave to frighten people and make them unhappy just because it's fun."

Queenie made no reply. She was not angry, yet she rather felt as if she ought to be.

"What made you think of all that, Bertie?"

"I don't know. It seemed to come into my head. I suppose somebody told me once."

"Are you brave?" asked Queenie, suddenly.

Bertie shook his head gravely.

"I don't know. I want to be; but I don't know if I am. I try."

"How do you try?"

The color rose in the child's face, and he turned his head a little away whilst he made his answer.

"I try not to fret and be unhappy because—because I haven't any home or name or anything. I try to love God, and ask Him to make things come right when He thinks best. I want to be good, and not to be impatient or ungrateful or naughty. I can't say it properly; but I do try."

Bertie stopped short. He had not made his meaning at all clear, yet he knew himself what he had in his mind.

Queenie was very much surprised at being talked to so seriously. She had never in her life been troubled by thoughts such as these. It seemed to her rather awful and unnatural.

"Bertie," she said, rather severely, "are you saying all that because you think it sounds fine?"

He looked very much surprised.

"All what?"

"Why, all that about God. You can't really care about Him, you know."

Bertie was silent. He knew that he did love God, and did believe that He was taking care of him; but he did not in the least know how to say it all to Queenie.

“Yes, I do,” he answered, after a long pause.

“How? I don’t understand.”

Bertie was silent again, and then said, slowly,—

“Perhaps, if you’d got nobody belonging to you, you would understand. I can’t explain; only it just seems as if everything else had gone but God. He is there always—and I’ve nobody now but Him.”

Bertie’s lips quivered, and Queenie was touched.

“Never mind, Bertie,” she said, quickly; “it will all come right some day; and I’ll never tease you or be cross any more.”

A smile stole over Bertie’s face.

“That will be nice,” he said.

“And Phil is never cross. We’ll both help you to be happy. Only you must not be *too* good, you know, or we shall be frightened of you.”

Bertie’s face was bright again now. He did not quite understand Queenie’s words, but he saw that she was friendly again.

“You shall come to see us soon,” she said. “Have you any lessons to do?”

“No; the doctor says I mustn’t do any yet; but I read in the Squire’s study sometimes.”

“I wish I mightn’t do any either,” said Queenie, enviously; “but I don’t suppose I shall do much, now Phil is at home, so we shall have plenty of time to play together.”

Here Phil came rushing up, full of plans for future fun. David had said that his father’s boat would soon be back now, and that then they could go out rowing or sailing together. David knew all the creeks and islands along the coast, the cliffs where the sea-gulls bred, and all the places where fun was to be obtained.

Phil was utterly and entirely delighted, and as he went home he confided to Queenie that running away from school was the best thing in the world.

CHAPTER X.

BERTIE'S NEW FRIENDS.



THE friendship between the children in the two adjoining houses, begun under rather exceptional circumstances, led to a considerable degree of intimacy as the summer wore on.

The Squire encouraged the friendship, as likely to be of advantage to Bertie. Sir Walter Arbuthnot had no objection to it, and his wife soon became convinced that her children could take no harm from associating with the little waif.

So Bertie went as often as he chose to the other house, and his nurseries were always open to his new friends, so that hardly a day passed without a meeting at one place or the other.

Bertie was fond of Phil, whose constant flow of high spirits and imperturbable good humor made him a favorite everywhere; but Queenie was not always quite so easy to get on with, and although she fascinated him by her imperious ways, and made him do her bidding submissively and gladly, yet he was not sure that he was very fond of her always.

Queenie was undeniably disobedient. Phil often broke rules and disregarded his parents' commands; but then, with him this was the result rather of thoughtlessness than of downright, deliberate disobedience. I do not say that he would always deny himself a wish because he remembered just in the midst of his fun that its attainment would necessitate a breach of rule. Phil was lax in his ideas on such subjects, as are many boys of his age; but he was not in the least deceitful, and he would never lay plans and plot and scheme to evade detection, as his little sister often did; and if reminded

at the outset that what he meditated doing involved disobedience, he would often abandon the idea of his own accord.

Queenie, however, loved her own way, and hated control too much to be as amenable. She had a deeply-rooted belief that rules were only made in order to be broken, and that, so long as she could break them without detection, it was all quite right and fair. She had been spoiled from her babyhood, and it was perhaps no great wonder that she had come to look upon herself as a person of such great importance that she could hardly do wrong; still, from some cause or another, this was the view she held, and it led her into many faults, of which not the least was disobedience.

Bertie, who, without quite knowing why, was always very determined not to disobey anybody who had the right to command him, noticed this failing of Queenie's very much, and it troubled him a good deal, but he had not spoken of it, for he knew now by experience that the little lady was very intolerant of criticism, and that to offer it would be pretty sure to provoke a quarrel.

The Squire's rules were few; but they were scrupulously obeyed by Bertie. It is true he had forced his way into the library again and again after having been told not to go there without leave; but that had seemed to be with him a matter rather of instinct than a voluntary act. The library was the one place where, from the first moment, he had seemed at home, and his haunting of the room appeared to be something rather outside of his own will.

In other matters Bertie was perfectly docile and obedient. Mrs. Pritchard was loud in his praises, and Queenie many times held him up to rather merciless ridicule, because he insisted on returning home at the time he had been told, or declined to share in some escapade because he thought the Squire would not approve of it. But Bertie, in spite of his quiet ways and dislike to anything like a quarrel, could be firm enough when he chose, and Queenie soon learned to know that he could "hold his own" against her, as Phil called it, if he meant to do so.

This often annoyed the little girl at the moment; but it made her respect Bertie the more in her heart, and the children were very good friends, in spite of their little differences, and the companionship of playmates of his own age and station was of undoubted advantage to the lonely boy.

Still, it may be doubted whether Bertie's happiest hours were not those spent by him alone with David wandering over the sandhills, or watching with a sense of reverent expectancy for the daily turning of the tide. All the child's deeper thoughts were locked away in his own breast when he was playing with Queenie and Phil; but they were brought out quite naturally when David and he were alone together, and many earnest talks were held by the margin of the wide-flowing sea, and many prayers went up from two faithful, patient little hearts, that the great loving Father above, who never forgot to preserve the fisherman's cottage from danger, would look down and "remember Bertie again."

For as the weeks rolled silently away, it seemed as if Bertie would never "remember himself." His health improved gradually, and he was active and merry, though always in a quiet way; but no gleam from the past ever lighted up his mind; he was still as ignorant of his real name and state in life as he had been when he lay unconscious in the fisherman's cottage, and the vague impressions that used sometimes to flit across his brain were growing now more rare and more faint.

Dr. Lighton sometimes shook his head and looked disturbed as he heard from time to time of the state of the case. One day he began a sort of half apology to the Squire for having, so to speak, imposed upon him the charge of the child; but he was not allowed to go far in his speech.

"Don't name it, Lighton, I beg you. It is a matter of no moment to me. The child is welcome to his food and shelter. He is no trouble to me, and the servants seem to enjoy having him."

"Well, but there is the future to consider," said Dr. Lighton. "You are very generous and kind, but if this oblivion of the past continues, what of the future?"

The Squire waved his hand as if to dismiss the subject.

"The future, I find, generally manages to take care of itself. I have no doubt he will eventually remember something by which we can identify him; and if not, why, I must do what I can; I am ready to take my chance."

"You are very good," said the young doctor. "I had no idea of letting you in for anything so serious."

The Squire would not let him say more.

“The house is big enough for us both,” he said, rather curtly, “and that is all that matters. He is welcome to stay till he is claimed.”

So Bertie stayed on in the unquestioning confidence of childhood, and at times he would almost forget that all his life had not been spent at the old Manor House.

For the most part Bertie was happy enough in the society of little companions not much older than himself; but he had his own troubles to bear, as all of us have, and one of these was of a rather curious nature.

The boating excursions to which Phil had so eagerly looked forward became in due course a reality. The fisherman, David’s father, and his two big sons, returned from their long excursion in search of herrings, and they were quite ready to take out parties of pleasure in their large boat, or to let the little one to the boys to row themselves along the coast, provided David were of the party.

Bertie had looked forward as impatiently as anybody for the time to come when they could go out sailing or rowing over the sea he loved so well; and yet, when the day came, and he found himself in the boat, gliding over the shining water, he was seized with a horrible and unconquerable sense of terror; his agitation became so great that the boat had to be put back to land, so that he could be put ashore and no determination on his own part, or persuasions or ridicule from others, ever induced him to repeat the experiment. Again and again he made up his mind that it was all nonsense, and that he *would* conquer himself, and again and again the first sight of the boat would bring back all the nameless horrors which he could neither understand nor drive away. The very thought of trusting himself to those frail timbers was agony to him, and nothing could bring him to the point of entering the boat again.

Phil and Queenie laughed at him, and David was quite distressed that he should miss all the pleasant hours the rest spent upon the water; but they were all kind each in a different way, and Bertie was allowed to please himself in peace until the other big brothers came from school, and with them his troubles began.

Walter, Bernard, and Ralph Arbuthnot were strong lads, high-spirited, full of fun and mischief, and quite determined, like most boys fresh from

school, to get all the fun out of the holidays that they possibly could. They were not hard-hearted or unkindly boys, but they loved to tease and to play tricks on anybody who gave them the chance, and they found in little Bertie a sort of victim whom they sadly plagued, without having any idea of the pain they inflicted upon him.

He took it all so quietly that they fancied he did not feel it. When they laughed at him for being nameless and homeless, a sort of “outcast” and “vagabond,” he never made any reply, and they had no notion that their taunts cut into his very heart and brought back all that sense of misery and desolation that he had gradually been outgrowing with time.

They liked the little boy in reality, although he was so different from themselves that they could not help poking fun at him. They had no wish to be unkind, but they did not understand him in the least, and had no idea that he was not as careless and “thick-skinned” as themselves.

It was some time before they discovered Bertie’s horror of the water. The arrival of a very favorite uncle soon after the commencement of the holidays took up a great deal of their time and attention; and so long as Uncle Fred was available to play tennis or cricket or take long walks or rides with them, they wanted nothing else, and the boating was given up for a season.

Mr. Frederick Arbuthnot was always very kind to Bertie whenever the child appeared, but the little boy rather shunned the Court just now, for he dreaded the banter of the bigger boys, and he fancied that he was not wanted by any one.

He returned to his old pastime of wandering over the sandhills alone or with David; but a sort of melancholy had come over him, and he often felt unspeakably lonely and desolate. The only thing that seemed to do him any good was to repeat again and again the words of unchanging promise that he had learned from David’s card that Sunday long ago.

One day, as the two boys were sitting together under the shadow of the boat, they heard the sound of trampling footsteps and many voices, and the whole party from the big house rushed down to the shore and proceeded unceremoniously to lay hands upon the boat, ordering David to run and fetch oars and rudder whilst they launched the craft.

Bertie stood aside and watched them run the boat down to the water. He learned from Queenie that Uncle Fred was coming down shortly, and was going to take them a long sail or row, and she asked Bertie if he would not like to come too.

“You know we shall be *quite* safe with Uncle Fred. He was once a sailor himself.”

But Bertie shook his head with a troubled look. He would so much have liked to go, had it not been for his fears; but he dared not. He knew he should be miserable as soon as he felt himself upon the water.

Phil came up at the moment to make the same suggestion that Queenie had done, and the attention of the other boys was attracted, and they learned for the first time Bertie’s horror of the water.

“Why, that must never be allowed to go on!” cried Walter, with a twinkle in his eye. “Bertie will grow up a pitiful coward if we don’t take him in hand. Little boys who are afraid must get over their fears. Come along, Bertie, and get into that boat at once. I’ll guarantee you shall be safe.”

But Bertie shrank back, looking pale and scared.

“I don’t want to,” he said, quickly.

“Little boys can’t always do what they want,” quoth Bernard, sententiously; “we were brought up to believe that, if you weren’t. Don’t you be a fool, Bertie, or you’ll never be good for anything.”

“If you once get over the funks, you’ll enjoy it like anything,” urged Phil. “Don’t be silly, Bertie; they’ll make you do it, and you’d better go peaceable than not.”

Bertie was horribly frightened; an unreasoning panic had seized him; he made a rush to try and escape, but nothing could have been more fatal to his hopes than that. He was caught in two minutes, and the excitement of the chase and of his opposition made his captors absolutely determined now to work their will upon him. A very little is enough to rouse a boy’s instincts of tyranny, and to the Arbuthnots, who did not know what nerves were, Bertie’s cowardice seemed utterly despicable. Indeed, they firmly believed that they were doing him a real service in putting it down with a firm hand.

“Here he is!” cried Walter, who was holding the prisoner in an iron clasp. “This sort of thing won’t do, you know. Who has a piece of whip-cord?”

Two or three pieces were speedily produced, and the boys proceeded deliberately to tie Bertie’s hands and feet firmly together. His terrified struggles only served to strengthen their purpose and to draw the knots tighter, whilst the sight of his obvious fear convinced them that they were doing the best thing possible in teaching him how foolish it was.

Queenie and Phil took no part in the matter. They were rather sorry for Bertie, but both thought their own brothers perfectly right in their estimate of the case; and when Walter and Bernard took the captive up bodily, carried him down to the water’s edge, and deposited him in the boat, they could not help joining in the triumphant laugh that was raised, and they thought Bertie quite stupid and bad-tempered not to enjoy the joke himself.

Uncle Fred had not as yet appeared, and some instinct warned the boys that Bertie’s “lesson” had better be concluded before his arrival. David was just coming from the hut with his load, and the boys ran to meet him and took the oars from him, for they were not quite certain what he might do if Bertie appealed to him for help.

Bertie, however, lay quite still, his face as white as death, his eyes fixed with terrified intensity upon the dancing water that was ruffled to-day by a fresh breeze. When the boys pushed out into deep water, he only shivered convulsively, but did not utter a sound.

The big lads were rather disappointed. They expected more of a “scene,” and betrayed the nature of their true feelings by trying to add to the child’s silent yet visible terror; for, had they only been actuated by the wish to benefit him, they might surely have dispensed with any such unnecessary demonstration.

Queenie and Phil had remained on shore, and the big boys felt themselves entire masters of the situation.

“Can you swim, Bertie?” asked Walter.

The child shook his head, but said nothing.

“Because, you know, you should learn. It would help you better than anything to overcome your foolish terror. Now I’ve heard that there’s

nothing like being pitched into deep water at once to teach a fellow to swim, especially when he's small."

"To be sure that's the way!" cried Ralph. "I know I read in a book that little niggers were always taught that way. I don't believe it ever fails."

"We might try, any way," suggested Bernard, gravely; "and there's no time like the present. You see, if it should fail, no great harm would be done. People always come up three times before they drown, and we could catch hold of him when he came up if he could not manage to swim. It's a nice warm day, and I always think the sea is more buoyant when it's a little rough."

The boat was rocking very much with the combined roughness of the sea and the restlessness of the boys. Bertie could not hold by anything, for the whip-cord resisted his most violent efforts to free himself, and in his terror he fancied every moment that he should be rolled out into the green, terrible water. Of course there was not the least danger of this, but fear knows no laws, and the horror of his position was almost more than the child's nerves could stand. There was water, too, at the bottom of the boat, and the lapping of the waves against the sides made him certain that it leaked and that they would soon be swamped.

But the idea of being thrown overboard was the most awful of all, and he was firmly convinced that his tormentors were quite capable of doing what they proposed. So that when Ralph sprang towards him, making the boat lurch horribly, he was certain his last moment had come, and, uttering a stifled cry, he fell back senseless.

CHAPTER XI.

UNCLE FRED.



THE boys were frightened enough themselves now, and their only thought was to get to land as quickly as possible and find help for Bertie. They hardly knew whether they were most relieved or most alarmed to see that their uncle had now come down to the shore, and was standing with Queenie and Phil, waiting for the boat to come back.

They were glad he had come, because he would know what to do with Bertie; but they had an uneasy feeling that he would not approve their treatment of him, and their own consciences began to tell them that they had not acted well towards the helpless child.

But they had not much time for thinking or for planning excuses. Five minutes of hard rowing brought them to the shore, and Uncle Fred hailed them in his hearty way, and was waiting to help them to run the boat aground.

“Where’s Bertie?” cried Queenie. “Did he mind the water to-day?”

Walter’s face was very red.

“I think he’s fainted, or something. I never guessed he’d be scared like that.”

Uncle Fred looked searchingly at the speaker, and then, catching a glimpse of the huddled-up figure in the bow, he stooped down and lifted out the unconscious child.

Bertie's face was deadly pale, and quite rigid. His wrists were bleeding where the cord had cut into them.

David uttered a frightened cry; and Uncle Fred's face was very stern.

"What does all this mean?"

The boys were silent; and Queenie tried to make some explanation that should also be an exculpation; but as soon as her uncle had gleaned the bare facts of the case, he cut her short very unceremoniously.

"Go home, all of you! There will be no boating to-day. I have nothing to say to you now. Another time we must talk of your cowardly and cruel conduct. Go away now at once. You must not be in sight when the child recovers. Go! I am very much displeased with you all."

The boys and their sister moved slowly away in a shamefaced manner, very unlike their usual rattling pace. They heartily wished they had never indulged their teasing propensities to the extent of trying to give Bertie a lesson. Their own good feeling told them they had been wrong, and they were terribly vexed at having incurred Uncle Fred's displeasure. Queenie and Phil wished now that they had followed their first impulse, and interfered on Bertie's behalf; but they had been ashamed to do so at first, and now the mischief was done.

Meantime, Uncle Fred had cut the cords that bound Bertie, and had bathed his face with vinegar and water that David brought from the cottage. Very soon Bertie heaved a long, shuddering sigh, and slowly opened his eyes. He did not at first seem to know where he was or who was with him; but after Uncle Fred had spoken to him once or twice kindly, reassuring words, the child appeared to recover himself, and put out a small hand, saying questioningly,—

"Uncle Fred?"

The young man smiled at hearing himself so addressed, but he was pleased to be accepted on such terms.

"Yes, my little man, it is Uncle Fred; and if Uncle Fred had only been here a few minutes earlier, all this should not have happened. I am very sorry those rascally nephews of mine have given you such a fright; but you

will be a brave boy, I know, and not think of it more than you can help, and you will be none the worse in the long run.”

Bertie remembered all about it now, and he began to tremble in spite of the kindly pressure of Uncle Fred’s arm round him.

“What is the matter, my child? You are not afraid now?”

“No—not exactly—if they won’t do it again.”

“I will take care they do not.”

“They said they would throw me in to teach me to swim,” and the child’s teeth chattered at the bare recollection.

Uncle Fred muttered some words that Bertie did not catch, and then said aloud,—

“Never you mind what they said. They shall never have another chance.”



Something in the tone warned Bertie that his tormentors were going to have rather a warm time of it, as they themselves would phrase it, from this favorite uncle of theirs.

He was sorry then, and looked up suddenly with appealing eyes.

“Please don’t be angry with them. I don’t think they understand. You see, it never happened to them.”

“What never happened to them?”

“Why, the water coming in—the cold, dreadful water—rising higher and higher—and the people crying and shouting and rushing to the boats;” and Bertie pressed his hands into his eyes, as if to shut out some terrible picture.

Uncle Fred remained long silent, hoping the child would go on, and perhaps utter words that might be a clue for his identification; but he said no more, and presently the young man asked,—

“And did all that happen to you, Bertie?”

“Ye—es—unless I dreamed it;” and Bertie slowly took his hands from his face and looked wonderingly up at Uncle Fred.

“And when did it happen? Just before you came here?”

But the child shook his head with a look of distress.

“I don’t know. I can’t remember. But in the boat it seemed just like it.”

Uncle Fred was much interested; but he judged it better to say no more on such an exciting topic. Bertie’s eyes glowed strangely, and his face, a little while ago so deadly pale was now flushed and hot, and the little frame still quivered with excitement, and perhaps with fear. It was evident that the child needed soothing, and he purposely turned the conversation into a channel that could not but be safe.

“Bertie,” he said, gravely, yet very kindly, “when you are frightened and troubled about anything, do you remember to ask God to take care of you and to make you brave and strong?”

Bertie looked up quickly and wistfully into the face above him.

“I do sometimes; I pray to God every day; but when I get frightened, I think I forget.”

“Do not forget again then, my child; for you will never pray to God in vain. He never forgets.”

Bertie’s glance was more touchingly appealing than before. It made Uncle Fred ask,—

“What is it, my child?”

