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Molly's Bible.

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MOLLY'S BIBLE.

CHAPTER I.

Life's record forever,
Which fadeth out never,
Let us write carefully ;
Looking up, prayerfully,
To him, from whom weakness,
Acknowledged in meekness,
Receiveth a blessing.

MAUD LAMSON was sitting by an open window, looking to the distant hills, while a half-finished letter lay upon the table before her. A book had been allowed to slide from her lap, and several new magazines were scattered upon the floor.

It was one of Maud's restless days, when her ever active mind, under the influence of some exciting cause, refused to obey the dictates of her will. It was evident that she had no thought for the landscape on which her eyes rested.

She took from her pocket a crumpled letter, yet laid it aside after reading the last sentence. This letter was from Corinne Burton, Maud Lamson's most intimate friend. It had been received the evening before, since when, it had been often read, with an increasing feeling of disquiet.

These friends had not met for six months, and this was the longest separation they had known since their early childhood. With no tie of relationship between them, they had grown up under the same roof, and were as tenderly attached as they could have been, had the same blood flowed in their veins.

Being left motherless, they were placed by their respective fathers under the care of one, who, so far as this life was concerned, had faithfully performed her duty. No pains or

expense had been spared, in fitting them to occupy high positions in society, while, at the same time, they were taught many homely accomplishments, so necessary to woman's usefulness and happiness.

They had scarcely missed a mother's love, so tender was the affection lavished upon them by Mrs. Bascom. Herself widowed and childless, the care of these children had done much to render more tolerable a desolated life.

Maud had been received first, when only five years of age; and a few months after, Crin, as she was called by her friends, shared her home. Each was delighted with having a companion in her sports, and, at once compared notes upon different subjects. They soon discovered that their birthdays occurred in the same month, and they were "just the same years old."

Mrs. Bascom lived in a country village, about forty miles from the city in which Mr. Lamson and Mr. Burton were engaged in business. At first, they visited their daugh-

ters frequently; but, satisfied with the care bestowed upon them, and becoming more engrossed with their occupations, they sometimes allowed half a year to pass between their visits. Ample provision was made for the expenses of their education, and a generous recompense bestowed upon Mrs. Bascom. Having done this, they were disposed to throw off all responsibility.

When Maud was twelve years of age, her father had married again, and proposed taking her home; but his young bride objecting, the child remained with "Auntie Bascom."

There was a seminary in the village, which the two girls entered as day scholars. Here they pursued their studies under the same teachers, and made rapid progress; each, however, manifesting her own peculiar tastes and talents.

Maud had a hearty liking for mathematics, enjoying nothing better than a difficult problem which required hours of study before it could be perfectly mastered. She had a clear, analytical mind, tracing effects to their causes,

and seeking fully to comprehend every subject presented for her consideration.

She committed few things to memory until she understood the principles upon which they were based. Consequently, in the commencement of a study, she might make imperfect recitations; but they were always followed by those of uniformly marked excellence. She loved music, but mere mechanical execution had no charm for her. It was necessary that sounds should express thought and feeling.

Such was Maud Lamson, original and independent in her style of thinking, yet frank and genial in her manners, a favorite with teachers and scholars.

Crin Burton, too, was a marked character, with many points in opposition to those of her friend, yet by no means suffering in the contrast. Her perceptions were quicker, her intuitions surer, and when once her interest was aroused, she could pursue a train of thought for as great a length of time. But she did not so heartily enjoy it, preferring

rather to accept some other things upon trust. Mathematics was not to her taste, and a hard problem was sure to give her a headache, a fact for which she accounted by the intimate sympathy between her head and heart.

But not to linger over this delineation, when these girls had attained the age of eighteen, they left Mrs. Bascom, and each went to reside with her father. The parting was a sad one, and many were the promises of undying affection and frequent visits.

Mr. Burton had removed from the city in which he had formerly lived, so that his daughter was entirely separated from her old companion. She found herself a stranger in the house of her father. A widowed sister had also come to reside with him, bringing with her an only son, who had been an invalid for many years.

He was four years younger than his cousin, and had looked forward to her arrival with boyish impatience. "Do you think she will be like Etta?" he often asked his mother. "I do hope she will; for then it will seem like having sister back again."

This sister, Etta Lynde, had died at the early age of sixteen, and her brother fancied his cousin might supply her place. Mrs. Lynde, not having seen her for two or three years, was unable to answer his questions.

When she came, they saw, at a glance, that she was entirely different from her who had left them. Corinne was tall and graceful, with manners somewhat stately at first appearance, while Etta had been petite in figure, simple and childlike in her appearance. Frank was sadly disappointed, and doubted if he should ever feel at ease in her presence.

Mr. Burton really wished to make his daughter happy; but his ideas of how this was to be done were very indefinite. She had finished her education in the popular sense of the term, and it seemed time that she should be introduced into general society.

So far as Corinne herself was concerned, she would have preferred remaining in the quiet home of Mrs. Bascom, with Maud Lamson. True, she had a desire to see the world, and indulge in its gayeties; but she considered

this privilege purchased at too dear a price, when it involved the sundering of so many ties.

Her acquaintance with relations was very slight. She had occasionally accompanied her father in visiting them ; but most of her memories clustered around the home of Mrs. Bascom, and the friends she had there met.

Her aunt's presence relieved her of all care of the house ; so there was little to occupy her time, except music, and the studies she was to continue under skilled teachers.

Her father had thought the last unnecessary ; but it was sufficient for her to know that Maud proposed to spend some further time in study, and she was allowed to pursue her own plan.

Mr. Burton was very proud of her beauty and accomplishments ; but he laughingly protested that it required great courage on his part to appear in public as the father of such a grown woman.

"I really don't know what you ought to do," he said to her, a few days after she came

home. "Your Aunt Hattie will tell you, if you ask her. She was a wonderfully capable girl, and I have some old-fashioned notions about a woman's being able to cook a good dinner, and look after housekeeping in general."

This was said in reply to a question, asking how he wished her to employ her leisure time.

Mrs. Lynde had no wish to dictate her niece. On the contrary, she consulted her in regard to the details of her management, and received all expression of her opinions with cordiality. But, for some reason, she made slow progress in gaining the confidence of this young girl.

Although not dependent upon her brother, it was pleasant to have a home with him, and she naturally desired to render herself acceptable to his daughter. Moreover, her heart prompted the most affectionate consideration. Having known a mother's love for a daughter, she had been prepared to receive her with much the same feeling she would have welcomed a long absent child.

Perhaps Corinne was disappointed in not being housekeeper for her father. When she and Maud were only children, they had talked a great deal about housekeeping; and even after Mr. Lamson's marriage, she had not given up the idea for herself.

Then, too, her aunt was, at times, so engrossed with Frank, that she seemed to have neither time nor thought for any one else. A large part of her evenings was wholly devoted to him. This left Corinne much alone, unless her father was with her; and his presence detracted little from her feeling of loneliness, as he was usually devoted to his newspaper. Everything was so different from what it had been at Mrs. Bascom's, when Maud shared each thought and feeling.

It never occurred to her that she was herself in fault, and that she was virtually rejecting a sympathy which waited for her acceptance. She never dreamed that the cousin, whose slight figure and pale face were so in contrast with all she had seen of boyish strength and vigor, could teach her the secret of true happiness. She intended

to treat him kindly; but her manner chilled him, until he began to fear that she considered him an intruder in her home.

At length, an indisposition, which threatened to prove serious, confined her to her chamber for several days, and then she began to learn something of the goodness of Aunt Hattie. There were plenty of servants in the house, but she was not left to their care. Mrs. Lynde, with her own hands, ministered to the wants of her niece, denying herself needed rest and sleep.

Corinne was too generous not to acknowledge this kindness, and in doing so, she gave her aunt an opportunity to express the deep interest she felt in her.

"You know I once had a daughter, and I hoped you would supply her place," she said. "Frank and I had many long talks about you, before you came."

"Please tell me of Cousin Etta," said the sick girl. "I know very little of my relatives. Even father seems almost like a stranger."

"I thought so," was the reply. "You have been lonely since you came home."

"Yes, auntie: very lonely. I have cried myself to sleep many a time, large as I am. I never could make friends in the sudden way so many girls do; and the people I have met here have in no way filled the place of those I left. I have sometimes almost envied Frank the care and love you give him."

"I have enough for you both," replied Mrs. Lynde, in a low, sweet voice. "I should not love you less, for loving him. When Etta died, he was all I had left."

"Her death must have been very sad for you all."

"Sad for us who mourned her loss; but she was very happy. There was no sadness for her."

Corinne looked earnestly at her aunt as she said this, wondering of the strange happiness which could buoy up a spirit in the presence of death.

The conversation, thus commenced, was carried on, until the invalid was reminded that she needed rest.

"I think I will go down, now, and sit with Frank, for a little while," said Mrs. Lynde.

"Do so," responded Corinne. "I am afraid he will feel that he has been neglected."

"You need have no fears on that score. His whole anxiety is for you, and I think he would be glad to have me remain with you constantly."

"He is very kind," was the reply. "Please give my love to him, and tell him I shall soon be down-stairs. Then we will try to be better acquainted than we are now."

The boy was delighted with this message, and a warm flush overspread his face, when, at his request, it was repeated the second time.

That evening Mr. Burton found his daughter in better spirits than usual, and complimented her upon her improved appearance.

"We shall have you about the house, in a few days," he said. "Hattie was always a good nurse, and she has had a great deal of experience within the last six years. Her husband and Etta were both sick for a long time, and Frank has been an invalid since his father's death. I hope he will grow stronger

by and by. He has good abilities and a most amiable disposition."

"I thought his mother was entirely devoted to him, before I was taken sick; but she has not left me to suffer. She seems to have room in her heart for two."

"Of course she has. I knew you would have the best of care. I always had the most implicit confidence in Hattie, and love her very much, although we think so differently upon religious subjects."

His daughter was on the point of asking him what his religious opinions were, when he rose and abruptly bade her good-night. He either feared some such question, or his remark had given rise to unpleasant thoughts.

Religious subjects were those of which Corinne was profoundly ignorant. The study of them had formed no part of her education.

Mrs. Bascom conformed her life to the strictest code of morals, depending upon this and the universal mercy of God for salvation. She knew the Great Father was merciful and forgiving. Beyond this, she did not care to investigate.

Maud Lamson and Corinne Burton had, unconsciously, adopted this belief, or, rather, *want* of belief; for we must have some definite ideas of a subject before we can be truly said to believe anything in regard to it.

When Corinne was left alone, she began again to question and wonder, but soon grew weary, and was glad to dismiss all serious thoughts. A quiet sleep followed, from which she awoke to find her aunt moving noiselessly about the room. For a few moments, she lay watching her, and studying the calm, placid face.

"I have been waiting for you to open your eyes," at length said Mrs. Lynde, going to the bed.

"Did you know I was awake?" asked her niece.

"I thought so," was the reply, "but supposed you were not quite ready to be disturbed."

Corinne thanked her aunt for thus humoring her whims, and with a happy smile composed herself again to rest.

In a week from this time, her father carried her below stairs, and laid her on the lounge in the sitting room.

"What a heap of blankets and cushions!" she exclaimed. "Somebody must have known how much I fancy them. Aunt Hattie has a wonderful knowledge of human nature," she added, slightly changing the position of one of the cushions.

"I had nothing to do with fitting up the lounge for your reception this morning," said Mrs. Lynde.

"Was it you, father?" asked the invalid.

"No, indeed, Crin. I should make awkward work at such business."

"Then it must be cousin Frank. I intended to ask for him as soon as I was below stairs. Where is he, auntie? I must thank him for his consideration."

"He is studying, now," replied his mother.

"Then my thanks will keep, and perhaps grow all the more earnest."

"Good bye, Crin," said her father, directly, as he looked in from the hall. "Keep yourself well, until I come home."

It was very pleasant for her to lie there, so perfectly at ease, without a thought of anxiety for the future. She manifested no inclination to talk, and her aunt soon left the room.

More than an hour passed, and she was beginning to feel a little lonely, when the door opened, admitting Frank Lynde.

"Good morning, Cousin Frank," said the occupant of the lounge. "I am indebted to you for a most luxurious couch, and wish I could make some fitting expression of my gratitude. Besides I am very glad to see you."

"And I am very glad to see you," replied the boy, clasping her extended hand. "I was afraid you were going to be very sick."

"So you were willing your mother should stay with me. You must have missed her."

"I always miss her when she is away, but I didn't think much about it then."

"The sickness has been a very good thing in many ways," said Corinne, seriously. "I was mourning so for the old home, that I

overlooked the advantages of the new one. I am beginning to appreciate them now, and mean to be very happy here, in future.

"I hope you will," replied Frank, looking as though he would like to add something more.

"That is not all you wish to say," said Corinne, looking at him closely. "Don't hesitate. As we are to live together, it will be best to have a good understanding established at once."

"I was afraid you didn't like to have mother and me here," he said, after some delay.

"Well, I do like to have you here," was the reply. "So that is settled, and we will try to make each other as comfortable as possible. When I came here, everything seemed very strange. Mrs. Bascom had been like a mother to me, and Maud Lamson was dear to me as a sister."

"I never had any sister," she added, in reply to Frank's question. "Maud was brought up with me. How came you to know that I liked cushions and blankets?"

"I thought you would," replied the boy. "Etta did, and I always fixed them for her."

"I wish I had known Cousin Etta," said Corinne, absently. "Your mother told me she was very happy."

"Yes," he answered. "She was sorry for us, but she said it was a blessed thing to go and live with the angels. Sister was a Christian, and you know all Christians are happy, when they come to die."

Frank was sitting in a low chair, beside his cousin, when his mother came into the room, smiling pleasantly at this proof of a friendship which was to grow stronger as the winter days went by.

Corinne was of great assistance to Frank in his studies, although she often wished Maud was there to demonstrate some abstruse point in mathematics. "We must study it out, together," she would say; and this often so encouraged him, that he needed no further aid.

Her companionship was beneficial to him in many ways. She challenged him to active

exercise, and lured him out of doors, into the clear, bracing air. And, while giving much, she was well repaid.

A few days after Corinne had come to live with her father, she asked him where he attended church.

Great was her astonishment, as he replied, "To tell the truth, Crin, I don't go anywhere. I've got out of the way of going, and I don't think it makes much difference. Before you came, I thought about taking a pew in Dr. Barnes's church, but I've neglected to do so. I will attend to it to-morrow, if you'd like to have me."

"Is that where Aunt Hattie goes?" asked his daughter.

"No, indeed," was the emphatic reply. "You could hardly persuade her to hear a sermon from Dr. Barnes. She has no faith in his doctrine."

The Sabbath morning following this conversation, Mr. Burton told his daughter that he had forgotten to do anything about obtaining a seat in church; and if she wished to go

out, her Aunt Hattie would probably not object to her company.

Mrs. Lynde, only too happy at this arrangement, invited her niece to a constant attendance. Corinne accepted her invitation for the day, but was little profited by what she heard. She only knew that the singing was fine, and the preacher eloquent.

She soon found, however, that, unless she again urged the subject, she must accompany her aunt, or remain at home.

Having been taught to consider attendance at some place of worship necessary to a respectable observance of the Sabbath, she was somewhat mortified by her father's utter disregard of the day. He did not go out to his business; but he brought business home with him Saturday evening, and spent most of the sacred hours in calculating profits and balancing accounts.

After her illness, the severe weather kept Corinne within doors for several weeks, and when again able to go out, she listened with new interest to the preaching of God's word.

Her aunt and cousin found such delight in it that her curiosity was aroused.

"Are you going out again?" asked her father, as she was preparing for the afternoon. "I should think once would be sufficient for you, at least until you are stronger."

"I was very much interested this morning," she replied. "The preacher is to speak again upon the same subject, and I wish to hear what he has to say."

"What is the subject?" asked Mr. Burton.

"Man's accountability to God," was the reply.

"And you were interested?"

"Certainly."

"I should suppose you would have found it very dull."

"Dull doesn't seem to me to be the right word," said the young girl, looking her father full in the face.

"What, then?" he asked, laughing. "I yield to your superior knowledge of words and their uses."

"I should call the subject a serious one."

"I accept the amendment. And do you like serious subjects?"

"Not always."

Here Mrs. Lynde's appearance interrupted the conversation, and very soon Mr. Burton was left alone to his own reflections. That these were far from pleasant was evident from his restless movements.

In all his life he had never given one hour's serious thought to the relation he sustained to God. He had a vague belief in the existence of a supreme being who governed the world according to the counsel of his own will; but he had never troubled himself to inquire what this will might be. The Bible had always been to him a sealed Book, so far as a knowledge of its contents was concerned. Neither his father nor mother had been religious people, so that his childhood was passed without the spiritual teaching so necessary to every human soul.

His wife, an amiable woman, assured herself that God was too merciful to punish his children for their mistakes.

Thus, the influence of his best loved friends had tended to foster a feeling of indifference, and he was inclined to consider all anxiety in regard to the eternal future as a proof of some mental weakness. Careful and anxious to make provision for this life, he questioned not of that which is to come.

Something in the manner of his daughter, when she told him the subject for the day, had strangely moved him.—Man's accountability to God!—The words seemed still sounding in his ears.

He was sorry Crin had heard them, and for a moment regretted that he had not taken a pew in Dr. Barnes's church, where he was sure no such unpleasant subject would be intruded upon the audience. His reason for neglecting to do this had not been forgetfulness, but the fear that Crin would insist upon his going there with her. Rather than subject himself to such an annoyance, he had allowed her to accompany his sister.

He began to think he had acted unwisely. Hattie's religion was well enough for her and

Frank; but he was not prepared to accept it for his only child.

During the next week, Mr. Holbrook, who had talked so eloquently of man's accountability, called at the house of Mr. Burton, and was introduced to his daughter. Interested in his sermons, she was also pleased with his conversation, which was singularly well timed.

Meanwhile, Corinne was making many acquaintances among the young people about her, and began to feel quite at home. Yet she did not forget her old friends. Regularly, every fortnight, letters were sent to Mrs. Bascom and Maud, detailing the routine of her daily life, with its pleasures and impressions.

For some reason, however, she passed over the sabbaths hastily, only speaking in a general way of attending church. Why she did this, she hardly knew, unless it was the feeling that these friends would have no sympathy with her newly awakened doubts and questions.

Mrs. Lynde wisely forbore to address her

niece directly upon the subject of religion, or the study of the Bible; but she lost no opportunity of placing them before her in an attractive light.

She had no hope of reaching her brother through any ordinary means. He was too strongly intrenched in worldliness to be easily moved, and the habits of years were too firmly fixed to be quickly broken. There was a tacit understanding between them that neither should interfere with the other; but this loving sister could not look calmly on, while one dear to her trod carelessly the pathway of destruction. She prayed that she might so live as to recommend the religion she professed, and thus, in God's own good time, win for her Saviour the heart of her brother.

When Corinne came, and she found he was not disposed to influence her, she took courage.

Saturday evening, Mr. Burton came in, looking a little troubled, as though about to make a proposition which he was not sure would be well received.

"Well, Crin," he said, when alone with his daughter, "I have secured a seat at Dr. Barnes's church; so you can go there now."

"Are you going there?" she asked, quickly.

"I shall go there when I go anywhere," was the reply. "I think you will like Dr. Barnes. He is a liberal man, and a good scholar; has an intelligent congregation, and an attractive house. The best quartette in the city sing there. You enjoy good singing."

"Yes, sir: very much," she answered. "But I can't think of going to church alone. When you go, I will go with you; the rest of the time I can accompany Aunt Hattie and Frank, as I have done."

"But, Crin, on the whole, I should prefer to have you hear Dr. Barnes."

"Why, father? What difference does it make to you? I should think it would look better for the family to attend church together. I wish, particularly, to hear Mr. Holbrook to-morrow; but I can deny myself to please you."

"Do you really care anything about this matter of church-going?" asked Mr. Burton, seriously, taking his daughter's hand, and drawing her towards him. "I thought Mrs. Bascom was very liberal in her ideas."

"I suppose she is what you call liberal. She doesn't believe as Mr. Holbrook preaches."

"Do you?"

"I don't know," answered Corinne, frankly.

"I have never thought much about it until this past week. It would be necessary for me to hear him longer before deciding."

"You haven't told me, yet, whether you care about church-going," said her father, after a short silence.

"We always went when at Auntie Bascom's," was the reply. "She said it was hardly respectable to stay at home constantly, on the Sabbath; and of course I wish to attend church somewhere."

"And you don't wish to go alone?"

"I certainly don't. I think it would look very strangely."

Mr. Burton allowed the subject to drop here; but, in the morning, he told Corinne he was going to church. "So we will occupy our pew this morning," he said.

"There will always be a seat for you and Frank, when you wish to hear Dr. Barnes," he added, turning to his sister.

Mrs. Lynde acknowledged the courtesy, but did not choose to avail herself of the offered privilege.

Corinne was disappointed at this turn of events, and, when she reached the church, was in no mood to be either edified or entertained. Dr. Barnes was liberal, as he had been represented, the audience was fashionable, and the singing charming; but there was nothing to move the heart, except the pure tones of a sweet, contralto voice, chanting a hymn of praise.

Mr. Burton made an effort to fix his attention upon the speaker; but it soon wandered. He had embarked in an exciting speculation, the day before, which seemed to him of far more consequence than abstract theories. He

might better have remained at home, where, by the aid of pen and paper, he could have made his calculations with far less mental effort. He was deep in "chances for and against," when he was roused by the closing exercises of the service.

"Well, Crin, how did you like the doctor, this morning?" he asked, when they reached home.

"Not so well as I do Mr. Holbrook," was the reply. "I didn't quite understand what points he wished to bring out. He said a great many beautiful things; but, for some reason, I didn't exactly comprehend them. I saw you paid good attention, and I wish you would tell me the subject of the sermon."

Mr. Burton was fairly caught, and, after some hesitation, he acknowledged he had been thinking so much of something else, that he lost "the run of the discourse." "But the doctor is a very smart man," he added. "Everybody says that, and I hoped you would like him well enough to go there all the time."

"I shall go when you do," was the laughing reply; and then Corinne turned to her cousin, who had just come in, and asked him if Mr. Holbrook preached.

"Yes," he answered; "and I wished you were there to hear him. He was so good. I am sure all the children understood him; and, when we were coming out, I heard an old man say it was a great sermon. I can tell you the text, and I remember a good many things that he said."

Mrs. Lynde would probably not have said so much as this before her brother; but Frank was too young to understand that many people, who profess to consider preaching of no consequence, are often very angry when it is mentioned.

Mr. Burton was more consistent than most of like faith with himself, and asked his nephew, with a smile, if he thought his minister could compare with Dr. Barnes.

"He is better for me," was the answer of the boy.

"And do you think he would be better for Crin and me?" asked his uncle.

"I suppose you must judge for yourselves," he answered, respectfully.

"Are you going to church this afternoon?" asked Corinne of her father, some time after this.

"No, child. Once in a day is quite enough for me; and I think it would be as well for you to stay at home."

"I wish to go very much," she replied.

"Then go," said her father. "I believe in liberty of conscience."

But when he found she proposed to attend the third service in the evening, he protested against it. "That is too much, Crin. We shall have you sick again. I don't believe even your aunt will think it best, church-goer as she is."

The answer was the same it had been at noon: "I wish to go, very much;" and no further objection was made.

Mr. Burton's pew was seldom occupied. Occasionally, he made a great effort, and appeared with his daughter; but it was always a task. She once asked him to go with her to hear Mr. Holbrook. This he refused to do

so decidedly that she never repeated the invitation.

In her own attendance, she was as regular as were her aunt and cousin, her interest increasing with each successive Sabbath. Although never speaking of this to her aunt, she sometimes talked with Frank, who, having been a Bible student from his earliest childhood, had a most thorough knowledge of its great truths.

Corinne often wished Maud could be with her and hear as she heard. She would investigate the whole subject, and see if it was really true that we are accountable for every act of our lives.

These two friends were expecting to meet in the summer, and spend several weeks with Mrs. Bascom, and there would then be an opportunity for the discussion of this and kindred topics. Both looked forward impatiently; but Maud Lamson found it impossible to fulfil her part of the engagement, and Crin did not care to go where she would miss her old companion even more than at home.

"We will meet in the autumn," wrote Maud, when announcing the change in her plans. "Father insists upon my visiting Uncle Rufus, a relative of whom I never heard, until within the last few months. He lives somewhere among the hills, and is supposed to be quite wealthy."

It was while visiting this Uncle Rufus that the letter was received which so troubled her. Crin had kept silence until she could do so no longer. If she wrote to Maud at all, she must write of what engrossed so many of her thoughts.

"If the Bible is a revelation from God to man, why is it not more studied and better understood?"

"If every human soul is to live throughout the endless ages of eternity, why do so many consider it foolish to make preparation for this eternity?"

"Are we all sinners in the sight of God? If so, how shall we escape the just punishment for our sins?"

These were some of the questions contained

in the letter, and answers would be expected. Maud read them again, then rose from her chair and paced the floor nervously.

As she passed the window, a child's voice exclaimed, "Cousin Maud, please come down. Uncle Rufus says we may go to ride, if you will go with us."

She did not wait for a second call, and soon a merry party were seated in the old family wagon. As they were driving out of the yard, Mrs. Lane called to them to wait until she could get a basket ready to send to Widow Brown.

"Aunt Mary is always sending them things," said Burt Lester, the youngest of the party, not quite enjoying the delay.

"She doesn't send any more than they need," replied his sister Anna, who was ten years of age, and considerate as a woman.

"Lots of good things in that basket, I know," said Burt, as it was stowed away under the seat.

"Which way are we going?" asked Maud, when they were out upon the road.

"Up," answered Anna, laughing. "Mrs. Brown lives a great way above us."

"Yes," chimed in Burt. "I asked Cousin Fred, once, if it wasn't almost up to heaven."

"What did he say?" questioned his sister.

"He said she was going to live in heaven after she died. Isn't it queer, Cousin Maud, that everybody is going to live, after they die? I don't understand it," he added, shaking his small head. "Mrs. Brown wears old clothes now, but Cousin Fred says she'll wear a shining robe when she gets to heaven. I should like a shining robe. Do you think I'll have one, Cousin Maud?"

"I hope so," she answered, absently; then added, "I have no doubt you will."

"Cousin Fred says I shall, if I am a ——— What is that name, Anna?" he asked, turning to his sister.

"Do you mean Christian?"

"Yes: that is it," he replied. "If I am a Christian, I shall go to heaven, and wear a shining robe. That is what Cousin Fred told me once; and he knows all about heaven."

Maud had heard so much of "Cousin Fred" that her curiosity was excited in regard to him. The children, Anna and Burt Lester, evidently considered him an oracle upon all subjects, and were never tired of repeating what he had said. Uncle Rufus and Aunt Mary, also, quoted him as good authority, and looked forward to his arrival with nearly as much impatience as the younger members of the family. Others were expected, and the house would soon be filled with guests; but, of all these, Fred Spaulding would be most eagerly welcomed.

Uncle Rufus Lane had really very few relatives; but he never wanted for those who were glad to be adopted into his family. Maud Lamson's mother had been his favorite niece; but after her death, he quite lost trace of her child. Mr. Lamson had not taken the trouble to keep him informed, neither had he told his daughter concerning him.

In the spring after Maud's return home, he heard an acquaintance mention the name of Rufus Lane. He made some inquiries,

and learned that the old gentleman had accumulated a large property.

"He bought land when it was cheap, and sold when it commanded a high price," said the informant. "In all that region of country, there isn't a pleasanter home than his. Everybody calls him Uncle Rufus, yet I don't know that any one has a natural right to address him by that title."

Mr. Lamson was a shrewd man. He resolved, upon the instant, that Maud should spend the summer with this uncle, and wrote, proposing the same. Of course, a favorable answer was received, and so it came about that Maud Lamson and Crin Burton found their plans frustrated.

Uncle Rufus was delighted to see the daughter of his niece, and she was at once domesticated in the house where her mother had spent so many happy days. It seemed almost like a dream, this coming, a stranger, to the dear old people, who had received her with open arms. And to these children she was already Cousin Maud, although she had known them but a week.

This was not the first drive she had taken with them, and they wondered how one usually so entertaining could be so silent, while she, on her part, was vainly endeavoring to dismiss the serious thoughts which haunted her.

"Now we are almost there," exclaimed Burt, as the road turned abruptly to the right. "Just one hill more, the steepest of all;" and so it proved.

On the top of this hill, under the shade of an old oak, which looked as though it might have stood there for centuries, was a small cottage.

"Is this the place?" asked Maud.

"Yes," replied Anna, "and there is Nancy, sitting on the bench."

"Who is Nancy?"

"Mrs. Brown's daughter. Don't you know about her?" whispered the child.

Maud shook her head.

"She had fits when she was a little girl, and she can't learn much," said Anna, in the same subdued tone.

This was true, but not the whole truth.

Nancy Brown, then about thirty years of age, was in a state slightly removed from idiocy. In summer, she would sit, all day long, on a bench, in front of the cottage, amusing herself with knitting needles and yarn, although her mother had never been able to teach her to knit.

At first sight of the wagon, she rushed into the house; and when Maud drove up to the door, Mrs. Brown was standing there, holding her daughter by the hand. "Good morning," she said, pleasantly. "You have taken a fine morning for a ride."

Maud almost started at the low, sweet tones, so different from what one might have expected to hear in such a place.

"This is Cousin Maud Lamson," said Anna, directly introducing her companion; and while the two were exchanging greetings, Burt commenced dragging the basket into sight.

"This contains some things for you, from Aunt Mary Lane."

"I know the basket well," replied Mrs. Brown. "Will you come in, and sit for a while in my humble cottage?"

Something impelled Maud to accept this invitation, and she entered a room, poorly furnished, but neat as hands could make it. The best chair was placed for her, and Mrs. Brown carried the basket into a bit of a pantry, where she emptied it, and then returned to talk with her guest.

During this time, Nancy had been looking at the children; but when her mother sat down and commenced talking, she went to an old chest of drawers, and taking from it a book, carefully enveloped in a towel, she laid it in Maud's lap.

"My daughter is unfortunate, as you see," said Mrs. Brown. "She wants you to look at our new Bible. It was given to me a few weeks ago, and she considers it a great treasure. She has shown it to every one who has been in the house since."

To please this poor creature, Maud examined and praised the Bible, although she could hardly endure the vacant stare of the large, blue eyes. Nancy seemed gratified at this, but commenced making signs rapidly, while she muttered a strange jargon of sounds.

"She wishes you to read," explained her mother. "Would you be willing to read a little?"

Thus asked, the young girl could not refuse, and she read that to which she first opened, — the fifth chapter of Matthew. No sooner had the sound of her voice ceased, than Nancy knelt, covering her face with her hands.

"What makes her do so?" asked Burt, in a half-whisper.

"She expects somebody will pray," was the reply. "Most of the people who have come to see us, lately, have read and prayed. 'Perhaps you would pray,' she said to the reader.

"You must excuse me," Maud found voice to say, really shocked by the suggestion.

After remaining upon her knees two or three minutes, Nancy turned round and commenced the gibberish which had before seemed so dreadful.

Her mother tried to quiet her, but this was impossible; and, as a last resort, she knelt by her side, and offered a short prayer. This

had the desired effect, and the daughter went out to her bench.

"Cousin Fred will pray when he comes," said Burt, looking reproachfully at Maud.

"Do you mean Mr. Spaulding?" asked Mrs. Brown.

"Yes, ma'm," replied Anna; "and he is coming next week."

"Then we shall have a meeting where I can go. I am thankful for that. It will do me a world of good. Is the young man a relation of yours?" she asked her guest.

"Not even an acquaintance," was the reply. "I never heard of him until since I came to Uncle Rufus's. He seems to be a general favorite there."

"And well he may be. He is one who goes about doing good. He visits all the poor people up here on the mountain, and holds meetings in the school-house."

"Is he a minister?" asked Maud.

"He is going to be, when he gets through studying," replied her companion. "He has been here two summers, and I was afraid he wouldn't come again."

The visitor, wishing to change the subject of conversation, remarked upon the lonely situation of the cottage.

"It would be very lonesome here without the Bible," answered the dweller in this humble home. "Then I know God watches over me, so I don't need to be afraid."

"The snow must drift around you here in winter."

"Not so much as you'd think. We live in the shadow of a great rock, that keeps the northwest wind from sweeping down on us as it would if it wasn't for it."

Maud rose to look from the little back window, and saw the huge rock, its sides covered with grapevines and clematis.

"What a wild place!" she exclaimed.

"That is what everybody says who comes here, and a good many come this way in berry time. Perhaps you'll come up then. There's going to be a good many this year."

"I should like to come," said the young girl. "And now I must bid you good-morning, or I shall hardly be home in season for Aunt Mary's early dinner."

Anna and Burt were already seated in the wagon, but they preferred walking down the steep hill, and so left Maud to drive down alone. This required her undivided attention, and it was not until they were nearly home that she could give much thought to the strange visit.

"Just in time," said Uncle Rufus, coming forward to assist the young people from the wagon.

They all, however, sprang past him, and landed safely on the ground, beyond the reach of his outstretched arms.

"When I was a young man, you couldn't have done that, Miss Maud," he said, as she stood laughing merrily at his discomfiture. "My arms are not as strong as they were then, and I can't move quite so quickly; so you take advantage of my infirmities."

Soon after, all were seated at the dinner-table, and Mrs. Lane inquired concerning Mrs. Brown.

"She said she was very well, and she certainly was very grateful for what you sent

her," replied Maud. "But how can she live, with the great, vacant eyes of her daughter staring constantly at her! I believe I should go mad if I were shut up in the room with her for only half a day."

"I know the sight of her is terrible to a stranger; but her mother is so accustomed to her, that she probably thinks nothing about it, at least not as other people do."

While this was being said, Burt laid down his knife and fork, and seemed waiting for an opportunity to speak. Anna shook her head warningly, to remind him that he should keep silence; but he was too much absorbed to notice her.

"What is it?" asked Uncle Rufus, by whom the child was sitting. "Burt has something to tell us."

Considering himself at liberty to speak, the boy recounted the principal incidents of the morning's visit. "Cousin Maud read the Bible," he said, "but she didn't pray. Cousin Fred would if he'd been there, and I shall always pray when I am a *man*."

This was a severe reproof to the grown members of the family, no one of whom was ever heard to utter a word of prayer. Uncle Rufus was a most exemplary man; but he made no pretensions to being a Christian, and his wife, who had for fifty years considered him well nigh perfect, was content to follow his example.

There was a profound silence until Mr. Lane, with an apparent effort, said, "I hope you will, my boy."

Maud did not stop for her after-dinner chat, but hastened to her chamber. Tearing in pieces the partly written letter which lay upon the table, she commenced another, writing rapidly for nearly two hours, covering sheet after sheet, until she had said all she wished. Then she gathered up the scattered sheets, read them carefully, and leaned listlessly back in her chair.

A light tap upon the door roused her, and, at the word of welcome, Burt Lester entered. "Anna says it was wrong for me to tell what I did, this noon. I am very sorry. Will

you forgive me?" he asked, looking at her wistfully.

"There is nothing for which you should ask my forgiveness," she answered.

"Did you feel badly?" he continued, innocently. "Anna thought you did, and I was sorry."

Maud took the child in her lap, assuring him that he need feel sorry no longer, and the sweet face was at once illumined by a bright smile.

"Anna said I mustn't stay long, for you might be busy, and not want me," he said soon after, sliding from her arms.

"I think I must be busy for a while," was the reply. "By and by, I will come down, and we will have a nice time together. What was Aunt Mary doing, when you came up?"

"Sleeping in the rocking-chair; and I came just as still as I could, so as not to wake her."

Aunt Mary was sleeping when Maud went down; and the children were on the piazza, making wreaths of clover-heads and daisies.

They were all very quiet until the good woman awoke, with a start, as the old clock in the hall struck the hour of four.

"I must have been asleep," she exclaimed, rubbing her eyes, and starting immediately for the kitchen, to see how matters were going there.

"Any letters for the office?" asked Uncle Rufus, as he came in to exchange his working dress for one somewhat better. "I have a little business to do in the village, and I guess I'll drive down before supper. There'll be plenty of time."

Maud was glad to avail herself of this opportunity, and with some laughing remarks in regard to its size, she brought forward the voluminous epistle to Crin Burton.

Supper was ready in the long dining-room at precisely five o'clock, but Mr. Lane had not returned.

"Something hinders him," said his wife. "He meant to be back. I guess he'll come before we get through."

She was mistaken. It was more than two

hours before he was seen coming, and then he was not alone.

"I think it's Cousin Fred with him," said Anna.

"I'm sure it is," exclaimed Burt; and the next moment Aunt Mary added her testimony.

"He has come a week before we expected; but we shall be all the more glad to see him."

Everybody in the house welcomed this visitor; the workmen from the field, and the domestics in the kitchen.

In the confusion Maud made her escape, but she did not go beyond the sound of a rich, manly voice. When the stars began to come out Anna Lester went to her room, and asked her to go below stairs. "Cousin Fred is going to read and pray now, and Aunt Mary sent me for you."

This message, although not welcome, was one which must be obeyed, and Maud presented herself in the general sitting-room, where the whole family were assembled. A

large Bible was open before the newly arrived guest, and, without giving time for an introduction, she glided to an obscure corner, and seated herself in a low chair.

Only three of those present knelt during the prayer,—he who offered the petition, and his young cousins; yet the hushed silence of the room testified to the reverent attention of the listeners.

Conversation was not quickly resumed after its close. Burt was first to break the spell, claiming attention, and Anna went over to the corner where Maud was sitting. One by one the inmates of the room went out, leaving Mr. and Mrs. Lane alone with their guests.

"I should think somebody would tell you about Cousin Maud," whispered Burt to the young man in whose arms he was cradled.

"Perhaps you can tell me," replied his cousin in a louder tone.

This caught the ear of Uncle Rufus, who hastened to apologize. "I was so busy thinking, I forgot to tell you that the daughter of my niece is spending the summer with me, and I have some idea of adopting her.—Miss

Maud Lamson, this is Mr. Frederic Spaulding. If I wasn't a teetotaler, I'd drink to your better acquaintance. As it is, I hope you will be good friends."

Maud was, for a moment, somewhat embarrassed by this speech; but Mr. Spaulding acknowledged it gracefully. "You are very fortunate in having some claim upon these good friends," he said to her. "It is only by sufferance that we are allowed to say uncle and aunt, and we count even that a blessing."

Aunt Mary made some pleasant reply to this, and then they separated for the night.

Every event of the day had tended in one direction, and the subject most distasteful to Maud Lamson had been forced upon her attention. The letter, with its direct, heart-searching questions; the visit, with its startling incidents; and last, the evening worship, of which she had been an unwilling spectator.

It was not strange that her utter indifference to all interests beyond those of this world, should have given place to a restless, feverish anxiety.

CHAPTER II.

The old, the simple story,
Told oft and oft before,
Of Him who left the glory
He with the Father wore.



RIN BURTON was by the sea. Her aunt, cousin, and herself were spending the summer where they caught the faintest whisper of old Ocean.

Her father was usually with them for the Sabbath, and sometimes stopped for a day or two after. These days, when he left business in the city and devoted himself to pleasure, were holidays, indeed; and he would have made the Sabbaths like them, had his daughter been willing to share his excursions. This, however, she declined doing, preferring,

if she could not attend church, to spend the day in reading and quiet conversation.

Mr. Burton was hardly pleased with the "strict notions" of his daughter. He often found her with Bible in hand, and he could see that she was fast adopting her aunt's ideas in matters of conscience; yet he made little effort to counteract this influence. Liberality, that term so vague and indefinite as to apply equally well to all shades of opinion and no opinion at all, was his particular hobby. He was *liberal*, — willing that all should think as they pleased upon religious matters, and professing to consider it strange that any one should be so bigoted as to suppose there was but one way to heaven. But he never argued even this point. He said it was against his principles, and we must give him credit for speaking the truth, until we have proof to the contrary.

"People think differently upon other subjects: why should they not upon this?"

This was the reply he once made his sister when she urged upon him the claims of re-

ligion. He said his own way of doing business was best for him, since it suited his tastes and abilities, while an entirely different management might be conducive to his neighbor's interest.

He thought he would have preferred that his daughter should care less for serious things, yet he was not quite sure; for, after all, Mrs. Lynde, with her cheerful, unobtrusive piety, very nearly realized his ideal of a true woman.

At first, Crin had been to him a wonder, with her girlish ways, and frank expression of thought and feeling. She now seemed more reticent, — less inclined to speak of her own plans and wishes.

Looking upon her with the fond partiality bestowed upon an only child, he was inclined to blame himself for this, and redoubled his efforts to gratify her. Not much of a reader himself, he took care to supply her with magazines and books, often carrying quite a package of new literature from the city on Saturday evening.

One Sabbath he inquired of her why she was not reading a book which he had brought the day before, and with which she had seemed much pleased.

"Aunt Hattie says it is not suitable reading for to-day," she replied.

"What is the reason?" he asked quickly. "There can be nothing objectionable in the book, for I heard Dr. Barnes recommending it to a young lady, only yesterday, and I bought it for you on the strength of what he said."

"I thank you very much for bringing it to me," replied Crin, with a smiling face. "I know I shall enjoy reading it, but I prefer to leave it for to-morrow. I think Dr. Barnes would hardly recommend it for the Sabbath."

"I don't know about that. He told Emma Clay he hoped she wouldn't commence it last evening, as he was afraid he should miss her from church if she did. If he had thought it unsuitable for the Sabbath, he would have been likely to say so."

"But Aunt Hattie says so," urged Crin. "She is pretty good authority."

"You and Aunt Hattie are too much for me, so I give up; but I should think it would be difficult to keep on the right track all of the time. How is it, Frank?" he asked, turning to his nephew, who came into the room book in hand. "Do you always know what is right? You are all getting so particular that I hardly feel at home with you. It must take most of your time to decide between the lawful and the unlawful."

"I don't think it does," was the boy's reply, as he looked from his uncle to his cousin, in the vain endeavor to comprehend the reason of these questions and remarks.

"What book are you reading?" directly asked Mr. Burton. "The outside is attractive."

"And the inside is still more so," replied Frank. "It is a book of sermons. Mother bought it before we came down here, so that we could have a sermon for every Sabbath when we could not attend church."

The gentleman had no wish to prolong the conversation, and soon after strolled down to

the beach, with a secular newspaper in his pocket.

The next Saturday he carried to his daughter a volume published by the Tract Society.

"There, Crin, I guess that will do to read Sunday," he exclaimed, as she opened it and glanced at the title page. "At any rate, the man I bought it of said so. I told him, when he came into the counting-room, that I had no time for reading; but he said everybody could find some time on Sunday. I thought of you and bought it."

She thanked him for his kindness, but did not stop long to examine the book, when he produced a letter from Maud. It was the one written with such absorbing interest; and, as Crin Burton took it from the envelope, and saw the number of sheets, she felt certain her questions were answered. To her surprise, however, she found it contained only an account of the visit to the cottage on the hill, and some reflections on the same.

"Maud is a good correspondent," said Mr. Burton. "She has sent you a very long

letter, and I suppose it is very entertaining."

"It is very interesting," replied his daughter, thinking more of Nancy Brown than of what she was herself saying.

"Such a letter as that must be a curiosity in its way," continued Mr. Burton. "I wonder what you two girls can find to say to each other every fortnight."

"There is never any trouble on that score," said Mrs. Lynde, with a smile, looking up from a long row of figures, which had claimed her attention. "But your friend has been very generous," she added, as she turned to her niece, and saw the scattered sheets. "I hope she is enjoying her visit as well as during the first of the season."

Crin was very anxious to hear what her aunt would say to the contents of this letter, and proposed reading it aloud.

"I trust I am not to be excluded from the audience," remarked her father, shrugging his shoulders.

Frank came in just as this was said, and

considered himself very fortunate in being allowed to remain.

Maud Lamson was a fine writer, having excelled all her companions in school. Far better than I have done, did she describe the dwelling in the shadow of the great rock; the old oak, with its protecting branches; and the rude bench, with its solitary occupant. But the reading of the Bible, and the poor unfortunate upon her knees, waiting for words of prayer, had most deeply impressed her own mind, and were most prominent in the transcript sent to her friend.

Corinne closed the letter with a tremulous voice, tears standing in her eyes, as she read the last words: "I cannot answer your questions now; I must have time to think of them."

Mr. Burton had listened with rapt attention, more moved than he would have been willing to acknowledge. Mrs. Lynde was first to break the silence.

"That is a wonderful incident," she said. "I have heard before of a darkened intellect

receiving enough of light to comprehend the existence of God; but this is very striking."

Frank wished he could go to the cottage, and see Mrs. Brown. "What a Christian she must be, up there almost among the clouds!" he exclaimed. "When I am older, I should like to visit such people who live off by themselves. Some of them must need a missionary."

This was the work Frederic Spaulding had set himself to do, and, in doing which, he had made the acquaintance of Mrs. Brown. Coming to the village as a teacher, he had spent his holidays in visiting from house to house, in the remote districts of the town.

Wherever he went, he was sure to make friends; and he rarely found any difficulty in introducing the subject he thought most important. He held meetings in the different school-houses, and there talked of the Saviour who came into the world to save sinners. Sometimes he was the only Christian present; but he always succeeded in interesting his audience, and was permitted to see the good

results of his labors. He always carried a supply of tracts, which he left, not only in the hands of those who promised to read them, but by the wayside. Single sheets he fastened to trees and guide posts, so that the traveller might learn something of the way to heaven. Many a man, as his horse drank from the roadside fountain, read an earnest appeal, who would never have thought of doing so in his own home.

Frederic Spaulding was wise to win souls, and he left no proper means untried.

Mr. Lane dated his acquaintance with this noble young man from the first day he entered the town; and during the three years intervening between this and the time Maud Lamson heard his voice in prayer, he had been a frequent guest in the hospitable home.

He early adopted the fashion of those about him, and addressed his host as Uncle Rufus. When his young cousins came to board for a few weeks, they followed his example; and a stranger would never have dreamed but they were relations indeed.

Having no permanent home, he was glad to spend his vacations from study where he could not only *get* good but *do* good, and he had come to consider himself as a member of the family. Yet here, where he was most respected and beloved, he seemed to have the least influence as a Christian.

Mr. Lane considered religion a good thing, was constant in his attendance at the village church, and gave liberally to aid in the support of the gospel; but he was not ready to unite himself with the people of God. "I mean to do about right," he said, when pressed upon the subject. "I should be glad if every person in town was a good Christian; and I really wish I was one, myself."

"Then why are you not one?" asked his young friend.

"I hardly know," was the reply. "I have so many other things to think of, that I don't find time for that. I hope I shall, sometime."

Mrs. Lane thought more of this than her husband; but she was waiting for him.

Years before, she would have come out, decidedly, had he encouraged her doing so ; but her confidence in him was so great, that she perilled her own soul, rather than act without his unqualified approval.

Frederic Spaulding thought much of these friends, and prayed earnestly that they might, ere it was too late, realize their dangerous position. Impelled by his anxiety, he had frequently talked with them in regard to their souls' salvation ; but he resolved to make no allusion to the subject, during this visit.

Having been licensed to preach, he had come a week earlier than was expected, that he might supply the pulpit of the village church, on the following sabbath.

The pastor, who had grown gray in the service of his Master, was beginning to feel the infirmities of age. These prevented all effort beyond the usual weekly exercises, and the distant parts of his parish were seldom visited. He rejoiced, when, two years before, an active laborer came among them, and bade God-speed to him, who, with the enthusiasm

of youth, wrought in the great vineyard. Ever ready to give counsel and sympathy, he sometimes planned the work which another prosecuted.