Bertie’s lip quivered.

“I’ve been asking Him for weeks and weeks to let me remember who I am; and He never does. I do try to believe He will; but He does make it such a long time. Sometimes it seems as if He must have forgotten, though David says He doesn’t ever forget really; but I do think He must have forgotten me;” and then the child’s voice broke altogether, and he told amid his sobs how he and David tried to meet every day at the turn of the tide, to pray for something that they seemed to ask in vain.

Uncle Fred was much touched by the simply-told tale, and he put his arm round the little boy in quite a fatherly fashion, and let him sob out his trouble upon his shoulder, and then, when the child had grown somewhat calmer, he began to talk to him in a quiet and reassuring fashion.

“My dear little boy, you may be quite sure of one thing, and that is that God hears every word you say, and that not one of your prayers is lost; but you must be patient, and wait for the answer until He sends it. He knows when that will be, though you do not, and He knows best.”

“I know,” answered Bertie, quickly. “I always try to remember to say ‘Thy will be done’ too;” and the old look of perplexity stole over his face as he added, “Somebody told me to say that—it was when the water was coming in.”

“You do not know who told you?” asked Uncle Fred, gently.

Bertie shook his head and looked distressed. Already the recollection had passed like a flash, leaving only the blank behind.

“Whoever it was said quite right,” said Uncle Fred, gravely. “You know who it was that taught us that prayer, Bertie?”

“Jesus,” answered the child, softly.

“Yes, Jesus; and you must never forget how much He had to bear, and to bear for us. He prayed that the bitter cup might pass away if it were God’s will, and yet He drank it to the very dregs, and all for our sakes. He once thought God had forsaken Him; but do you think He had?”

Bertie shook his head.

“Oh no. He could not forget His Son, you know.”

“And He cannot forget one of His children either, Bertie. Are you one of His little ones, my child?”

Bertie looked up wistfully.

“I don’t know. I should like to be. How can I tell?”

“Have you ever gone to Him in His own way, and asked Him to make you His?”

“I don’t know,” answered Bertie, slowly. “I have prayed to Him; but I don’t know how to go to Him—I don’t know what His way is.”

“His way is the way of the cross,” answered Uncle Fred, very gravely; and then, seeing that the child did not understand his meaning, he added, “I mean, my child, that you must go to Jesus first, and the rest will follow of itself.”

“How can I go to Him?” asked the child.

“You can go in prayer, my little boy. You must take all your troubles with you and all your sins. Your burden of sins may not be very heavy, but I daresay it troubles you sometimes.”

Bertie hung his head.

“I feel very naughty sometimes. I get angry and cross, and I think naughty things, if I don’t say them; and then I am miserable, and it doesn’t seem as if God would care for me any more. Once or twice, when I’ve been frightened, I’ve said things that were not quite true. I know God can’t love me any more if I do that. I sometimes think that is why He won’t hear me when I pray to Him.”

Uncle Fred was too wise to make light of Bertie’s little recital of sins. He said gravely, and gently,—

“You will have to get those sins taken away, Bertie, before you can feel quite happy again, or before you will feel to be one of God’s little children.”

Bertie look up pleadingly.

“Will Jesus take them away if I ask Him?”

“Yes, Bertie, indeed He will. He is always waiting for us to come to Him with our sins. He can see our hearts. He knows when we are really sorry; and if we are, He washes away our sins in His precious blood, and make us worthy to call ourselves the sons of God.”

“But—but—”

“Well, my child, what is your difficulty?”

“I don’t quite know how to say it; but don’t you think He might not care to listen to anybody like me? He would love *you*—perhaps He likes grown-up people to come; but I’m only a little boy—and I don’t belong to anybody—and perhaps—”

“You belong to Jesus, Bertie,” was the gravely-spoken answer. “You belong to the dear Lord who died on the cross to save *you*. And can you not tell me who it was that said, ‘Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not?’ Is He likely after that to forbid them Himself?”

Bertie looked up with a sudden smile.

“He is very good, isn’t He? I should like to belong to Him always.”

“Yes, Bertie, go to Him, and leave your burden of sin at the foot of His cross. Be one of His own little children—His faithful little soldiers, ready to obey Him and to fight for him as well as to love and trust Him; and then, whatever happens to you here, whatever may be His will about you, whether He gives you back to your earthly parents or not, you will always have a loving Father in heaven, a Friend and Guardian in His Son, and in His good time, I trust, a Comforter and Counsellor in the good Spirit He will breathe into your heart. Whatever else may happen to you, Bertie, you will never be alone.”

The child could not understand all this speech, yet he entered into its spirit, and it comforted him strangely. He felt as if once he had known something of the grand truths now unfolded before him, as it were, for the

first time, and the sweet, undefined sense of familiarity brought them home to his heart with a peculiar sense of warmth and light.

He looked up with one of his rare smiles.

“I think I understand. I think I had forgotten about Jesus; but I shan’t forget any more. I love Him very much now.”

“And you will not love Him any less as time goes on,” answered Uncle Fred, in the grave, kind way that Bertie liked so much. “And now, my little boy, I am going to take you home, and tell the Squire all about my naughty nephews.”

Bertie looked rather disturbed.

“I don’t want them to be punished. They did not mean to be unkind. They did not understand.”

“Well, well, we will not talk of that any more. They were old enough to know better; but if it distresses you, they shall get off easily. Do you feel quite able to walk home now?”

“Oh yes!” answered Bertie, getting up, but finding himself a little unsteady on his feet. However, with the help of Uncle Fred’s hand, he was able to get along quite easily, and his new friend talked so pleasantly and kindly to him all the way, that he enjoyed the walk very much, and was almost sorry when it was over.

CHAPTER XII.

A PROJECT.



WHEN Uncle Fred returned to his brother's house, he went in search of his nephews, with the intention of speaking his mind to them pretty freely on the unmanliness of their treatment of little Bertie. But when he opened the schoolroom door, he was assailed by such a chorus of eager voices, that it was some time before he could "get a word in edgeways," as the saying is.

"Oh, Uncle Fred, how is Bertie now?"

"Oh, Uncle Fred, we're so awfully sorry!"

"We really did not mean anything."

"We never guessed he'd care like that."

"We only meant it in fun, we never thought he'd think we should!"

"Please, Uncle Fred, don't be cross with them:" this from Phil, who had taken no active share in the matter. "They didn't really know how frightened he is. I think I ought to be punished most, because I only laughed instead of taking Bertie's part, and I knew much better than they did about him."

Uncle Fred looked into Phil's bright, frank face with an approving glance. He liked the boy all the better for his honest confession of a fault.

"That is right, my boy. Never try to shirk blame when you feel you have deserved it. Why did you not take Bertie's part, then, when you understood so well how frightened it made him to be on the water?"

Phil hung his head for a moment, but he looked up bravely again the next, and in spite of the gravity of his face there was a merry sparkle in his bright blue eyes.

“It was not at all nice of me, Uncle Fred, but I *couldn't* help enjoying it. Bertie did cut away so fast, and kicked and struggled so hard, and seemed in such a passion—I suppose it was fright really, but it looked like a jolly big rage, and he made me laugh, and when I once begin to laugh, it's all over with me;” Phil glanced up roguishly at his uncle, and then dropped his eyes and added, with genuine penitence, “But I was awfully sorry when I saw that Bertie was really hurt. It hasn't done him any harm, has it?”

“I hope not; but it is very bad for any one to have a scare like that; and Bertie is not strong, and you big boys ought to be more manly than to combine against one smaller and weaker than yourselves. You would not like to be called cowards, but if you heard the story told in a book, I think you would call it a very cowardly trick to set upon a little fellow like Bertie and treat him as you did.”

The boys flushed deeply, but did not try to defend themselves. They felt a little guilty and conscience-stricken, for one thing, and then Uncle Fred was an immense favorite, and they knew that he never spoke to them like this without good cause.

But Queenie was indignant at having her brothers condemned, and she tossed her head in her favorite fashion as she exclaimed,—

“I think it's Bertie who is the coward, Uncle Fred, not my boys.”

He turned and looked at the little girl with a smile in his kind eyes.

“Is it always cowardly to be afraid, do you think, Queenie?”

“Of course it is, Uncle Fred!” she answered, quickly; and after a moment's pause she added, proudly, “*I'm* not afraid of anything!”

“No?” he answered, questioningly; and then he looked grave as he said, glancing round at all the faces of his little relatives, “Perhaps you would all be braver and happier if you were afraid of more things.”

Queenie looked surprised and defiant. Uncle Fred often puzzled her by some of the things he said, and she thought that this was great nonsense.

She wondered why the boys said nothing and looked half ashamed; but she was not readily silenced, and answered, quickly,—

“It *can't* be brave to be afraid, Uncle Fred. You're only trying to puzzle us. Everybody knows that it's only cowards who are afraid.”

“Excuse me, Queenie, but you're quite wrong there,” answered Uncle Fred, quietly. “All the bravest men I have known have been afraid—very much afraid, some of them—of some things.”

“What sort of things?” asked Queenie, with a little gesture of scorn. “Rats, and mice, and snakes, and all that sort of thing?”

Uncle Fred's face looked rather grave, yet very kind, and he took Queenie's hands in his and gazed down very steadily into the little girl's blue eyes, that glowed and flashed rather excitedly.

“No, my little maiden,” he answered, speaking in a tone that the children often heard him use, and that never failed to impress them more than they could quite understand. “No, Queenie, they were not afraid of things of that kind, these brave men whom it has been my privilege to know; they have been afraid of doing wrong, afraid of falling into careless, idle, disobedient ways, afraid of not proving themselves true and fearless servants of the King they had bound themselves to serve, afraid that by some act of their own, committed perhaps thoughtlessly and without intent of wrong, they might injure the great cause they had vowed to protect and to forward all their lives through.”

The boys looked down, conscience-stricken and abashed, but Queenie either did not or would not understand her uncle's meaning.

“What king?” she asked, impatiently. “We haven't got a king, we have a queen; and if you're talking about foreigners, of course we all know they're all cowards!” And Queenie waved her hand, as if dismissing all such poltroons from the question in hand, with a fine insular prejudice that would have made Uncle Fred laugh at any other time; but just now his face was very grave and earnest.

“The King these brave men served, Queenie, is the great King I trust we are all bound to obey—every one of us, whether we be men or women, or little children only just starting in life with the little battles of childhood to fight. There, my boys, I know you understand me. I will not preach to you

to-day; I will only say how pleased I shall be to see you all more afraid of breaking the wise laws that our King has laid down for His soldiers.”

Queenie did not approve a line of argument which she felt put her at a disadvantage. She was silent, more because she stood a little in awe of Uncle Fred than because she was convinced by what he said. She was not prepared to admit that fear was ever anything but cowardly, and was half vexed when Phil looked up and said, lightly,—

“I know what you mean, Uncle Fred, only you know it’s awfully hard for a fellow to think of all that, and to be afraid when he ought. It’s much easier to be like Queenie,—like all of us, in fact,—and not to be afraid of anything.”

Phil was always a favorite with everybody. He was so merry and bright and outspoken, that it was impossible not to like him, and Uncle Fred smiled at the boy as he answered his remark.

“The easiest way is not always the best, Phil.”

“Why, no, to be sure, worse luck! it’s generally the worst!”

“You wouldn’t like all your fighting to be quite plain sailing, would you, Phil? There would not be much glory in it if it were.”

Phil looked grave for a moment, and then answered, brightly,—

“To be sure not. No, I’d like some good tough battles, only I’m such a fellow for forgetting—I might get into the wrong lot before ever I knew what I was about, as I did just now.”

“You must try to learn thoughtfulness as you grow older,” said Uncle Fred, kindly; “that will be one of your battles.”

“All right,” cried Phil; “I’ll try to think of it like that. Are you going to punish us, Uncle Fred, for bullying Bertie? because if you are, I wish you’d set about it sharp. I hate having a thing hanging over one’s head.”

Uncle Fred could not help laughing.

“Well, as I’m not your father, but only an uncle, I don’t know that I have any right to punish you, and, besides Bertie almost made me promise not to.

“And as you seem sorry for being unkind and unmanly, I would much rather say no more about it, but let bygones be bygones. I don’t think you will be tempted to repeat the offence, and all I will ask of you is to try and be kinder to the little boy in the future, remembering that he is very lonely, and has nobody in the wide world whom he can really look to for love or kindness.”

“Oh yes, poor little chap!” cried Phil; “we’ll be good to him now;” and all the boys echoed Phil’s words heartily; and Uncle Fred left the room, feeling that there was no need to punish his thoughtless nephews. It was in ignorance and carelessness that they had acted, not with intentional cruelty.

“And don’t you call yourself ‘only an uncle’ any more,” cried out Phil after him; and all the boys broke out into the chorus—

“For he’s a jolly good fellow,”

which pursued their uncle all down the long passage.

They had all recovered their usual high spirits and good temper except Queenie, who still felt annoyed, though she could hardly have explained why.

“Bertie *is* a coward!” she exclaimed, in her very determined fashion. “He is a horrid little coward, whatever anybody says; and *I* think it served him quite right.”

The boys were secretly rather pleased that their little sister stood by them, as it were, so boldly. They were very fond of Queenie, and liked to look upon her as the little queen she had always been taught to consider herself.

“Well, I’m not quite so sure of that,” answered Phil, who was always honest, whatever faults he might have besides. “I heard Dr. Lighton say once that he was afraid of the water because he had been so nearly drowned, and that he could not help it, and would most likely grow out of it if only he was let alone.”

The elder boys exchanged glances, conscious that their idea of curing him had differed from the doctor’s.

“Why didn’t you say so before, Phil?” asked Walter.

“I never thought of it,” he answered; “I always do forget everything.”

“I should take him out every day in a boat till he gave over being silly about it—that’s what I should do if he were *my* little boy,” announced Queenie, very grandly. “I have no idea of spoiling children like that.”

And at that all the boys laughed, but they laughed admiringly, for they were proud of their sister’s spirit, although they all knew quite well that she had been spoiled by every one in the house, save her nurse, from the hour of her birth until now.

“That’s right, Queenie,” cried Bernard. “Never you let anybody have a will of his own but yourself. You stick to your opinion, and let all the rest go. But we can’t bully that little chap any more, after what Uncle Fred said. Shall we try to make it up with him instead, and show him we didn’t mean any harm?”

“Uncle Fred would like that,” remarked Ralph. “Only I don’t know if he’d care to make friends just to-day—Bertie, I mean, you know.”

“He’d make friends, I know,” answered Phil. “He never bears malice; he’s a meek, gentle little chap; but I guess he’s had enough of us for a while. I vote we leave him in peace for to-day, and think of something jolly for to-morrow.”

“What sort of thing?”

“Oh, I don’t quite know; I must think a bit,” and Phil thrust both his hands into his tangle of curls. “Why, yes, I have it now! You know what we were going to do to-day—row to that odd rocky bay ten miles down the coast, where the sea-gulls live. Well, let’s go a regular picnic there. Uncle Fred can take some of us in the boat, and three of us can ride by the road,—Bertie loves to ride, and I’ve hardly ever lent him my pony, though I’ve often promised to,—and we’ll take heaps of food, and have a regular jolly day. Bertie will like that no end, and we’ll show him we want to make up for frightening him.”

Phil’s plan was hailed with acclamation, and when Uncle Fred heard of it he gave his ready consent, and was pleased that the boys should have wished it themselves. He thought the change of the ride and the picnic would be very good for Bertie, and he made all plain with the children’s parents for the long day’s holiday upon the water.

Phil and Queenie, it was decided, should be the two to ride with Bertie. The little girl submitted to this arrangement because she was not very fond of long journeys in the boat; its movement sometimes made her feel rather sick, and the glare of the sun upon the water often brought on a headache. She liked riding on the whole better than the long row; but, as she felt a little cross with Bertie, she was not quite pleased at being obliged to spend so much time in his company. Still, that could not be helped, and she was very anxious to visit the rocky bay; for she had heard a great deal about it that had raised her curiosity to a high pitch, and she had a secret hope of her own which she at last confided to Phil.

“Phil,” she said, mysteriously that evening, as they wandered together about the garden,—“Phil, don’t people say that lots of young sea-gulls are hatched in that bay every year?”

“Why, yes, to be sure. What of that?”

“Phil, don’t you think,” sinking her voice to a very low whisper, “that we might find one or two little gulls if we searched very carefully, and bring them home in an empty basket? You know some people have tame sea-gulls in their gardens, and I should *love* to catch some of my very own and keep them here always.”

Phil seemed struck with the brilliancy of this idea.

“What a capital thought, Queenie!” he cried. “It would be a tremendous lark to take a sea-gull’s nest—only, I fancy they’re pretty hard to get”—He paused suddenly, and then added, as if struck by an unwelcome thought, “But I’m afraid it’s the wrong time for sea-gulls. I think all the young birds are hatched in the spring. I don’t believe there will be any left now, you see it’s August—pretty nearly September too.”

Queenie’s face fell.

“Oh, how tiresome! Why can’t they arrange things differently? Are you sure, Phil?”

“About the young birds, Queenie? Yes, I’m afraid I am sure.”

For a few minutes she looked a good deal cast down, but then a brighter look crossed her face.

“I’ll tell you what we can do, Phil,” she said, with energy. “We can have a good look at the place, and make David tell us where all the best places are; and then, you know, when the spring comes round—”

Phil tossed his cap into the air.

“To be sure, Queenie! you’re a brick for thinking of things.”

CHAPTER XIII.

A PICNIC.



BERTIE felt rather queer when he got home that day. His head ached a little, and he was not much disposed to eat his dinner. He did not care about going out any more, and by and by he stole down-stairs to his old haunt, the library window-seat, and established himself comfortably there.

He had not been seen in that place so much of late as he had been at first. Latterly his frequent visits to the next house had taken up a great deal of his time, and he was out of doors for the greater part of these warm summer days. Then Phil and Queenie often came to see him, and at such times the children were not allowed to leave the nurseries except to play in the garden. The liberty granted to Bertie himself was not accorded to his friends.

So he had been little to the library of late, and when he found himself there again he heaved a sigh of contentment, as if he had somehow found a haven of refuge for himself. The Squire was not in his room when Bertie found his way there; but he came in a little bit later, and his grave, stern face seemed to soften as his glance rested upon the figure of the child.

He did not speak, however, only crossed the room, and stood for a few moments in the embrasure of the window, his hand resting kindly upon the head of the little boy.

It was more of a caress than Bertie had ever before received from his benefactor, and it seemed to give him courage; for when the Squire seated himself in his chair with the newspaper, Bertie followed and took a

footstool at his feet, leaning his tired head against the Squire's knee; and in that position he quickly fell asleep.

When he began to awake, he found himself on somebody's knee, a kind arm encircling him, and his head resting comfortably upon a supporting shoulder. Half-sleeping, half-waking, the child moved a little, and said, dreamily,—

“Grandpapa—where's mother?”

It was the first time the child had ever named any relative. He had called the Squire “grandpapa” as if by instinct, and had appeared when he first came to have some association with that name, but he had never spoken of either father or mother, and it had sometimes seemed doubtful whether he had ever known a parent's love at all.

The Squire waited silently, hoping he would say more, but Bertie's eyes began to open then, and, after a few seconds of great bewilderment, he appeared to recollect himself, and pressed his hand to his head, as if to quiet the confusion of his brain.

“Does your head ache, Bertie?”

“Yes, grandpapa. I think dreaming makes it ache worse.”

“What were you dreaming about?”

But he shook his head with a look of distress.

“I can't remember.”

“Never mind, then; dreams are silly things, not worth remembering. Go to sleep again, and sleep the headache away.”

Bertie was very comfortable; but it dawned upon him that he had never sat like this upon the Squire's knee before.

“I'm afraid I'm in your way,” he said, sleepily.

“Go to sleep, child, go to sleep,” was the rejoinder; and Bertie obeyed in such good earnest that when he next awoke it was to find himself in his own bed, and the morning sunshine streaming in through the uncurtained window. He had actually slept all the rest of the day and all the night, and woke up as gay as a lark and as fresh as a kitten. So that, when the ponies

came to the door and Phil ran in with his invitation to the picnic, Bertie was eager to join the pleasure party, and rushed off to the library to ask leave with a face as bright as the sunny morning.

The Squire was very kind: he gave a ready assent to the proposal, and came himself to the front door to lift the child into the saddle and to “pay his respects to Miss Queenie,” as he called it. When he saw how well the boy sat, how at home he seemed on the spirited pony, and how easily he managed his reins and whip, he nodded approvingly, and said,—

“So, so, Master Bertie, you have not forgotten your riding. We must see about a pony for you one of these fine days.”