Feeling the need of a prolonged rest, he obtained a release from all pulpit duties, for several weeks, and recommended to his people to engage the services of Mr. Spaulding. This was cheerfully done, and he had come to spend two months among the mountains.

Mr. and Mrs. Lane were delighted at the prospect of hearing him preach, and sabbath morning, every member of the household was up betimes, that no one might be late for the morning service. It was two miles to the village ; but the distance was nothing for men who walked and worked on the farm each day of the week. Every vehicle on the premises was put in requisition for the conveyance of those unable to take the long walk, and Mr. Lane's household made quite an addition to the congregation.

Rarely is there so attentive an audience as

the one which listened to "the young minister's sermons," on that bright summer day. There were old men, with bowed forms and hoary heads; women, who had toiled through threescore years, and needed to look beyond this life for rest. There were Christians and worldlings; those who had a sure title to the blessedness of heaven, and others, who had no claim to its rewards. Young men and maidens, with fair, innocent children, all gathered to hear the glad tidings of great joy.

Most of the congregation counted the preacher a personal friend, while to all he was known as one who adorned the doctrine he professed. He carried to his work, not only a heart glowing with love to God and man, but a mind well disciplined by study.

He broached no abstract theories, indulged in no rhapsodies, pleasing the ear with well-turned periods and mingling of sweet sounds. His was only the old message,—the "faithful saying that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

The manger, the cross, and the sepulchre; the lowly birth, the laborious life, and the ignominious death,—all, all were endured for his enemies.

"An enemy to Christ! A despiser of Him who left his throne in the heavens, and dwelt among men, that he might atone for the sins, for which, otherwise, there was no forgiveness!"

"The Jews cried, 'Crucify him, crucify him;' and the cry has come sounding down, through all the ages, as a testimony against them; but not less guilty are those who now neglect the great salvation."

"An unsullied reputation, a life honorable in the sight of men,—what are these to bring into the presence of One who searches the inmost recesses of the heart!"

"Have you no sins of deed, word, or thought? Then may you come boldly, and claim the just reward of your conduct. Dares any one of you do this?"

The dropping of a pin might have been heard, so profound was the silence which fol-

lowed this question. Again was the faithful saying repeated, and the services closed with a prayer and the benediction.

There were few comments made. Perhaps some were disappointed; but all were impressed with the solemnity of the message that had been delivered.

Among the faces in his audience, one had so fascinated the preacher that he found it difficult to withdraw his gaze. It was that of a man somewhat past the meridian of life, who occupied one of the back pews.

The eager, hungry look in his face, told of sin or suffering from which he longed to be released. Sometimes an expression of hope flitted for a moment over the worn features, only to be replaced by a deeper gloom.

In the afternoon the man was again in his place, listening as for his life. When the congregation dispersed, he walked rapidly away, without seeming to notice any one about him.

Mr. Spaulding made some inquiries concerning him, and learned that he moved into town early in the spring, and was living on a back farm, nearly a mile from any neighbor.

"He's a strange man," said his informant. "Nobody seems to know much about him. He's a son and daughter at home; but they never come out."

Uncle Rufus Lane knew more than this, and the next morning he told his guest some particulars in the history of this family.

The man, Jared Simpson, had worked in town some years before, so that he had a knowledge of the old farms and their owners. He moved there for the purpose of living in retirement, or, rather, this was the inference drawn from his habits. His son, though but twenty-two years of age, had committed a crime when under the influence of intoxicating drink. For this he was sentenced to three years' hard labor in the State Prison.

"There were a good many extenuating circumstances," said Uncle Rufus, "and the sentence was considered very severe. It was only the stealing of a horse in a drunken spree, and nobody had any proof that he intended to keep it. However, he served out his term, and when he was released, the family left their old home, and came here."

This, then, was the sorrow for which the father sought relief, and the listener to his story felt that here was work for him to do. To seek out this family, and gain their confidence, must be one of his first endeavors. He knew the location of their home, and made some change in his plans to bring it among his early visitations. Carefully examining his store of tracts, he selected such as were best adapted to his purpose.

The face which had riveted his gaze in church, haunted him both sleeping and waking. Before the expiration of the week, he called at Mr. Simpson's, but was not, at first, invited to enter.

In a pleasant way he told the woman who met him at the door, that he was making a tour of the town, as he had done for two previous years. He then asked for a drink of water, and she felt obliged to ask him to "come in and wait," while she could go to the well.

* He proposed drawing the water, but she objected, and he seated himself in a pleasant room which had been opened for his reception.

When she returned, he gave her some tracts,

and succeeded in commencing a conversation, which he took care to prolong. Still no other member of the family appeared. It was past the middle of the afternoon, yet he lingered, although sounds from the kitchen warned him that supper was being prepared.

At length he saw Mr. Simpson coming from the field, followed by a young man, who would have been recognized anywhere as his son, so striking was the resemblance between them.

"Is that your husband?" asked the visitor, addressing his companion, who was now evidently anxious to be rid of his presence.

Receiving an affirmative answer, he said, "I must have seen him in church last Sabbath. His face seems very familiar."

"He was there," she replied, and abruptly left the room.

Directly he heard the heavy step of a man in the narrow hall, and the eager listener of the previous Sabbath stood before him.

"Mr. Simpson, I believe," he said, advancing with extended hand.

"And your name —"

"Is Spaulding."

For a moment the farmer stood irresolute, then looking closely at his unwelcome guest, he exclaimed, "You are the man that preached last Sabbath. I am glad to see you," and the extended hand met a warm, friendly grasp.

"We are not much used to having strangers come this way," he added, by way of apology for his cool reception.

Mr. Spaulding repeated what he had said to the wife in regard to his habit of calling upon the people of the town, and his host invited him to take supper with them.

"Our fare is not of the best," he said; "but such as it is, we shall be glad to share it with you. Excuse me a moment."

He went out and returned, accompanied by Mrs. Simpson, who seconded her husband's assurance of welcome. There was some delay in which the good housewife added to the provision for the family supper, and then they met in the low kitchen where the table was spread.

A son and daughter were presented to the

stranger. In both faces there was something of the same eager questioning which was so painfully apparent in that of the father.

That they were annoyed by this intrusion upon their privacy, was plainly seen; yet they answered respectfully such remarks as were addressed to them. Accustomed to meet and converse with all classes of people, now that he had really found an entrance into this home, Frederic Spaulding was at no loss how to proceed.

He could see how the consciousness of disgrace had crushed out all hope and ambition in these young hearts; and how, like an incubus, the memory of a three years' imprisonment clung to both brother and sister. She who waited at home, had not been the least sufferer, and his heart was moved to pity as he marked the deeply furrowed lines on the fair, young brow.

"I suppose your minister, Mr. Thayer, has not called upon you very often, since you came here," he said, when supper was nearly over.

"I've never seen him at all," replied Mrs. Simpson, to whom the remark was addressed. "My husband has heard him preach a few times."

"He is too old to do much extra labor," responded her guest; "but he has the good of the people at heart, and would be glad to visit them all. He has engaged me to do some pastoral work for him, and I am trying to begin in season."

Esther Simpson glanced furtively at the speaker, as this was said.

"I intend to have a meeting in the school-house belonging to this district, to-morrow evening; and I shall hope to see you all there."

"What time will it be?" asked the father.

"At seven o'clock. I know it is a busy season of the year; but I think every one can afford to spend an hour in religious meetings."

"You didn't give any notice of it, Sunday."

"No, sir; but I have notified several to-day, and shall see others to-morrow; enough to make a pretty good attendance."

John Simpson, the son, looked interested, and was about to speak, when a painful thought silenced him, and a deep blush overspread his face.

As they rose from the table, Mr. Spaulding asked his host if he was willing he should read from the Bible, and pray with them.

Without replying, Mr. Simpson brought forward a Bible, and gave it to the young minister, while the family seated themselves as listeners. The Scripture read was wisely chosen; and the prayer which followed was like the petition of a son to a loving, indulgent parent. Each word breathed of trust and confidence.

"I wish I could pray like that," said Mr. Simpson, as the petitioner rose from his knees.

"We can all pray acceptably, if our hearts are right," he replied, not quite sure that he comprehended the meaning of this impulsive remark.

"That's the trouble," said the man. "I shouldn't care about the words I used if I only felt right. I thought, when you were preach-

ing Sunday, I should like to have a long talk with you. You said some things I never thought of before, and I told mother, when I got home, that it seemed as though you must know just what I needed."

"We all need to hear the same gospel truths, for we are all sinners, and there is but one way to escape punishment. It is always safe to preach Christ and Him crucified, for His is the only name whereby we may be saved."

He waited to see what effect these words might have, and after a short silence, Mr. Simpson said, "Stay with us to-night, and let us talk this matter over. We need a minister here if anybody does. I guess mother can give you a comfortable bed."

Again the same deep blush overspread the face of the son, and his sister shared the confusion.

"I shall be very glad to stay with you, if you desire it," replied Frederic Spaulding, thankful that he seemed so near to accomplishing his purpose.

"I've got some chores to do, and then I shall be ready to sit down with you," said the farmer. "Perhaps mother would rather have you go into the other room, now, while she does up the work."

"I should like to go out with you, and look around. I have a fancy for seeing green fields and fine cattle. I saw some as I came along that I suppose belong to you."

Mr. Simpson and his son took their milk-pails, and went out, calling loudly for the cows, which soon came trooping down a green lane. Their guest watched them for a while, and then made an effort to engage the young man in conversation.

Some remark which he thought would elicit a free expression of feeling was answered coldly; but, nothing daunted, he persevered, sure that there must be a chord in that saddened heart which would vibrate at a skilful touch.

A glorious sunset. Clouds of crimson and gold lay heaped in huge masses, flooding the hills and vales beneath with a soft, mellow

light. John Simpson, even with bowed head, caught the glow of the western sky, and stood erect to drink in its full beauty. His dark eye kindled, and his face grew radiant under its influence, as, with half-parted lips, he gazed upon the ever-changing scene.

"One seems almost to catch a glimpse of heaven, when permitted to look on such a sunset," said Frederic Spaulding, uncovering his head reverently.

"And is heaven like that?" asked his companion.

"The holy Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God; and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone; clear as crystal. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper, and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, every several gate was of one pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass."

Thus was the answer given, while crimson and gold grew dim, and the gates of glory closed.

"Did you read that in the Bible?" asked John Simpson.

"I did," was the reply. "It is part of the Apocalyptic vision, and I presume you have often read it."

"I remember something like it; but I don't read the Bible much."

"Allow me to ask you why not?" said the young minister. "I should think you would find great pleasure in its study."

"I suppose *you* do; but I guess it wasn't made for such folks as I am."

"It was made for all, and is profitable for all. I have never known any one who was not benefited by its study. You cannot be an exception."

"Do you know that you are talking to a State Prison convict?" fiercely demanded the stalwart youth, as his clenched hands twitched nervously.

"I know that I am talking to a sinner like

myself," was the reply, — "one for whom Christ died, and to whom the gospel has been sent."

"I wish that was true," said the listener sadly; "but some way I can't trust it."

"God's word is sure. He is my authority. You certainly can trust *Him*."

"It's hard work for me to trust anybody; but I should like to hear more about Christ and sinners. I've been a wicked one, but not so bad as they said. I'd killed myself long ago, if it hadn't been for Esther. She loves me, for all that's happened, and 'twould break her heart if I should leave her; so I try to live on."

"Another loves you better than she can: Jesus, the Saviour, loves us with an infinite love."

"Perhaps so. I've heard it before."

"And must hear it again," responded Frederic Spaulding, as he walked away.

He soon entered the house, and sat down in the room where Mr. Simpson had met him. The tracts he had left upon the table were

gone, and their place was occupied by a bouquet of flowers. There may have been no design in this, but it seemed to him like a mute expression of thanks; and he accepted it as an omen of good.

In about half an hour, the farmer came in, closed the door behind him, and leaned against a bureau which occupied one corner of the room. "I suppose you've heard all about us, before you come here," he said, after some hesitation.

"I have heard very little," was the reply. "I saw you in church, and, as you were a stranger, I inquired your name."

"I am a stranger," answered the man; "and I wish sometimes that I could go where I should never see a human being, except my own family."

"That would be a lonely life; you could do but little good in such a position as that."

"I don't expect to do any good. It's too late for that."

"I cannot agree with you."

There was a long silence after this, broken at last, by the host, as he said, —

"You are a young man to have much experience; but I thought, last Sunday, when you was preaching, that I should like to talk with you, and tell you all my troubles. Now, it seems hard, and you might not want to hear."

"I wish to do you good," replied the young preacher; "and whatever you may choose to tell me will be as carefully guarded as my own secrets. I know you have been deeply afflicted, and need the comforts of religion."

"I need comfort; but it seems, sometimes, as though there wasn't any for me."

"Sit down, my friend, and tell me all," said the sympathizing visitor. "A grief shared, is often lessened."

Thus entreated, Jared Simpson drew a chair to the table, and, resting his head upon his hand, commenced a recital of his troubles.

They had all come within the short space of five years. Previous to that, his had been a happy home, with no thought of disgrace. His two children were the joy and pride of his heart.

The son was an easy-tempered, affectionate boy, who displayed no vicious propensities, and for whom no anxiety was felt. But his very amiability proved a snare. He lacked force of character, and the resolute will, which, defying all temptation, enables its possessor to move steadily forward in a well-defined course.

Like many another, he was persuaded to indulge in the intoxicating cup; and then the cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, appeared. It gathered rapidly, despite the efforts of his parents to disperse it. Away from them, their son was often guilty of excesses which he deeply regretted in his hours of sobriety.

His associates, far worse than himself, taking advantage of his indecision, placed him foremost in their schemes, so that he received a large share of the blame which should have fallen upon others.

The exhibition of a circus in a neighboring town was made the occasion of unusually free drinking and consequent rioting. A horse was stolen, or rather taken; and, as John

Simpson was afterwards seen, alone, driving it, he was held responsible for the theft. His companions, whose heads were less easily affected, had sense enough to leave the wagon when they were likely to be overtaken.

Appearances were strongly against the driver; and, as the community had long been incensed against the young men belonging to the company, of which he was one, it was decided to make an example of him.

His father possessed neither money nor influence, sufficient to obtain his acquittal, and, at the early age of nineteen, the prison-doors closed behind him. No pen can portray his agony and remorse, when, in the loneliness of his narrow cell, he realized that for three years he was shut out from the blessings of freedom, and that, through all the coming years of his life, he must bear a felon's disgrace.

At home, the family were half paralyzed by the blow which had fallen upon them, the father and mother neglecting their work, to brood over this great sorrow. Esther, who

had almost worshipped her brother, grieved herself sick; and anxiety for her finally roused her parents from their state of morbid grief.

Shrinking from the presence of friends, as well as strangers, they isolated themselves from all society, and thus added to their unhappiness. Morning, noon, and night, as they sat around their well-spread board, the thought of the prisoner haunted them like a spectre. The law of the land had condemned *one*; but the great law of Nature which so links together human hearts, had condemned *four*. Months, weeks, and even days were counted, as time went by.

The owner of the stolen horse regretted the severity with which he had prosecuted the suit against John Simpson, when he saw the misery it had caused. He offered to assist in an effort to obtain the release of the young man; but his father rejected the offer with disdain.

In the mean time, the conduct of the prisoner was such as to commend him to the favorable notice of those who had him in charge. He

accomplished far more than his allotted task, working constantly and rapidly, incessant labor being the only relief from harrowing reflections. This extreme application sometimes resulted in illness, which forced him to desist from work until returning strength made it again possible.

Thus he served through the whole term for which he had been committed. When released, his father was waiting to accompany him to their new home, which, as I have before said, was in a retired location.

Frederic Spaulding heard these facts from the lips of his companion, not continuously, as I have related them, but in broken sentences, uttered, sometimes, in a tone scarcely above a whisper. It was a bitter confession to make, but the man breathed more freely at its close.

"Perhaps you'll think me a fool for telling you this," he said, after a moment's pause, in which he remembered that he had been speaking to a stranger.

"No, no," was the reply. "You need to

talk with some one, and I shall not betray your confidence. You have brooded over your trouble until it appears greater than it really is. Possibly, what you consider the most terrible of all afflictions may have been sent upon you in mercy."

Jared Simpson looked at the speaker as though disposed to doubt his sanity, and he hastened to explain. "Your son was not vicious; but, according to your own description of his character, he lacked the moral principle and firmness necessary to resist temptation. If he had gone on in the course he had commenced, he might have become a most abandoned wretch; and to be guilty and unpunished is worse than to be punished unjustly. Perhaps his arrest and imprisonment were necessary to make him a better man."

"What difference does it make whether he is good or bad?" asked the father, almost defiantly. "Nobody'll ever respect him, any way."

"That is by no means certain. It depends entirely upon himself. As to its making no

difference whether he is good or bad, even if he was past all hope for this world, there is another, in which he must live through all eternity."

"I know it, but we've never thought much about it. 'Most every body seems to think it's enough to look out for this world; and when a man's been in prison, he's about finished up."

Prison, and the disgrace of an incarceration within its walls, were uppermost in his mind, and it was necessary to give a new direction to his thoughts before he could be benefited.

"Christ died on the Cross," said the young preacher, solemnly. "He suffered the most ignominious death which His enemies could inflict upon him; yet He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. He died, cheerfully, that He might purchase the pardon of our sins."

"That's what you said last Sabbath, and I want to hear more about it," exclaimed the unhappy man.

"It couldn't have been a new doctrine to you," responded his companion, anxious to

know how far he understood the great truths of religion.

"Not exactly new; but, some way it sounded different, and it seemed as though you said it to me."

"I did say it to you," was the reply, "and I am glad of an opportunity to repeat it: 'Christ died to save *you*.' You know the story of His Crucifixion?"

"I've 'most forgot. I'll bring the Bible, and perhaps you'll read it to me. I shall understand it better if you do."

"No need of going for a Bible; I have a Testament," replied Mr. Spaulding.

As he took the precious volume from his pocket, his host opened the door into the hall, so that the reading could be heard by the whole family. Seldom has the simple narrative been read with more true pathos, and it was well understood by the listeners. The door was closed with the reading.

"I need that same Jesus for a friend," said Jared Simpson, with streaming eyes. "I've always needed Him, but I didn't think about

it till lately. If I was sure He loved me, I'd try and get along with my troubles. They wouldn't seem so hard, then."

A plain, faithful exposition of the plan of salvation was then made to him; and, until a late hour in the night, he sat there with his youthful teacher, hearing the wondrous things he taught.

As he had said, these were not exactly new to him, for he had often heard the gospel preached; but, like many others, even in Christian communities, he had heard with scarcely a thought of personal application.

Now, in his helplessness, burdened with both guilt and sorrow, he was thankful to listen to what had before seemed but an idle tale. Groping blindly, he sought for light; yet, when it was placed in his hands, he almost feared to trust its shining.

In the morning, he rose from a sleepless pillow, and met his guest with an anxious face. The solitary watches had not solved the problem which engrossed his attention.

After breakfast, there was reading of the

Bible and prayer, as on the preceding evening. Mrs. Simpson expressed her thanks for the tracts, and Esther found courage to say that she liked them very much.

"Perhaps, then, you would like some others, which I have with me," said Mr. Spaulding. "Here is a small book, too, which has interested me," he added, offering her one, which he had brought, hoping for just such an opportunity to dispose of it.

This was received gratefully by the gentle girl, to whom a new book was a rare treasure.

A short conversation with the father was closed by his promise to attend the meeting that evening, and use his influence to have his son accompany him.

"I wish you would talk with him," he said. "It seems as though you might do him some good."

John Simpson had left the house as soon as he could do so without absolute rudeness, and was much surprised when, an hour after, he saw the young minister walking directly towards him.



Mr. Spaulding's Visit to John Simpson. Page 93.

So closely had he been occupied with his work, that he had not noticed the intruder, until too late to make his escape, as at first he felt inclined to do. With the best grace he could summon, he awaited the approach.

"I wished to talk with you this morning; so you see I have come to you," said Frederic Spaulding, judging, from past experience, that a direct mode of address would be more effectual here than any other.

This, however, failed to elicit a reply, and he had recourse to a plain question.

"Are you willing to talk with me?" he asked, endeavoring to catch the eye of his companion.

"What do you want to talk with me for?" was the ungracious question which followed.

"That I may do you good. What other motive could I have?"

"I didn't know," said John Simpson, in some confusion, his manner softening a little. "A man like me is apt to be suspicious. — I'll talk with you," he added after a moment's pause.

"Then let us sit down here," responded his friend, pointing to a pile of logs, which offered a tolerably comfortable seat.

They talked long and earnestly, each forgetting all other claims upon his time, until the sun rode high in the heavens.

"Almost noon, and I have several calls to make," at length said the visitor. "I must leave you now; but we shall meet this evening."

"You have spent the morning with me, now you must have dinner before you go," was the reply, as the sound of the horn announced that the mid-day meal was nearly ready. "It will be late before you get to the next house."

So they went to the house together, and surprised Mrs. Simpson, who, nevertheless, received the unexpected guest cordially.

It required rapid walking to visit the other families of the district; but it was accomplished, and, by seven o'clock, the little red school-house contained more people than are usually seen at a neighborhood meeting in the country.

Mr. Simpson was there with his son and daughter, the first time the young people had been seen beyond the limits of their father's farm since they moved into town. A few Christians were present, men and women not often blessed with such an opportunity for religious conference.

The experience of the last twenty-four hours had given a new impulse to the zeal and enthusiasm of him who occupied the old-fashioned desk as leader of the meeting; and those who listened to him caught something of his spirit.

One aged woman, leaning upon her staff, addressed her neighbors with words of solemn warning, urging them to accept the offered mercy of Christ, and taste the joy of his salvation. Others followed, and the allotted time was fully occupied, some even lingering after the benediction was pronounced to talk of what they had heard.

There was some pleasant strife in regard to Mr. Spaulding's entertainment for the night, which was finally settled by his going home with the poorest man present.

This was Thursday, and it was necessary that he should return to Uncle Rufus Lane's the next day; but he found so much to interest him that it was nearly night when Burt and Anna Lester ran out to meet him and welcome him home.

"I've been looking for you all day long," said the boy in a grieved tone. "Why didn't you come before?"

"I found a great many people to talk with," was the reply. "And what have you been doing?"

"I said my lesson to sister, then I played with old Bruno till he was tired, and —" but here the grave recital was interrupted as Burt saw a white dress on the piazza. "There's Cousin Maud come down now. I wonder what she's been doing. She said she was so busy she couldn't go to ride with us."

"I think Cousin Maud has had a headache," rejoined Anna. "I heard Aunt Mary talking to her about it."

By the time they reached the house, the white dress had disappeared, and was seen no

more until the family were called together for evening worship.

Maud Lamson was too restless, and her thoughts too much preoccupied, for the enjoyment of society. She had, as yet, found no satisfactory answers to the questions propounded by Crin Burton. She wished they had never been asked; but the wish did not solve her difficulty.

The sermons she had heard the previous Sabbath, deepened her serious impressions; and every day's reflection convinced her there was a wisdom higher than that of this world.

Why was she so averse to giving this subject the consideration its importance demanded? It seemed strange, even to herself, when one involving the interests of but a few short days would have been most carefully weighed. Had it been a scientific question, she would have pored over books, and consulted authorities, until every doubt was removed. She was no dreamer, wasting in idle vagaries the time which should be devoted to study; yet the Bible, which she honestly

believed to be a revelation of God's will to man, was seldom opened.

While Frederic Spaulding was away on his "missionary tour," as Uncle Rufus was pleased to call his system of visitation, she heard much said of his fine scholarship and devoted piety. Of the first of these, she was assured by her own observation; and she sometimes wondered that one like him should find so much pleasure in the duties of religion.

Not wishing to draw attention to herself by refusing to go to the dining-room, at the hour of prayer, she entered reluctantly.

"Mr. Spaulding has been telling us about Esther Simpson," said Mrs. Lane, when only themselves and Uncle Rufus were left in the room. "I wish we could do something for her."

"Who is she?" asked Maud. "I don't remember having heard her name before."

"I don't know as you have," was the reply. "It must have been before you came, that we talked so much about the Simpson family."

Perhaps Mr. Spaulding will tell you about them. He knows the truth better than we do."

"I should like to hear about them," replied Maud, with animation, suddenly recollecting a remark she had heard her uncle make, only the day before, and which, at the time, roused her curiosity.

"I believe I shall not betray any confidence, if I repeat what is already generally known," said Mr. Spaulding; and then proceeded to give a hasty sketch of the events which had cast such a shadow over the home he had visited. He expressed his belief that the young man had no intention of stealing, and ought not to be considered or treated as a thief.

His sympathies were enlisted for the whole family, but more especially for Esther, whose young life seemed entirely blighted. "She is not a spirited girl who would throw off her trouble, or rise above it," he said. "She sits down there at home with her parents and brother, hoping for nothing in the future, and

enjoying little in the present. They all have a morbid feeling in regard to their disgrace, which only religion can remove. I never so desired persuasive eloquence as I did when talking with them. The salvation of those four souls would well repay the labor of a lifetime."

"Has John Simpson the making of a man in him?" asked Uncle Rufus.

"I think so," was the reply. "He might yet be respected and happy if he would become a Christian; but that is his only hope. I shall see the family often while I am here, and do what I can for them."

"I'd go over and see them if it would do any good," said the old gentleman, who had always been disposed to think of them with charity. "Maud might go with me and get acquainted with Esther."

"I'm not sure that would be well, unless you could make it appear that you had some other object in view. Wait until berries are ripe, and then we can all go over that way together. It will be strange if we can't find some good excuse for calling there."

This proposal was received with favor, the more so since an excursion for berries was one of Maud's anticipated pleasures. She wished to ask some questions in regard to the looks and personal appearance of Esther Simpson ; but Mr. Spaulding commenced speaking of her loneliness in a way that absorbed attention.

"She needs a friend sadly," he said.

"I guess she has found one," said Aunt Mary. "You seem to be a friend to everybody."

"I hope I am," was the reply ; "but she needs the help of some woman who can talk to her about a great many things of which I am ignorant. Miss Lamson might do her good if she was disposed to make the effort."

Maud had never thought much about doing good ; indeed, there had been little in her life to call forth benevolent feeling. She had hardly thought that she was in the world for any purpose but self-gratification. The idea of benefiting one less fortunate than herself was new and strange.

Perhaps the novelty made it more attractive, for she answered quickly, that she would be

very glad to assist Esther Simpson in any way she could. "If I can once speak to her, I will do my best to gain her confidence."

"Going to be a missionary, too," exclaimed Uncle Rufus, pleasantly. "I am glad of it, and wish you success. There's room for all the workers."

"I am afraid I should make a poor missionary," replied his niece. "I haven't the first qualification."

"What is that ?" he asked ; but the question was lightly parried, and Maud left the room.

Sabbath morning, as Mr. Lane was entering the church, he saw Jared Simpson and his son, a short distance behind him, and waited for them to come up. They did not even look at him ; but he placed himself directly in front of them, and extended his hand cordially.

"I think I used to know you, several years ago, when we were both younger than we are now," he said to the father.

"I used to live here," was the reply.

"This is your son, I presume ?" Mr.

Lane added, giving no heed to his companion's coldness.

The young man bowed pleasantly, and a few words were exchanged before the morning service.

At noon, the preacher went to Mr. Simpson and his son, as to old friends, expressing his pleasure at seeing them, and inquiring for the mother and sister at home. Several followed his example, and these men had no reason to complain of being treated with neglect.

Maud Lamson observed them closely, and resolved to improve the first opportunity for calling upon the family.

This she accomplished sooner than was expected. Two or three days after this, while driving with the children, she was lured on by shady roads and murmuring streams, until she found herself in a strange locality. She looked around for some familiar landmark; but, discovering none, was forced to drive to the nearest house. Here she stopped, and inquired her way.

At the first sight of the young girl who appeared to answer her question, she felt sure it was Esther Simpson, and intentionally prolonged the interview. Burt wished for some water, and Anna desired to get a nearer view of some flowers that were in blossom a short distance from the house.

This furnished an excuse for their leaving the wagon, and Maud was only too glad to follow them. Directly, a woman came out, whom the young girl called "Mother," and who addressed her daughter as "Esther."

This made assurance doubly sure, and Maud was just wondering what she could say or do to make longer delay pardonable, when Burt came running up, to tell her that there was a "great splendid bird in the barn-yard."

"It is the peacock," said Mrs. Simpson. "Perhaps you would like to go and see it?"

Of course she would, and did. The "great splendid bird" was Esther's pet, a present from her brother; and the admiration it inspired quite delighted her.

"I have seen Esther Simpson," said Maud Lamson to her uncle, that evening.

"Where?" he asked.

"In her own home," was the reply. "She invited me to ride that way again, and said she would go berrying with me any time."

"You've done well," said the old gentleman. "I rather guess you were cut out for a missionary, after all. Mr. Spaulding himself couldn't do better than that."

Here was another adventure, the record of which was sent to Crin Burton, who shared in her friend's astonishment that so many strange characters should be hidden away in that quiet country town.

"Just think of it, Auntie Lynde," she exclaimed, after reading Maud's letter aloud. "There are Mrs. Brown and Nancy, unlike anybody else, in their queer little cottage; and now this Simpson family has come to light. That young minister, too, is quite remarkable. It's a marvel to me, how they all happened up there, when we have seen only common sort of people here."

"You forgot my old sailor," interrupted Frank.

"I had forgotten him," replied Crin. "But you know I have scarcely seen him."


"I want you to see him and hear him talk. This morning, we saw some pieces of a wrecked vessel, floating on the waters; and he said they reminded him of those people who make shipwreck of everything good in their lives, and then go drifting about in the world, until death takes them away."

There are many drifting; not only those who *have* made shipwreck of their souls, but an innumerable company who bid fair to do so. With no fixed principles, no trust in God, no saving faith in Christ, they are blown about by every wind of doctrine; and when the storms of trial come, they are engulfed in the seething waters of destruction.

CHAPTER III.

To labor on, nor know the end,
To give, as God has given;
Then, be our talents great or small,
There's rest for us in heaven.

One earnest word, one prayer of faith,—
May sound through all the ages;
Nor cease its power while time shall write
Upon its mystic pages.

LD Aleck Wilde had been a sailor from the time he could serve as cabin boy until age had disabled him for active service. Then he built a rude hut by the sea, and eked out his small income by mending nets, and doing other odd jobs for the fishermen who lived near his home.

This was about two miles from where Mr. Burton's family were spending the summer;

but in one of his long rambles Frank had found the old man seated upon a rock, reading his Bible. This arrested the boy's attention, and, as he lingered, the reader looked from his book, and recognized the presence of the young stranger.

Then an acquaintance commenced which was pleasant and profitable for both. Old Aleck, as he was familiarly called, loved to talk with those just entering upon life, and in Frank he found one who sympathized with him in his regard for religion.

The hut came to be a favorite resort for the warm-hearted boy, who was strongly attracted by the earnest manner and quaint sayings of its inmate. He could not but be curious in regard to the life which was here drawing to its close, and a few days after Frank had repeated to his cousin the lesson drawn from the drifting wreck, his curiosity was gratified.

"I can't remember father or mother," said the sailor. "I lived with an old woman I called granny until I was eight years old,

when I shipped as cabin boy on board the good ship Neptune, sailed by Captain Bond.

This was the commencement of what Frank thought a rough, hard life; but the old man did not seem thus to consider it. As he told of the dangers through which he had passed, his young companion listened spell-bound.

"It is no child's play to go aloft when one must cling to the ropes like a cat, or be blown overboard," he said. "But I knew every rope and spar, and was ready to obey orders in storm or calm."

"Were you never afraid?" asked Frank.

"Never," was the reply. "I always looked up, and there's not much danger to a sailor when the ship holds her way, with plenty of sea room."

"I didn't stay on shore much; for I'd nobody to see but granny, and she died when I was young. I earned money and spent it, like my shipmates, for no good, until I was twenty-five years old. Then I found Molly Dent and her brother tossing about the world, with no place for safe anchoring."

Here the old man paused to wipe away a tear.

"I loved her," he said at length, "and perhaps you'll think it strange, but she loved me too, rough as I was. I found a snug berth for her and little Jem, paid the rent, and gave her what money I had. Then I said good-by, promising to come back and make her my wife when that voyage was over. She cried when I left her, and said she never should see me again; but she was always a frightened little thing, and I tried to cheer her up, telling what fine things I'd bring her.

"She was right," he added, again brushing away the tears. "She never did see me; but I saw her, in her coffin. She was buried the day I came back. Jem and me were the only mourners, but she couldn't had truer ones.

"I never thought much about dying before; but when the dirt was thrown on the coffin, I began to think. I went back with Jem to the rooms I'd fixed for her, and he gave me Molly's Bible. There was a letter in it she'd

written after she began to be sick. She wasn't much of a scholar, no more than I; but I spelt out the letter, and found what it meant. It was all about the Bible, God, and heaven. A good lady had given her the Bible, and she wanted I should have it, so I might learn the way to heaven, and meet her there.

"I was a rough, hard fellow, then; but I read that letter on my knees; I kissed the Bible, and made a vow that I'd do what Molly had asked. I began that night, and Jem said the prayer he had learned.

"I didn't sleep much for a good many nights; but I found out that I was a great sinner, and needed Christ for a friend. I staid in the rooms where I'd left Molly; and when I wasn't studying her Bible, Jem told me how they lived while I was gone. He said Molly used to pray for me every day, and this made me surer to pray for myself.

"Jem clung to me, for he'd nobody else now; and I got a woman, who lived in the same house, to take care of him."

All the time, though, I thought of my sins, trying to pray for forgiveness, and hardly knowing what to say, I was so ignorant. My sins seemed like a heavy load that I couldn't throw off, and I carried them to sea with me. One night, in my watch on deck, I was thinking over what I'd read in the Bible, when all at once, I remembered that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin; and since then, I've been sure of seeing Molly in heaven."

This was a homely romance, told in a homely way; but the love which had given it birth had been none the less ennobling that it dwelt in uncultured hearts. It had accomplished its mission, transforming the reckless sailor into an humble Christian, and Molly, though she may have been to others only a poor, unattractive girl, was to him an angel of light.

The tears of the listener mingled with those of the speaker, and, for a time, they sat in silence, looking out upon the sea.

"What became of Jem?" at length asked Frank.

"I almost forgot him," said the old man, rousing himself. "When I came on shore again, I found him sick, and, in a few days, I buried him beside Molly. So I lost all I had to love me here; but I've kept my Saviour. Molly's Bible and letters are all that's left of her; but I shall see her in heaven."

By and by, when Frank rose to go, Aleck went to the old sea-chest, which had been the companion of his voyages, and took from it Molly's Bible. It was wrapped in a bright-colored shawl, which he removed almost reverently.

"I bought that for her," he said, pointing to the shawl. "She liked such things; but she never wore it, and I've kept it all these years."

There, too, was the letter, discolored by time, the writing illegible to all eyes but those of its possessor; yet it was his greatest earthly treasure; and, while he clasped it in his hand, he was left alone to recall the pale, sad face his kindness had wreathed with smiles.

Crin Burton heard this story from her

cousin, and was forced to acknowledge that Maud had found no more strange character than this same old Aleck, who, with grizzled beard and bowed form, still worshipped the Molly of his youth.

"Truth is stranger than fiction," said Mrs. Lynde, after listening to the expressions of astonishment over this heart history. "Men and women walk this earth unknown, and, sometimes, when the curtain is lifted, revealing the hidden springs of action, we wonder at the sight. The ways of providence are past our comprehension. A Bible, bestowed upon a poor girl, was the means of saving her soul, and, we will hope, that of her brother. How many others have been indirectly benefited by this gift, we cannot tell."

"I am sure it has benefited me," said Frank. "It was like hearing a sermon to look at it. It taught me that a great deal of good may be accomplished with a very little trouble; and that we should never allow an opportunity to pass unimproved."

"We should be active in season and out

of season," replied his mother. "Christians have a great work to do in this world, and they cannot be held guiltless, if they fail to perform it."

Crin took a book, and went away by herself, not to read, but to think. Every day's intercourse with her aunt and cousin convinced her that they had a motive of action, higher and purer than any by which she was herself actuated.

Her own good judgment taught her also, that, as an eternity is before us, it is the extreme of folly and madness to ignore its existence. She had been quick to see that those among her friends who acknowledged their accountability to God, and lived with this great truth ever in view, were more reliable in all worldly relations, than those who did only as seemed good in their own eyes.

Maud Lamson had not answered the questions propounded to her; but the questioner had no longer any doubts. Duty and privilege were plain before her; yet she hesitated

to perform the one, or accept the other. She thought it would be easy to be a Christian, if her father would lead the way; but so long as he manifested such utter indifference to all interests of the soul, it required too much of an effort for her to break away from old associations, and come out decidedly as a follower of Christ.

Meanwhile, the summer days went by, each marked for Frank with a white stone, so rapidly was he gaining health and strength.

He introduced old Aleck to his mother and cousin, and although not so communicative as when alone with him, they yet felt repaid for the long walk which had brought them to his home. Mrs. Lynde led the conversation to religious subjects, and was surprised at the clearness and comprehensiveness of his views.

The Bible had been almost his only teacher. During his sailor life, so much of his time was spent on shipboard, that he seldom heard a sermon; and as he was now situated, it was not often that he could attend church.

On the sabbath, he made himself clean,

and in good weather, went out to his favorite seat on a rock which overlooked a wide expanse of ocean. Here he was usually joined by some of the fishermen and their children, to whom he read passages from the Scriptures, explaining, in his own simple way, what seemed obscure.

"I think I've done a little good since I came here," he said to Mrs. Lynde. "I've tried to teach the children, and they don't swear, now, when they come around my hut. I try to do what I can; but I see many here every summer, who might do a great deal, and they don't even give their own hearts to Christ. The Saviour is all the friend I have; so I can't but love him. If I had money, perhaps I should set my heart on it, and so forget God. I used to wish I was a scholar, then I might do more for my Saviour; but I've seen a good many scholars down here, who made pictures and wrote books, without thinking of Him."

Crin was interested, not only in hearing him, but in seeing the internal arrangement

of his hut, which was made to seem, as much as possible, like his old quarters on shipboard. Some curiosities, which had been gathered in his voyages, were placed on rude shelves, as ornaments to the humble dwelling, while two or three faded pictures adorned the walls.

"Everything was so odd," as Crin expressed it, when describing this visit to her father, "I almost imagined I was on some island, shut out from the world, and old Aleck was a hermit."

"I think I have seen old Aleck, as you call him," said Mr. Burton. "Perhaps more than once; but I remember one Sabbath in particular, when I had strolled in the direction of the fishermen's huts, I noticed one at quite a distance from the rest, and an old man came out of it, with a book under his arm."

"That must be the very one," replied his daughter; "and he is more entertaining than you would imagine such a rough looking old sailor could be."

Mr. Burton laughed heartily at this, saying,

"Handsome people are not always entertaining. They do very well to look at; but one gets tired of them, after a while, unless the mind corresponds with the face. However, I should not expect to find a very remarkable character within the walls of a fisherman's hut."

"Old Aleck is very remarkable," insisted Crin; "and you would think so if you should hear the story he told Frank."

"It may be; and I think I'll make an errand down that way sometime, and get a good sight at him."

The next Sabbath Mr. Burton found himself near the hut in question, just as a black cloud cast its shadow on the sand. Looking up, he saw that he must soon seek shelter from the rain; and, as no better would offer, he went to the open door and asked the privilege of entering.

"You are welcome, sir," was the reply, as an old-fashioned arm-chair was brought forward. "We're likely to have a squall, and it's well to be housed," he said, looking seaward.

He had a book in his hand, and, after a short conversation, Mr. Burton begged that he might not interrupt his reading.

"I was only studying my chart, sir," said the old man; "and I can wait for a little."

"Your chart," repeated his visitor in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, sir; chart or Bible. It's all the same to one like me. I study it to learn the way to heaven; so it's my chart. I hope you're going there, sir."

It must have been an inspiration which prompted this remark, for its boldness was not at all like old Aleck Wilde.

It was so unexpected, so entirely without his line of thought, that the visitor could make no reply, until after some reflection. He was, at first, disposed to consider it an unwarrantable liberty; but his good sense soon banished this feeling. Heaven was a place of happiness, and it certainly was no rudeness to express the hope that he was going there.

With this thought, the slight flush faded from his cheek, as he answered, "I trust we are all going there."

"It would be a blessed thing if it was so," said the sailor; "but we never make a port unless we steer for it. If you should float a vessel and let it drift with the current, it would soon go down, or be driven on a lee shore. You'll never hear of one being so foolish as to do that."

He waited respectfully for an answer, and Mr. Burton felt compelled to speak.

"It is necessary that a vessel should be kept to her course, or she will never reach her destined port. No one can deny that," he said.

"And the soul, too, needs to be kept straight to its course, or it will never reach heaven. I've heard many a man talk as though he expected to land there, when he was steering to the opposite."

Something in this novel manner of treating the subject arrested the attention of the listener; but he was not willing to follow the train of thought to its logical conclusion. If the sun had been shining, he would have bidden his host an abrupt farewell; but heavy rain-drops were plashing upon the windows,

and he must stay where he was to hear the truth, if so be old Aleck was thus inclined.

"We men of business are so occupied with its care, that we find little time to think of anything beyond this life; but we still believe that, in some way, all will be well in the end."

"No soul can drift into heaven. There's a chart to mark the way, and a compass for the steering, and he does well who takes heed to his sailing. I wish you'd take time to think of it, sir. The Bible says there's but one way to heaven."

"You are going there, yourself," responded Mr. Burton, almost involuntarily.

"Please God, I am, sir," was the quick reply, as the seamed and rugged face brightened in anticipation of this glorious consummation of hope. "I've been wishing to-day that I could do some great work for the Master; but he knows my heart, and he is able to make the weak things of the earth to confound them which are mighty."

"Your way of thinking is certainly safe,"

said the visitor, moved to this acknowledgment by the simple faith of his companion.

"And is yours, sir?" asked the old man, looking earnestly at his guest.

"I really don't know," was the honest confession. "It's something I've never troubled myself about; and I'm willing that everybody should enjoy his own opinion."

This last remark seemed like a reproof to old Aleck for his faithfulness. "I hope you'll not think me too bold, sir," he said. "It's only for your good that I spoke. I know you're far wiser than I."

Mr. Burton made haste to assure him that he cast no reflection upon him, in repeating this favorite saying. In the conversation which followed, the name of Frank Lynde was mentioned.

"He's a fine young lad, sir," said the sailor, on learning that he was a nephew of his guest. "It does my old eyes good to see him coming down the beach. He reads to me, sometimes, and he's brought me some books for the children."

Mr. Burton echoed the praises of Frank; for, think as he might of his religious views, he had the most unbounded confidence in him, as well as a sincere respect for his abilities.

"He was down here with his mother, and a young lady he called cousin," continued the old man; "and I'm sure he's been well trained."

"Indeed he has. His mother is a noble woman; a Christian, too, who believes the way to heaven is narrow, and walks in it."

By this time, there was a rift in the clouds, through which the sun appeared, and with a friendly shake of the hand, Mr. Burton left the hut of old Aleck. On his way down, he was thinking of business; but as he returned, his thoughts were busy with far other subjects.

He questioned whither his own immortal soul was bound. Was he drifting, waiting only for some stronger current or fiercer blast to drive him on the rocks?

Crin met him at the door, anxious to know where he had been during the squall.

"I spent the time with one of Frank's friends," he laughingly replied.

"Then you've seen old Aleck!" she exclaimed. "Didn't you find him entertaining, just as I told you?"

"I found him a very good preacher," was the reply. "I didn't go out for the purpose of hearing a sermon; but I heard it, nevertheless."

"Did he really preach to you, father?"

"What he said sounded very much like preaching."

"What was his text?"

"He didn't have any text; but he used the word heaven more frequently than any other."

"Did he talk to you about heaven?" now asked Crin, with a serious face.

"He did, my dear; and he had something to say about drifting on a lee shore."

"I wish I had heard him."

"I wish you had," responded Mr. Burton.

"What he said was well said; and he is

sincere in his belief, whether it is true or not."

"Do you think it is true?"

A direct question, hardly to be ignored, while a sweet young face was upturned in expectation.

"I never think about these things, Crin," he said, after some hesitation. "I've got along well enough, so far, without; but I don't wish to influence you. Judge for yourself," and he left a kiss upon the fair brow of his daughter as he turned away.

Frank heard a report of this conversation, and openly rejoiced that his uncle had found some one who could speak to him of heavenly things.

Everywhere are Christian preachers and Christian workers needed. To all classes and conditions of men must the gospel be preached; and to all souls, whether stained with crimes against the laws of the land, or sinful through ingratitude, must the blood of cleansing be applied.

Old Aleck, in his hut by the sea, was doing

his work well, for he improved the talents God had given. Frederic Spaulding, among the mountains, with his rich dower of genius and learning, could do no more.

Success in God's work is measured not by worldly rules; for he who numbers the stars in our crowns numbers also the gifts he has bestowed.

A Bible given with words of counsel and followed by prayer, may prove an instrument of great good; how great, can be known only when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed.

The worn volume, in the old sea-chest, had done much; but it was destined to a wider influence.

To while away some idle hours, Frank Lynde had written a sketch of old Aleck's history. This sketch, entitled "Molly's Bible," so delighted Crin, that she begged a copy for her friend Maud Lamson.

She, in turn, was charmed by the touching story, and read it to her aunt. Soon the fame of it spread throughout the family, and all

were anxious to know about "Molly's Bible." No one was more interested than Frederic Spaulding, who was ever gleaning facts with which to illustrate the truth.

"I should like to read it to Esther Simpson," said Maud, when he returned it to her hands. "I know she would enjoy it."

"And appreciate it too," was the reply. "It would give her a new subject for thought."

At this time, Maud Lamson and Esther Simpson were no strangers to each other; and, although there was a striking contrast between the two, there was yet a strong bond of sympathy.

The value of this acquaintance to Esther could hardly be estimated, while Maud was learning lessons which would serve her well in future.

Esther had not yet attended church; but her father and brother repeated so much of the sermons as they could remember after their return home. This served to fasten the great truths in their own minds, while it instructed others; and often these detached

parts of sermons formed the theme of conversation in the family circle for hours.

Then there were the Bible and tracts, with a few religious books, upon the table. These opened to the eager mind of the young girl rich veins of knowledge; and, as she read, new beauties unfolded, until the world no longer seemed one great prison-house.

She hoped for herself and her brother, who, under more genial influences, was developing the better part of his nature. Though still suffering from the consciousness of disgrace, he trusted to wipe out the stain in part, and, God helping him, to bear the rest bravely.

Mr. Spaulding had been a most judicious counselor for both father and son. Uncle Rufus Lane, too, had assisted them. He went to Jared Simpson as an old friend; and, if he could not talk to him like a Christian, he *could* and *did* talk like a noble, true-hearted man, as he was.

"No one here considered your son a thief," he said. "We are all ready to trust you and him too. If you want a favor, come to me, and it shall be granted."

These were no idle words, as the man thus addressed well knew, and after events proved.

The excursion for berries was made, and the day passed delightfully. Dinner was eaten, not as had been anticipated, under the shade of a tree, but in Mrs. Simpson's kitchen, where good things were heaped upon the table until it would have groaned, had tables the power to express their burdened sense. The surprise of this entertainment added to its pleasure; and with the hearty cheer were mingled harmless jests.

John Simpson could look their guests in the face without blushing for shame; and, as Maud said afterwards, he was beginning to grow handsome. Esther flitted about, wondering at her own happiness, and treasuring up each word and tone of her whose friendship had been such a blessing.