Bertie flushed with pleasure, and as the children rode away together Queenie said,—

“He’s a very kind old man, isn’t he?”

“He’s very kind to me,” answered Bertie, emphatically,—“very kind indeed!”

“Is he going to adopt you?” asked the little girl, who was not always very quick to see when she gave pain by her words.

Bertie flushed painfully.

“I don’t know,” he answered, and the tears sparkled in his eyes.

“People say he will,” asserted Queenie, “unless anybody finds out who you really are. Dr. Lighton isn’t half so sure about your ever remembering for yourself as he was at first.”

“Oh, you’ll remember fast enough, never fear!” cut in Phil, whose feelings in some things were quicker than his little sister’s. “You’ll wake up some fine morning with it all as plain as a pikestaff, and meantime it won’t be half bad to be adopted by the Squire.”

Bertie said nothing. He always felt sad when his forgotten past was brought up and discussed; but he knew that Phil meant kindly, and was much obliged by his friendly words.

As they rode on over the level roads through the bright sunshine, and with the fresh breeze whistling in their ears, they all grew merry and cheerful. Bertie was delighted with his pony, Phil was as full of fun and

chatter as a monkey, and Queenie, though rather inclined to be “on her high horse,” was too pleased at the prospect of the picnic to be cross to Bertie.

He felt sure she was not quite friendly towards him by the way she laughed at any blunders he might make and teased him whenever she had the chance; but he always considered it Queenie’s privilege to plague him, and submitted to it with great humility.

At length they reached their destination, and Bertie was very much impressed by the change in the character of the coast as they approached. The level sands with which he was so well acquainted had been gradually merged in tracts of rocky coast of a wild and strange formation; and as they proceeded onwards the rocks grew higher and higher, until they became great frowning cliffs, sometimes jutting far out into the sea, in other places sweeping inwards and forming great coves or bays, many of which were floored by the loveliest white sand or by pebbles of every color of the rainbow.

Bertie thought he had never before seen anything so beautiful, and he rode along for the last few miles in a sort of dream of wonder and delight, feeling quite lifted out of himself by the beauty of all he saw.

At last they reached the bay that was to be their goal, and reined up their ponies at the top of the cliff. Far away in the distance they saw a boat slowly rowing through the blue waves. It was plain it could not reach the bay for at least half an hour.

“Ha, ha!” laughed Phil, triumphantly. “I told those other fellows that we should be here the first. Now, get off, you two, and I’ll take the ponies to a farmhouse I know close by, and then we’ll find the path and climb down it, so as to be waiting for them when they come.”

Phil led off the three ponies, and Queenie and Bertie were left standing on the cliffs together. The little girl began fastening up her long riding-skirt by means of cleverly-arranged loops and buttons devised by nurse to keep it out of her way whilst she was climbing about the rocks, and Bertie went down on his knees to help her, and as she condescended to permit his attentions he asked, timidly,—

“Are you cross with me, Queenie?”

Queenie made a little disdainful gesture.

“Cross? What a question! Do you think I should ask you to come with us if I were?”

“I thought you seemed rather vexed,” explained Bertie, with gravity.

“Well, it would serve you right, I think, if I were,” she answered, judicially. “You know you were horribly stupid yesterday.”

“I’m afraid I was,” he answered, meekly; “only I *can’t help* being so frightened on the water; I do try not to mind,—I do indeed,—but trying doesn’t seem any good.”

Queenie smiled rather severely.

“Well, if you can’t help it, you can’t, I suppose. But you can help being a hypocrite, I hope.”

Bertie looked much astonished.

“A hypocrite!”

“Yes; you know what that is, don’t you?”

“Yes—but—I didn’t know I was one. I don’t understand you, Queenie.”

“Don’t you? Well, I can soon explain. Do you remember when Phil ran away from school and was going to hide and have a lot of fun, what a fuss you made about being brave and not afraid of things, and how you spoilt everything by making him tell papa straight out? Well, after all that lecturing, of course, I expected you to be as brave as a lion yourself, instead of which you turn out a horrid little coward, and nearly get the boys into a great big row because you are such a coward. That’s the sort of thing I hate!” and the little lady stamped her foot imperiously, having talked herself into a good deal of excitement. “I like people to *be* brave, not to talk brave, and then turn awful cowards when the time comes to try.”

Bertie stood humbly before the angry little girl, feeling very much subdued by her vehemence, and not at all inclined to defend himself. He felt that there was a certain amount of injustice in the charge brought against him. He knew in his heart that he was not such a dreadful coward as she thought him, although he could not control his terror in a boat. But her argument was put in a fashion that made it difficult to answer; and it was only after a very long pause that he said, slowly,—

“I don’t think I should be a coward about other things. Can’t you give me something else to do that isn’t going in a boat?”

Queenie quite approved of being appealed to in this way. She liked to feel her power over Bertie, and her face relaxed its severity. After a little pause she approached a few paces nearer to the little boy, and asked, in a low and mysterious tone,—

“Should you be afraid to climb about the cliffs to look for sea-gulls’ eggs or young birds?”

Bertie looked both eager and astonished.

“No, I don’t think so,” he answered, glancing down the rugged face of the cliff, which showed numbers of rough ledges and natural rocky steps, very tempting to boys with steady heads and a natural aptitude for climbing. “Do you mean now—to-day?”

“No,” answered Queenie, laying her finger on her lips and looking cautiously round her. “It’s a great secret, and you mustn’t say a word to anybody. But when the spring comes Phil and I are going to come here and try and get some young sea-gulls,—David will tell us the best places,—and if you can promise to be brave, perhaps you may come too.”

Bertie looked eager and excited. He had a good deal of innate daring and love of adventure, little though some of his companions guessed it, and a hunt about those grim, rocky cliffs seemed to him the most attractive of schemes.

“Oh, shouldn’t I like that!” he cried. “I’ll practise climbing every day till the spring comes. I’d like to catch a pair of gulls for the Squire too. I heard him say once that he wanted some, to eat the snails in the kitchen garden. Can’t we find some, to-day, Queenie? Why must we wait till the spring?”

“Phil says there are no young birds now; they’ve all got big and flown away. We must wait till some more are hatched—that will be in the spring. I’m glad you’re not afraid, Bertie. You shall come with us, and perhaps David too; but you mustn’t say anything to the rest. We want it to be a secret, and if they know they’ll tell everybody, or let it out by accident, and then”—she stopped suddenly and added, with a little laugh, “then it would all be spoiled, and they would get all the fun; but it’s Phil’s secret and mine, and you must promise not to tell anybody.”

“Of course not,” answered Bertie, promptly; “I won’t say a word to anybody.”

And then Phil came back, and led the way down to the sandy bay beneath by means of a steep narrow path not known to many save the fisher-people of that coast.

The boat came in a little while after they had reached the shore, and the hampers of good things were landed; and a capital picnic they all had sitting on the smooth white sand beneath the shadow of the jagged cliffs.

Uncle Fred was a capital companion for children, and was coaxed into telling stories of his adventures by land and sea, to which they all listened with undivided attention, although many of them had heard the best stories again and again. Time sped away “twice too fast,” as Phil declared, and it was time to go long before anybody wanted to move.

Phil, however, had made good use of his time, and had found out from David a good deal about sea-gulls and their habits. The fisherman’s boy knew a great deal about the ways of the wild creatures of the coast, and could answer all Phil’s questions in a very satisfactory way.

When the boat had started off, Phil turned to Queenie and said,—

“We needn’t go for half an hour yet. I want to try my hand at climbing.”

“So do I!” cried Bertie, eagerly; and Queenie told how Bertie had been let into the plan and had promised to keep the secret.

“All right!” cried Phil; “I think Bertie’s safe enough. Now for a little practice.”

The boys threw off their jackets and began climbing the craggy face of the cliff. It was hard work, and it cut their hands a little; but they found it quite possible, with pains and caution, to mount from one ledge to another, and also to descend again, though this was by no means so easy. Queenie watched them eagerly and approvingly, and was obliged to admit that Bertie was not at all nervous or timid in climbing, and was quite as clever and agile as Phil.

They had not time to do much climbing to-day, however, but they satisfied themselves that the face of the cliff did not present any very

terrible difficulties, and they determined to ride over by themselves soon and have another preparatory scramble.

“The worst thing is, though,” said Phil, when at last they had turned their backs on the coast and were trotting quietly along in the direction of home, “that David says the birds always choose the most difficult places possible for their nests. Most of them build in places we couldn’t get at anyhow without ropes and all kinds of things; but some aren’t so bad, and there always are young birds hatched among those ledges every year, only the old birds are very fierce, and it isn’t always easy to rob them.”

Nevertheless, and in spite of all difficulties, the three children were quite determined that, when the right season came on, they would visit together one of those craggy coves, and not return without a prize of eggs and young birds from the nests of the sea-gulls.

CHAPTER XIV.

AUTUMN DAYS.



UMMER merged into autumn almost before any one was aware of the change, and with the advance of the season came changes in the life of little Bertie.

The Arbuthnot boys went back to school, and Sir Walter took his wife and little daughter away to Scotland, where he possessed a shooting-box, and Queenie told her playfellow that she did not know when they would be back, for her mother had talked of paying a round of visits during the winter months, and, unless they came home for the boys' Christmas holidays, it was quite possible they might remain away in one place or another until the spring came round again.

Queenie was pleased and excited at the thought of all the changes and amusements in store for her. She had been used to a London life, and had thought the country just a little dull. She liked the idea of going about with her parents and paying visits at country houses, for she always made her way wherever she went, and was quite a pet and plaything to grown-up people, to whose company she was well used.

So she talked a good deal of anticipated delights, and pitied "poor Bertie" a good deal, wondering whatever he would find to do all through the long winter months, with nobody to play with "except that fisher-boy, David."

Bertie, however, did not seem at all put out by the prospect of his loneliness, as depicted by Queenie. He smiled when she pitied him, and said,—

“Oh, never mind me; I shall be quite happy. I don’t mind being alone. Besides, there is always the Squire, you know.”

“But he doesn’t play with you.”

“No,” answered Bertie, with his grave smile, “he doesn’t play;” and then the little boy smiled again, as if such an idea amused him.

“And he doesn’t talk much either, does he?”

“No, not much.”

“And you don’t see him often?”

“Not very often, perhaps; but I can always sit in his library when I like.”

“Well,” remarked Queenie, tossing back her curly head, “I can’t quite see what good the Squire can be to you, if he doesn’t play, and doesn’t talk, and only lets you sit in his library.”

Bertie smiled again in the way that Queenie never quite understood.

“I like him to be just as he is,” answered the little boy. “I shouldn’t like him to be a bit different. He is just right, I think.”

Queenie looked puzzled.

“You’re a very odd child, Bertie. I often say so, and so do other people.”

“Am I?” he answered, meekly. “I don’t know why.”

“I can’t explain quite,” returned Queenie, nodding her head, “but you *are*.”

Bertie, however, was not at all disturbed by this opinion, nor did he consider himself such an object of compassion as Queenie evidently did. He certainly missed his little companion when she was really gone, but he did not fret or worry himself over his loneliness, but quietly resumed the solitary habits that he had fallen into before he had found his new friends.

His mind was much clearer and more active now than when he had first recovered from his long sleep of unconsciousness, and, although his memory had not returned, he had lost for the most part that aching sense of loss and blankness that had weighed upon him like a leaden weight at first.

He was beginning to have a little past of his own, on which his thoughts could dwell. He had friends amongst the animals upon the place. A big black Newfoundland dog called Samson was a great source of delight to him, and an Alderney cow, and the Squire's great bay horse were alike objects of deep interest and affection.

But the child's love and admiration, as well as his imagination, were chiefly and mainly occupied with the Squire himself. Bertie's was one of those natures that seem to require a central interest and object in life. He wanted something to think about, something to dream about, somebody to love in his quiet, undemonstrative fashion, somebody who would satisfy the imaginative and poetical side of his temperament. And this object,—strange as it might appear to some, he found in the quiet and matter-of-fact Squire of Arlingham.

During the lengthening autumn evenings, when the lamp in the nursery was lighted early, and the fire attracted Bertie to a cosy position upon the rug, when the kettle sang cheerily upon the hob, and the cat purred contentedly upon the child's lap, and Mrs. Pritchard's busy needles clicked together with the pleasant regularity of the practised knitter, then would come a time of deep enjoyment for Bertie, when his kind friend the housekeeper would tell him long stories of the Squire's boyhood and youth, of his happy married life, and the deep sorrow that had fallen upon him and changed the proud and loving husband and father into the grave, stern, silent man, widowed and childless, that Arlingham knew so well now.

And Bertie listened to this story again and again, until it seemed absolutely to belong to his own past. It seemed to him as if he had always known the Squire. He studied the portraits in the long gallery until he knew each one by heart. He could see the Squire as a curly-headed boy, with his pony and his dog, as a tall, handsome man in his scarlet hunting-coat, with his great whip in his hand; he could see him a year or two later with a pair of fine lads beside him; and, best of all, he knew him as he now was, a white-headed, keen-eyed, silent man, very grave and rather severe, despite his kindness of heart, a man to be revered and perhaps a little feared, as well as loved, towards whom the child felt an increasing sense of attraction.

The Squire fascinated his imagination as much as he won his heart, and the central thought in his mind each day was how much he should see of his

benefactor, how much he could talk to him, and what he would say when he did talk.

Bertie was very shy of showing his feelings. He had that innate tact and sensibility not uncommon with children, that told him exactly how to speak and act in presence of his elders. He felt by instinct that any open demonstrations of affection would be unwelcome, that he must copy in his childish way the Squire's quietness and reserve; but he could make little quiet, timid advances from time to time, and these were never repulsed, and the tacit way in which they were accepted often brought a pleasant sense of warmth to the child's heart, taking away for the moment all his loneliness and isolation.

Then, too, he knew all about the little children who once had made the silent house ring with their merry voices and laughter, who had just begun to develop into big, handsome lads and winning maidens when the call home had come and laid them sleeping side by side in the quiet churchyard. Bertie often felt as if he had actually played with Tom and Charley, had heard Mary and Violet practising their music on the schoolroom piano, and had petted the "baby" of the house, little Donald, as every else petted him, according to Mrs. Pritchard. He knew every event of their lives as detailed to him by the fond old nurse. He studied the crayon heads upon the walls, until each face was like that of some familiar friend and playfellow. He kept their toy cupboards in perfect order, never mixing Charley's things with Tom's, or Mary's with Violet's; and their story-books, battered and torn as they were, attracted him more than any of the bright new volumes of boys' tales that arrived for him from time to time from the bookseller's shop in the town.

Then, too, the "children's gardens," away behind the kitchen garden wall, attracted him at this time more than any other part of the garden.

Once they had been neat little plots enough, tended with care, watered and watched over with loving solicitude; but fifteen years of partial neglect had wrought a sad change, and although the gardeners kept the weeds from becoming rampant, and maintained a certain brightness in the little sunny garden, yet it was evidently "nobody's business" to look after the little plot; and it wore—or so Bertie fancied—a forlorn and desolate look.

“Would the Squire let me keep it in order, do you think?” he asked of Mrs. Pritchard one day, as they stood together beside the attractive spot.

“Why, yes, for sure, dearie,” answered the old housekeeper. “He would as soon your little fingers did the work as the men’s every bit, not to say more. But autumn’s a poor kind of time for garden work? there’s nothing to show for it till the spring comes.”

“There are some chrysanthemums to come on still,” answered Bertie, gravely; “and the verbenas are blooming still, and the marguerites too, and the rose-bushes would look nice if the dead leaves and flowers were picked off. William says we get no frost here till December. I think I could make the gardens look quite nice. Tell me which was whose, if you remember. I should like to keep them all clear.”

Mrs. Pritchard soon managed to recall all that was needful for the identification of each garden. There were four little plots, for the baby of the house had not been promoted to the honor of a garden of his own; but the rest were soon made out clearly enough, and on the very next day Bertie set about his task. He hoed up all the weeds and raked the brown earth nicely over; he trimmed the box edging, and thinned it out a little, so as to have enough to make a division between each separate garden; and he collected a number of white smooth stones from the shore in order to write the name of each proprietor in the dark soil.

It took him some days to get all to his liking; but he worked with a will, and was never wearied of his self-imposed task.

The gardener, who watched him at his toil; helped him with advice and occasional assistance, and gave him some hardy flowering plants from pots, to lend a temporary brightness to his plot.

Bertie was very proud of his handiwork by the week’s end; and his final triumph was the writing of the names in white stones along the edge of each little garden. David had been very zealous in collecting pebbles of suitable size and color, and Bertie set about this final work with great good will. When all was done he brought Mrs. Pritchard to see, and was much edified by her praise of his care and neatness.

“Why, it looks like old times, so it do, for sure,” she exclaimed, as she saw the neatly-weeded plots, each with its own well-trimmed plants still

bearing the last of its blooms; but the good woman's face looked a little grave as she saw the names traced there. "And for what did you do that, dearie?" she asked, a little uneasily.

Bertie looked up quickly.

"Why shouldn't I?"

Mrs. Pritchard hesitated for a reply.

"Well, I don't just know why you shouldn't; only it struck me as perhaps the Squire would not be best pleased. You see, he never names them now, nor never has done. It seems to hurt him like."

Bertie looked down at his letters and then up at Mrs. Pritchard.

"But he can't have forgotten," he said,— "I'm sure he hasn't forgotten."

"Bless your little heart! it isn't that he forgets, but that he thinks too much."

"Thinks of them, you mean?" questioned Bertie, indicating the four names he had written.

"Yes, of them as have gone before. Poor man, I doubt if they're ever long out of his thoughts."

Bertie looked up very gravely.

"And if he is always thinking of them, he can't mind seeing their names written. Perhaps he would like it; perhaps he would be pleased that somebody else thought of them and loved them too."

Mrs. Pritchard wiped her eyes with the corner of her pocket-handkerchief.

"Well, for sure, a child knows best sometimes, as I do always say. We'll let them stay any way, dearie. I doubt if the poor master ever so much as walks this way now."

Bertie did not know. He had never seen the Squire in this part of the garden. Perhaps he avoided the plot of ground which his dead children had once frequented so much.

It was Saturday when the gardens were finally put to rights, and Bertie's week of toil had done him good, and made him feel more of a man. The

weather had been bright and fine, and he had been able to be out most of the daylight hours, so he had seen less of the Squire than usual.

But Sunday was Bertie's best time for making way in that quarter. The Squire was at leisure, for one thing; then he always took the child to church in the morning, and the two dined together after service, as Bertie had once petitioned to do. Not much conversation went on as a rule between this oddly-assorted couple; but Bertie enjoyed his Sundays immensely, and looked forward to them all through the week.

As they sat at table together on this particular day, Bertie asked a question.

"Didn't the clergyman say that there would be service in the afternoon now, instead of in the evening?"

"Yes; it changes in winter months always."

"Why?"

"Because the evenings are so dark, and the poor people from the farms, who have a long way to come, can hardly find their way."

"Do you always go in the afternoon the same as in the evening?"

"Yes, certainly."

"May I go with you, please?"

The Squire hesitated.

"I think not to-day—not until I have asked Dr. Lighton what he thinks."

Bertie looked surprised.

"I'm not ill," he said.

"No; but Dr. Lighton has his own ideas about you. I cannot take you with me this afternoon."

Bertie never disputed the Squire's final verdict; he accepted it as an oracle. But he looked a little disappointed, and sat very still, with his eyes upon his plate. Suddenly a bright thought seemed to strike him, and he looked up eagerly.

“Well?” asked the Squire, seeing that a request was trembling on the child’s lips.

“May I come to the church in time to walk home with you afterwards?”

Again Bertie fancied that there was a pause of hesitation before the answer came.

“Do you wish it very much?”

“Yes, please.”

“Very well. I shall be out of church by soon after four; but I am often detained a little. You may meet me by the gate of the path through the wood at twenty minutes past four. Wait for me there if I do not come at once, and we will take a walk together then.”

Bertie’s face flushed with pleasure.

“Oh, thank you, grandpa! That will be *very* nice indeed!”

A walk with the Squire was a rare treat; and Bertie looked forward to it with a pleasure he could not have explained. He knew beforehand that there would be no conversation. They would walk side by side, he trying hard to emulate the long strides of his big companion. Most children would have done much to avoid so dreary a promenade; but Bertie was delighted at the prospect, and wished he could hurry on the time.