Pails and boxes were filled with large, luscious blackberries, and yet the fruit of the hillside seemed undiminished. All were ready to sympathize with Burt, who exclaimed, as he cast a lingering look behind

him, "It's too bad to leave them all here."

"This day's intercourse will do more for that family than a dozen pulpit sermons," said Mr. Spaulding, on his way home. "If you wish to benefit such people, you must meet them as friends and equals."

"You don't seem at all afraid of compromising your dignity," responded Uncle Rufus.

"I hope not," was the reply. "Christ had the true kind of dignity, and he ate with publicans and sinners. If I may but win souls for him, my object is attained."

He always spoke thus earnestly and frankly of his work, whenever occasion demanded it; but during the five weeks he had, at this time, spent in the home of Mr. Lane, not one word had he addressed to him upon the subject of personal religion.

As I have said before, this was the result of prayerful consideration. He hoped that silence would effect what words had failed to do.

His host wondered at first, not doubting,

however, that the usual appeals would be made sooner or later; but, as days and weeks went by, with no warning or entreaty, he grew restless and anxious.

Was it possible that this young friend considered him past all hope, and so bestowed his labor where some good results might be expected?

His wife shared his anxiety. "I don't know but Mr. Spaulding thinks I've lost my soul," she said, when the subject was under discussion; and at the thought, her tears flowed freely. "Nobody talks to us now," she added, in a husky voice.

As Mr. Lane heard the words, "If I may but win souls for Christ, my object is attained," he recalled the conversation of the previous evening, when his wife uttered this almost despairing cry.

He had never cavilled at the truths of the Bible. He believed in accountability and retributive justice; and whenever he thought upon the subject, intended, sometime, to make his peace with God. But he had delayed

this work until a more convenient season, and now it might be too late.

When Maud read to him of old Aleck, he could not but wonder at his story. "How much Molly's Bible has been to him in all these years!" he said. "The poor girl must have been very ignorant; but she learned the way to heaven, and we can none of us do better than that. You and I would like to spend an hour in the hut, and look into the old sea-chest," he said, lightly, to hide his emotion.

"I wish we could," exclaimed Maud, with enthusiasm. "We might learn some things there, which we never dreamed of here."

"I presume we might," replied her uncle; "but truth is the same in all places. I've learned some lessons of worldly wisdom, in the course of my life; but I'm afraid I've thought too much of this world, and too little of the next. I'm getting to be an old man; and my work, here, is almost done," he added, after a pause.

Maud looked up in astonishment at the

serious face. "Why, uncle," she said, "you don't seem old to me. You are always so bright and cheerful, I think of you as being young."

"A great mistake, my dear. I was sixty-five years old on my last birthday, and another is near at hand. It is a long time to live; but it looks short to me, now."

If Maud had been a Christian, she could have told him of a life beyond the grave, where the aged wear again the freshness of youth, and the weary find a blessed rest.

Esther Simpson's eyes grew dim with tears while she listened to the history of old Aleck's treasure.

"Please leave it with me," she said, after expressing her own pleasure. "I want John and father to hear it."

She had another story in which she took great delight, and directly she asked, —

"Don't you ever wish you were such a Christian as some we read of, who are happy, under all circumstances?"

"Yes; I do," was the reply; and this was

the first time Maud had expressed the secret wish of her heart; and she would have regretted it but for the sympathizing smile with which it was received.

"I asked Mr. Spaulding about it," said Esther, intent upon the subject. "He said special grace was given when it was needed; and if we are true Christians, we can bear whatever is sent upon us."

"But if we are not Christians at all," suggested Maud.

"Everything seems hard. Perhaps you've never had any great trials to make you unhappy."

"My wishes have most of them been gratified, and I've seen but very little trouble," was the reply.

"I thought so the first time I saw you," said the simple-hearted girl. "I wondered, then, if you'd talk to me as Mr. Spaulding did. But I suppose he came on purpose, and you lost your way."

"I intended to come soon," replied Maud. "Mr. Spaulding had told me about you."

"I suppose he told you about John, too. He is so much happier," continued the loving sister, in reply to her companion's mute assent. "I hope he is a Christian, too. He don't think so; but I hear him pray every night, after he goes to his room. I used to wish we could all die together; but now we are going to live, if God sees best. By and by, perhaps we shall all go out west, where there won't anybody know us. That's what John says," she added; "but he didn't make any such plans until after Mr. Spaulding came here."

Esther had never before spoken of her brother in this way; but she was so rejoiced at the change in his manners and feelings, that it was a pleasure to talk of it. She also confided to her friend the fact that her father read the Bible aloud, every evening.

"I suppose *your* father always does," she said, innocently; "but it's something new for us."

For once, Maud assumed the part of listener; indeed, heart and conscience were so

strongly moved, that silence was necessary to conceal her feelings. She pleaded headache as excuse for making a shorter call than usual, and started homeward with the children.

On their way, they encountered Mr. Spaulding, who was just giving a tract to a beggar man, as Burt called him. The man had seated himself upon a rock, and was eating a crust of bread, when the young minister came up and addressed him.

"What kind of reading was there on that paper?" asked Burt, as his cousin stepped forward to speak to them.

"Good reading," he said, "which I hope may be blessed to the salvation of his soul. Miss Lamson, will you accept a tract this afternoon?" he asked, offering her one from his package.

"Thank you," she replied, extending her hand to receive it.

"And will you read it?"

"Certainly, I will."

"And think of it?"

"I always think of what I read."

"I shall not ask you to pray over it; but I hope you will," he said, as he touched his hat, and bowed an adieu.

"I guess Cousin Fred won't come home to-night," said Burt, as they drove on. "I'm real sorry when he's gone, for there isn't anybody else to pray."

This regret of the child was shared by Mr. and Mrs. Lane, who were beginning to prize the morning and evening devotions.

"I'll tell you what I can do," said the old gentleman; "I can read the Bible if I don't pray. It seems heathenish not to do as much as that."

"I wish you would," replied his wife; "and if you only *could* pray—"

"I don't know how. I never prayed but once in my life. That was when you were sick, and the doctors told me you were going to die. I got down on my knees then," said the old man, with streaming eyes, "and begged that you might be spared to me."

"Your prayer was answered."

"Yes; you began to get better that very day."

"If you should pray again —"

Mary Lane laid her hand on her husband's shoulder, and left the sentence incomplete.

"I should ask God to forgive my sins, and make me a Christian," he responded.

"I wish you would, and pray for me too," said his wife, looking up tearfully. "O Rufus, I've been waiting for you, all the years, since that sickness. I thought you couldn't be wrong."

"Thought I couldn't be wrong, Mary! Why, I've been a great sinner. I don't know as there's any mercy for me. Waiting for me!" he repeated. "Did you pray, too, when you were sick?"

"Yes, and I resolved to live a better life, if I got well; but I haven't done it. *Do pray, husband.*"

"I can't, I can't;" was the agonizing reply. "If Mr. Spaulding was here, I'd ask him to pray; but I can't pray myself."

A silent group gathered around the tea-

table. The guests of the family were absent, and Maud was too much occupied with serious thoughts to commence the usual badinage with her uncle.

"How still it seems," said Burt Lester, to his sister, as they went out on the piazza, in the early evening. "I hope somebody'll come back to-morrow, or else Cousin Maud will say something."

Mr. Lane having decided to read the Bible aloud to his household, was not one to delay the duty. Quietly all were summoned, and, in a husky voice, he read from Christ's own words.

Anna and Burt Lester knelt, according to habit; but the old man bowed his head upon the Bible, and not a sound was heard, until the boy turned towards him, and asked if he might repeat his prayer.

"Yes, child," was the choked reply.

No one present could ever forget the artless petition which followed. At its close, Anna, whose sense of propriety was somewhat outraged, led her brother from the room.

"Why was it bad?" he asked, in reply to her reproof. "There wasn't anybody else. I waited for you, but you didn't speak. I'll ask Cousin Fred when he comes back; and you'll see what he says. Uncle Rufus ought to pray himself," he added, before his sister had time to reply. Then, seeing she looked troubled, he kissed her, and promised "not to do so again, unless Cousin Fred said it was right."

Uncle Rufus and his wife were left alone; and, for a time, only the ticking of the clock was heard; but, at length, Aunt Mary rose and went to her husband. "Rufus, it's dreadful to have nobody in the house to pray, except that child. Let us try;" and she knelt at his side.

Words were given her, or, rather, they sprang up from a full heart. She *could* pray and *did* pray. She asked that their sins might be forgiven, their hearts purified, and their lives conformed to Christ's teachings.

There were sobbing and tears, with cries for mercy, as her husband folded his arms

about her, and drew her closer to himself. "I'm glad you didn't wait for me any longer," he said, with a sigh of relief, when he was able to speak calmly. "I'll try to follow you, but don't depend upon me. I'm a great sinner, a great sinner," he repeated.

And Maud,—she was pacing her room with the hurried step which indicated extreme mental excitement.

She had studied the Bible much, in secret, had weighed every sentence heard from the pulpit, and observed the characters of those about her, until she was convinced that the easy faith of her early friends had no foundation in reason or revelation.

She had read the tract given to her that afternoon, and, whether she would or not, she thought of it continually. It appealed to the head rather than the heart, and was judiciously chosen for one who brought everything to the test of precise demonstration.

On the other hand, there was to be considered her father's opposition to everything like what he was pleased to term "fanati-

cism." He claimed to be liberal; but he ridiculed all who disagreed with him in his peculiar tenets.

The Bible was, according to his opinion, a very good sort of a book; but no one could be quite sure what parts were truly inspired, and what, not. People should use judgment and reason when studying it. The world had made progress since it was given to man, and a new order of things had been established, quite different from that of the early ages.

All this, and much more in the same spirit, had Maud Lamson often heard her father say, in the few months she had found a home with him. He was a bitter partisan, not hesitating to sneer, openly, at all evangelical creeds, although he denounced sectarianism. He was far more inconsistent than Mr. Burton, since he professed to have devoted much time and thought to the study of revealed religion.

This was not true. He had scanned the writings of some modern teachers, who lay claim to a wisdom of which the Fathers never

dreamed; and he had made himself somewhat familiar with a certain class of flippant arguments against a pure Christian faith. These seemed, to his undisciplined mind, strong and conclusive; yet they would vanish at the first touch of true scholarly logic.

He *had not*—and shame be it to one of his pretensions, that he had not—studied the great text-book of the world.

His daughter recalled the long dissertations with which he had favored his family, when his attention was directed to the subject of religion or revelation. This happened not unfrequently, as an item in the daily paper, or the chance remark of a friend, was sufficient to call forth his eloquence.

Maud had at first listened respectfully, then grown weary; and now she utterly condemned the whole as both false and foolish. Her father might talk of the cowardice which made men unwilling to bear the consequences of their own acts; he might curl his lip in scorn, at the *man, Christ*; but she knew that this Christ, God, manifest in the flesh, was

the only hope of mankind. Oh for the simple faith of Molly, who, reading, believed, and, believing, accepted! Maud Lamson had read, and did believe; but, for that night at least, she rejected the great salvation.

There was a hush of expectancy in the house the next morning. The strange event of the previous evening had been discussed by farm hands and domestics. Some were of opinion that Uncle Rufus would pray himself, next time; others, that he would give up the reading, and so avoid an unpleasant position.

"He'll never give up, when he's once started. You may be sure of that," said one. "*Something's* got hold of him. He didn't go out to look after the horses, last night, and it's the first time that's happened since I lived here."

"We shall know, if we wait," said another.

"There can't anybody find fault with Uncle Rufus, but I suppose he might be better; and if Mr. Spaulding tells the truth, he needs religion as much as anybody."

Curiosity as to what the old gentleman

would do, was not gratified that morning, as Mr. Spaulding returned just as the family were sitting down to breakfast.

"I had an opportunity to ride, so I came early," he said, as he walked into the dining-room, with a bright smile upon his face, and was welcomed by all.

"You are just in season," said Aunt Mary, "and there is a plate laid for you. Burt was wishing some one would come."

"I didn't intend to come so soon; but a good opportunity ought not to be neglected," he said. "I have eaten breakfast; yet I think I could drink a cup of your coffee."

His presence had a decided effect upon everybody's spirits. Conversation flowed freely. He gave an account of the meeting he had attended, and related some good news connected with his labors. This was done, not with a spirit of boasting, but in answer to inquiries.

Family worship was conducted as usual, with this exception, that the heads of the household knelt during the prayer.

As soon as possible, Burt coaxed Cousin Fred away by himself and told him what had happened while he was gone.

"Anna said it wasn't proper for me to say my prayer; but there wasn't anybody else to pray, and somebody ought to," pleaded the boy. "Uncle Rufus said I might."

"You did right," replied the young man, his inmost soul moved by the touching incident.

Delighted with the approval of one whom he never doubted, Burt ran to tell his sister the decision. Maud Lamson was near, and overheard the burst of exultation with which he greeted Anna.

"I shall always pray, now," he said in conclusion.

"He'll not do much injury in that way," said Mr. Spaulding.

"I should think not," was Maud's absent reply. "He is a strange child; but one can't help loving him."

"Were you present when he repeated his prayer?"

"I was," she replied, and moved to pass on.

"Excuse me for detaining you, Miss Lamson; but will you please tell me if you read the tract I gave you yesterday?"

"I read it directly after I reached home. It is very well written," she added, hoping this criticism would prevent further questions.

She was successful; for the young minister, devoted as he was to his work, was never guilty of rudeness; and, with some general remark, he left her.

He debated with himself whether he should seek his host, or wait for further developments.

He had not long to wait, for within half an hour Uncle Rufus called to him to know if he was at leisure.

"So much so, that my time is at your disposal," he said.

"Then I should like to have a talk with you," was the reply.

They went together into the sitting-room, and, without any hesitation, the old man ex-

pressed his earnest desire to be a Christian. "I don't know but I've sinned so long, that I can't be forgiven," he said. "I suppose you think so, or you would have said something to me about it."

"I don't think so," replied Frederic Spaulding in a tremulous voice. "I had said all that I could, and you knew your duty."

"I did, I did; but I refused to do it."

"Then delay no longer."

"What can I do?" asked the old man hopelessly.

"You can pray God, for Christ's sake, to forgive your sins; and he never turned a true penitent away unforgiven."

"I don't know how to pray."

"Don't know how to pray!" repeated the young man. "Is it possible you have lived all these years without praying?"

"I prayed once," was the reply; and, in nearly the same words used when speaking to his wife, he related his experience as a suppliant.

"Then you did ask God for what you really

desired, and you could do so again. The trouble is not in your want of ability to pray. It lies deeper than that."

"Where?" was asked quickly.

"What would you have given to save the life of your wife?" was asked, in reply.

"Everything I possessed. What could I have done without her?"

"Pardon me, Uncle Rufus; but you must allow me to speak plainly," said his companion. "If you desired the forgiveness of your sins, and the sanctification of your heart, as much as you did the life of your wife, you would find some way to ask for these great blessings."

This was enough. It opened the eyes of the inquiring man. He saw where he was wrong.

"But, I do wish to be a Christian," he said after a short silence.

"Then pray that you may be."

"I will," he answered. "But pray for me, and with me. Pray for Mary too," he added, as they kneeled down.

Uttered in earth, and heard in heaven, this prayer was the outpouring of a full soul that knew whence cometh salvation.

"He knew just what I needed," said Uncle Rufus, when speaking of this prayer to his wife. "My heart went with him, for it seemed as though he knew all my thoughts."

"Have you prayed for yourself?" she asked.

"I tried to; but they were poor words I used. I ought to have begun sooner; but I'm going to pray now as long as I live, and perhaps I shall be forgiven at last. I'm sure you'll go to heaven, if I don't," said the old man, looking fondly at his wife.

"I trust we'll go together," she answered, as a radiant smile broke over her face.

"You look very happy," said her husband.

"I *am* happy," was the reply. "I went to sleep last night thinking about the Saviour. When I first woke this morning, I thought about him, and, some way, I've been thinking of him all day."

Aunt Mary had found the true source of

happiness. Looking away from herself and her sins, she saw the bleeding Sacrifice, and was filled with wonder and surprise at His infinite love. She did not stop to analyze her feelings. She only knew that a sweet peace rested upon her, and gloomy tears had fled.

Before noon, she found an opportunity to talk with Mr. Spaulding, who confirmed her trust.

"Why haven't you talked to me, this summer?" she asked, and received the same answer he had given her husband.

"Well," she said, "it may have been a good way. Perhaps I thought more for it."

"I didn't stop praying, if I stopped talking," he said, later in the conversation. "There has hardly been a day since I first became acquainted with you and Uncle Rufus, that I have neglected to pray for you."

"But I don't know as I'm a Christian yet," responded the good woman, a shadow for a moment resting upon her face.

"You know that you love God."

"I believe I do."

"And you can trust in Christ."

"I am sure I can do that."

"No one can do more. Only remember the injunction, 'keep my commandments.'"

There was the return of guests in the afternoon, with the usual chatting and laughing incident to such an occasion.

"Everybody in town seems to be talking about Mr. Spaulding," said a middle-aged lady to her host. "He has a very strange way of introducing his favorite subjects; but no one seems offended."

"He has the good of the people at heart, and there is no reason why any one should be offended," replied Uncle Rufus. "If we had a good many more such men as he is, the world would be improved."

"I know he is a good man, and a fine scholar," rejoined the lady; "but it seems to me that he is rather too much of an enthusiast."

"I don't think so," was the reply. "He suits me exactly. I like to see a man in earnest. He has chosen his business, and

what is worth doing at all, is worth doing well. I've changed my mind in regard to some of these things," he added, observing the look of surprise upon his companion's face. "Frederic Spaulding labors to save souls; and he shows himself a good workman."

"That is all very well, and perhaps necessary," said Mrs. French. "But there's no need of talking about it everywhere."

"There are souls everywhere, to be saved or lost. I never heard that Mr. Spaulding intruded the subject of religion impolitely."

"Neither have I; but he is sure to bring it in so that people will think about it."

"He does right; and I rejoice in his success."

"Why, Uncle Rufus! I am not sure but he has made a convert of you," exclaimed the lady. "I never heard you talk like this, before."

"He has converted me to his way of thinking," said the old man, "and I hope the grace of God will make me a Christian. If I

was one, I should ask you to think seriously about a preparation for eternity."

"That's the strangest thing I've heard of," said Mrs. French to herself, as some one called her host from the room. "I never should have thought of that. Uncle Rufus Lane going to be a Christian in his old age! He is good enough any way."

This goodness of some moral people was Mrs. French's strongest argument against the doctrine of an atonement. She believed, or *said* she believed, in the reformation of the vicious, and the development of goodness and nobility in others. With anything beyond this she had no sympathy.

She understood little of human nature, or she would have known that, to a soul steeped in crime, some powerful, transforming influence must be applied, ere it can be won to purity and uprightness. What matters it to talk of more enduring pleasures than a sensual life will give, when there are no aspirations for anything above and beyond!

The philanthropist who ignores or denies

that all power belongeth to Him who once dwelt among us, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," paralyzes his own right hand.

It was well that he who entered the home of Jared Simpson, as comforter and friend, carried with him the assurance, that Jesus, our great High Priest, "in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, is able to succor them that are tempted."

"He is my only hope for time or eternity," said the young man, who had, so long, lived without hope; and "He alone can save us," echoed the father.

Esther looked on the change, wrought in those she loved, and gave God praise. The mother went about her household duties cheerfully, looking forward to the time when all shadows should flee away, and the sunlight of righteousness illumine the earth.

Alone, and without counsel, they had been groping blindly, feeling their great need of help, yet ignorant whence it was to come. It had come at last, and they welcomed it.

Frederic Spaulding had said it was worth a life-time of labor, to save these souls; but, thus early, was he permitted to see the first good fruits of his work.

The old minister returned; and, being told of this family by his young brother, rode over to see them.

There was no coldness in his reception, no shrinking from his presence, no painful blushes. Mr. Simpson and his son were called to the house, and they engaged freely in conversation.

"I don't consider myself a Christian," said the father, in answer to a question asked by Mr. Thayer. "I am a sinner, and deserve condemnation; but I pray, constantly, that my sins may be forgiven. That's all I can do."

"That's all any one can do, except to have faith in Christ," replied the clergyman. "His blood cleanseth from all sin."

John Simpson was strongly attracted by the genial manners of their visitor, and lingered beside him after he was seated in his carriage.

This opportunity was not lost by the good pastor. Addressing the young man, kindly, in regard to his own personal experience, there was no hesitation or concealment in his replies. Like his father, he disclaimed all pretensions to being a Christian, although it was the strongest wish of his heart that he might become one.

"I shall hope to see you on the Sabbath," said Mr. Thayer, as the declining sun warned him it was time to leave.

"I shall be at church," was the reply. "I should be sorry to lose the preaching. It gives me something to think about all the week."

The sermons which he heard were of very great benefit to him, and he was exceedingly anxious that his mother and sister should hear for themselves.

Esther, having been so long secluded, shrank from appearing among strangers, and could hardly be persuaded to give the subject a thought. Then, too, her wardrobe was deficient, and she pleaded that the necessary outlay could not be afforded.

Maud Lamson, acting upon Mr. Spaulding's suggestion, used her powers of persuasion; and, after many objections, Esther promised, if her clothing could be put in proper order, that she would attend church. Maud was again of service. She had a rare tact in refashioning and fitting, so that, with slight expense, her young friend was made presentable.

"I suppose this work was all laid out for me, before I came," said Maud, to her aunt, when speaking of her interest and efforts in behalf of Esther Simpson.

"I suppose so," was the pleasant reply, "and I'm glad you've been able to do it."

"So am I," she responded heartily. "But it has been a new experience to me; and one I could not have expected. It is only eight weeks since I first saw Esther; and it seems as though I had known her all my life. She reminds me of one of my schoolmates, a timid girl, who always needed some one to encourage her. I used to tell her she was like a vine, reaching out for support."

"And you think Esther is like her."

"Quite like her, in that respect. She clings to her brother as the vine to the oak. If he keeps erect and strong, she will go up with him."

"I guess he is sure to do that, now," said Aunt Mary. "At any rate, Mr. Spaulding thinks so, and he has seen a good deal of him."

"I hope so, for his own sake, and Esther's," replied Maud. "He has improved very much in his appearance. That is certain."

"Who has improved so very much?" asked Uncle Rufus, looking in at the open window.

"We were speaking of John Simpson," replied Aunt Mary. "Maud has been telling me about her visit there yesterday. Esther is going to church next sabbath."

"I am glad to hear it," said the old man. "I wish she would come over here and make us a visit."

"I wish so, too, uncle; and I have asked her a great many times; but she is shy of meeting strangers."

"We are not strangers."

"I know *we* are not; and I think she will come by and by."

It was the last Sabbath Mr. Spaulding was expected to preach, and the house was better filled than usual. Among the new faces was that of Esther Simpson. A little disconcerted, at first, she certainly was; but, when the services commenced, she forgot everything but the speaker and his subject. During the intermission at noon, Aunt Mary Lane took care that she should not feel neglected; and this, with Maud's presence, secured her a pleasant hour.

At the close of the afternoon service, many of the congregation gathered around the young preacher, to bid him good-by, and wish him success in his chosen work. Among these were Jared Simpson and his son, who, too deeply moved for words, could only clasp his hand in silence.

There was a prayer meeting in the evening, and, with that, Frederic Spaulding closed his labors, for the summer, among this people.

Perhaps, however, a call made the next day should be counted among his labors, since it was entirely for the benefit of others, and not for his own pleasure.

"I believe I must go to Widow Brown's again," he said, in the morning. "The poor woman is always so rejoiced to see me; and she has few earthly pleasures."

"Please, Cousin Fred, let me go with you," said Burt.

"Yes," responded Uncle Rufus. "There is a horse and wagon at your service, and you can take the children with you. I guess, too, there will be a basket to go."

This basket had made a weekly pilgrimage to "the top of the hill," during the entire summer. Maud Lamson, who usually accompanied, had been fearful of entering the cottage, lest she should again be asked to pray; but the almoner of Aunt Mary's bounty, for that day, would have no such fear.

Nancy was sitting on the bench, with no thought beyond her flashing needles, and the bright-colored yarn she held in her hands,

when, at the sound of a ringing laugh, she sprang up, and saw the familiar wagon approaching. This she made known to her mother, and then sat down quietly until the visitors came in.

Mr. Spaulding always spoke to her pleasantly, and took her hand in his, although she could reply only with meaningless sounds. Perhaps this attention had helped to fix his memory in her mind, for she evidently recognized him, and, in her way, expressed great delight.


She gave him the Bible, and a chapter was read. Then followed a prayer; and soon Nancy was again in her old seat, gazing after her friend.

The summer was ended; but the harvest was not yet past.

CHAPTER IV.

Now, only for time,
For a few fleeting years,
A life spent in toil,
With some smiles, many tears.

Eternity, then,
Where the cycles roll on,
Yet take not away
From the cycles to come.

 HERE'S little Esther Simpson, coming with her brother," exclaimed Burt Lester, running in from the piazza, to tell the news.

"You shouldn't call her *little*," said Anna, mindful of proprieties. "She is a young lady."

"She's a very *little* young lady," urged her brother. "Not half as large as Cousin Maud."

"That's a mistake."

"Well, I think she looks *very* little," insisted the boy.

While this discussion was being carried on, Jared Simpson's new buggy was driven to the door, and a tall, broad-shouldered young man took the very little lady in his arms, and deposited her safely on the piazza.

Maud Lamson was there to receive her, and give her escort a friendly greeting. Uncle Rufus and Aunt Mary joined them. Then the horse was hitched, for John Simpson must see some fancy fowls, which had just been bought "to please the children." This required a long time, or, rather, it was more than an hour before they returned; and even then, there was a further delay to discuss some topics interesting to farmers.

"A smart young man, after all," said Mr. Lane, to a neighbor just coming up as the object of this remark drove away. "He's a clear thinker, and I'm mistaken if he don't make it manifest, before he dies."

"Pretty hard case for him, though. Folks

ain't apt to forget when a man's been in prison."

"Plenty of men, who never saw the inside of a prison, would find it hard work to stand up beside him, now. I like him, and I'll help him, if I can."

The neighbor, who was not famed for honesty, hung his head, and regretted his unfortunate speech. He managed, however, to make known the object of his coming, and Uncle Rufus, who seldom withheld a favor, sent him away a dollar richer than he had come.

Little Esther Simpson was happy as a bird, all day long, "just as pretty as she could be," and just as much petted as any gentle heart could desire. In the evening, her brother came for her, and, after much persuasion, was induced to enter the house.

This call was much to him, and the visit still more to his sister. She had caught glimpses of a life in which was more of refinement than had ever been known in her own home. She began to see that beauty might

walk hand in hand with comfort, and graceful adornment conceal the sometimes homely details of thrift.

She made her brother comprehend something of the new revelation she had received, and ventured to suggest some changes in their own mode of living.

"You must remember that we are poor folks," he answered. "We can't afford to live in such style as they do at Mr. Lane's."

"I don't think it would take a great deal of money just for what I want. You know it didn't take much for my clothes; but you said they looked nice."

"And so they do, sister. And you look nice with them on."

"Better than I did with the old ones?" she asked.

"To be sure you do. If you didn't, what would be the use in having them? But you always looked well enough to me, and I guess we shall have to put up with things, about as they are, at home."

Esther was disappointed in having her plans

thus set aside; and her brother, observing this, hastened to assure her, that when he was rich, she should have everything she wanted. "I'll help you now, too, all I can," he added.

This satisfied her; and, for the time, she was content to waive the subject, although she commenced to calculate the probable cost of some desired improvements.

"Did you enjoy the visit?" asked her mother, as she entered the old house.

"Yes, indeed; all of it. Everything is so nice and pleasant there, it made me wish our home was like it."

For answer, she received again that oft-repeated excuse for want of beauty and adornment: "We are poor folks, and it takes money to buy such things. We can live without them."

Jared Simpson was reading the Bible; but laid it aside to hear Esther's account of the visit which had given her so much pleasure.

"You thought you shouldn't like going away from home. Seems to me you've changed your mind," he said with a smile.

"Perhaps I shouldn't like to go anywhere else," she answered, lightly, and went from the room to lay aside her hat and shawl.

"It does me good to see her look so bright," said her mother, as the door closed behind her. "I wish we could give her advantages like other girls."

"Perhaps we can," replied the father. "I've been thinking about it lately. We shall come out pretty well this year, — better than I expected; and I guess she can have what she needs."

At that moment John Simpson came in, bringing a large package of books and magazines. "There's work for the long evenings," he said, as he placed them on the table. "Just what I wanted."

"Where did they come from?" asked his mother.

"From Mr. Lane's. He gave them to me, when I was coming away, and told me I needn't be in a hurry about returning them. Good books, too, all of them," he added, reading aloud the titles of some.

"I forgot about those books," said Esther, as she returned to the room. "Maud Lamson selected them, and said I should like them. I wish we could have books and papers of our own, as they do at Mr. Lane's."

"So do I," echoed her brother. "I always liked to read, when I was a boy, and, for want of what was good, I read the bad."

"Come here, Esther," said Mr. Simpson, beckoning her to a seat on his knee. "I'm afraid this visit has made my little girl dissatisfied with our poor home."

"Oh, no," she answered brightly. "I like my home. I only wished we could have some books; but we can do without them."

"We can have them, and some papers, too. My little girl shall be gratified in this."

Then followed a quiet talk, more hopeful than had been known in the house for years; and then, with the sweet words of divine truth still lingering on their ears, they laid them down, and slept in peace.

Maud Lamson was thinking of returning home, although no summons had come for

her, and her friends protested against it. They begged her to stay so long as she could be happy with such old-fashioned people.

She could be happy, or, at least, contented, if it had seemed best to stay; but she was anxious to find her place in the world. Life had grown to be something more than a mere holiday to her.

She heard from her father, occasionally; from her stepmother, never. With the views and feelings cherished a few months before, it would have seemed the height of happiness to go back with Crin to Mrs. Bascom's, and resume her old life; but her heart, now, demanded something better.

She was sad at the thought of leaving those who had received her so kindly, and loved her so fondly; but she decided to go. Four months, the time of her visit, seemed long in anticipation; but it had passed quickly.

"I don't know how it is with you, my dear girl; but we feel as though you belonged to us," said Uncle Rufus, the evening before she was to leave. "Come back to us any time, and you shall have a warm welcome."

"I shall always be glad to come," she replied; "but I'm not sure of my future. Home isn't what it would be if my mother had lived."

"No, child: you couldn't expect that. I don't know much of your father; but he's an honorable business man. I hope you will be happy with him."

"I shall try; but it will be a great change to go back to him. He doesn't think as you do about the Bible and religion."

"Do you mean he doesn't believe in them?" asked Uncle Rufus.

"Not as you do," replied Maud.

"Perhaps he is careless and indifferent, as I have been most of my long life."

"He is not indifferent, for he talks about them a great deal. It didn't trouble me so much when I was with him; but now it would seem terrible."

"Then you have changed, my dear."

"I hope so, uncle. I don't mean my heart is changed; only my opinions and belief," she hastened to add, lest she might be misunderstood.

"My opinions and belief are not changed; but I trust my heart is," said the old man, reverently. "It seems almost too much to believe that God will hear the prayers of such a sinner as I have been. But the blood of Christ, the blood of Christ is my only dependence. This summer has been an eventful one," he added, resuming the conversation, after a silence which his companion did not seem disposed to break. "You came to see us, and that was a pleasure we did not expect. Mr. Spaulding came, and we were interested in the Simpson family. We have seen a great change there; and lastly, Aunt Mary and I have decided to come out on the Lord's side."

"I wish I had so decided," thought Maud; and still more did she wish so, when, at the hour of prayer, she heard herself commended to the mercy of God.

There was no longer any curiosity in regard to what Uncle Rufus would do about praying with his family. He had taken upon himself the office of priest for his household. Morning and evening he made confession of sin, and implored forgiveness.

"How I shall miss this worship, Aunt Mary!" said her niece, at the close of this prayer. "It seems as though Uncle Rufus prays differently from any one else."

"He prays from the heart. I hope you won't put off being a Christian as long as we did," said the good woman, smoothing the dark hair of the girl at her side. "You'll need religion every day of your life. No one knows what is before them."

Maud's heart responded to this. She looked forward, almost with trembling. A shadow rested upon her path. She had deliberately refused to accept the terms of salvation, even when convinced that they were offered in infinite love. There was reason for her sadness.

Maud had well done her duty for others, although failing where herself was concerned. Esther Simpson considered her not only a friend, but a benefactor; and mourned her departure sincerely.

Mr. Lamson was glad to see his daughter,—at least, he said so; and for the first few days she observed nothing peculiar in his appear-

ance. True, he talked less than usual, and this seemed to her an improvement.

But, at the end of a fortnight, she felt sure that he was greatly troubled. He seldom smiled; his lips were closed so firmly as to deepen the strong lines about his mouth; and the whole expression of his face indicated discouragement and perplexity.

She overheard angry reproaches from her stepmother, because denied money; and her father made a general remark that it would be necessary to economize in their expenses.

Mrs. Lamson had not the slightest idea of doing this. She had no patience with long faces and short purses; therefore she made herself and all around her uncomfortable.

This state of things was most unpleasant for Maud, who could offer neither sympathy nor relief. Home was less than she had expected; her two young brothers, one scarcely more than an infant, being almost her only society.

At the time when everything looked darkest, she received an invitation to spend the next three months with Crin Burton. This

she at once decided to accept, unless her father should make strong objections.

As for Mrs. Lamson, she manifested not the slightest interest in her stepdaughter's arrangements, only too glad when she was away.

"You are tired of us, soon," said Mr. Lamson to his daughter, as she asked the privilege of leaving home. "I know it's a dull place, just now; but you ought to be with us, some of the time. Wouldn't it be better not to go quite yet?"

Maud's face expressed her disappointment, as she said, "I should like to go now."

"Well, then, get ready. I suppose you'll want some money for your outfit, and I'll try to let you have some, to-morrow."

"I shall not need very much."

"You are the first woman I ever heard say that," replied Mr. Lamson, laughing. "But you are a good girl, and you shall be provided for."

He made good his word, and Maud received more money than she thought best to expend.

A pleasant journey and a safe arrival. Crin Burton was waiting at the depot, and the two friends met with demonstrative affection.

"This is Cousin Frank Lynde," said Crin, when she found an opportunity to introduce her companion. "And, Miss Maud Lamson, I wish you to adopt him at once as *your* cousin."

"I will do so gladly, provided he will ratify the adoption," she replied.

"Cousin Maud, I am very glad to see you," he said, with graceful bow and beaming smile; then turned to look for her baggage.

Mr. Burton received his daughter's friend warmly, claiming that, as Crin's sister, he must be expected to have a fatherly regard for her. Mrs. Lynde loved her at once; and this home, so in contrast to her own, seemed to the young girl like a haven of rest.

As they had always done, Maud and Crin occupied the same room, and almost forgot to sleep, so much was there to say. They had time, however, for comparing but a small



MAUD'S VISIT TO CRIN. Page 179.

part of their experience, and the great questions which so deeply interested them were hardly mentioned.

Breakfast waited for them the next morning, and Mr. Burton laughingly declared that wakefulness had stolen the roses from their cheeks, and given them no equivalent.

Heads ached, but this did not prevent an incessant flow of words; and, before noon, each had a pretty distinct idea of the other's state of feeling. Maud did not attempt to conceal the fact that her home was different from what she had hoped and expected.

"If mother was like your Aunt Hattie," she said, "I think I should be happy even if she didn't love me very much."

"She would love you then," replied Crin. "Aunt Hattie loves everybody. I was so foolish as to think she couldn't love me, because she was so devoted to Frank; but I soon found out my mistake. She is a Christian," added her niece. "I used to consider Auntie Bascom nearly perfect, and so she is, in one way; but she lacks what our minister

calls the crowning grace of a truly noble character."

"What is that?"

"Religion," was the reply. "I am glad you will hear Mr. Holbrook. His sermons are not such meaningless essays as we have heard most of our lives. Every word has a deep significance, and his audience feel it."

"Perhaps he is like Mr. Spaulding," suggested Maud.

"Perhaps so. At any rate, I am sure, from what you have written, that he preaches the same doctrines. I never thought much about our accountability to God, until I heard Mr. Holbrook preach a sermon upon man's accountability to his Creator."

"Your letter was the first thing which made me think," responded her companion.

"And you haven't answered my questions yet."

"I know I have not; but I suppose they have been solved to your satisfaction long before this."

"Yes," answered Crin. "I know if the

Bible is a revelation from God to man, it should be studied, and its precepts obeyed. I know, also, if we are to live throughout eternity, that it is no weakness to prepare for it. I don't suppose I reached these conclusions in the same way that you would; but I am satisfied with them."

"It doesn't matter how truth is discovered; and, if we reach the top of the ladder, it makes no difference whether or not our feet touch every rung," said Maud. "I believe as you do; but this faith cost me a severe struggle."

"It was forced upon me," responded Crin. "I could not avoid it."

"Did you try to avoid it?" asked her companion.

"I hardly know. My mind was, for a long time, in a state of confusion. Aunt Hattie and Cousin Frank were so good and happy, that I knew their religion was a reality; but father had no sympathy with them. He was wholly indifferent until while we were at the sea-side. Old Aleck talked with him plainly then, and I think he feels more inter-

est. Aunt Hattie believes he will be a Christian; and that would make me perfectly happy."

"Are *you* a Christian?" asked Maud.

Her companion hesitated before answering this question. "I hope so," she said, at length, tears trembling in her eyes. "At least, I am trying to be. I should have written about it, if you had not been coming here. I thought I could tell you, and it is only a few days since I dared to hope that Christ had accepted me."

Crin had spoken truly, when she said that her mind was, for a long time, in a state of confusion. She was convinced of the truth, but undecided how she would act. With Frank, she talked somewhat freely; but whenever her aunt introduced the subject of personal religion, she found means to avoid a protracted conversation.

A sudden death occurring in their midst, under peculiarly painful circumstances, every one was more or less impressed with the necessity of making preparation for an event which must come to all, and may come with-

out warning. Crin was startled from her usual reticence, and was not only willing, but anxious, to talk of this preparation.

No wiser counselor could have been found than Mrs. Lynde, who knew so well the fulness there is in the gospel plan of salvation, and whose years had not removed her from sympathy with young and inexperienced hearts.

Tenderly, and with judicious care, she pointed out the way in which to go. Being herself keenly sensitive to every influence, she guarded each word lest the inquiring mind might grow weary, or the feelings become unduly excited.

She instructed, encouraged, and calmed perplexing fears, until she had the satisfaction of knowing that her labors and prayers were not in vain.

Crin dared to hope that she was forgiven, and revealed her glad experience.

Frank Lynde wept in his excess of happiness. Of the family group, there now remained only his uncle, who had neither part nor lot in the rich inheritance of the just.

But even he had changed. He no longer felt secure in his ignorance. He could not say that he never thought of serious things. He did think of them ; and, although trying to forget, or crowd them from his mind, by closer application to business, they still intruded, until he was sometimes almost compelled to take time for calm and decisive consideration.

He had no means of fortifying his old position. He could not bring a single argument for the support of his liberal faith. Truth to tell, he had never been sufficiently interested to seek one.

Worldly good and worldly success had seemed to him of such permanent importance, that eternity was of small moment. "Everything will be well enough in the end," he had often said, and was content to risk his soul, while he allowed not a single detail of business to escape his notice.

Is it true that eternity is less than time ? Is it grand and noble to command success for this life, and trust to vague dreams for that

which is to come ? Is it heroism and bravery to wrest from arctic cold and tropic heat their wealth, while despising the true riches which shall endure while everlasting ages roll ?

It may be, as the world sometimes counts nobility and bravery ; but He who sitteth in the heavens shall have such in derision.

Mr. Burton congratulated himself upon his prosperity. His plans had been well laid, and wisely carried out. His property was increasing in value. Every new investment proved his foresight, and made ample returns. "Clear-headed," was the term applied to him, among business men, and he well deserved it.

Old Aleck had been first to bring home to his mind the unwelcome truth, that he could not safely trust to winds and waves, without some guiding hand. "You will never make a port for which you do not steer," the old man had said. "No soul ever drifted to heaven."

Over and over again, the voice of conscience repeated these words in the ear of the worldly man. He was drifting. He

knew it at last; whither, he could not tell. It might be towards sunken rocks, or roaring breakers; and it might be towards a bold, precipitous shore; but all, alike, threatened ruin and death.

His home was pleasant as an ample fortune could make it. The attractions of his fire-side were all that grace, beauty, and refinement could give. He should have been a happy man. But he was not.

As the weeks and months went by, after his lesson by the sea, his disquiet increased, until it was sometimes difficult for him to conceal his manifestations.

He knew that Crin was considering the all-important question which he was striving to forget; and, when, one evening, she stole noiselessly into his room, and laid her hand upon his shoulder, he half-suspected her errand.

"Well, my dear, here is your seat," he said, pushing aside his papers, and extending his arms.

For a moment after, nothing was said.

Mr. Burton pressed the warm cheek of his daughter against his own, while she, hesitating, and almost fearing, delayed to speak.

"What is it?" he asked at length. "You have something to tell me."

"Yes, father," she answered; but her voice was so choked with sobs, that she could go no further.

Once he would have been entirely disconcerted by this emotion; but now he soothed her with caresses until she regained composure, when he repeated his question.

"What is it, my dear? There can be no reason why you should hesitate like this."

"I am trying to be a Christian, and I wish you to know it," she said, in a breath, not daring to trust herself to a more deliberate utterance.

It was she who then waited for the silence to be broken; but she knew, by the close clasping of her father's arm, that he would not put her from him, for this change.

"I am glad," he said at length. "I had no wish to influence you; and, whatever may

be true, a Christian is always safe. I must think for myself; but I shall put no obstacles in your way."

"Thank you for that, dear father," answered Crin, for the first time looking him in the face; but I desire more."

"What more?" he asked, unthinking.

"That you become a Christian, and help me to do my duty."

"I don't know about that, child," was his reply. "You know I never have thought much about such things."

"But don't you think now?" asked Crin.

Confession or denial,—it must be one of the two, for the eyes of his daughter were looking straight into his own.

"Well, Crin, you seem disposed to know the whole truth," he said, attempting a smile. "I have thought more, lately. That old sailor presented his belief in such a way that I haven't forgotten it. But then,—

He was about to qualify this remark in such a way as to detract from its force, had he not remembered that she to whom he was speaking might be influenced thereby.

"But then, what?" asked his daughter.

"I hardly know what I should have said," was the reply. "I am not used to talking of these things."

"I shall want to talk with you about them, dear father."

"You must talk with your aunt. She knows."

"And you need to learn," said the affectionate girl. "We are all going to pray that you may be a Christian," she added, emboldened by his kindness.

"My dear child."

This was the only answer to her remark, except what was implied in the kiss he left upon her brow.

"Now I will go and leave you to your papers," said Crin, shortly after. "I am afraid you will get tired of me."

"Not tired of you, my dear," he replied, "but this business must be attended to;" and, as she went from the room, he drew the papers towards him, and dipped his pen, preparatory to writing.

He held it for some minutes; but not a stroke was made. His thoughts were engrossed with other subjects than dollars and cents; and, after a time, he turned from the table, and sat with his eyes fixed on the glowing coals.

Crin listened and waited to hear him moving, so that she might speak again to him before retiring; but she listened in vain.

This was but a few days before Maud Lamson's arrival; and no allusion had been made to the conversation of the evening, while Mr. Burton took care that there should be no opportunity for its repetition.

The first Sabbath Maud was with them, he made himself ready, and invited her and his daughter to accompany him.

"We were going to hear Mr. Holbrook," replied Crin. "Please to go with us."

He hesitated; but a few words from Maud decided him. "I suppose my gallantry will be called in question, if I refuse," he said, by way of apology for accepting the invitation. "I will go with you to-day, and next Sabbath,——"

"You may like Mr. Holbrook so well, that you will wish to hear him again, by that time," said Crin, interrupting her father.

"It may be," he answered. "However, it is not necessary to decide for next Sabbath, now."

Mr. Burton had found it almost impossible to fix his attention upon the sermon, while listening to Dr. Barnes; but he experienced no such difficulty when Mr. Holbrook was speaking. He could not avoid thinking of what was said.

Every word had its own significance, and each sentence but made place for the succeeding. The services seemed short. All had been interested, and none wearied. Maud's anticipations were more than realized, while Mr. Burton had been agreeably disappointed.

"Now, father, didn't you like Mr. Holbrook?" asked Crin, when they reached home.

"Very well," was the reply. "He is very much in earnest, and that is an essential qualification of a good speaker. He holds the attention of his audience."

"Yes, indeed," replied Crin. "There are not many sleepers in the congregation."

She invited her father to go out, in the afternoon, but pride whispered that to do this would be manifesting quite too much interest.

The next Sabbath, matters arranged themselves in much the same way. No one really wished to hear Dr. Barnes, and Mr. Burton attended church with his family. Mrs. Lynde hailed this as an omen of good; all the more, since he frankly acknowledged that he enjoyed the services.

About this time, one of his friends, who attended the church of Dr. Barnes, inquired concerning his non-appearance there. "Your pew is generally empty," he said. "I shall appoint myself a committee to investigate the matter."

"The investigation will require but little time," was the reply. "The fact is, I don't attend church much, any way."

"But I don't see your daughter there," continued the friend.

"No. Her sympathies are in another di-

rection; and I am willing she should think for herself. She is one of Mr. Holbrook's hearers."

"I should hardly suppose you would be satisfied with that."

"Why not?" asked Mr. Burton. "I see no objection. Mr. Holbrook is a good man, and a fine speaker."

"He is a perfect fanatic," responded the friend with bitterness. "His heart may be all right; but the doctrine he preaches is strange and unreasonable."

"I am beginning to think that the doctrine is not so very strange. At any rate, it has many believers."

"That may be. But none of my family will listen to it, with my consent."

"There is the difference between us," said Mr. Burton. "My family all listen to it; and I have no objection."

"Then I shouldn't be surprised to hear that you accompany them."

"It is quite possible that you may. I believe in liberty for all; though I don't pretend to know much about doctrines and creeds."

"Well, I think it is best for a person to have some settled belief, and be able to give a reason for it."

Mr. Burton was ready to assent to this, notwithstanding he made no pretensions to any belief himself.

Soon after, Mr. Holbrook, who had noticed his presence in church, took occasion to express his pleasure in having him for one of his congregation.

This was properly acknowledged, and the clergyman, without apparent effort, held the conversation to the subject of church-going.

"I haven't been a church-going man," said Mr. Burton, in answer to some remark of his companion. But lately, I've thought it would be better to pay more respect to the observance of the Sabbath. Then, too, you had all my family; and their influence was more than I could resist."

"I am very glad that such is the case," replied Mr. Holbrook. "Your daughter and nephew are among my best listeners. I look to their faces for inspiration."

This clergyman had long been acquainted with Mr. Burton, and knew that he was a thoroughly worldly man; but he thought it possible that the time had come when a word, kindly spoken, might be the means of arresting his attention.

Judge, then, of his surprise, on being told that this word had been spoken months before; and there remained for him only to prosecute the work commenced by old Aleck.

"I have never been able to forget that conversation," said Mr. Burton, after describing his interview with the old sailor. "I often wake from a dream, in which I seem to have been drifting helplessly, in mid-ocean. I am sometimes in a boat, sometimes clinging to a plank; but I never have oar or paddle. The idea of drifting haunts me."