He watched from the staircase window whilst the Squire strode off towards the church; and then he hurried up-stairs to ask Mrs. Pritchard to let him have his overcoat and cap, for he had a plan in his head that he wished to carry out before his appointment with the Squire.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GRAVE IN THE CHURCHYARD.



BERTIE set out upon his ramble that Sunday afternoon with a definite plan in his head.

Although it was now November, the air was mild and sunny, and the tints upon the oak trees still glowed golden and almost scarlet as the light touched them and brought out all their varying hues.

Bertie looked about him as he moved with a sense of keen enjoyment. He had grown to love very dearly the home that had been his in the new life,—the only one he had ever known, as it seemed to him now,—and he did not hurry through the park, for he had plenty of time before him.

He took a quiet, rarely traversed pathway that cut diagonally across the Squire's estate and led towards the village and the church. The rabbits, startled at the sound of his footsteps, scuttled away or darted across his path as he moved, and the child smiled as he watched their little white scuts vanishing down a friendly hole. But the rabbits and he were very good friends on the whole, and many amongst them did not condescend to fly from him, but sat up at a little distance and stared at him with their round, black, bead-like eyes.

The dead leaves rustled and crackled pleasantly beneath the child's feet as he moved. The birds had begun to sing again, after their long summer silence. The rooks were noisy in the tree-tops above him, and the sound of the church bells were musical in the soft air.

The bells soon stopped ringing, however, but there were other pleasant sounds telling of Nature's peaceful life all round.

Sheep bleated and cattle lowed in the level fields lying westward, whilst from the east came the soft, ceaseless murmur of the ocean, that mysterious, inexplicable voice that is never silent, and yet whose secret language no man has ever yet been able to interpret.

Bertie walked onwards in a state of dreamy contentment. The air was very clear and blue and sunny, the sky overhead was free from all cloud, but in the west there was vapor enough to give to the slowly-declining sun a new glory of form and color, which would increase as the day drew to its close.

Bertie was repeating to himself some words that had haunted him with greater or less persistence ever since he had heard them many months ago now.

"I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."

Bertie said those words over two or three times to himself, and a smile suddenly shone over his face.

"I do think He is," he said, half aloud. "If he hasn't done quite what I asked, He's been very, very kind to me. He's sent me to people who are good and who love me, and I might have been so miserable. He is good and kind; He doesn't ever forget us quite. I'll try always to be strong and of a good courage, and not to be afraid of anything. I think He's sure to go on taking care of me, as He's always been so kind."

And Bertie went on his way with a contented smile, feeling very safe and happy in the sense of the loving protection of the great Father in heaven. His destination was the churchyard, and as he approached he glanced up at the clock in the tower, and saw that he had plenty of time at his disposal before he should have to meet the Squire at the gate he had mentioned as the trysting-place.

He heard the muffled sound of the organ and voices from within the ancient building, but all without was still and deserted, and he could prosecute his search unseen.

What was it in that quiet graveyard that the child had come to see?

Nothing more or less than the grave of which Mrs. Pritchard sometimes spoke with tears, where the mother and five children lay sleeping, all laid to rest together within the space of one short week.

With quiet, reverent steps Bertie picked his way among the silent graves. A strange sense of loneliness had fallen upon him, and yet he was not afraid. He felt as if he were quite alone in this great Sabbath calm and stillness, with only the graves of those who had gone to keep him company.

“Under the great yew tree at the south corner.” These had been Mrs. Pritchard’s words when Bertie had asked her where the grave stood that held the Squire’s dear ones, and by this description he guided his steps.

Yes, there it was, just as Mrs. Pritchard had described—a simple slab of marble beneath the protecting shape of the ancient yew tree. There were all the familiar names—names that were now as those of familiar comrades. Bertie read them one by one with an odd dreaminess stealing over him. He sat down upon a low bough of the great tree and gazed at the marble slab with wide-open, abstracted eyes.

Where were they all now, those children who had laughed and played up and down the corridors of his present home, and had made the silent house ring again with their merry romps and happy voices? They had been children once just his age, perhaps they too had known just such thoughts as so often crowded into his busy brain. They had seen the same things that he looked on day by day; surely they must once have been very like him, and known just those very same feelings and longings as he experienced.

And where were they all now? What did they think of the bright world they had left behind? Was all forgotten as if it never had existed? or did the children who had never lived to grow old look down sometimes with smiling eyes upon the happy home they had left, and perhaps spare a loving glance for the little boy who loved them all without ever having seen them?

These thoughts crowded fast upon Bertie as he sat still in the dark yew tree. What was death? he asked himself again and again—the death that had come so very near him once, and had almost grasped its prey. What was it? What became of those who were taken away from this world! Where did they go, the children who never grew up?

And a voice in his own heart answered so clearly and softly, that the child was quite startled.

“Suffer the little children to come unto Me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

Bertie lifted his head and looked round; but there was no one near, and he smiled at his passing fear.

“They are in heaven,” he said softly to himself, “with Jesus—I suppose it is always heaven where He is. They must be very happy. I hope I shall go there some day. I wonder if I shall know them when I do. I feel as if I should.”

The thought of having in heaven some children who seemed almost like living friends was a strange and rather solemn one to the little boy. It filled him with a sense of mingled happiness and awe, and he looked again at the names upon the tombstone, and read them slowly one by one.

And then his eye was caught by four words, standing quite alone at the foot of the stone:

“Thy will be done.”

Bertie covered his face with his hands and sank into a sort of dream, which he could not possibly have put into words. Strange thoughts and flitting memories crowded in upon his brain, and he shut out all outward sights, and was deaf to all outward sounds, and knew nothing more until he was suddenly aroused by feeling himself touched very gently, and his own hands taken away from his face.

“What is the matter, my little man?”

It was the Squire’s voice that spoke, and it was the Squire himself who was now standing before him, beside the quiet grave.

Bertie looked up with bewildered eyes and said nothing.

“Why are you here, my child?”

The voice was so gentle that it helped Bertie to recover himself. He shook off the curious feeling that had oppressed him, and answered, slowly,

“I came here to see the grave.”

“What made you come?”

The child looked at the names upon the stone, and sudden tears sprang to his eyes.

“Because I love them all,” he answered, simply, and with quivering lips. “I love them so very much, and I wanted to see—where they—”

He could not get on any further; but suddenly he found himself lifted up in a pair of strong arms and kissed as he had never been kissed in his life before, so far as he could remember.

The Squire had taken Bertie’s seat upon the strong arm of the yew tree, and the child was pressed very closely to his heart.

“And so you love them all, do you, my child?”

Bertie nodded vehemently.

“Don’t cry, my little man,” said the Squire, kindly. “What is it that troubles you?”

Bertie looked up, his soft eyes swimming in tears.

“I love you too,” he said, tremulously, “and you are all alone—” There was a break in the child’s voice, and then he added, “It does seem—as if—God might—have left you—*one*.”

The Squire bent his head lower over the child’s.

“My little boy,” he said, very gravely and impressively, “I once said that myself; but I have been sorry ever since, for the good God knows best; and what He wills always must be right. Do you see those four words underneath the names? They were not put there at first; at first I could not say them; but they were added later, when I had learned the lesson that all this was sent to teach me; and since I have learned it I have not been alone.”

Bertie held his breath to catch the low-toned words that hardly seemed to be spoken to him, but rather as if the strong man were communing with his own soul. Bertie’s was a nature that could apprehend much more than it could actually understand, and he seemed to gain a strange and wonderful

insight into the nature of this self-contained man. It was as if he knew by instinct something of what he had passed through.

He did not speak for some time, and when he did, it was with a certain curious assurance.

“You were strong and of a good courage, I suppose,” he said, “so of course He did not forsake you.”

The Squire looked down at the little boy.

“What do you mean, Bertie?”

“It’s what God said to Joshua, I think. He says it to us all: He won’t forget us if we trust in Him.”

“Did you think He had forgotten you, Bertie?”

The child hung his head.

“I think I did once. It was naughty, I know, but it did seem rather like it, didn’t it? But I know now that He hasn’t.”

“Why?”

The child looked up suddenly with one of his rare and peculiarly sweet smiles.

“I think partly because He sent me here to you; and you are so very, very kind to me.”

The Squire looked into the child’s face, a strange softening coming into his own. Then he bent his head and kissed Bertie’s brow.

“Perhaps He has given us to each other to make both our lives more bright and less empty.”

The child looked up quickly, his face flushing with keen pleasure.

“But—but,”—he said, tremulously—“how can I do anything for you?”

The Squire’s face was very tender in its expression.

“Never mind the how or the why, my little man; let it be enough that it is so. Say, are you willing to help to fill the blank that has been left so long in my life?”

Bertie's eyes were full of astonishment. Even now he half fancied himself dreaming.

"What can I do?" he asked.

"You can be a little son to me, if you will. You have no parents, and I have no children. Are you willing to call yourself my little boy?"

A great light came into Bertie's face. He put his arms suddenly about the Squire's neck and laid his cheek against that of his adopted father.

No more words were spoken, and none were needed. The compact was sealed without that. The strong man and the little child understood each other as by instinct, and the bond between them was metaphorically signed and sealed by the eloquent language of a few caresses.

Then the Squire stood up and took the child by the hand to lead him home.

They did not go for their walk after all. Time had run on, and the short daylight was beginning to wane. They took the nearest path home across the park, and, although hardly a word was spoken, Bertie felt as if a sudden new warmth and happiness had come into his life; his little heart was filled to overflowing with love and gratitude.

As they reached the garden, the Squire turned aside, and, still holding Bertie by the hand, led him to the well-known spot where the "children's gardens" stood beneath the shelter of the sunny wall.

It was plain that he had heard of Bertie's labors over this patch of land. Perhaps, unknown to all, he often visited the gardens that had once been the pride and pleasure of his children, as he visited Sunday by Sunday, unknown to all, the grave that hid his loved ones away from him. Perhaps he had watched the child at his labor of love during the past week; at least he expressed no surprise when he stood beside the trim enclosure and looked at the carefully-tended plots.

But he pointed to the white stones and asked,—

"Why the names?"

And Bertie could explain now, as he could not perhaps have done an hour ago. He looked up into the Squire's face and said, in his earnest way,—

“I was afraid perhaps—some day—that they would get forgotten; when you are dead, you know, and I have gone away. I thought somebody else might come who wouldn’t know, and who would dig up the gardens and take them right away. I didn’t want them to do that, so I thought if I put the names there, that perhaps people would wonder, and ask whose gardens they were, and then they would hunt about and see the names in the churchyard, and then they would know that they belonged to the children who had all died together long ago, and that would make them feel sorry and they would tell the gardeners not to disturb these gardens, but to keep them nice always, and so Tom and Charley, Mary and Violet, would never be quite forgotten.”

The Squire made no reply; he started a little as the long unheard names of his children fell upon his ear, but he did not speak, and only took Bertie’s hand again and led him towards the house.

And on the threshold he paused, bent his head and kissed him, saying softly and gently,—

“My little boy now.”

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT BERTIE DID.



NEW life began from that day forward for little Bertie. He could hardly have defined the change that had passed over his head, but he was keenly alive to it day by day, and as grateful as he was happy at the thing that had come to him.

He was no longer the lonely little outcast he once had been.

He was no longer a chance guest in this hospitable house, entertained there simply because no other home opened to him, and the master was too kind-hearted to turn him out upon the mercy of a cold world.

No, he was no longer a desolate little waif and stray cast up homeless and desolate by the cold sea-waves; he was now the child of the house, tended and loved as if he had been born to the position he occupied, and the cloud of depression that had long weighed more or less upon him during his sojourn there now melted away in the sunshine of the happy present.

It was not that Bertie understood, as some others about him did, the great change in his position now that he had been adopted by the Squire of Arlingham, a man of considerable means, and with no near kindred to call his own. There were many discussions in the neighborhood as to the probability of Bertie's becoming his heir, and inheriting eventually such property as he had to leave, and succeeding to the title of Squire, which had so long been held from father to son by the family who dwelt in the Manor House; but the little boy knew nothing of all this, he was too young to be troubled by thoughts of such a nature. All he knew or cared to know was that he was loved by the Squire, whom he had long secretly idolized in his

heart of hearts, and that he had been adopted as a little son, instead of being kindly tolerated as a nameless stranger.

Bertie was very happy.

He was not demonstrative in his joy; his temperament was of a quiet and contemplative kind, more prone to silent than noisy indications of happiness; but his face showed plainly the entire contentment of his heart, and those who watched him from day to day could see how his nature expanded and unfolded in the warm atmosphere of "home."

His outer life was but little changed in its quiet course. He still breakfasted in his nursery, and took his early walk either alone or with Mrs. Pritchard. He still made his way, on his return, to the Squire's library, as he had been wont to do, to pass an hour or two in that quiet retreat.

But there was a little difference now in the line of conduct he adopted when there. He used to enter the room very quietly, and pause for a moment beside the door, to see if any notice was taken of his appearance. Sometimes the Squire would give him a smile and a nod, and thus dismiss him to his nook, sometimes he would hold out his hand and say a kind word or two or ask a few questions as to his well-being; whilst upon other days he would take no notice at all of the child's entrance, but continue his writing without so much as looking up, and then Bertie would creep on tip-toe to his window-seat and remain there as still as a mouse so long as this mood of absorption lasted.

That had been what passed in old days; but now all was changed.

Bertie entered the library each day with a beaming face and shining eyes. He walked straight up to the Squire and put his little arms about his neck, and books and papers were all pushed to one side for a happy ten minutes, whilst the newly-found father took his little adopted son upon his knees, and talked to him as only fathers can.

And then came the business of the morning.

"We must try and make up for lost time now, Bertie," said the Squire one day, very soon after this change in their relations to one another. "We must not be idle any longer, or we shall be growing up a little dunce."

Bertie looked up quickly and smiled.

“I write copies every day for Mrs. Pritchard,” he said, “and I read to her in the evenings, and she takes the book when I’ve done, and makes me spell the hard words. I’ve done some sums, too, out of Charley’s book. I’d like to do more lessons. I don’t want to be a dunce!”

The Squire patted his head.

“No, no, I’m sure we don’t; and Dr. Lighton has no objection to short hours and easy tasks. We will leave the reading and writing and spelling to Mrs. Pritchard, but I will take the arithmetic and Latin. Do you think you have ever learnt any Latin?”

“Hic—hæc—hoc!” said Bertie, suddenly, and as suddenly stopped short.

The Squire smiled.

“Perhaps it will come back to you; you did not forget your reading and writing, and Dr. Lighton tells me you can speak French.”

Bertie nodded.

“I could talk to that funny old sailor who came here last month; I understood him quite well. I think I must have lived once in France. Do they wear red caps there and blue jerseys, and sing when they take their boats down the river? I feel as if I’d dreamed something like that once.”

“Or seen it, perhaps,” answered the Squire. “I think you know more about France than I do. Well, we must keep up the French as best we can, and see how far the Latin goes. I daresay you can find a grammar amongst the books up-stairs you seem to know so well.”

Bertie darted away, and soon returned with the desired book.

“It’s Tom’s!” he cried, displaying it eagerly; “I always know Tom’s books from Charley’s, because they’re so much more untidy. See, he’s burnt his name on this one with the poker. I wonder if anybody scolded him for spoiling the cover?”

The Squire sat quite still for a few minutes, with his eyes upon the book. His mind was far away in the past. He was unconscious for a short time of all outward impressions. It was so many, many years since he had looked upon or handled any of the possessions of his lost children. An odd thrill ran through him, and yet it was not all pain. Indeed, there seemed

something soothing and healing in the sense that he was about to use one of the familiar books that had belonged to the buried past. That battered Latin grammar brought back a host of memories to the mind that for fifteen long years had striven to banish them, and yet these memories brought with them now almost as much of pleasure as of pain.

Bertie did not disturb the Squire's reverie by one word. He seemed to know by intuition that he was thinking of his dead son; and by and by, in token of his unspoken sympathy, the child bent his head and pressed his soft cheek against the hand that still held the old book.



Then the Squire awoke from his dream, and put his arm about the little boy.

“Now let us see how much you know,” he said, in his usual quiet way; “let us see if you ever learned anything like this before.”

And after this fashion Bertie’s education began.

Every morning brought its hours of study in the library, and as Bertie loved his books, and was bent above all things on pleasing the Squire, he progressed rapidly, having evidently been well grounded before, and being able to push on at a great rate.

Then there were other pleasures in store for him too, for one day the Squire said, quite suddenly,—

“You must begin to learn something of farming, if you are to be my little boy, Bertie. Can you be ready every fine morning at nine o’clock to come round the place with me when I go to see after things?”

Bertie’s face glowed with pleasure as he gave a glad assent; and behold, upon the very next morning he found himself arrayed in extra strong boots and tanned leather leggings up to his knees, “just like papa’s” as he proudly remarked to Pritchard in the hall, and with his top-coat buttoned well up and his dog-whip in his hand, he awaited the Squire in a state of joyous impatience.

Just as the clock struck nine, the dining-room door opened, and out he came, and Bertie’s kiss and greeting that morning were more joyously childlike than perhaps they had ever been before.

The great dog Sam was as pleased as anybody at an arrangement that did not divide his allegiance, and hand in hand, with the dog at their heels, the Squire and his little adopted son commenced their round of the farm and stables.

This part of the premises was quite new to Bertie. He had had leave to ramble anywhere about the garden, but he had never been told that he might visit the yard or the farm; and, with his ingrained sense of obedience, he had never allowed himself to trespass without leave, although he had many times wished he might investigate the mysteries of those many long sheds and high brick walls.

But this way of doing things was better than any dream.

The Squire was careful to explain as much to the child as he could take in at first. He let him count the cows in their stalls, and gave him material for many sums to be worked out afterwards as to the quantities of milk and butter. He let him watch whilst they were loosed and turned out to graze in the rich meadows below, and encouraged him to caress the pretty Alderney whose acquaintance he had made in the fields.

He showed him the different pigs, and explained their “points” to him; he let him look at the horses, and told anecdotes about several of them that were listened to with deep attention.

When the more serious business of the day began, and orders were given to the different men, and consultations held with the bailiff as to the disposal of cattle or the rotation of crops, Bertie listened with all his ears, trying to look as much like the Squire as possible, secretly imitating his attitudes, and repeating to himself some phrase that struck him as particularly fine.

He was dismissed presently to the garden and the park, as the Squire had to prolong his inspection by a trudge over some ploughed land, too heavy for Bertie to traverse: but the little boy went happily away, much delighted by his morning’s work, and quite convinced that there was nobody in the whole world half so wise or so kind as the Squire.

And a few days later there was a new surprise for Bertie.

He dined every day now at the Squire’s luncheon hour, not only on Sundays, as in old times; and one day, as they rose from table, they heard the sound of horses’ feet upon the gravel drive outside, and the Squire looked at the clock and said,—

“Why, it is later than I thought. Run and get your hat and coat, Bertie. We ought to be off almost at once, or we shall be benighted.”

Bertie ran off in a great state of delight, not quite knowing what was in store, but certain that it would be something very nice. Nor was he disappointed, for when he came down there was the Squire’s own bay standing ready saddled at the door, and beside it a smaller and slighter horse, very gracefully made and very pretty, also a bay, at whom the master was looking very critically as the groom led him up and down before him.

“Now, Bertie,” he said, facing round as the child approached, “I have got you something to ride, and as no pony could keep up with Castor, I have had to get you something bigger than I meant at first. He is very fast, but at the same time quite gentle, and his mouth is very good. Do you think you can manage him? If you feel at all afraid, say so, for it is not the least use mounting a thoroughbred horse unless you mean to be master.”

Bertie looked at the horse and then up into the Squire’s face; he was flushed with excitement, but his mouth was firmly set.

“I’m not a bit afraid,” he answered, quietly. “I should like to ride him very much.”

“Very good; you shall.”

So Bertie was lifted into the saddle, and he gathered up his reins and settled himself in his seat in a way that showed him no novice in the art of horsemanship. The little horse stepped daintily back and forth, as if longing to be off; but Bertie’s gentle voice and hands controlled him, and he stood still, arching his neck and pawing the ground with his foot, until the Squire was mounted and gave the word to start.

How Bertie enjoyed that ride he never could afterwards express. It seemed like the realization of his brightest dream to be galloping along the soft slushy roads beside the Squire, mounted on a horse who seemed ready to fly, yet who was so gentle that the child had no real trouble in controlling him.