"It may be well that it should," replied Mr. Holbrook. "The sailor chose an apt illustration to enforce the truth. The great mass of mankind are drifting without chart or compass; but they are so blinded to their true condition, that they refuse to listen to any word of warning."

"I have always thought myself safe, until within a few months."

"You ought not to have reached that conclusion without carefully weighing the subject," responded his companion.

"I can't say that I *reached* the conclusion at all. I was satisfied to accept it without consideration."

"Pardon me, Mr. Burton; but would it not be nearer the truth to say that you thought little or nothing in regard to it?"

"Yes, sir; it would," was the frank reply; "and I can hardly understand, now, why the subject forces itself upon me as it does. I assure you, I have made great effort to banish it."

"Let me entreat you to do this no longer," said the pastor. "Some one may be praying earnestly for you."

This completely subdued Mr. Burton.

"I know there is," he replied, with tears. "That may be the reason."

Enough had been said; and, with the assurance that another would remember him

at the throne of grace, Mr. Holbrook went on his way.

"I must know something more of old Aleck," he said to himself; and the first time he called upon Mrs. Lynde, he inquired concerning this sea-side acquaintance.

Frank gladly improved the opportunity to speak of his humble friend, and gave a glowing description of the hut and its simple furnishing. The sea-chest, with its treasured Bible, were ever uppermost in his mind, when thinking of the old sailor, and these occupied a prominent place in his story.

"Some record should be made of that life," said the clergyman, after listening, with deep interest, to the animated description given by his young friend.

"Cousin Frank has done so," Crin ventured to say. "He wrote the sketch last summer, and we all liked it very much."

"I presume I should like it very much. Will you allow me to read it?" he asked, turning to Frank Lynde, who was somewhat astonished that his cousin should have thus brought him into notice.

After what had been said, he could not refuse Mr. Holbrook's request. So "Molly's Bible" had another reader, and old Aleck's name seemed likely to be rescued from oblivion.

At this time, Crin Burton's Christian character was rapidly developing. In seeking to influence her friend, she was herself more firmly established; and, modestly attempting to instruct another, she was herself taught in return.

Maud Lamson was charmed with the cheerful religious feeling manifested in this family, and often wished that she had taken the decisive step which would seal her immortal destiny. She would have withheld her hand from no other proffered good; but she persistently refused to accept the priceless boon of God's free grace.

Mr. Burton, too, now saw the path of duty. He had been obliged to think and consider. The prayers of those who loved him, had been unceasing, and in answer, the Spirit had moved upon his heart.

Crin had urged him no more with words; but her eyes often met his with a pleading look, which he could not fail to interpret.

At length the hour came when he felt compelled to make a final decision. He had been unusually busy during the day, and was just leaving his counting-room, when it flashed upon him that he had neglected to look at the date of an insurance which covered quite an amount of property. He had thought of this several times within a month; but, for some reason, had failed to make the necessary examination, and with his best efforts, he could not recall the date of the policy.

The morning of the day in question, he resolved to attend to it; but it entirely escaped his mind, until time for dinner. He was tired, his head ached severely, and he had received especial orders to be home early. These conditions all pleaded for delay, and he went out into the street, thinking that the next day would do as well.

Two men just passing, entire strangers to him, were conversing earnestly in regard to

some heavy losses by fire. He overheard a single remark, "I never run any risks where property is concerned."

This was sufficient for Mr. Burton. He went back to the counting-room, and examined his papers, unmindful of fatigue or pain. To his consternation, he found that it was already time to renew the policy; and, without a moment's delay, started to do so.

This was accomplished. He was late to dinner; but many thousands of dollars had been insured. Nothing would have induced him to leave this undone; and he was wise to take all possible precautions against loss, for the good things of earth are by no means to be despised.

He congratulated himself upon having heard the remark which had been uttered with no regard to himself or his interests. "A chance remark," he called it; and, in one sense, it was so. But in another, which recognizes the care of an overruling Providence, it had been spoken expressly, that he might hear.

Several times, during the evening, he referred to the strange occurrence; and always, with some expression of surprise. It so absorbed his attention, that he could think of nothing else.

"In case of a fire to-night, I shall be safe," he said. "Had the policy been unrenewed, I might wake to-morrow to find myself a much poorer man."

He was thinking of this, when he fell asleep, rejoicing that a chance word had warned him of his danger.

In the dead of night, he was roused by an alarm of fire. This was not an unfrequent occurrence. Mr. Burton was usually satisfied with a hasty glance from the windows, to assure himself that the fire was not in his immediate vicinity; but this night, he felt impelled to go out.

He had passed only a few squares, when he was told that a large block of stores, which he had that afternoon reinsured, was burning. This quickened his steps, and he reached the scene in time to see the walls totter, and fall into one blazing mass.

"Well insured, I hope," said a friend.

"Yes," was the reply, with a quickened breath, as he remembered the events of the day.

The fire swept on, a strong wind fanning it into a continuous blaze, despite the best efforts of firemen and citizens. Nothing could stay its progress, and the owners of the burning property could only look on and see its destruction.

Through the entire night, Mr. Burton was thus occupied, returning home in the morning, exhausted and saddened. Crin met him in the hall, anxious to know what had so detained him.

When told, she exclaimed, "Why, father, what a kind Providence saved you from loss."

"Yes, indeed," he replied. "I was never so near a great loss, before. I have always been fortunate; and it seems that my luck has not deserted me. It was a pretty narrow chance, though."

The whole family received him with congratulations. He talked of chance; but Mrs.

Lynde ascribed his good fortune to a kind Providence.

"I suppose you are right, Sister Hattie," he replied. "Any way, there was a merciful interposition in my favor; and I am tolerably certain that I shall run no risks in future."

Crin looked at him quickly and earnestly. He could read her thoughts. He knew she was wondering at his inconsistency.

Through the day, every moment was occupied. He made plans for rebuilding in improved style; counted the cost, and probable income. He also took the trouble to examine every policy in his possession, and calculated anew the condition of his entire property, until satisfied that it was safe as human foresight could make it.

On his way home, he met Mr. Holbrook, who accosted him with the remark he had so often heard during the day, "I suppose you were well insured."

"I was. The policy was renewed only yesterday," replied Mr. Burton.

"I knew your business habits so well, that

"I thought you would be prepared for any contingency."

"I intend to be prepared," was the reply. "But this came near finding me without an insurance. It will teach me a lesson for the future."

"Most men are careful to insure houses and lands; but many neglect to provide against the loss of their souls," responded the clergyman. "This ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

Mr. Burton had not bestowed a thought upon anything beyond this world, since he was startled from sleep the night before. If, for a moment, a thought of accountability intruded upon him, it was so quickly banished that it left no trace."

This meeting with Mr. Holbrook had been ordered by the same Wisdom which sent the weary man back to his counting-room, and thus saved him from a great loss. A word, fitly spoken, revealed the folly of striving to gain the world while risking the loss of a soul.

Mr. Burton saw it more clearly than ever before. He realized that he had acted unwisely, and was overwhelmed with a sense of guilt.

He reached home as quickly as possible; but he had no appetite for dinner, and no interest in the subject which was supposed to be uppermost in his mind. His sister thought he was suffering from over-exertion, and prescribed rest.

Rest! There was no rest for him. He was glad to be alone, that he might escape observation. Sitting or walking, it mattered not. Still the same accusing voice sounded his condemnation.

Crin went to his room; but he wasn't inclined to talk with her. He complained of a severe headache, yet assured her that a night's sleep would set him right again.

"And shall I leave you?" she asked, at length.

"Yes, my dear, if you please. I am poor company this evening; and you will find it dull business staying here. To-morrow I shall be more agreeable."

After this, she could not stay, although she longed to do or say something that would give him relief. Later, she tapped at the door; but he assured her that he needed nothing, and should soon retire.

It was a night never to be forgotten by the convicted man. He had been tried at the bar of conscience, and condemned. Yet there was hope. Pardon was freely offered, and but waited his acceptance.

Strange that he should have hesitated! He was guilty, condemned, and doomed to punishment. Why should he not improve the only way of escape?

Why? This is a question often asked, but never satisfactorily answered. True, the way may seem narrow; but what is that compared with the goal, which all shall reach, who walk therein?

He endeavored to look at the subject calmly. If he resolved to be a Christian, there would be no reserve in his consecration.

Again he recalled the words of old Aleck, and the pleading looks of his only child.

Ere the morning there was a new burst of joy in heaven, as another name was written in the Lamb's book of life.

Mr. Burton experienced none of that ecstatic joy which sometimes characterizes a sinner's conversion; but he felt a calm, firm reliance on God, and an assurance that his sins were forgiven.

A sweet peace, unknown before, filled his heart. Yet he made no expression of this, save as it beamed from his face. He wished to test this new-born happiness, and try the strength of his faith, before he revealed it to others.

He went about his business for the day, diligent as usual, but there was an undercurrent of thought which had no relation to the things of time or sense.

He was welcomed home so affectionately at evening, that he could hardly refrain from speaking of the great change in his hopes and purposes.

"I am glad to see you looking so much better," said his sister, as they were seated

around the dinner table. "We have all been anxious about you."

"There is no more need for anxiety," was the reply. "I believe I have quite recovered from yesterday's trouble."

"Then we shall not allow you to be shut up alone, all the evening," responded Crin.

"Not *all* the evening," he answered. "I must have a short time to myself. After that, I am at your service."

The time he spent alone was occupied in reading the Bible, and prayer. The sacred book had for him a new significance. It was now a revelation of his Father's will, to be studied and obeyed.

So much was he interested, that he quite forgot to join the family; and Crin surprised him, with Bible in hand. She paused at the sight; but advanced directly, in answer to her father's welcome.

"Come here, my dear. I have something to tell you," he said. "With God's help, I intend to lead a Christian life, in future."

There was no reply to this, until the first

feelings of thankfulness and joy had found vent in tears; and, even then, it was impossible to express in words the deep emotion of the overjoyed heart.

"Now we are going to heaven together," at length said Crin. "Nothing could have made me so happy as this. If you should lose all your property now, I should hardly think of it. Aunt Hattie and Frank will be perfectly happy, too. We have all prayed for this."

"I know it, my dear, for I could not forget my accountability. I tried hard; but it was ever in my mind."

"You'll not wish to forget it, now."

"No, my dear. Accountability will be the watchword of my life. I must do a great deal of good in the time that is left me."

"Yes, father; and you can do good, for you have the means."

"You mean that I have money."

"I was thinking of that."

"Money may be made a powerful auxiliary in doing good; but it is not always necessary. Old Aleck has no money, yet he may have

done more than I can ever do, with my best endeavors."

"And Molly's Bible was what saved him," said Crin, tracing effects to their causes.

"And the Bible was given by some Christian, who then laid the foundation of a series of events which have resulted, as I trust, in bringing me to the Saviour," continued her father.

"I wish we could see old Aleck now. It would make him so happy to know that his prayers for you are answered."

"I believe he would rejoice," said Mr. Burton; "and if we live another summer, we will try to see him. I should enjoy his conversation now, better than when the storm made me a prisoner in his hut."

"Indeed you would," said Crin. "And now may I tell Aunt Hattie that you hope you are a Christian?" she asked, soon after.

"I don't know what is best," was the reply. "I didn't intend to tell any one, at present; but when you came in, it seemed impossible not to speak of it."

"I am so glad you did, father. It is too good news not to be told. Aunt Hattie will be overjoyed to hear it. Perhaps you would choose to tell her yourself."

Mr. Burton was silent for a moment, and then answered, "I think I will. You may ask her to come here."

"Father would like to see you in the library," said Crin, to Mrs. Lynde, a moment after.

"I know it is for something pleasant," said Frank, as his mother left the room.

"How do you know that?" asked his cousin.

"Because you look so happy," was the reply.

"You do look happy," rejoined Maud; "but there are tears in your eyes."

"Tears of joy," said Crin. "You will know soon." Then, unable to be quite silent upon the subject, she exclaimed,—

"Shouldn't we be a happy family, if we were all Christians?"

"Is uncle a Christian?" asked Frank, quickly.

"I trust he is," was the daughter's reply ; and then for a few minutes there was little said, except in short, abrupt sentences, each expressive of joy and gratitude.

"Oh, now it will seem like our old home, when father was alive," said Frank.

Why?" asked Maud.

"Because uncle will have morning and evening worship."

"I hope so," responded Crin.

"Of course he will, if he is a Christian," said the boy.

They waited long for Mrs. Lynde's return. There was much to be said by the brother and sister ; points of duty to be discussed, and experiences to be compared. When they came out to the young people, a look of quiet happiness rested upon their faces.

Maud felt herself almost an intruder, until Mr. Burton, taking her hand, addressed her kindly, and begged her to yield her heart to the Saviour. Then she had no fears of intrusion ; but a great fear seized upon her, lest it might be too late for her to find acceptance with Christ.

Too proud to acknowledge this, she took refuge in silence ; and although her heart was almost bursting, she succeeded in maintaining an outward composure.

Mrs. Lynde placed an open Bible before her brother. From it he read a few verses, and then assumed the attitude of prayer.

God sees not as man sees, and hears not as man hears. To Him, prayer may be acceptable, although uttered in weakness. Fluency of speech, and elegance of diction recommend no petition to his favorable notice. He looks on the heart, and judges by other rules than those of man. This prayer had the elements of sincerity, humility, and faith.

At its close, Maud Lamson left the room. She, alone, was without the fold of the Good Shepherd, wandering on the forbidden mountains, faint and weary. She heard the sweet voice, entreating, pleading, even, as she turned away, "Come, and I will give you rest."

While others rejoiced, she mourned. Tears, not of joy, but grief, bedewed her cheeks.

"We must all pray for Cousin Maud, now,"

said Frank Lynde to his mother. "I know she thinks about being a Christian."

"I am quite certain of that," was the reply. "And she seems to me to have reached the point where only prayer can avail her."

Crin was of the same opinion, and troubled her friend with no more advice; but, as with her father, eyes were eloquent when lips were silent.

The succeeding days were full of enjoyment. Everything was done for the comfort and entertainment of their guest. There were pleasant engagements for the evenings, while choice reading, music, and entertaining conversation occupied the leisure hours.

Mr. Burton enjoyed his home more than ever. His heart, now at peace with God, seemed to have enlarged its capacities for happiness.

He saw Mr. Holbrook, who rejoiced with him, thankful that a word had been spoken which fastened the truth, so that it could not be removed from its place.

"We shall expect great help from you,"

said the pastor. "Too many of our business men are without the pale of the church. I am sometimes startled, as I look around and see the energy with which they are prosecuting their business, and then consider what good might be accomplished, if only this energy was devoted to the service of the living God. The world would soon be converted."

"I wish to do my duty," responded Mr. Burton; "but I shall hardly understand my new work."

"Do good as you have opportunity; and never neglect to pray." This was Mr. Holbrook's counsel. "One who really desires to labor for the salvation of souls will find an opportunity. Those who have money must give freely, or their piety will languish. Those who have not, can give sympathy and counsel. Even the humblest of Christ's followers is not shut out from this work; for prayer is, after all, the most potent influence."

"I am sure of that, in my own case," was the reply. "The thought that my family

were praying for me added to my feeling of responsibility."

"It could hardly fail to do so. But prayer moves the arm that moves the world, and, in answer, He who holds the hearts of all in his keeping, sends the Holy Spirit to accomplish its own peculiar work. In your case, you were aware that the blessing was sought; but some are wholly unconscious that prayer is being offered for them; yet it is answered, and they are saved.

"It is well to select from your acquaintance particular subjects of prayer. I once knew a man who had adopted this plan when he first became a Christian, and persevered in it through a long life. He had a list of the names of those for whose souls he had thus wrestled, and nearly all had been hopefully converted. Many of them he had never seen, but something in their position or character would interest him, so that he felt moved to pray for them."

"He was a poor man," said Mr. Holbrook, in answer to a question from his companion,—

"uneducated, too, except in the knowledge of the Scriptures; but he accomplished a vast amount of good. Nearly all of it was done through prayer.

"He told me of one instance which was so marked that I have never forgotten it. In the town adjoining that in which he lived, there was a young lawyer, of rare talents and acquirements. His friends had high hopes of him; but, in an evil hour, he yielded to the siren of the wine-cup, and the fond expectations of friends were blasted. His downward career was rapid, and all efforts to reform him proved unavailing. He neglected his business, and associated with the idle and vicious.

"One day, while fishing with his boon companions, he was seen by the Christian man of whom I have been speaking. His appearance was such as to attract attention; and, inquiring his name, it was added to the list of subjects for prayer. Soon after, his whole history was learned; and from that time, not a day passed in which he was not remembered at the throne of grace. His unknown friend

took pains to keep himself informed in regard to his habits. There was no appearance of reformation ; but he was not discouraged. He prayed on.

"Two years went by ; and then, to the great astonishment of his friends, this dissipated young man announced his determination to change his course of life. He did so ; and, although at first it seemed hardly possible that he would persevere, those who watched him were agreeably disappointed.

"Did he give any reason for this change ?" asked Mr. Burton.

"He said it was the result of his own convictions."

"And did the Christian man believe that his prayers were the means of saving the young lawyer ?"

"He was too humble to say that. He only knew that he had prayed, and the young man was saved."

This narrative was an excellent lesson to one just setting out in the Christian course. It showed the advantage of system and perse-

verance. If *one* could do thus much, through the agency of prayer, why should not another ?

Mr. Burton thought of his numerous friends, and resolved to select a certain number for whom to pray. As was natural, under the circumstances, the names of Maud Lamson and her father headed this list.

He debated whether it would be best to tell her of this. Circumstances decided. He was relating his conversation with Mr. Holbrook, dwelling particularly upon the incident of the young lawyer's reformation. The family were deeply interested, and none more so than their guest.

"I should wish the person, for whom I was praying, to know it," said Crin.

"I should think this knowledge would add to the power of prayer," responded Maud, absently.

"It would have a great effect upon some," said Mr. Burton.

"It certainly would upon me," she answered in the same tone ; and then, as if, for the first time, realizing the import of her words, she

added, "But perhaps I am not a good judge."

Crin could not refrain from speaking.

"You ought to be," she said. "You are the subject of many prayers."

With all her self-control, she could make no answer to this, and Mrs. Lynde hastened to cover her confusion. "The man of whom you have been speaking must have found great pleasure in tracing the history of his friends," she said.

"They were not all friends for whom he prayed," remarked Frank.

"He must have considered them as such," was the reply.

"He was certainly a friend to them," said Mr. Burton,—"such a friend, too, as most people need."

An hour after, as Maud Lamson was rising from the piano, he said to her, in a subdued tone, "I shall pray for you, every day, until you give your heart to God."

She put up her hand beseechingly, and her eyes met his. "I *must* pray for you," he added.

She made no reply, but seated herself again at the piano. Touching but a few simple chords, she gave them such force of expression, that the room was filled with their melody. Crin and Frank stood by her side, spell-bound.

It was not often that her mood prompted to such utterance; but, when it did, each tone was instinct with feeling. Mr. Burton, alone, understood the cause of this outburst; and, as the music grew more subdued and plaintive, he recognized a corresponding decrease in the intensity of her emotion.

"I wish some inspiration would give me such power," exclaimed Frank Lynde, as the quivering fingers were withdrawn from the keys.

"It is hardly a power to be desired," responded Maud. "It seldom comes to me."

"When it does, may I be there to hear?" answered the boy, quite unconscious of the deep springs in which it had birth; while Crin, with a better understanding of her friend, could only wonder.

The evening seemed long to one who was

striving to conceal the tumult of her heart; but it was over at last. Good-night greetings were exchanged, and the family separated.

No sleep for Maud Lamson; and in the watches of the night, her companion woke to find her pacing the floor, standing for a moment where the moonlight streamed through the open shutters, and then pausing, to catch the warmth of the stove. "Maud, dear, what is the matter?" she exclaimed.

"Nothing but restlessness," was the reply. "I did not mean to disturb you. I hoped you would sleep."

"I *have* slept. What time is it?"

"The clock has just struck one."

"What can I do for you?"

"Nothing," and the tone in which this was uttered, told Crin that the speaker had no desire for further conversation.

After this, Maud compelled herself to sit quietly for a time. In the gray of the morning, she fell asleep, and was absent from her place at the breakfast-table. She rose late, with heavy eyes and aching head, yet persist-

ently declined all offers of care and nursing.

"I believe I am growing nervous," she said, with an effort at cheerfulness. "I used to be a good sleeper."

In addition to her anxiety concerning her spiritual interests, Maud was harassed with fears in regard to her father. She had written to him several times since leaving home, but had received no reply.

When the long-looked-for letter arrived, it contained a request that she would make her visit much shorter than had been her intention. "I need you," wrote her father; "and, although I know it cannot be pleasant for you here, I must ask you to come home within two weeks. The children are well, and impatient to see Sister Maud."

Not a word from her stepmother. Not the slightest message. It was hard to go from the love and light which surrounded her, to a home, where its mistress would not even bid her welcome.

The contents of the letter were discussed at the dinner-table. Crin suggested that a protest be sent to Mr. Lamson.

"How would that do?" asked her father. "If it would have the desired effect, I should be happy to draft it."

"It would do no good," replied Maud. "I know that I ought to go. Father would never have written as he did, without good reason."

"Then we must submit," was the reply. "In the mean time, we will solace ourselves with hopes for the summer."

Mr. Burton proposed that his family should spend the next summer by the seaside, and Maud was included in his plans. To see old Aleck, and visit his hut, was one of her strongest desires; but the letter seemed to have entirely destroyed her enthusiasm.

Instead of the usual expressions of pleasure with which mention of it was received, she answered, "We can none of us tell what the summer will bring. I may be obliged to consult duty rather than pleasure."

"If so, God will give you needed strength," replied Mrs. Lynde. "But we shall hope to have you with us."

"You can give us a few more days now,"

said Crin. "Your father does not ask you to come directly."

"He does not ask it; but I know he wishes to see me. I wonder if Aunt Hattie can give me an hour of her time," said Maud, after the lamps were lighted, and she was sitting alone with her friend.

"Of course she will," was the reply.

"She seems to me more like a mother than any one I know; and I need some advice."

"You will go to the right one," responded Crin. "She seems to know just what everybody ought to hear."

Mrs. Lynde was glad that their young guest sought this interview. Having watched her narrowly, she knew that the time had come when some decision should be made. "You can come to my room at any time," she said.

"Then I shall come soon," was Maud's reply.

Mrs. Lynde did not wait long for her appearance; and the door had hardly closed, when she exclaimed, "I wish to be a Chris-

tian. I cannot go home until I am. Oh, tell me how!"

This last sentence was spoken with her head resting in the lap of her friend, while the fast-falling tears attested to her sincerity.

"Is it so difficult?" was asked.

"It seems impossible for me," answered the young girl. "I have waited so long, I am afraid it is too late. What shall I do?" she cried in agony.

"Ask God to forgive your sins."

"I have tried; but I get no relief. It is all dark before me."

The head was still bowed, while, in gentle tones, some of Christ's own precious promises were repeated. "They are all for you," added the speaker. "The Saviour of the world died to save you."

"But I rejected him. I knew my duty long ago, and refused to do it."

"Are you willing to be a Christian?" at length asked Mrs. Lynde.

Startled by this question, Maud sprang to

her feet. "How could you ask me such a question!" she exclaimed. "You know that I *wish* to be."

"What is it to pray?"

"It is to ask God for what we really desire," answered Maud, after some hesitation.

"Do you believe I would grant you a favor?"

"I am sure that you would, Aunt Hattie."

"And yet you believe God refuses to answer your prayers for forgiveness, even though he sent His Son into the world to die for you. You doubt his promises."

"No, no: I cannot doubt him."

"Then trust him. Go to him with unre-served confidence. He loves you infinitely more than I can, and is waiting to do you good."

For some reason all this seemed lost upon the inquirer. The darkness was yet un-broken.

"Will you make me one promise?" at last asked Mrs. Lynde.

"I will promise anything you desire," replied Maud.

"Will you do whatever conscience tells you is your duty?"