There is something infectious in the utter gladness of heart with which childhood can enter into new pleasures. The sight of Bertie’s happy face and shining eyes brought many a smile to the grave countenance of the Squire, and he looked down with much tenderness at the little boy at his side, and once it seemed almost as if an unwonted tear stood in his eye. Bertie, at least, glancing up at the moment, almost fancied that he had seen it, and wondered what it meant.

When they drew rein by and by, and walked their horses quietly along the lonely road, Bertie looked up once again into the Squire’s face and asked with great interest,—

“Used you to take Tom and Charley out with you when you rode, like you are taking me to-day?”

“Yes, they very often came with me.”

“I wonder if they liked it as much as I do.”

“You like it so very much, then?”

“Oh yes, don’t I! I think it’s splendid!” cried Bertie, with a burst of enthusiasm unusual with him. “I don’t think anything could be nicer in all the world than to go riding with you!”

The Squire smiled, rather a sad smile perhaps, but once he had rarely smiled at all.

“Please tell me about Tom and Charley,” went on Bertie, with eager interest. “Mrs. Pritchard can tell me all about what they did at home; but she can’t tell me about other things, because she didn’t see. I want to know about them when they went riding with you. What did they do? and where did you go? and what did they like best to talk about when you went out? And did Mary and Violet ever come too?”

Bertie forgot in his eagerness and excitement that he had never heard from the Squire’s lips a single word about the sons and daughters he had lost; and he did not know that for fifteen long years their names had never even passed his lips. He asked his questions in absolute ignorance or oblivion of all these facts, and when the father began to tell little anecdotes of the rides he and his children had taken together long, long ago, Bertie listened with undivided interest and pleasure, not in the least realizing—how should he?—that this moment was almost as great a turning-point in his benefactor’s life as the one when he took the child in his arms in the lonely churchyard and called him his adopted son.

But so it was. The barrier of reserve that had locked itself like an icy wall about his heart had melted beneath the warm sunshine of a little child’s love. The silence of fifteen long, dreary years had been broken at last, and a load like a leaden weight had rolled away with it.

That night the faithful Pritchard remarked to his wife,—

“I’ve never seen the master look so like himself since last summer fifteen years.”

And Mrs. Pritchard wiped her eyes and answered,—

“’Tis the child as has done it, for sure, bless his little heart! Wasn’t I always sure as he would bring a blessing with him when he came?”

CHAPTER XVII.

CHRISTMAS-TIDE.



UT in the midst of all his newly-found happiness Bertie did not forget his old friends.

He had told the Squire all about his affection for David, and had been encouraged to show all the kindness in his power to the fisher lad, who had been kind to him when he was a lonely little outcast.

So almost every day he visited the humble cabin, and wandered with David among the sandhills, and found in him as sympathetic a confidant, now that he had happy secrets to tell, as in the old days when these had all been sad.

"I do be glad, that I be," said David again and again, when Bertie told him of his happiness. "I just knew the Lord couldn't forget thee—didn't I always tell thee so?"

"Yes, you did, and you were quite right. He didn't ever forget me, though He didn't remember me in the way I expected quite."

"Maybe He does things in His own way," remarked David, simply. "My teacher says as He knows best."

"Yes," answered Bertie, softly, and with childish reverence. "You know I always tried to say 'Thy will be done' too. I'm so glad I did; for I'm sure His will is best."

Sometimes David would look earnestly at his little companion and ask,—

“Don’t thou want to remember what thy name is or who thou really be?”

And Bertie’s face would put on a grave, far-away look as he would answer,—

“I want Him to do just what He thinks best. He’s given me such a lot of things that I know He’s not forgotten me; and I’d like to leave it all to Him.”

“Maybe that’s best,” David would say. “I do be glad He’s made thee so happy.”

The Squire, who took an interest in everything and everybody that made a part of Bertie’s life, began to take notice of David now, and found out from his mother that he did not seem physically adapted for the seafaring life that would naturally fall to his lot.

He loved his home near the sea, and the sea itself, but he had no taste for the career of fisherman or sailor, and when the Squire asked the good dame if she would like to see him employed about the garden or farm connected with the Manor House her eyes brightened with pleasure, and she answered, that there was nothing in all the world he would like so well; it would keep him at home, and yet near Master Bertie.

Every one round and about Arlingham knew the substantial advantage of entering the Squire’s service. None of his laborers or workpeople were ever “turned off” when work was slack, none were dismissed when old age robbed them of their former powers. If they behaved themselves well, they might stay upon the place from early youth to hoary old age. Such had been the traditions of the house for many generations, and many were the men who had grown grey-headed in the service of the Squires of Arlingham, and who had learned to love and revere the masters who were always just, yet always generous, and who looked after them in sickness and in health with a quiet, kindly sovereignty that never became tyrannical and never degenerated into undue familiarity. The master was always the master, and yet each one of his servants, even if they feared him a little, knew that he was at heart the staunchest friend they need wish to have, so long as they earned his good-will by quiet attention to duty.

So David’s mother was deeply delighted at the prospect of seeing her son enter the Squire’s service, knowing well that an opening in life would be

thus secured which would afford him a means of livelihood for as long as he cared to remain.

The next step was to speak to the lad himself and discover the bent of his tastes. It would be hard to say which of the boys was most pleased at the prospect thus held out—David or Bertie. The Squire was a good deal amused by the animation of his little adopted son, and was pleased at David's visible gratitude and eagerness. A few questions soon elicited the fact that the farm attracted him more than the garden. He had a great love for all live animals, and had been more or less used to cows and pigs all his life, having often been employed by one or another of the village folks to look after their beasts when they themselves were too busy to do so.

So David was promoted to be a cow-boy at the Manor Farm, and greatly did both he and Bertie rejoice in the new dignity thus conferred upon him. He had a certain number of cows to milk and look after, and the favorite Alderney was amongst these. Bertie began now to haunt the farm like a little "Squire born," as the men used to say among themselves: "For all the world like poor Master Tom," the elder laborers would add. And they all looked kindly upon the little boy, who on his side always spoke nicely and courteously to every one of the people, and they sometimes said amongst themselves that if Master Bertie succeeded in his day as Squire of Arlingham, there would be no fear but that the old traditions would be kept up. He was not the sort to let them die out.

So Bertie went about very much as if he had been born and bred upon the place. He learned to milk the cows and to understand their ways. He had his own chickens and turkeys, and was fattening one of the latter with untiring assiduity for the Squire's Christmas dinner. He could talk quite gravely and knowingly about the price of corn or the quality of hay, and modelled himself in all things upon the Squire in a way that often provoked a smile.

He was very happy in those days—happier than he had once believed it possible for him to be. The forgotten past did not haunt him with vague, fleeting images and illusive dreams. The present was full of satisfaction and pleasure, and amid its many and vivid interests he never felt that blank sense of emptiness that had once so weighed upon his spirit.

Dr. Lighton began to shake his head when questioned now as to the probability of the vanished past ever returning to him.

“It may do still,” he would say: “the sight of a familiar face or a place that he has known might bring it all back in a flood; but he is so young that a few years of this life may cause actual forgetfulness, irrespective of the original injury, and he may never be able to recall the past at all. If he were older, the chances would be much greater; as things stand now, I confess I am doubtful.”

The Squire showed no uneasiness at hearing this. People were beginning to say that he looked ten years younger already than when Bertie had first come; and the young doctor, who was on more intimate terms with him than anybody else in the neighborhood, was much impressed by the change in him.

“To tell the truth, doctor,” said the Squire, smiling, “I am in no wise anxious to discover the child’s parents. I did my best at first, but quite failed in tracing them. I have grown fond of him. He is like my own child now; and, without wishing to be selfish, I shall be personally glad if he is never claimed. He has settled down very comfortably here, and I think I can make him happy.”

“There is no doubt as to that, I think. I incline to hope, for both your sakes, that he never will be claimed.”

Christmas-time came round in due course; but it did not bring back Bertie’s little playfellows to the empty house behind the trees. He had a letter from Queenie saying that they were all going to spend the holidays at the house of an uncle and aunt; but that she thought they would come home again in March or April, and she hoped it would not be too late to get the young sea-gulls.

The Squire was afraid Bertie might be disappointed at not seeing his young friends and sharing together the Christmas festivities; but the child was quite content that it should be so, and, putting his arms about his so-called father’s neck, he whispered,—

“I’ve got you, papa. I don’t want anybody else.”

The lonely man and the lonely child had grown very dear to one another during these past weeks. They were together during the greater part of the day, and they shared each other’s confidence in a way that was quite peculiar.

They had a world of their own, too, other than the material world around them, and one quite unknown to any but themselves. It was the world of the Squire's buried past, that for many long years he had shut away in his own heart and had striven to forget. A long closed door had at last been unlocked by a childish hand, and old memories awakened into a new life that seemed to bring them a strange sense of peace and consolation.

Tom and Charley, Mary and Violet, the gentle mother and the baby Donald, were now as household words on the lips of one who had thought never to speak their names again. To the little boy, who was never tired of hearing stories of their brief lives, they were real and living friends, whose personality was as vivid to him as if they still ran races in the hall and flocked about their father at dusk to beg for the stories he always kept for them.

The Squire was called upon as imperiously now for stories as ever in the sweet days of the happy past, and no stories were so eagerly welcomed as those that told of the children whom he began to look on as not lost, but only gone before.

There was one story that Bertie longed to hear, but that he had never asked for yet. Many times the request had been on the tip of his tongue, but had never actually passed his lips. He had heard a part of the story from Mrs. Pritchard, he had imagined it many times for himself, but he had never heard it from the Squire, and he felt that until he did so he should never be entirely satisfied.

It was Christmas day, and the day had been full of pleasure and interest to little Bertie. Upon the previous afternoon the happy work had begun in the distribution of Christmas dinners amongst the Squire's people and the poor folks of the place. Early in the day there had been another distribution of warm clothing and bright scarlet cloaks to the old people, and after morning service a great dinner in the laundry for all the Squire's laborers and workpeople who were not married, and preferred this way of dining to solitary meals or those taken with families who perhaps preferred their room to their company.

The Squire and Bertie had visited them at dinner, and enjoyed seeing their happy, jovial faces and the gusto with which they fell to upon the good cheer before them; but what had delighted the child most was the big

Christmas tree in the barn for the youngsters of the place, where all kinds of things were given away and nobody was forgotten.

It was many, many years since the Squire had shown himself as he did this year. Christmas at the Manor House had always been kept with almost feudal or mediæval liberality and hospitality, and the tree, that had been inaugurated by the last lady of the Manor only a year or two before her death, had always been an institution since; but it was fifteen years since the Squire had seen it or since he had helped to give away its load of presents.

Bertie had not been forgotten. He had come in for a lion's share of pretty things, trifles that children prize so much. The old servants had each their little offering for the child they all loved. David's clever fingers had made a wonderful cap out of sea-gulls' feathers, which Mrs. Pritchard had hung upon the tree at his earnest request, and the Squire had been represented by articles of a more costly and serviceable kind. But Bertie's pleasure had been less for himself than in seeing so many other people happy. He was learning in a very practical and emphatic way that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

And now all the excitement of the day was over, even the seven o'clock dinner with the Squire, when they had both partaken of the fatted turkey, which was said to have done credit to the care bestowed on it. Eight o'clock had struck, and it was nearly Bertie's bed-time, but he fearlessly followed the Squire into his library and climbed upon his knee as he settled himself in his easy-chair.

There had been a long silence between them, and then Bertie asked, softly,—

“Have you enjoyed your Christmas, papa?”

The arm that encircled him pressed him a little more closely.

“Yes, my little boy, I have enjoyed it this year. And you?”

“Oh, I have been very, very happy!—I always am now, you know.”

“You are content to be my little boy? You do not want anybody else?”

“I think I would rather be your little boy always now,” answered Bertie; and then he looked up into the face above him with a peculiar depth of gravity, and added, “I feel as if God had given me to you.”

“I think He has, my child; and I am grateful to Him. He has given back to me a part of what He saw fit to take away. He has given me one little son to be with me in my old age.”

Bertie sat up and looked into the face above him.

“Papa,” he said, softly, “will you tell me one story to-night? I want to know about—about it all—when He took them all away.”

There was a deep silence for a few minutes after those words were spoken, and Bertie, gazing into the father’s eyes, half repented of his question, and yet did not repent. He could not read the look upon that face, it awed him into unbroken silence; and yet there was no anger there, no sternness even, only a deep, far-off sadness, as if some picture were slowly rising above the mental horizon that could only be looked upon with tear-dimmed eyes and with tender, haunting regret.

The moments seemed very long to Bertie, but he did not speak again.

“My child,” said the Squire at last, “why do you ask for that story to-night?”

Bertie hardly knew himself.

“You have never told it me,” he answered, shyly; “and to-night—”

“Well, to-night?”

“To-night seems a happy time. It is Christmas, you know, and the angels are always glad at Christmas. I think they are always nearer us then, because, you know, the shepherds saw them once, as if they liked to fly nearer to us at Christmas-time—”

Bertie paused again, hardly knowing how to frame the thought, and again the Squire said,—

“Well?”

“I thought, perhaps, they might be nearer to us to-night—Tom and Charley and all of them, you know. Perhaps they are helping the angels to sing; and if they are, I’m sure they would try to come near us to-night. I thought you would not mind telling me about them, when perhaps they are not so very far away. Don’t you think it is rather nice to think that they are

up there—so happy helping the angels to sing, ‘Peace on earth and glory to God’?”

There was another long silence, which again the Squire broke.

“I will tell you the story to-night, my child, if you wish to hear it.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SQUIRE'S STORY.



O you want to know the story of that summer fifteen years ago, do you? I, I have never spoken of that time to any living creature since, but, as you are to be my little son, perhaps you ought to know the story of those who went before you."

The Squire spoke in slow, measured tones. He looked straight before him into the fire, and his voice had a dreamy, far-away sound, as the voice of one who is lost in the depths of his own thoughts and memories.

Bertie, sitting upon the Squire's knee, drew the encircling arm more closely about him, and rested his head against the kindly shoulder that gave it such comfortable support.

"I like to know everything about you," he said, softly, "and about all of them. I know a great deal, but not quite all. I want to know why you wrote 'Thy will be done.'"

The subtle sympathy that existed between the man and the child made Bertie's thought clear to the Squire. He understood the child's meaning, and saw that he had himself been understood.

"You want to know how I learned my lesson, Bertie? Very well, you shall hear."

He paused; but Bertie said nothing, and after a long silence the Squire commenced his tale.

“I was an only child, and my parents were all that is kind and wise and judicious. I was not spoiled, and yet I had every reasonable indulgence, and I was very happy. I was brought up in the fear and love of God, as well as in the earnest wish to do my duty to my fellow-creatures, especially to those who lived about me, and were, or would be, in a measure dependent upon me for their daily bread. I was never inclined to treat such matters lightly, accepted the teaching my parents gave me readily and sincerely, and I never felt tempted to wander from the beaten track that my forefathers had trodden. I had a very happy, untroubled youth, and life was very bright before and around me. I was kind-hearted and generous, a favorite with our people, and if I had ever been questioned upon the subject, I suppose I should have said that I was doing my best to live the life of a Christian gentleman. I was not in the least aware that there was nothing personal in my religion. I had accepted it from my father and mother in just the same fashion as I had accepted their politics and their teaching upon a variety of subjects; only, whereas I interested myself deeply in secular subjects, and verified the wisdom of their views by practical experience of my own, I was content in the matter of religion to take all upon trust, and accept everything they said, because I had no reason to doubt their wisdom, and because it was much easier to let them do the thinking for me than to do it for myself.

“As years passed by, changes came into my life. My parents died, and I married, and had children of my own to care for. My life continued easy and pleasant and prosperous, as it always had been. I was very happy, and had never known what real trouble was. The death of my parents had been my only grief. I mourned sincerely for them, but in the love of my wife and the caresses of my baby boys I soon found comfort; and in this happy and quiet way my life flowed on from year to year, till, like somebody else of whom we read, ‘I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved; Thou, Lord, of Thy goodness hast made my hill so strong.’”

There was a pause, which the quiet little listener did not try to break. How much he understood of all this, how much he entered into the frame of mind described, the Squire did not pause to ask. It was plain enough that he was deeply interested in any story that dealt with the past life of one he loved so well.

“My wife, Bertie, was a very good woman. You see her picture there. She brought up our children to be like her—how like I did not know for many

years. I was very happy and very busy every day of my life, from one year's end to another. I loved my wife, I loved my children very dearly. They loved me in return, and it seemed as if no cloud ever shadowed our peaceful home. Sickness never came within our doors. We often laughed at our yearly doctor's bill, it was so very small. Everything seemed to thrive with us. Trouble passed us by as if it had no part or lot in our house. I began to take our happiness and prosperity so much for granted that I almost forgot to be grateful.

“Not so my wife; her gentle voice was often raised in thanksgiving for the brightness of our lot. I always assented readily when she spoke of the gratitude we owed to God. I did not know how little my heart really responded to her words. I was soon, however, to learn that my service had been all this while little more than the service of self.

“Fifteen years ago last summer, the cholera came to this country on one of its periodical visits. It attacked our village; but in the first instance the nature of the malady was not detected. Our good old doctor was himself ill, and away for his health, whilst his young assistant was quite inexperienced, and had never seen cholera in his life. We heard that there were many cases of illness in the village, and from what we heard we gathered that it was caused by some impurity in the water supply. We had never been in the least alarmed on our own account when attacks of sickness had from time to time taken place in the village. We had never banished the children, nor had we ever had cause to repent our temerity. My wife was assiduous as ever in ministering to the wants of the sick. Nobody called it cholera during the first week that it visited us. Many people took it and died, and a sort of panic set in; but that made my wife only the more anxious to encourage others by her own example.

“The boys had just come home for their holidays, and as they were very popular in the village, and had a number of friends amongst the people, they were continually running across; and if they heard of a case of illness in any house they knew, they would look in to say a cheery word to the sufferer and ascertain if he had everything he wanted.

“But at the end of a week the mortality became so great that the gravest fears were excited. Medical help from other places was called in, and we were soon made aware that the scourge of cholera had visited us. I took the

alarm then. I said to my wife that she must make instant arrangements to leave, taking all the children with her, but that I should remain to do what I could for the sufferers and to help those who were working for them. My wife would fain have stayed with me, but I would not hear of it. For the sake of the children she submitted to my verdict; and, with the heroism that had always characterized her, she forbore to tempt me away from the place where my duty bade me stay.

“It was on Saturday that we awoke to a sense of the peril of our position. On Monday morning we had arranged that all for whom any anxiety was felt, or who were at all afraid to remain, should leave the house. All our plans were made—but they were made too late.

“On Sunday afternoon Mary came running to us with a frightened face, saying that Tom had been suddenly taken very ill whilst playing in the garden. We hastened to him, and found him cold and blue and almost pulseless. We saw at a glance that he had been smitten by the relentless foe, and when first I saw him my heart seemed to stand still, for I felt certain that there was death in his face.

“We knew by that time what measures to take, and they were promptly taken. We had been two hours with him, and still that state of rigid collapse had not yielded, when Mary called us once again to say that Charley was complaining of dreadful pain, and looked almost as bad as Tom had done.

“There were two beds in the boys’ room. Tom occupied one now, and in another hour Charley was lying still and rigid in his. The doctor came, and looked very grave. From the character of the seizure in both cases, he anticipated the worst from the first moment.

“That night both my boys died. They were conscious towards the last, and they knew both their mother and me. She told them they were going home, and asked if they were afraid. They told her no; because Jesus had died for them. I asked them how they could be so sure of it; they looked half surprised, and Tom answered, with a look I shall never forget—it seemed so strange in the eyes of laughter-loving, careless, merry Tom.

““He said so, father; and besides, I feel it *here*’—laying his hand on his heart. ‘He said, He died for *all* of us. He said, He took away *all* sin with His

blood. I know He's taken away mine. Mother and I have asked Him so often.'

"Charley's testimony was more faintly spoken,—the boy had suffered much and was sinking rapidly,—but it was just as clear.

"He's coming for me, mother dear. Don't cry, sweet mother. I'd like to stay with you if I could; but He knows best. He's so good; and I am quite happy. You will be—happy—too."

"And so they died—both in one night—brave and steadfast and fearless, as young soldiers who have known something of the battle, even if their fighting days have been but brief. They were not unhappy or afraid. Dying for them was but leaving one happy home to find another—a far brighter one than this could ever be.

"My wife was the next—she was only two days behind her boys; and her little girls so closely followed her that she could hardly have had time to miss them before she found them again in the everlasting home. For a very little while I hoped that my last little boy, the pet and darling of the house, was to be left to me. Each night, as I visited him in his sleep, and marked the bloom on his cheek and the healthy, natural slumber, I told myself that he would surely be spared me; but there came one morning when I saw, by the frightened and averted glances of my servants, that some new calamity had befallen me. I asked no question, but went straight up to the nursery.

"There he lay in his little bed, white and still as marble; his little hands crossed upon his breast, and fair white flowers around him. He had been found dead in his bed in the morning, having evidently passed away in his sleep. The poison had done its work swiftly and well, and the child had not known one struggle or one pang.

"They were all laid in the quiet churchyard within a week of each other. The sickness declined amongst us from that day; and only the many new mounds in the graveyard and the empty chairs around many hearths were left to tell the tale of that terrible time.

"I was left alone in my home—quite alone; for in my despair I found that what I had taken to be my love of God and trust in Him was all an illusion, a shadow that vanished away the moment my prosperity was overthrown. God was showing me the true worth of those things in which I had put my

trust. He was showing me that I had never known Him truly all my life long. I was not quick to learn the lesson He was teaching me. Trouble hardened my heart, and in my thoughts I reviled the God who had taken away all that made the happiness of my life and had left me alone in misery and darkness. For a long time I was very, very unhappy.

“At last, in the days of my darkness and misery, God sent me a message of comfort. He sent it me by the hand of my dead wife—in a few words she had pencilled on the fly-leaf of her Bible, only a few hours before her death, and which it was months before I found courage to read.

“‘God will be with you always, my dear husband,’ she wrote. ‘His Holy Spirit will be your support and stay in all trials, and will lead you to the eternal home in our Father’s own good time—’ The pencil had evidently dropped from her fingers then; but she had told me enough.

“‘Lord, give to me the guidance of Thy Holy Spirit,’ was my daily prayer, when once the hardness of my heart was melted, and I had sought my Saviour’s forgiveness and pardoning love. That prayer was not uttered in vain. In His own good time God sent His Comforter to me; and I trust that I have learned the lesson He taught me during those dark and desolate days. We are always failing, always slipping, always needing new lessons and new strength to learn them; but I think there is one great life-long lesson that I shall not have to learn again.

“When I had learned it first, I put upon the marble slab over the grave that held my all the words I have never since wished unsaid—‘Thy will be done.’”

CHAPTER XIX.

COMING CHANGES.



O the winter days wore happily away, the bond between the Squire and his little adopted son growing ever stronger and stronger; and by slow yet sure degrees the sunshine began to take the golden radiance of spring, the buds upon the bare trees swelled with the stirring life within them, the hedges showed a filmy network of tender green, and the shy wild flowers began to peep out from sheltered sunny corners, smiling up at the sunshine from beneath the protecting roots of great trees, or nodding their heads in friendly greeting to passers-by from cosey nooks in the south slope of a sheltered bank.

Bertie and his friend the Squire welcomed the spring, as all the world does to a greater or less extent. The winter had been a very happy time for them both; but the promise of spring seemed to them to be charged with gladness and brightness for all.

Once when they were crossing the park together, the Squire looked down at his little companion and said,—

“This is the first time that spring has been spring to me for fifteen long years.”

Bertie, who was hunting for primroses in a mossy bank, looked up quickly.

“The years were like one long winter to me,” continued the Squire, looking out straight before him; and then, lifting his hat for a moment, he added, reverently, “But, thank God! that has all passed now.”

Bertie came and took one of the hands of his so-called father and laid his cheek against it.

He knew quite well that this was the Squire's way of telling him that his coming there had been a source of comfort and happiness.

"I came here in the spring, didn't I?" he asked. "I think I've been here nearly a year—David says so."

"Yes, it is going on now for a year—a year in April since you were washed ashore. Has it been a happy year to you, my child?"

Bertie glanced up into the face above him with eyes full of love.

"Ever since you let me be your little boy," he answered, with emphasis, "I have been quite happy."

"And before?"

"Before I was happy sometimes—when I was with you; but I was often very lonely. If I hadn't felt sure that God would take care of me, I think I should have been miserable sometimes."

"But you were sure of that?"

Bertie paused and reflected.

"By and by I was—not just at first—but by and by. And then I found out something for me to do, and then all the rest came easy."

"What did you find to do?"

"I found out that you were lonely and unhappy, and I wanted to comfort you," answered the child, very softly. "Because you had no little children of your own left. I didn't think at first that I could; but by and by you said I did."

"Yes, my child. We were given to one another, to fill, as it were, the blank that God had thought fit to make in both of our lives. We must trust Him now to leave us to one another, and not to part us unless that too is a part of His holy will."

Bertie looked up timidly.

"I could never leave you now, papa."

The Squire looked down at him with a smile.

“I hope not, my little son; but it is possible you may some day remember your own parents, and that they may want you back. But whatever happens we know will be for the best, and we must always be strong and of a good courage, and do what is right. No happiness ever comes from shirking duty.”

Bertie looked up wistfully.

“You have not heard anything, have you, about me?”

The Squire smiled reassuringly.

“No, no, my little boy; I am only speaking of a possible future, and one that we ought perhaps to wish for. But I think it quite possible, under all the circumstances of the case, that your parents, did we succeed in tracing them, would allow you to remain in my care as my little adopted son; and we do not even know that they are living, for they might well have been lost that stormy night when you were washed ashore at the fisherman’s hut.”

Bertie’s face was very grave. He did not often speculate now upon the past, and the Squire rarely alluded to the subject. He was quite content to dwell in the present, and it seemed highly probable, as Dr. Lighton had said, that he would never awake to recollection, but that the oblivion of childhood would sweep away the vanished past, even when the physical injury had gradually cured itself.

It was impossible for the child to wish for any change. He was so entirely happy in his new home, and loved his father so devotedly, that there was no room in his heart for the vague yearnings that had troubled him once, and he felt as if he belonged by birthright to the place he now occupied.

And new interests and pleasures were in store for him now in the return of the Arbuthnots to their long-deserted house.

He did not know they were coming until they had come, and he suddenly met Queenie in the park, face to face, as she was running up to see him and tell him all the news.

He was so surprised that he only stood quite still, staring hard at her, and exclaimed, “Queenie!” in a very astonished voice.

“Bertie!” she answered, mimicking him, and then she began to laugh in her old merry way.

“Why, Bertie, how astonished you look! Didn’t I say we should be home in the spring? Aren’t you pleased to see me back?”

“Yes, very pleased,” answered Bertie, recovering himself. “Are the boys here yet?”

“Not yet. They will be back at Easter. Papa and mamma and I have come home now. Bertie, is it true that the Squire has adopted you properly?”

“I am his little boy now,” answered the child, simply. “He says so.”

“And do you like it?”

“Yes, very much.”

“You like him?”

“I love him.”

“And you’re not dreadfully dull?”

“Oh no!”

Queenie looked at him critically.

“You don’t look as if you were unhappy. You’ve grown, I’m sure. You look quite different from what you did. Are you happy?”

“Yes, very.”

“Well, I’m glad of that,” said Queenie. “I like people to have nice times. I’ve had *such* fun myself.”

“Have you? Where have you been?”

“Oh, to lots of places. We stayed in ever so many houses, and it was great fun. Sometimes there were other children, and sometimes there weren’t. I liked both, but I think I liked it best when there were no nurseries or schoolrooms; then I was generally with the ladies. I liked to hear them talk, and they gave me pretty things. I’m never troublesome, you know, except to nurse,” added Queenie, shaking her curly head with a merry laugh; “so people like me, and say I’m no trouble, and then I’m not turned out.”

Bertie laughed too, because Queenie’s mirth was infectious.

“Do you know,” went on the little chatterbox, as Bertie turned and walked beside her,—“do you know we are not going to live here much longer? only till midsummer, perhaps not so long?”

“I didn’t know,” answered Bertie. “Why are you going away?”

“Mamma doesn’t like it, nor papa either; and I don’t think *I* care for it so very much;” and the little maiden put on her grand air, as if her wishes had been of very great consequence in the decision of her parents. “We always used to live in London till papa had this place left to him, and then we came here for a little while; but nobody cares very particular for it, and so they have decided to sell it.”

Bertie opened his eyes wide.

“Then will somebody else buy it, and come and live here?” he asked.

Queenie nodded her head mysteriously.

“Somebody has bought it already.”

“Oh!”

“Yes, somebody you know. Guess who it is.”

“Somebody I know,” repeated Bertie, slowly; “but I know so few people.”

“Then you will guess all the quicker!” answered Queenie, with her merry laugh.

Bertie considered a moment and then said,—

“The Squire?”

“No, not the Squire; he only cares for his own property. Papa says our land is nothing to his; he wouldn’t care for it. Guess again.”

Bertie was puzzled.

“Dr. Lighton?” he asked, doubtfully; but Queenie’s laugh was answer enough.

“No, indeed! Where would he get the money from? Guess again.”

“I can’t; there’s nobody else I know. Are you sure I know him?”

“Of course you do! You must guess. You’ve seen him at our house often and often.”

Bertie paused again, hesitated, and suggested, timidly,—

“Uncle Fred?”

Queenie clapped her hands.

“There! I knew you could guess if you tried. Yes, it’s Uncle Fred. He likes the place, and he has plenty of money now, so he has bought it, and he’s going to come and live here very soon, as soon as he can get married and come over to England.”

Bertie looked mystified.

“Isn’t he in England now?”

“No, he’s in Australia. He likes travelling about, and he went there almost as soon as he left us in the summer, and now he’s going to get married.”

Queenie said these words in a voice that implied a great deal. She tried to excite Bertie’s curiosity by her manner, but he was too simple-minded to understand her moods, and he only said, quite quietly,—

“Is he?”

“Yes, he is; and if you like I’ll tell you all about it. It’s very romantic.”

“What is?”

“Why, Uncle Fred’s marriage.”

“What is romantic?”

Queenie tossed her head, but to tell the plain truth she did not exactly know herself.

“Well, that’s what mamma says when she tells people about Uncle Fred. She says it’s so romantic, and everybody else says the same—so it must be so, you know.”

Bertie had never dreamed of disputing this, so, as he had no answer ready, he merely said,—

“Well?”

“Well,” returned Queenie, settling down to her story with great animation, “this is what has happened. You know, when Uncle Fred was quite a young man, he was very fond of a lady he knew very well, and he wanted to marry her; but he was not very well off, and he did not like to ask her to marry him till he got some money. So he went away to sea to make his fortune, and when he came back after a year or two with a good deal more money, he found that the lady had married somebody else,—he had never told her how fond he was of her, which I think was silly,—and had gone away to live in London. Well, poor Uncle Fred was very sad, for he loved her very much, and he always had fancied that she liked him too. A friend of his told him that people thought the lady had married partly to please her father, for she was very fond of him and very obedient; anyway she was married, and Uncle Fred was too late, so he went back to sea again and tried to forget all about her.”

Queenie paused here, and Bertie asked,—

“Is that all?”

“Of course it isn’t all!” cried Queenie; “all that happened ten years ago.”

“Oh!” returned Bertie, who was getting a little puzzled by Queenie’s romance.

“Yes, all that happened ever so long ago, when Uncle Fred was quite young, and before he came into his money. But he never married even when he was quite rich, because he never had cared for any lady except the one he wanted to marry long ago. Well, last year he went out to Australia, as I told you. He had made a good many friends there before, and he thought he would like to go and see them all again. And when he was at Sydney or Melbourne, or one of those places, he went once to a great party given by some rich man there, and when he got there, who was it, do you think, that he met?”

Queenie’s face told its own tale. Bertie was not very well read in romances, but he could guess the sequel to this one. “I suppose you mean that he met the lady that he wanted to marry once.”

“Yes,” answered Queenie, very impressively, “the lady he is going to marry now—at least he has married her, I suppose, already, and perhaps they are on their way home now.”

“But I thought she had married somebody else,” objected Bertie.

“She did years and years ago, but he died very soon after they were married; only Uncle Fred had never heard of it. Her old father died too, by and by, and she was left all alone; and she had some cousins in Australia who asked her to come and live with them, and so she did. I don’t think she’s been long in Australia; I don’t think her father died till last year or something; anyhow, she was there when Uncle Fred found her last Christmas, and now they will be married and come and live here.”

Bertie’s interest was now fully aroused.

“That will be nice,” he said. “I’m glad nobody’s coming that we don’t know. I like Uncle Fred; he was always very kind to me.”

“He always liked you,” answered Queenie. “He took a fancy to you from the first moment. He will be a nice neighbor for the Squire too; they always got on very well together. I hope he will have a nice wife. He must be very fond of her, so I should think she was nice.”

Bertie was less interested upon this point than upon others.

“Will you ever come here after you go away?”

“Oh, yes; we shall be sure to come and see Uncle Fred sometimes.”

Bertie looked pleased.

“That will be nice. We shall be able to play together, and you won’t forget me. I don’t like people to go right away and forget and get forgotten; it seems rather sad, don’t you think?”

“I don’t know; I don’t think I ever thought about it; but you won’t have a chance of forgetting us, any way. And, Bertie, have you forgotten about the sea-gulls in the Rocky Bay?”

Bertie shook his head and smiled.

“I’ve not forgotten a bit,” he answered, “and I can climb very well now. I’m ready to go as soon as ever the right time comes.”

CHAPTER XX.

THE ROCKY BAY.



O-MORROW, Bertie, to-morrow!" whispered Phil, in a sort of ecstatic excitement. "Keep it dark; and be ready at nine sharp. Do you think you could get David to come too without the Squire's knowing it?"

"No; but if I ask him to let him come with me, I know he will say yes. Of course I shall tell him where I am going,—I always do."

Phil whistled a little.

"Do you though? I hadn't bargained for that; but you won't say anything about the young gulls."

"No, that isn't my secret; I promised not to tell; but I shall have to ask leave to go to the Rocky Bay to-morrow. I know he'll let me, and he'll let David come too if I ask, and then I can drive in my little cart and bring something to eat, and you can go in the boat or on your ponies, as you like best."

"Oh, we shall ride," answered Phil. "The other fellows would guess there was something up if we wanted the boat out; and, besides, we could not pull it all that way alone. If you have your cart it will be jolly. We can take everything back in it, young birds and all. Oh, yes; we'll have a rare good day! You're sure the Squire will let you go?"

"Oh, yes; he is very kind. He always likes me to ask him for things."

So Bertie made his proposition very boldly that night, and received a ready assent.

Mrs. Pritchard was pleased to supply the party with lunch, and, as David was going, she felt no anxiety as to the safety of her pet. David was a good, steady lad, and could be trusted to look after Master Bertie as carefully as his own mother.

The Squire came out to see the boy drive away. He lifted him into the varnished cart, and as he gave him the reins he said,—

“A nice day to you my boy. Take care of yourself; but don’t go climbing about the rocks after sea-gulls’ eggs, or you’ll be getting into danger.”

The pony had started before his words were all spoken, so that he could not see the sudden cloud that fell upon Bertie’s face. The little boy drove through the park with a keen sense of disappointment weighing upon him. What had put it into the Squire’s head to utter that prohibition just at the last? Did he really mean what he said, or was it only spoken in jest?

Bertie had half a mind to turn back and plead for a reversal of the verdict; but he resisted the temptation, and drove on in silence. He was afraid, for one thing, of betraying the secret entrusted to him by his companions; and, for another, he had not lived for a year beneath the Squire’s roof without learning that, however kind and considerate he might be, his will was law to all about him, and that he never gave an order, however trifling, without some good reason, and always expected that order to be strictly carried out.

So Bertie knew that there would be no climbing that day for him, and he was keenly disappointed; for he was sure that Queenie would accuse him of cowardice, and he was well aware that he had acquired, by practice in trees and crumbling walls, and about the roof of the old Manor House, a skill and agility in climbing with which he had quite hoped to take his companions by storm.

However, there was nothing for it now but to obey,—for, to do the child justice, he never dreamed of disobedience,—and it was with a heart a good deal less light than he had expected that he joined his companions at the place they had agreed upon.

Phil had a good big basket with him, which was transferred to the cart, and the little cavalcade set forwards. Conversation was not altogether easy

between the riders and driver, so Bertie's silence passed unnoticed; but the faithful David felt certain his little master was cast down about something, and, making a shrewd guess, he whispered,—

“Don't 'ee be sad about it, Master Bertie; I'll get thee the best eggs as can be had in the bay. I know where them birds build, I do, and I'll see thee has all thee wants. I'll get thee a pair of young uns too, if so be as they're hatched and fledged; but we're full early for birds yet.”

“Yes, but Phil has to go back to school so soon that we had to come to-day. Don't you get into any danger, David. I don't care about the eggs—at least not so very much.”

“Bless thy heart! 'tis nothing to me. I've been born and bred to it all my life long.”

By the time the little party had reached the bay, the sun was riding high in the sky, and the children were hungry and thirsty as well as hot.

David took the ponies away to the farm, and the others carried the baskets down the rocky path into the bay. Lunch was, of course, the first consideration, and as Queenie set to work upon her sandwiches and cake, she looked across at Phil and said,—

“Why, we haven't told Bertie about Uncle Fred!”

“What about him?” asked Bertie.

“Why, he's landed in England—he and his wife, you know. They came one steamer before we expected. They're in London now—at least they were last night. They stayed a few days there, and to-day they're coming down to us. The house belongs to Uncle Fred now, you know, and we shall soon leave it. When we get home Uncle Fred will be there.”

“Yes, and a new aunt,” added Queenie, laughing; “it will seem so funny to have a new aunt. What did mamma say her name was? Wasn't it Aunt Winifred?”

Bertie suddenly put up his hand to his head, as he used sometimes to do when he first came, but hardly ever now. Queenie noticed the movement, and paused to ask,—

“What is it?”

“I don’t know,” he answered. “What were you saying? Go on, please.”

“Well, it is not our house any longer, and we shall go very soon. Shall you mind?”

“I shall be sorry,” answered Bertie, slowly. “But I suppose you will come there sometimes?”

“To see Uncle Fred? Oh yes, of course. Uncle Fred is sure to ask Phil and me every year. It will be nice to come here sometimes and see you again. I like this place, though perhaps it is a little dull for living in always.”

“I think it’s jolly!” cried Phil. “I like it heaps better than London. However, as I’m at school now, it doesn’t so very much matter to me. Eton is out and out the best place in the world!”

“You like it better than Dr. Steele’s?” said Bertie, gravely; and Phil laughed uproariously at the question, remembering old times there, and his half-triumphant, half-ignominious flight from his old abode just about a year ago.

After the children had satisfied their hunger, the main business of the day began. Eager eyes were fixed upon the rocky ledges of the perpendicular cliff, and the movements of the sea-gulls who frequented the spot were closely watched.

David’s opinion was eagerly waited for. He did not seem to think that there were as many birds as usual building, or at least laying their eggs in this place; but his practised eye discovered one or two places where he felt certain, from the movements of the parent birds, that the young were already hatched; and there were sure to be other nooks where eggs might be found, if a patient and careful search were made.

Phil, who was ambitious, was bent on securing some young birds, and he made David point out the places where he thought these were to be found. Phil made his selection from these, and, although the elder lad shook his head and said he did not think he would ever reach the place, the schoolboy was in no wise daunted by difficulties.

When Phil had begun his cautious climb, and David had left them to hunt for eggs, Queenie, who had been watching her brother’s movements with some attention, turned suddenly upon Bertie, and asked,—

“And what are you going to do?”

Bertie looked rather red, and answered,—

“Nothing.”

Queenie’s eyebrows went up.

“What do you mean? You’ve been boasting all this time about how you’ve been climbing and what wonderful things you can do. It was all practising for to-day. Why don’t you show us what you can do?”

Bertie was more red than ever now. He had not really boasted at all, but he had admitted to Phil that he had been doing a good deal of climbing, and hoped to be able to make good use of his agility when the day came to visit the Rocky Bay. He was intensely eager now to show his prowess and to join the climbers in their ascent; but he stood quite still, looking sheepish and disturbed.

Queenie looked at him with a surprise that changed to scorn.

“You are afraid,” she said, disdainfully. “Why could you not say so before?”

“I’m not afraid,” answered Bertie, rather hotly. “I’m no more afraid than you.”

Queenie tossed her head scornfully.

“Then why on earth don’t you go? I know it’s because you’re afraid. You always were a pitiful little coward—all the boys say so.”

Bertie clenched his hands tightly, tears of anger and mortification stood in his eyes. It was very hard to be accused of cowardice when he felt himself quite innocent of the charge; and the worst of it was that Queenie would never understand his real motive. Obedience was not a part of her moral code.

With a great effort the little boy swallowed his resentment, and said, quietly,—

“The Squire told me this morning that I was not to climb the rocks for eggs.”

Queenie only looked the more scornful.

“Of course he did. They all do. Papa always does whenever we come here. If he had known Phil was going to-day, he would have forbidden him; but nobody cares for that. Rules are only made to be broken, you know. They must have exceptions, or they wouldn’t be rules—everybody knows that. I know now why you would tell the Squire. You wanted him to forbid you because you were afraid. I always thought you were a horrid little coward, and now I know it!”

When Queenie was vexed, she did not pause to consider other people’s feelings, and she had grown up with brothers who were used to her sharp speeches and did not mind them much. They knew that “her bark was worse than her bite,” as the proverb says, and did not trouble themselves over her angry words; but Bertie was not hardened like this. He was not accustomed to be spoken to so harshly, and his eyes filled again with tears of mortification and distress.

Queenie was something of a little tyrant. She liked to feel her own power, and she was inclined to use it rather mercilessly. Seeing that she had made an impression upon her companion, she proceeded to improve the occasion.

“You who lectured Phil so about courage! It is uncommonly easy to talk big, Master Bertie” (Queenie evidently found it so, at any rate); “but when it comes to *deeds* the case is very different. The idea that *you* ever dared to talk to *him* about courage! I wonder you’re not ashamed of yourself!”

Bertie attempted no defence: for one thing, talking was not his strong point; and for another, he knew that any words of his would be quite wasted on Queenie, who was entirely impervious to reasonable argument when she had once mounted her high horse. So there was silence between them for a few moments; and, before anybody had attempted to reopen the conversation, the silence was broken by an alarming sound, the cry of a boy in distress.

For the last few minutes they had ceased to watch Phil’s ascent of the cliff, being engrossed in their own argument. Looking up quickly now with startled eyes, they saw that his position had become sufficiently perilous.

He had clambered from ledge to ledge with great skill and address; but he had not troubled himself to make sure, in the excitement of the ascent, that it was possible to descend in the same manner. He had been tempted on to

really difficult places, and suddenly he had found himself upon a narrow rocky ridge whence he could make no step either forward or backward. His last step had been a fragment of rock that had given way as he quitted it, and he had narrowly escaped a fall that must have proved fatal. But his present position was perilous enough to threaten his safety, and, as is so often the case in the presence of real danger, giddiness seized upon him, and he clung to the hard rock with convulsive terror, and called aloud in his fright.

Queenie's shriek of terror brought David quickly to their side, and he at once realized the peril of Phil's position; but he knew better than the children what to do, and the emergency seemed to give him courage and presence of mind beyond his years.

"Hold on! hold on, Master Phil!" he shouted. "Shut your eyes and hold on for ten minutes. There's plenty of foothold there; and if you'll just keep quiet and not look up or down, we'll do something for you directly."

And then, calling the others to follow, he commenced climbing the cliff path with the agility of a goat.

Bertie was not much behind, and Queenie, to whom terror lent wings, arrived closely in their wake. In a basket left up at the top of the cliff was a coil of rope of very fair strength.

David had brought it in case it might be needed, and it was well indeed that he had done so. In a few words he explained his plan.

"It's no good Master Phil trying to catch the rope if we let it down to him. He's much too giddy for one thing, and for another the edge overhangs a bit here, and he never could reach it if he hadn't all his wits about him. I'm going to tie it round my waist and clamber down to him. It's not easy to get down from the top, but it can be done with a rope round one pretty safely. When I get to him I'll put the rope on him and you'll draw him up between you; he'll climb too, of course, but the rope will help him and keep him safe. Then you'll let it down for me, and make it swing backwards and forwards till I can reach it. I shan't be giddy, I'll get it right enough, and the three of you can help me up, I know, and we'll all be all right then."

David had spoken with a rapidity and energy quite foreign to his ordinary nature, whilst the pressure of excitement and responsibility was upon him;

and as he spoke he was unwinding the rope and making a slip knot at one end; but before he had tied it round himself Bertie had stopped him.

“David,” he said, with a little touch of authority in his tone, not usual with the gentle little boy towards one who was his companion and friend as well as his servant, “you must let me go down to Phil with the rope. I do not think Queenie and I could pull him up by ourselves if he cannot help himself much, and I do not think anybody but you could swing the rope for the other one to catch by and by. I can climb very well, and I am not giddy. You must let me go.”

For a few minutes there was a sort of argument between the two boys: David reluctant to let Bertie endanger himself ever so little, Bertie quite convinced that the only way of securing the safety of all was in his plan. Queenie took no part in the talk, only standing by with clasped hands and dilated eyes, wishing, even at this moment when she had so much else upon her mind, that she had never called Bertie a coward, for was he not going to risk his own safety to secure that of Phil?

Bertie’s counsel prevailed. Indeed, it was evidently sound, and his quiet determination carried the day.

“I am not going after sea-gulls’ eggs,” he said to himself, as he commenced his perilous descent. “I know the Squire would let me go to try and save Phil.”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MOTHER.



HILST the children away in the Rocky Bay were in the midst of their perilous enterprise, the Squire was sitting alone in his library, quietly engrossed in his books and papers.

Visitors so very rarely disturbed him, visitors were almost unknown at the Manor House, and therefore it was with a good deal of surprise that he heard that Mr. and Mrs. Arbuthnot were in the drawing-room, anxious to speak to him at once.

The Squire was much perplexed for a moment even to know who these people could be, but Pritchard, who observed his master's surprise, added, respectfully,—

“Sir Walter's brother, sir,—Mr. Frederick, as he is often called,—and the lady from Australia whom he has lately married.”

The Squire remembered all about it then, for of course he had heard from Bertie and from others of Uncle Fred's marriage and of his purchase of the adjoining property. He had been pleased to hear of the change, for he had always liked the baronet's brother; but he had not even heard of his arrival at Arlingham, and he could not imagine what could have brought him and his wife so quickly to the Manor House.

However, there they were, and he must go and see them, so he crossed over to the drawing-room without delay. Uncle Fred and his wife were standing with their backs to the door, looking intently at a crayon head of Bertie, that the Squire had lately had taken by a clever young artist in the neighborhood. They both turned round quickly when their host entered, and

he saw that the lady's eyes were full of tears, and that they were soft dark eyes very like Bertie's own.

He greeted his guests courteously, and even in the first moments of introduction he was struck by the sweetness of the lady's face. He almost fancied there was something familiar in the cast of the features, but, however that might be, there was no doubt at all as to the charm of her voice and manner,—a charm which seemed to arise in part from the shadow of some settled sadness bravely borne, that had faded away in the sunshine of a present happiness.

“Squire,” said Uncle Fred (he may as well be called Uncle Fred to the end of the chapter, to avoid confusion), “we have brought you a piece of news that will astonish you greatly. I have had my suspicions for long, and my wife has been indulging hopes that the sight of that picture there has completely verified. The little waif you took in and befriended so well is the only child of my wife. We have lost no time in coming to tell you the news; more especially as she could not rest one moment without seeing the boy, and thanking you in person for your great goodness to him.”

The Squire sat perfectly still, not attempting a reply. He looked like a man who has received a blow, and requires time to recover from its effects. The lady's tears were falling fast, and Uncle Fred had to continue his tale, as nobody else seemed able to speak.

“You will ask what made me guess the secret. The first clue was the child's likeness to his mother, whom I had known as a child and as a young girl. It attracted me to Bertie from the first, but I only looked upon it as an accidental circumstance, and paid no serious heed to the matter. When, however, some months ago, my wife and I met once again in a far-off land, when I learned that she had lost her only child, a boy of nine years of age, in a storm that wrecked the little sailing-vessel she had elected to cross in from Antwerp to Hull, at the very time that Bertie had been drifted ashore here,—when I heard this story, my suspicions were powerfully awakened, and all that I heard tended to increase my conviction. I learned that the child had divided his time between London and Normandy, that he had a grandfather, in whose library he continually sat, learning lessons and turning over books. What I heard of his disposition and habits coincided entirely with Bertie's ways; and the story of the wreck seemed to make

assurance doubly sure. I heard how the water came suddenly pouring into the cabin where the child lay, how she had only time to wrap a rough pilot coat over his little nightdress and tie a life-belt about him, whilst she bade him be brave and try to say always, 'Thy will be done.' The child had told me almost as much himself in one of his moments of partial remembrance, and I knew how he had been drifted ashore just in these garments her child wore. The sea had overwhelmed them all, almost as soon as they reached the deck. My wife and two seamen were picked up by a steamer bound for Holland, and when she did return to England, no tidings reached her of the child, and from that day till a month or two ago she entertained no doubts of his death. My story gave her hope, and the sight of that picture has put away the last doubt. That is her little Ronald, the child who has been dead and is alive again, has been lost and is found."

Uncle Fred's own voice quivered a little as he concluded his tale, and his wife commanded hers with difficulty.

"Where is my boy?" she asked.

"He is out with your little nephew and niece, Mrs. Arbuthnot," answered the Squire; "but he will be home again in the course of an hour or two. You will wait and see him of course. You will let my housekeeper bring you some tea."

The Squire spoke with some constraint of manner. It was easy to see that he was a good deal moved.

The mother seemed to divine his feelings by the very depth of her own. He had risen whilst the tale had been told, and was now standing with his back towards them, looking out upon the sunny garden, with eyes that saw nothing of its brightness. He started when a soft touch was laid upon his arm. He was confronted by a sweet face, tremulous with tears.

"I have not thanked you yet for all your goodness to my boy."

"No need, I assure you, my dear madam; he has done a hundredfold more for me than I have done for him."

The tone was hoarse, and the words a little abrupt; but the mother looked beneath the surface.

“Does that mean that you would miss the child if I were to take him away from you?”

The Squire started at the question, and looked keenly into the face before him. He forgot that the situation so very new to him had been faced in all its bearings for many long weeks by the two who had pierced together the history of the lost child, and who knew well the sad story of the Squire’s lonely lot.

“Miss him!” he ejaculated, almost harshly, as a strong man often does when under the influence of some sudden emotion. “If you had known what it was to lose five children and a wife within ten short days, to live fifteen long years alone and desolate, and then to adopt and make your own a child that seemed given to you by a special providence, one whom you had the right to make your own and love as your own. If your old age had been cheered by the presence of such a child, and then he too was taken from you”—

The Squire stopped short abruptly, and then in a gentler tone he added,—

“Forgive me, my dear madam; I have no right to say all this. I have been taken by surprise, and I live so much alone, that I fear I forget myself at times. You must bear with an old man whom you have taken unawares. I cannot rejoice at your news for my own sake, but I will endeavor to do so for yours and the child’s. I will not be more selfish than nature and habit made me.”

Mrs. Arbuthnot endeavored to speak, but her voice failed her, and she looked towards her husband.

“Squire,” said the young man, stepping forward, “my wife wishes me to explain to you that her gratitude would be but ill-displayed were she, in return for all your great goodness to her child, to bring a cloud upon your later life. But for you, no one can say what might by this time have befallen the little waif; but for you, it would hardly have been possible that mother and son could ever have met again this side of the grave. Your goodness in adopting him and in giving him a home has been, under God’s guiding, the means of bringing them together—the main link in the chain of circumstances that has led to this goal. You have been a father to him in his

hour of extremest need. My wife will never be willing to requite such goodness by robbing you of what sunshine the child's love can bring."

The Squire looked steadily at the speaker, as if in doubt whither all this tended, and he glanced from one to the other, his face expressing more emotion than was its wont.

"I do not quite grasp your meaning," he said.

"Our meaning is this," said Uncle Fred, taking his wife's hand and drawing it within his arm. "We both have known enough of loneliness and sorrow to be very unwilling to inflict it upon another. God in His great goodness has at length given us to one another, and changed all that was dark in our lives into light and joy. We have each other, and our cup of happiness is very full. One more great mercy has been vouchsafed us—restoring to my wife the child she believed she had lost—giving it to her to see him living in peace and happiness in a home that was opened to him in his hour of sore need. Squire," concluded the young man, earnestly and with great feeling, "the whole matter stands thus: if the child has grown dear to you, if he is a comfort to you in your declining years, if you love one another, as we are told, like father and son, and you would feel personal loss and grief at his departure, he shall remain with you still. We are very near neighbors now. The child can see his mother daily, hourly, and yet be your boy, and live beneath your roof. There shall be no mine or thine with regard to him; if my wife is his mother, you at least have a claim to be called his father. We have one another, and our lives are bright; you are alone, and the boy has cheered you by his presence. So long as you need him, or wish for his companionship, we will not take him away. Our home is always open to him if ever you wish to be rid of your self-imposed charge; but so long as you care to have him with you, we will never claim him or take him away. The only difference the child shall find will be that he has two homes instead of one."

The Squire listened to this speech in unbroken silence, and not a muscle of his still face moved the while; but yet it softened in a wonderful way as the young man's meaning became more and more clear, and the expression in the deep-set eyes now fixed upon her face touched Mrs. Arbuthnot to the quick.

"Is this the expression of your thoughts, madam?" he asked, very gently.

“Yes; my husband has only explained to you what has many times passed between us on the subject. You know Dr. Lighton is his correspondent, and from him we have heard much of your great goodness to my little boy, and of the tie that seems to exist between you. My gratitude would be but ill-expressed were I to try and break that tie. The child had never known a father’s love until he found it in your home, for his father died when he was but an infant. Let him continue to feel that love about him, as well as that of the mother he has so strangely forgotten, and whom even now he may not be able to recall. Let us leave matters for the present as they now stand, and in the future be guided by the course of events and by the development of the boy’s character. If he disappoints you, his mother’s home will always be open to him. If he continues to occupy the place of a son to you, I will not take him away. He can be my boy as well as yours, and there shall be no jealousy between us.”

The words were spoken quietly, yet with much feeling, and the Squire accepted the sacrifice in the spirit in which it was made.

“Let the boy’s good be our chief concern, my dear madam,” he answered. “My gratitude to you is very great, and shall be shown in care for the child over whose future you still allow me to exercise some control. Believe me, your goodness shall not be abused. You will not find me exacting. If you will spare me as much of his society as you can, and let me love him as my own, I shall be satisfied and grateful, even though you may wish to change your mind by and by and receive him under your own roof.”

The mother understood by instinct the nature of the man with whom she had to deal. She smiled very sweetly as she answered,—

“I see very plainly that there will be no jealousy between us. For the present let all be as it is. If the child knows me for his mother, he shall still remain with you, unless—” She paused, and added, quickly, “And if not, and I have to tell him all, he is not likely to feel any wish to leave you for me. It will be very strange to be as a stranger to my little Ronald. I wonder —”

But the sentence was not concluded. There was a sudden stir in the hall without, and Dr. Lighton came in hurriedly.

“What is it?” he asked, quickly. “Where is the child?”

“What child?”

“Bertie. Has he not come yet? They tell me there has been an accident on the cliffs.”

Two faces blanched visibly at these words. The Squire took a quick step forward, and asked hastily,—

“What do you mean?”

“I hardly know myself yet. Little Miss Arbuthnot came galloping up to my door ten minutes ago, to say that Bertie had had a fall on the cliffs and was being brought home in the pony cart. I came on at once—luckily I had not started on my round—I suppose I am here before them.”

“Yes,” said the Squire, absently, and went out into the hall.

Uncle Fred looked at the doctor and said,—

“I want to introduce you to my wife, Lighton. We have put the matter beyond all doubt. She is the boy’s mother.”

It was no time for conventional greetings; anxiety and fear filled all hearts. All the party followed the Squire into the hall, where Queenie Arbuthnot was now standing, her face very white, her whole frame trembling with nervous excitement.

They questioned her closely. She was incoherent at first, but Mrs. Arbuthnot’s kind and motherly sweetness did much to restore her self-command, and they were able at length to elicit the following facts.

Phil had got himself into danger, and Bertie had gone down to him with the rope, as described in the last chapter. This errand had been successfully accomplished, and Phil, by aid of the rope round his waist, had been able to climb up in safety to the top of the cliff.

Bertie meantime had remained quietly upon the ledge, not at all giddy or afraid, waiting for the rope to be let down to him.

David had not attempted to throw the end of the rope to him, as he was afraid of his getting giddy with attempts to catch at it, but had let it down its whole length and then swung it slowly backwards and forwards until it came within the boy’s grasp. When the right moment came, Bertie had seized it, and that successfully; but then happened a catastrophe they had

not reckoned upon. The weight of the swinging rope had jerked the child from his precarious foothold, and although his fall had not been unbroken, owing to his grasp upon the rope, yet he had slipped down very fast, and when the rope stopped he had fallen with some violence upon the sand and stones beneath. Those above could not judge how far he had fallen, but could see that he lay still and motionless as if stunned or hurt; and, whilst David and Phil hurried down to his assistance, Queenie ran off to the farmhouse to give the alarm, and then, with more forethought than might have been expected from her years, she had had her pony saddled and had ridden off to Dr. Lighton's, so that he might be there as soon as Bertie arrived.

It was impossible to gather from the little girl's story what the amount of the injury was likely to be, but they were not kept long in suspense, for Phil came galloping up in a few minutes' time, and, flinging himself off the pony, he rushed up to the Squire and cried,—

“He's coming directly. Farmer Bayliss says he doesn't think there's much harm done, unless he's broken his arm. He's not dead, though he hasn't opened his eyes yet, and he doesn't seem much hurt.”

The next moment the pony cart turned in at the gate. David was driving, and a burly, jovial-looking farmer was sitting beside him, holding Bertie very tenderly in his arms.

“All right, I hope, Squire!” he called out, as soon as he saw the anxious group at the door. “He opened his eyes just now and spoke; but he seems dazed-like still, and not quite himself. I'm half afeared there's a bone broke somewhere; but, considering the distance he fell, we must thank God things are no worse.”

He gave over his burden into the Squire's arms, and Bertie was carried up-stairs and laid upon his own bed. Dr. Lighton and Mrs. Arbuthnot followed, and a look of keen interest was on the young doctor's face as he noted that the child's mother was beside him.

Bertie was not entirely unconscious, but in a dazed state that made it an effort to open his eyes or to rouse himself to a sense of his surroundings.

“Let him see you when he opens his eyes,” said Dr. Lighton to Mrs. Arbuthnot, and he signed to the Squire to keep in the background.

Bertie heaved a sigh, like a child just awaking from sleep. The long eyelashes began to tremble upon the white cheek.

Dr. Lighton himself drew back then to where he could not be seen.

“Speak to him,” he said to the mother, in low tones.

Mrs. Arbuthnot bent over her child.

“Ronald?” she said; “my little Ronald!”

The child’s eyes flashed open in an instant and fastened upon her face. A curious struggle seemed to go on within him. His great dilated eyes were full of an intense bewilderment and wonder. A sort of light seemed breaking in upon him, scattering shadows and dazzling him with its sudden vivid brightness. It was some seconds before he seemed able to speak, and then the word that passed his lips came almost like a cry, hoarse and choked, yet full of bewildered joy.

“Mother! Mother!”

CHAPTER XXII.

THE NAME FOUND.



WHEN Bertie found himself clasped in his mother's arms, and felt her warm tears upon his face, and heard her soft voice whispering tender, caressing words in his ear, he felt as if he had just awoke from a long bewildering dream, and such was the confusion of his mind that he clung to her more in terror than in joy; and his agitation was promptly checked by Dr. Lighton, who administered a soothing draught, which sent the child off into a sound sleep long before he had unravelled the tangle of his own ideas. This gave other people time to consider what steps had better be taken for the preservation of needful repose of body and mind after the double shock.

The child had been a good deal bruised and shaken by the fall, and his right arm was severely sprained, although not broken, as the good farmer had believed, Dr. Lighton attended to these injuries without rousing him from the torpid condition induced by opiates, and left with the injunction that he was to be kept perfectly quiet in a darkened room, and not encouraged to talk, or to do anything, in fact, but sleep.

And by a little dexterous management on the part of those about him, this health-restoring sleep was made to extend for more than four-and-twenty hours. When the child roused up, a little food was given to him by Mrs. Pritchard, nothing that could excite him was spoken, no face that might perplex him showed itself, and he dropped back into slumber almost at once.

But upon the evening of the day following the accident, Bertie woke up, his mind quite clear, and his brain alive with all sorts of new ideas and

impressions. Mrs. Pritchard was sitting at work beside him.

“Where is papa?” he asked.

The good woman looked up at the sound of his voice and approached the bedside. She saw that the little boy’s eyes were open and that he looked calm and collected.

“The Squire is at his dinner; do you want to see him?”

“Yes, please,” answered Bertie whose eyes were very bright and shone with a strange sort of exultation. “I have something very particular I want to tell him.”

The message did not take long to deliver to the Squire, and in a very few moments he was standing at the child’s bedside.

“Papa,” said Bertie, taking one of the strong man’s hands in his and holding it tightly, “I am going to be always your little Bertie; but my real name is Ronald Damer, and my mother’s name is Winifred Damer, and we have a house in London, No. 10 Grantham Square. When grandpapa died we went away to France; but I think it is mother’s house still, and perhaps she is there now. If you write, I am sure she will get the letter. Somebody there will know where she is.”

Bertie (as we must go on calling him now) said all this very distinctly, holding fast by the Squire’s hand and gazing up at him with very bright eyes.

“What has made you remember all this, my child?” was the quiet question.

“It was a dream,” answered Bertie, promptly. “Mother came and kissed me and called me her little Ronald, and then I remembered. Please do you think she could come soon if you telegraphed to her? She is such a dear, sweet mother, and she thinks she has no little boy left now.”

He seemed inclined to grow excited again. The Squire laid a firm, cool hand upon his hot brow.

“You must keep still and be patient, Bertie, and I will do what I can to bring your mother to you. Will you promise me to be very quiet and good whilst I go and see what I can do?”

Bertie folded his hands together with an air of quiet determination.

“I will try to be good, papa,” he answered, with a confiding smile. “Come back very soon and tell me what you have done.”

The child lay back on his pillows after the Squire had gone, and kept his promise literally so far as his body was concerned, but his mind could not be controlled in the same fashion. Strange thoughts and memories were chasing each other through his brain in so bewildering a phantasmagoria, that at last he could only press his hand over his eyes, as if to shut out the images that crowded themselves before his mental vision, and wait with a beating heart and a sense of expectancy that he could not in the least have explained for something, he knew not what, that he was certain was about to happen.

He heard steps approaching the door, the firm footfall of the Squire, and another tread much more light, accompanied by the rustle of a dress—but the sort of rustle that no garments Mrs. Pritchard ever wore could possible make.

Bertie’s heart beat faster and faster; there was a strange singing in his ears, as if water were surging round him. He pressed his hand more tightly over his eyes. It almost seemed as if he were afraid to look up, or to see who was approaching, and yet in his heart of hearts he knew.

“Ronald!” said a very sweet and gentle voice.

And then all the clouds seemed suddenly to roll away and the confusion to melt away like summer snow. The child looked up with a glad, sweet smile and said,—

“Mother dear, you have come at last. I knew you must be coming.”

The mother bent and kissed her child, as she had done so many times whilst he had lain asleep. He seemed to know it now.

“You used to kiss me like that in my dreams,” he said. “I did not want to wake because the dreams were so nice.”

The Squire was about to withdraw and leave them together, but Bertie saw the movement, and noted, too, the expression on the face he loved so well.

“Papa,” he said, holding out his hand,—“papa, don’t go, please. We both want you. Nothing is quite right without you now; and I know mother will always let me be your little boy too.”

“Mother,” said Bertie, later on, in one of those little confidences that they held from time to time during the days of his convalescence, “I’ve learned now what you used to tell me so often—about God’s taking care of us always. I used not to care about it much till I lost you and was so lonely. I thought He’d forgotten me then; but I’m sure now He hadn’t. He didn’t forget you either, did He, mother dear?”

“No indeed,” answered Mrs. Arbuthnot, gently. “He has been very, very good to me. Once He seemed to take away all that made my life glad; but He has restored it all fourfold now.”

Bertie’s face expressed a vivid interest and animation.

“I think He’s always very good to people when they’re lonely. You see He gave me to the Squire when I had nobody to love, and it was like having a home of my own then, and a father too. And when you had nobody He sent Uncle Fred to you. You are quite happy now, aren’t you, mother dear?”

“Yes, my little boy, I am very happy indeed.”

Bertie got fast hold of her hand and held it very tight. His eyes were fixed very intently on her face.

“Mother,” he said, “you are going to live quite close to the Squire now, aren’t you?”

“Yes, dear; we are living there already, and very soon we shall have the house quite to ourselves.”

“And where shall I live then? here or in Uncle Fred’s house?”

Mrs. Arbuthnot had been expecting this question for some days, and was quite prepared to meet it.

“You will have two homes then, my child. Which do you think you would like to spend most of your time in?”

Bertie’s eyes sought her face with great intentness. He took the hand he held and carried it to his lips.

“Mother dear,” he answered after a short silence, “you have Uncle Fred now, and the Squire has nobody but me. I shall see you every day. It will be almost the same, you know—”

The child broke off suddenly, looking wistfully at his mother.

“You know I love you just the same,” he said, simply; “but the Squire is so lonely, and he has been so very good to me. They have all died and left him alone, and he says I have been like one of them—the child of his old age—I don’t know how to go away and leave him.”

Bertie’s lip quivered, and the tears stood in Mrs. Arbuthnot’s eyes, as she stooped to kiss him.

“My dear little boy,” she said, very tenderly, “I think you and I both feel alike about this. I did not tell you what Uncle Fred and I have said, because I wanted to learn your own feelings first. We do not want you to do anything to darken the life of one who has been like a father to you when you were so sadly in need of love and care. My darling, we think that your place is still here with the Squire, if you are content to stay. We shall see you every day; you will always be our little boy too. You will have two homes instead of one, and loving parents in both. But, as you say yourself, I have Uncle Fred to take care of me now, and be my companion always, whilst he has nobody but his little Bertie.”

Bertie kissed his mother’s hand again, and looked at her with loving eyes.

“You always understand, mother dear. Some day I will tell you all about things—about the Squire, I mean, and how they all died,—Tom and Charley, and Mary and Violet, and even little Donald,—and then you will understand better still. But please may I see him now? I think he has been looking rather sad these last few days. He has not talked to me quite in the same way, quite as if I belonged to him now. I should like to see him and tell him what we have arranged. Please may I see him all by myself?”

Bertie’s quick instincts had not deceived him. These last few days had been rather sad ones for the good Squire. He had been trying to resign himself to the loss of the child, feeling that it would be ungenerous to take advantage of the mother’s concession, made in a moment of deep emotion, and being of opinion that the child would himself be unwilling to remain

beneath his roof when the mother he evidently so truly loved had a home to offer him herself.

Trouble had so far weighed upon the Squire's mind, that he was inclined to expect more, and to prepare himself for adverse fortune. It seemed more natural to him now to lose than to gain, and he had no real hope of keeping the child beneath his own roof much longer. Some compromise might possibly be made for the present; but his sense of ownership, of fatherhood, would be gone, and the sense of warmth and light that had slowly crept into his lonely life would be as slowly extinguished.

When he came and stood beside Bertie's couch,—the child was up and dressed for the first time to-day,—his face showed some faint reflection of the trouble of his mind, and Bertie's quick eyes detected it instantly.

The little boy got up and pushed him gently towards Mrs. Pritchard's great easy chair that stood beside the fire. It was May, but the cold east winds were blowing, and made fires very pleasant companions, especially when the light began to wane in the sky and the dusk crept into the corners of the room, as it was doing now.

"You are better to-day, Bertie," said the Squire, kindly. "Rather shaky on your legs still, eh?"

"A little," answered Bertie, laughing. "I feel rather funny when I walk; and my arm is very stiff. Take me on your knee, please, papa; I want to talk to you."

The Squire lifted him up, and Bertie nestled down comfortably in his accustomed resting-place, drawing a long breath of satisfaction.

"That is just nice!" he said.

"What is nice?"

"Why, to know that I shall be your little boy always now, and that nobody can ever want to take me away so long as you want me."

The Squire held the child a little more closely in his arms, but his voice was quite steady as he said,—

"What makes you speak so, Bertie?"

“I have been talking to mother,” answered the little boy. “We have arranged it all. I am to go on living with you,—if you want me.”

Bertie felt a sort of tremor run through the Squire’s strong frame, but his voice was as quiet and composed as ever.

“But what do you say yourself, Bertie? You have found your mother now. Do you not wish to go to her? You love her very much, I can see. Would you not rather belong to her than stay here to be my little boy?”

Bertie raised his face a little, so that he could look at the Squire. His eyes were full of gravity and a certain fixity of purpose.

“I want to stay with you,” he answered, slowly and steadily. “I do love mother very, very much; but I shall see her every day. She has Uncle Fred now; it is not quite as it used to be when she and I were alone together. She is not lonely now, she is very happy. I am going to be your little boy, and stay with you.”

The Squire bent his head and touched the child’s forehead with his lips.

“You are sure this is your own wish?—you will be content to stay with me?”

“Oh yes,” answered Bertie, quickly; and then, stealing his uninjured arm about the Squire’s neck, he added, with the quaint simplicity that seemed to belong to him, “I feel as if you and I just understood one another. I think we must have been meant for one another when I got washed up here and you adopted me. I don’t think anybody understands you as I do.”

The Squire smiled at these words, yet a suspicious moisture stood upon his eyelashes, as he once more kissed the child in his quiet fashion.

“Yes, my little boy, I think you and I understand one another; and if God has given us to each other, we will try to show our gratitude to Him by loving Him more and more all our lives.”

“I should like that,” answered Bertie, reverently; “because you know it was so kind of Him not to forget me that time when I was quite alone.”

And so, without any more discussion, the matter was settled, and little Ronald Damer was known to be still the Squire’s adopted son, notwithstanding that his mother and her husband were living within a

stone's throw of the Manor House, and that the child was as much at home in one house as in the other. He was still called by the name the Squire had found for him when his own had been buried in oblivion, and it seemed as if he would be always Bertie to those who had known him when he had had no other.

Queenie and Phil came to say good-bye before they left their home.

They had been constant in their inquiries after their little friend and companion; but Dr. Lighton had wished Bertie to be kept quiet for quite a long time, and they had not been allowed to see him.

He had been a good deal shaken by his fall, and did not get strong as fast as some children would have done; so that it was not until Sir Walter Arbuthnot and his family were just on the eve of departure that Bertie was allowed to see Queenie and Phil.

Phil was as merry and gay as ever, although his bright face grew grave for a few minutes whilst he thanked Bertie in boyish fashion for having saved his life on the cliffs that day; but Queenie was more quiet and less imperious in her speech than was at all usual, and Bertie, observing this, wondered what was the matter, and if she were sorry about going away.

"It is not that exactly," answered the little girl, when questioned. "I think it is because I have something on my mind."

"Have you? What sort of thing?"

"Something I want to say, only it isn't very easy," and Queenie got rather red, for she was a proud little maiden, and found it rather hard to own herself in the wrong. "I called you a coward, Bertie; I think I called you so a great many times. I want to tell you I'm sorry. I know now that you were just as brave as Phil or any of the boys, and I want you to say you forgive me for being so cross."

Bertie was quite taken aback, and blushed as red as Queenie.

"Please don't talk so. I was a coward about the boat; and I've forgotten all about the rest. You have always been very kind to me, Queenie. You know you made friends with me when I had nobody else."

Queenie began to laugh now; she had got a weight off her mind, and was her merry self again.

“I was often very cross,” she said. “I sometimes think I must have a very hasty temper. I do get so cross if I have to do what I don’t like. You don’t ever get cross, do you?”

“I feel cross sometimes,” answered Bertie, truthfully; “but you know, I like to do what the Squire tells me; I like to keep his rules.”

“I know you do,” answered Queenie, quickly. “You are obedient. Nurse often tells me so; but I like doing as *I* like, not as other people say.” She sighed a little impatiently, and then added, half reluctantly, “Sometimes I think I should like to be obedient too; only it seems so tiresome.”

“You would like it if you once began,” said Bertie, quickly. “It’s nice to please people when we love them.”

Queenie sighed again.

“I like pleasing Uncle Fred and Aunt Winifred; they are very nice and kind. When I come to stay with them I shall try very hard to be good. Perhaps, if I find it answers, I’ll try always.”

“Do,” answered Bertie. “I think you will be happier if you do.”

“Phil has been more obedient since he went to school,” said Queenie, reflectively; “and he is always happy. Perhaps I’ll try.”

And then they bade Bertie an affectionate farewell, and made him promise to come very often to see them whenever they came to stay with Uncle Fred.

And so there were changes in that little circle. Sir Walter Arbuthnot gave place to his brother, and a very close bond of union existed between the two households in the adjoining houses, the golden link that joined them together being no other than little Bertie, the child who had once been so lonely and homeless, without even a name to call his own.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.



OUR years have come and gone, four very bright and happy years; and the good people of Arlingham are wont to say that things have never gone so well with them, that times have never seemed so smooth and prosperous, since the Squire's sweet lady and her children lived at the Manor House and made the place bright and homelike with their presence.

Several minor changes have now taken place since Mr. and Mrs. Arbuthnot came to take possession of their house. Two little mites of children play now in the nurseries where Queenie once ruled supreme; and Bertie is never tired of watching the gambols and the antics of his tiny brother and sister, and, as he recounts to the Squire every detail of their wonderful performances, it is quite evident that he considers them the most remarkable children that ever lived.

When little Frank first began to try to "walk on his hind legs," as the elder brother phrased it, Bertie's admiration knew no bounds; and now that Winnie is beginning the same interesting process, his pride and delight in her is intense, and it is a pretty sight to see the boy out in the garden with the two little ones, carrying them about in his strong arms, and playing with them with a patience and good temper that never seems exhausted.

Bertie is still the Squire's boy, and has never wavered in his allegiance to his adopted father. He follows him about like his shadow, is his companion on his every expedition, and no father and son could ever have been more deeply attached than is this elderly man to the son of his adoption, who now wears his name and is acknowledged as his heir.

Bertie is growing a tall, strong lad now, and has quite shaken off the childish delicacy that had given some anxiety at first. His open-air life has done wonders for him, and he is as active and agile as any of the boys who have in old days climbed the trees he climbs now, or jumped the hedges and ditches that intersect the fields round his home.

Yet with all this new strength and health, Bertie has never lost the reflective and thoughtful cast of mind that characterized him as a child, and his manner is always quiet and gentle, and marked, when he and the Squire are alone together, with a peculiar affection and respect.

The tie that binds those two together is very close and strong. It would be hard, perhaps, to define its nature; but it had bound together two lonely hearts in the days when each had been so desolate and isolated; and as time passed on, and they grew more and more to each other, the cord of love seemed to wind more closely and firmly about each heart.

And Bertie's mother rejoices to see that it is so. No jealousy has power to disturb her sweet and noble nature; nor, indeed, has she any cause to cherish it, for her boy is loyal and true and loving towards her always, and she knows by sweet experience that one great love does not cast out another, but rather increases the capacity for loving within the heart that holds the two.

Bertie is her boy, too, as well as the Squire's; and when love is the law of households there is no clashing of interests and no divided duty. The Squire walks into Uncle Fred's study as freely as if it were his own, or puts his head into Mrs. Arbuthnot's morning-room to nod "Good-morning," or strays up into the nursery to play with the babies, just as if the house were his own; whilst Bertie's mother is as much at home in the Manor House as in her own domain, and is Mrs. Pritchard's general referee for any little matter about which she feels any doubt.

If the Squire grew old in a single week of his life now nearly twenty years ago, it has certainly seemed to the good people of Arlingham that he has grown younger and more hale and hearty during the later portion of that time.

"He's been a new man since Master Bertie came," is a common saying in the village; and certainly they ought to know, since he has been born and

grown old amongst them.

Certainly the grey-headed yet upright and vigorous man so often to be seen riding through the village with his son at his side, visiting those houses he once thought never to enter again, and playing in the garden with Mrs. Arbuthnot's pretty curly-headed babies, is strangely different from the heavy-browed, bowed-down Squire of five years ago; and the many tenants and servants who have loved him and served him for so many years rejoice at the change in one who has always been to them a true friend as well as a just and watchful master.

David has been promoted to the post of the "young Squire's groom." For Bertie is often called that now, and accepts a position he understands the Squire wishes him to occupy with the ready willingness and obedience that has characterized his conduct throughout. David may be his groom, but he is also his friend; for Bertie is tenacious of first impressions, and never forgets that he owes to David the first gleam of real happiness that seemed to gild his once lonely lot.

Bertie has quite a circle of friends now, and he studies regularly with his pastor, who takes pupils from several of the houses round about; but he is still quite as fond of a quiet chat with David by the sea-shore, where they talk over old times together, and lay plans for the future. A good many boyish yet very earnest resolves are exchanged between those two at such times, and they both find it helpful to talk together of their faults and failures as well as of their aspirations and hopes. They do not kneel down at the turn of the tide to ask God's special blessing, or to call themselves to His remembrance, for they know well now that He is always watching over them, and that to Him all times and seasons are alike; yet they often think of those days when they were struggling out of the darkness into the light, and I think nothing would ever make either of these two lads ashamed to say his prayers.

Queenie and Phil came every year to spend a pleasant visit with Uncle Fred and Aunt Winifred; and the little girl often remains for many weeks after her brother returns to school; for there is something in the atmosphere of her aunt's house which, as she expresses it, "does her good," and she is always very reluctant to leave.

She and Bertie are great friends, even if they are a little less outspoken than in old days. Now and then she tells him, in moments of unusual confidence, that she is trying to be more obedient, and does not find it quite so tiresome as she expected. She has learned, too, to believe in Bertie's courage and high principles, and she has a warm and increasing admiration for him, and ranks him in her heart as her favorite next to Phil, and in some ways more of a hero, for Phil's unbounded flow of spirits hinders him from posing in any way that could well be called heroic.

I think it will be easy for anybody to believe that Bertie's life is a very happy one. Of course he has his little trials and troubles and ups and downs, as we all have, and without which we should be sadly disposed to get careless and puffed up. He does not expect to be exempt from these, and he tries to bear them bravely and cheerfully. He is very grateful and happy in his life, and thinks that he is the most fortunate boy in the world.

But, in spite of all this happiness, he has his moments of sadness, moments when there comes over him a sense that all things here fade and change, and that life will not always flow for him quite in this smooth channel. Such thoughts come over him not unfrequently, and with no little significance. For Sunday by Sunday he now stands for a few solemn moments bareheaded by a quiet grave beneath the yew tree, where the Squire has stood every Sunday of his life ever since his dear ones lay below the sod; and sometimes the lad will feel the pressure of a hand upon his shoulder, and will hear a familiar voice say, dreamily,—

“When I am lying with them, my boy, at rest after life's long battle, you will not forget me, will you?—nor the traditions of the old place that will be yours after me? You will be a kind and a just master, and keep up the honor of the old name? You will not forget the widow or the fatherless children, nor suffer the aged to want for daily bread? You will do as those before you have done, and more if the way opens before you? You will try to be a credit to a name that I love and respect for the sake of those who have borne it before me? When you are Squire of Arlingham, Bertie, you will try to be a good one?”

It is hard for Bertie to answer questions like these, yet he looks up, after a struggle with himself, and says,—

“I will try, father, I will try my very best; but I cannot bear to think of it. It is so hard to think of being left alone again.”

The Squire with his quiet smile points to the words upon the marble slab.

“My boy, when you lay me to rest beneath that stone, you must learn, as I too had to learn, to say from your heart of hearts, ‘Thy will be done.’”

Bertie lifts his eyes, and although tears are in them their expression is resolute and brave.

“I will try, father, I will try. I will think of you and your courage and resignation when you were left all alone.”

“Not quite alone, my boy, not quite alone,” answers the Squire, laying his hand upon the lad’s head in a sort of benediction. “We have both learned by personal experience that there is One who never leaves us quite alone. In the fatherly care of that One I can leave you when the time comes without one doubt or one fear. Only be strong and of a good courage—He will never fail thee nor forsake thee.”

- Transcriber's Notes:

- Missing or obscured punctuation was silently corrected.
- Typographical errors were silently corrected.
- Inconsistent spelling and hyphenation were made consistent only when a predominant form was found in this book.

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