This was more than the young girl had expected; but, for her word's sake, she would not falter.

"I will," she answered firmly.

"And will you seek to know what your duty is?"

Another pledge was given. Whatever these promises might involve, Maud Lamson was not one to shrink from their performance. Reading the Bible, and prayer, she recognized as the duty of every one; and, before retiring to rest, these were done. With the watchword still in her mind, she fell asleep, to dream of toilsome marches, and upward struggles, all tending to the city, whose builder and maker is God.

The next day was opened as the preceding one had closed; and, in the desire to know her duty, she half forgot the burden of sin which had rested upon her. On considera-

tion, she decided that it was her duty to go home, and commenced preparation for doing so.

"Do you think this haste is necessary?" asked Mr. Burton, after expressing his surprise.

"I think it is best that I should go. I have promised Aunt Hattie to do whatever my conscience tells me is duty," she replied, with some effort.

"Then go, and God be with you. We shall remember you in our prayers."

"I shall need them."

"And you will pray for yourself."

"Yes, sir. I shall do that, not only as a duty, but as a privilege."

"Then you cannot go far wrong; and we shall count you among the followers of Christ."


Was she one of his disciples?

When the rough ore, mined from its mountain-bed, is thrown into the blazing furnace, then appears the pure gold, or the whole melts into an unshapely mass.

Thus is it when human hearts are tried in the furnace of affliction. They come forth refined like gold, or are consumed to ashes.

CHAPTER V.

"Let duty be the watchword;
Looking to God, for grace
To do, or bear, wherever
His love assigns our place.

OME! No word so full of meaning as this. Where the heart's treasures are gathered and enshrined, there is home. Who has not such a resting-place on earth, is doomed to weariness and sorrow. But to cross the threshold of what *should* be home, yet *is* not, is like treading upon one's fondest hopes.

No one waited for Maud Lamson as she left the cars. A servant opened to her the door of her father's house, and she went to her own room, without receiving a word of welcome.

It was a sad returning for a young girl, whose warm, affectionate nature craved the tenderest love and sympathy. Her first impulse was to throw herself into a chair, and indulge in a fit of weeping. But she remembered her promise, and, crushing back the tears, commenced the task of unpacking and arranging her wardrobe. Not quite daring to trust herself with her young brothers until she had conquered her emotion, she lingered over every article.

At length she reflected that, to the Christian, strength is given in answer to prayer; and, in her need, she uttered a cry for help. She was answered.

Smoothing her disordered hair, and making some change in her dress, she went to the nursery. She had no reason to complain of a cold welcome there. Dimpled arms were twined about her neck, the pure lips of childhood were pressed to her own, and sweet voices murmured lovingly.

This was something for which to be grateful. Here were two, bound to her by the ties

of blood, over whose lives she might have a powerful influence. Who would train them for God and heaven, if she did not? With a worldly father, a vain mother, who loved them far less than she loved the gilded trappings of wealth, some one must take this holy trust, or they would be lost.

"Never go away and leave Charley again," said the youngest, enforcing his words with a shower of kisses.

"And what says Guy?" asked the sister.

"Oh, I shall go next time, when you do," was the answer.

"Mamma says I'm troublesome when I want to love her; but you don't care," exclaimed Charley, a moment after, when he had exhausted himself in his efforts to express the love which filled his little heart. "She says I musn't tumble her dress; but you don't say so;" and again his arms found their way around her neck, to the great detriment of a well-ironed collar.

Guy was inclined to dispute his brother's monopoly of Maud; and she compromised the

matter by seating one upon either side of her. They were not interrupted; for the nurse, tired of her long confinement, left the room as the sister entered.

At length, hearing voices in the hall, one of which Maud recognized as that of her step-mother, she rang the bell, and, when the servant entered, left the children in her care.

Mrs. Lamson extended her hand coldly, as they met.

"I did not know you were expected so soon. I suppose your father knew about it; but I have seen very little of him for the last few days."

"I suppose father is very much engaged in his business," answered Maud, uncertain what reply would be proper for her to make.

"That is his excuse, whenever I ask him to go out with me; and I have heard enough of it," was the reply. "Did you leave your friends well?" she asked, after a pause.

"Very well," replied Maud.

"I thought you intended to stay much longer."

"I did; but father wrote that he wished me to come home."

"He did not tell me," said Mrs. Lamson; and the curve of her thin lips expressed more than her words.

Maud would need wisdom and fortitude to bear her lot. It was well that she had learned where to go for consolation.

Her father was not at home when the hour for dinner came. Only she and her step-mother sat down to the table, and she rejoiced when the ceremony was over.

She again visited her brothers; and, after seeing them quietly sleeping, went to the library to wait for the coming of her father. The fire had died out, and the lamps were unlighted. She was chilled by the gloom, and shivered as she closed the door behind her. A little while she sat in the darkness; then rang for fire and lights.

The servant made some attempts at apology for his neglect of the room, by saying that Mr. Lamson was not often at home until late in the evening.

When Maud was left alone, she tried to read ; but she could not fix her attention upon the page before her. She heard a carriage drive to the door, and knew that her step-mother entered it.

Two hours passed before her father came in. A single glance at his haggard face revealed to her the fact that some terrible calamity threatened him.

"I am glad to see you ; but I hardly expected you so soon," he said, after the first greeting.

"You said you needed me, father ; and I thought it was my duty to come."

"Then it was duty which brought you home."

Maud looked at her father for a moment, and then answered frankly, "I was very happy at Mr. Burton's, and wished to remain."

"I am sorry I wrote for you."

"No, father : I would not have you sorry. I think you must need me, for you look sick."

"My head aches a little. That is all," he

answered, with an effort. "Where is your mother ?"

"I heard her go out, some time since."

"And the children. Have you seen them?"

"Oh, yes : I made them a long visit ; and they seemed quite delighted with Sister Maud."

"I am glad they have such a sister."

"Have you been to dinner, father?" suddenly asked his daughter.

"Yes : I took my dinner down town. I often do so."

"I can't let you do so, now I have come. I should miss you too much."

For several minutes after this, Mr. Lamson sat looking straight into the fire. Maud remained quiet as long as possible, then knelt by his side, looking up into his face.

"I am poor company," he said, striving to speak cheerfully. "I am sorry I sent for you."

"And I am glad. But, father, you must tell me what is the matter."

"I have been a little worried in my busi-

ness for the last few months," he answered. "There have been some heavy failures, and I have lost by them."

"Please tell me all about it," said Maud, taking his hand and holding it fast in her own, as though she could thus command his confidence.

"No, my child," he said, passing his disengaged hand caressingly over the upturned face. "You are too young to understand business; and, if you were like Mrs. Lamson, you would hate the very sound of it."

"Mrs. Lamson!" Not "my wife," nor "your mother." Only "Mrs. Lamson." Maud drew a quick breath as she heard it.

"I shall hate nothing which concerns you, father," she answered at length. "I promised Mrs. Lynde that I would do my duty; and I have come home to do it."

"Duty, child," he murmured. "It is not time for you to talk of duty. But you were always a good girl," he added. "I should be glad to make you happy."

"Let me be of use to you, father, and I shall be happy."

"Well, child, I have no doubt that you will be of use to me; and now let me hear of your visit. I hear that Burton has been greatly prospered since he left here. Has he a housekeeper, or does Crin officiate in that capacity?"

"His sister, Mrs. Lynde, has charge of the house; and she is one of the loveliest women I have ever seen. She is like a mother to Crin."

Mr. Lamson heard this last remark, and felt the contrast between his daughter's position and that of her friend. Again he said, "I am sorry I sent for you."

"I should like to see Burton," he replied, soon after. "He is a clear-headed fellow, wholly engrossed with his business, and never thinking of anything beyond this world. I used, sometimes, to try and talk with him upon questions which interested me very much; but he was perfectly indifferent to them. He seldom expressed an opinion."

"What questions were they?" asked Maud.

"The questions which force themselves upon every thinking mind. The relation of mind to matter, and the influence which our present lives will have upon the great hereafter. Burton cares no more for them than if he had been born without a soul."

"He cares now, father."

"I am glad to hear it; and if I could see him, I should like to talk with him."

Mr. Lamson seemed to forget all perplexities, as he descanted upon his favorite theories. Human nature was dignified, nay, almost deified, in his estimation. Reason was exalted above Him who had bestowed it, and man sat in judgment upon the revelations of the Almighty.

Maud listened in silence, until she was constrained to cry out, —

"What is truth?"

"It is worth searching for," answered her father. "When I am at leisure, we will read some new books, together. My time has been

so much occupied lately, that I have read but very little."

She longed to tell him of the Book she was studying, and the truth she had accepted. But she was yet too weak to meet the storm of opposition and assertion such a disclosure would be sure to provoke. Disappointed that she had not received her father's confidence, she was considering how she could more effectually appeal to him, when the sound of carriage-wheels was heard.

They stopped in front of the house. Her father looked at his watch. "Nearly one o'clock," he said, with a frown.

A moment after, the street-door was opened and closed. A short pause in the hall, and the library door swung on its hinges. The woman who entered was evidently surprised at finding any one with her husband, and she turned abruptly to leave the room.

Maud rose from her seat. "Good-night, father," she said.

"Going so soon," he answered. "But it is

getting late; and I know you must need rest."

Yet he did not relinquish her hand. Her stepmother looked at them wondering, walked to the fire, and threw off her cloak. There was a gleaming of white neck and arms, and a flashing of jewels.

"Good-night, child;" said Mr. Lamson to his daughter, as he dropped her hand.

The next morning, Maud sat down, with her father, to an early breakfast. She poured his coffee; but he allowed it to cool, while he made a pretence of eating.

"I may not be back until late, this evening," he said, as he pushed back his chair. "How shall you amuse yourself to-day?"

"I am not thinking of amusement."

"What then?"

"Of you," she answered, looking at the face, still more haggard than it had been the preceding evening. "I know there is something terrible threatening you," she added, with sudden boldness. "If I could not help you, I might give you sympathy."

"It would do no good to make you unhappy," he said.

It was useless to expostulate. There was no relaxing of the lines about the stern mouth.

"I shall sit up for you, father. So please come home as soon as you can," rejoined Maud.

"Perhaps so," was the cold reply, as she was left alone.

The house seemed desolate. Maud had risen with a prayer upon her lips, else would she have yielded to the sorrow which oppressed her.

The library offered a retreat. A cheerful fire glowed in the grate, and upon the table were some new and attractive books. They must have been placed there by her father, showing that he was mindful of her happiness.

Involuntarily, she fell upon her knees, and buried her face in the cushions of the couch. She wept; and, as she wept, she prayed.

When Mr. Lamson had walked some dis-

tance from the house, he found that he had forgotten a paper, of which he wished to make use during the day. He turned and retraced his steps, entering the library so noiselessly that Maud was unconscious of his presence.

At first, no sound fell upon his ear but that of sobbing. Directly, however, as he listened, he heard the words, "Save my father!" They were repeated again and again, as though this petition expressed the one strong desire of her who uttered it.

The father stood breathless. Who had taught her to pray? Never had he, either by precept or example. Indeed, he acknowledged no need of prayer. Force of will, strength of purpose, and innate energy, — these were the forces to be summoned in the great crises of life.

Ah, well; it is easy thus to talk, when fortune smiles, and no cloud obscures our sky; but let the dark days come, which try men's souls; let ruin threaten, and the very earth upon which we tread, seem crumbling beneath

our feet, and we shall learn how weak we are.

Mr. Lamson had been striving, for months, to stay the tide of adverse circumstances; yet will, purpose, and energy, all, had failed him. He was desperate on this morning, a coward, too; for the tempter whispered that after life's fitful fever, there might be a dreamless sleep, and better this than what the world calls disgrace. One more effort, and then,—

He was not certain what would follow.

A slight movement startled Maud, and she raised her head. "Child, why are you here, in this posture?" asked the father.

"To pray for you," was the answer. "You would not let me help you, and I could only ask God to save you."

For his life, he *could* not, *dared* not tell her that this was idle and useless. He gazed into her face until a dewy softness filled his eyes. "Strange you should have done this," he, at length, found voice to say.

"Why so, father? I believe that God hears

and answers prayer. If you would only believe this, and pray for yourself, you would be happy."

She was astonished that she had said this, fearing it would rouse her father's anger; but the effect was entirely different.

"Have you patience to hear about my business?" he asked, after some moments of silence, during which Maud had risen from her knees.

"I shall be very glad to listen," she replied.

He commenced his narration, by saying that he had always considered want of success in life as the result of mismanagement.

"It is hard, now, to acknowledge that I have made a mistake, and failed to give my business the attention it demanded. Two years ago I was a prosperous man. To-day I am on the verge of ruin. I have heavy bills, which, if not paid within a week, will be protested; and I would rather die than bear such disgrace. I suffered by the failure of others,

and, when things begin to go wrong, it is hard to set them right."

It required some moments' thought for Maud to comprehend the full meaning of what was said to her. "Then you will fail, too," she said, looking at her father sorrowfully.

"I see no alternative, unless I could command the use of fifty thousand dollars for the next year. With that, I think I could weather the storm, and, in time, retrieve my fortune; but I will ask no one to run the risk of loaning to me, in the present state of my affairs. In a week, Maud, you may be the daughter of a poor man."

"I can bear that, father; don't think of me for a moment. Does mother know?" she asked.

"I have told her, but she refuses to believe it. I wish she was more like you." He did not say that her recriminations and complaints had goaded him well nigh unto madness, and made him feel that the future in another world was little more to be dreaded than in this.

Father and daughter conversed, for some time longer, until he felt obliged to go to his business. The desired paper was found, and as he opened the door, he looked back, to say, "I really believe you have done me good."

This was all she desired. If she could only do good, she could be happy, despite all reverses.

Her stepmother came down soon after her father left, and seemed, for once, really desirous of talking with her.

"I have had a wretched night," she said. "I do wish your father would stop pleading poverty; I am tired of it. I suppose you have heard the old story of heavy bills and no money."

"Father told me that his business was embarrassed, and he saw no way to meet his liabilities," answered Maud.

"That is what he told me, last evening, when I proposed giving a small party. He never goes out with me lately, and the least he could do would be to help entertain my friends at home."

Maud was astonished at the heartlessness of these remarks, and ventured to suggest that her father might not feel able to afford the expense.

"So you believe what he says," replied Mrs. Lamson, with a sneer. "He told me, last night, that fifty thousand dollars would help him through, and he has that in his hands, if he would only use it."

"How can that be?" asked the daughter.

"He is guardian for the Frost children, and might use the property until he gets through with his trouble, if there is any trouble, which I very much doubt. I need some new dresses, and I shall run a bill at Watson's if there is no other way; I have waited long enough."

It was plainly to be seen that Mr. Lamson's greatest trouble was at home. Maud trembled as she thought how much would devolve upon her. Had she not been mindful of her duty, she would have written to Uncle Rufus and Aunt Mary, asking a home with them.

A new fear took possession of her heart. There was money within her father's reach, —

not his own, but in his keeping. Might not his great necessity overcome all considerations of right and justice? She tried to banish the thought; but it went not at her bidding.

After whiling away some hours with her brothers, she tried to solace herself with music. This did not satisfy her. The notes seemed strange and discordant.

"I don't suppose we shall see your father, at present," said Mrs. Lamson, as they met in the dining-room. "He is getting very irregular in his habits; but it is of no use for me to say anything."

They were hardly seated, however, when the husband and father came in. Maud greeted him affectionately. "I am very glad to see you," she said.

"It must be all on *your* account," said her stepmother. "I might have dined alone."

"I thought I might as well come home. My business could be left," responded Mr. Lamson.

"I did hope not to hear anything more about business," exclaimed his wife. "It

seems to me you might find something more agreeable to talk about. Perhaps, however, Maud will like it."

There was no reply; and, after a while, this woman, who never allowed a project of hers to fall to the ground for want of perseverance, asked her husband what evening he would be at home to her friends.

"It is shabby enough that I have not given a party before, this winter," she said. "I can put it off no longer; and now Maud is here, she certainly ought to see something of society."

This was politic; for Mr. Lamson desired his daughter to have every possible advantage; but, situated as he was, he could not yield the point.

"I should be glad to gratify you, if it was in my power," he said. "Now, it is impossible. In less than a week, my notes will be protested. There is no help for it," he added.

His wife heard him with an incredulous smile upon her lips.

"I am telling you the truth."

This was said in so serious a tone that the mocking smile faded away, and the fair face grew pale with apprehension.

"You told me fifty thousand dollars would save you; and you could take it, if you chose."

"I told you it *might* save me," replied Mr. Lamson. "If I could command it, I should try hard to brave this trouble; but the trust of my old friend is sacred."

"You could repay it," suggested the wife. "There would be no wrong in that case."

Maud staid to hear no more. She would not presume to interfere; and it required too great an effort to keep silence. Again she had recourse to prayer; this time, in her own room, where she spent the evening. It was a severe self-denial not to go to her father; but it seemed best.

The next morning, he was not at the table; and, after waiting for some time, she went to the library. The key was turned in the door.

She knocked lightly, but there was no reply. Louder still: no answer.

"Father!" she called. "Please to let me in; I must see you."

This was repeated, when a shuffling step was heard. "Come in," said Mr. Lamson, as he opened the door. "I thought it was my wife who knocked. Come in, child, and sit down."

"You are sick," exclaimed Maud. "You look frightfully."

"I know I must, if my looks correspond with my feelings," was the reply. "I have not slept at all, during the night. I know not what to do," he added, pressing his hands upon his temples. "I should be glad to die."

At this, the daughter found voice to speak. "Then, what would become of us, dear father?" she asked.

"I have thought of that," he answered. "You and Guy and Charley — I love you all. But this is terrible; and I can do nothing more to save myself."

"Then give up now, to-day," she pleaded. "Let the worst be over; and then we shall see what can be done."

"I wish it was over. But your mother will blame me. She thinks I might use the money which belongs to the Frost children."

"Don't use it, father. That would be wrong; and we can bear anything but guilt. It is nothing to be poor, if we can only keep our self-respect."

"Ah, child: you little know what it is to be poor."

"I know I can bear it," answered Maud, bravely. "Do what is right, father; and let me help you."

He stood, for a moment, irresolute. "I *will*; and God help me," he said, at length.

"God *will* help you, if you ask him," responded the young girl, with tears of thankfulness. "Now, come and have breakfast."

"It would be impossible for me to eat," he answered; but he was persuaded to drink a cup of coffee. Then he went out to meet his

creditors, firmly resolved that before night this terrible suspense should be over.

The day crept on slowly. Mrs. Lamson remained in her room, and Maud rejoiced that a storm of sleet and snow prevented any one's calling. Her brothers thought she had been crying when she went to them, and they wiped away the traces of tears with their tiny handkerchiefs.

"I wish nurse would go off all the time," said Charley. "I don't love her much."

"How would you like me for a nurse?" asked his sister.

"We should love you, and we never'd be naughty any more," answered George. "Do, please, be nurse, Sister Maud."

Mrs. Lamson had been unguarded in her expressions of discontent, and the servants knew that there was trouble in the house. They discussed it in kitchen and dining-room, and some proposed to give warning.

"I'll do it this very day," said the nurse. "There's no telling whether we'll get our pay, and I can have another situation now."

This decision was carried into effect, by going to Mrs. Lamson's room, and informing her that she should leave when the month was up.

"You can go to-morrow," replied the offended mistress. "Mr. Lamson will pay you what is due."

Shortly after, the servant thus summarily dismissed, bounced into the nursery: "You can take care of the children altogether, Miss. I'm going as soon as I have my wages."

"How much is it?" asked Maud.

A small sum was named.

"If you will stop with the children, I will pay you myself," she said.

Thus she saved her father one annoyance, and one servant was dismissed. She had not thought to take upon herself, so soon, the duties of nurse; but the delight of the children quite reconciled her.

A good-natured Irish girl, employed in the kitchen, volunteered to add to her other labors that of keeping the nursery in order. This

relieved Maud of a disagreeable task, and she began to consider the possibility of maintaining a small establishment, with only Bridget for a servant. Of her stepmother she expected nothing. Whatever there might be of hardship and self-denial, must come upon herself, and she resolved to bear it bravely. "God will help me," she murmured.

All the day through, Mr. Lamson seemed to hear the words of encouragement his daughter had spoken, and, when tempted to falter in his purpose, he thought of her upon her knees. It was strange that this should influence him in the way that it did. Never, before, had he acknowledged the overruling providence of God, and he did so now unconsciously.

No one doubted his integrity, and, when he called upon his creditors, he was treated with the consideration due to an honorable though unfortunate — man.

"Suppose we give you an extension of time: would that benefit you?" asked one to whom he was most deeply indebted.

"It *might* ; but I am not certain. I would do the best I could."

"No one doubts that," was the hearty reply. "Between this and to-morrow morning, I will see what can be done for you. In the mean time, keep up good courage, and look on the bright side."

"I wish I could see a bright side," answered Mr. Lamson.

"You must look with the eye of faith," said his Christian companion.

This was the man he had most dreaded to meet ; but the interview inspired him with hope, and he returned to his counting-room, to make new calculations.

Mr. Harding (such was his friend's name) called late in the afternoon, to say that he should be able to report favorably in the morning. "I thought I would relieve you, and give you a chance to sleep, to-night," he said. "You look to me as though you needed it."

Maud Lamson's counsel and prayers had saved her father ; and he went home pre-

pared to acknowledge it. She saw, at once, that there had been some change in his prospects ; and, in a few words, she was made to comprehend the whole matter.

"Mr. Harding will deserve our sincerest gratitude," she said. "We must curtail our expenses, and live as cheaply as possible, until you are out of difficulty."

"That is what ought to be done," responded her father.

"It is what *must* be done," she said, firmly. "We must dismiss the servants, and give up luxuries."

"Then who will do the work ?" asked Mr. Lamson.

"I will do it with Bridget's help. She is strong and willing, and has an admirable faculty for getting on with the children. She is staying with them now, while we have dinner."

"Your mother ?"

"She has been in her room all day ; and does not wish to be disturbed."

Mr. Lamson followed his daughter to the

dining-room, and ate more than at any time for several days. When through, he said, "I am going to lie down in the library, and you can come there at any time."

Bridget had amused the children so well in their sister's absence, that they were in the best possible humor. "Sure, it's a pleasure to stay with the darlings," said the good girl, in answer to the thanks she received. "I'd do anything for ye," she added. "It's only kind words I want."

"Do you think you and I could manage the house?" asked Maud.

"Manage the house, is it?" was the true Irish answer. "Sure, I'd do my best, if ye'd tell me what. But cook says you'll soon be sinding us all away."

"She knows nothing about it," said Maud.

Guy and Charley, for the first time, that night folded their little hands, and repeated, after their sister, a simple form of prayer. When they slept, she went to look after her father, and found that he, too, was sleeping quietly.

Then she had leisure to write to Crin Burton. Of the trouble in her home she said but little, only indorsing her father's assurance that she was needed.

"Prayer has been my refuge," she wrote. "Without it, I should have fainted under the burden which rests upon me. Thank you, a thousand times, for your love and interest. Write to me soon, and remember me in your prayers."

Maud's last duty, that night, was to enter the library, replenish the fire, and place an additional blanket within the reach of the sleeper. Bridget occupied a bed beside the children; so she felt no care of them. It was past midnight when she went to her room, fatigued, yet hopeful.

The next day, Mrs. Lamson, still kept herself secluded, refusing to see her stepdaughter, although she sent a message, asking it as a particular favor.

Her father was not at home until late in the evening; but he brought good news. "Mr. Harding has been with me to-day," he said.

"With his kindness and advice, I believe I shall weather the storm. But I owe it all to you, child. Your advice to make a plain statement of the case, at once, was just what I needed. I must go to your mother."

"Dinner first," responded the happy girl. This over, she saw no more of him, until the next morning. There was a stormy interview between the husband and wife. Reproaches and tears were the arguments used against proposed retrenchment.

These were met by the claims of honor, justice, and prudence. Necessity compelled a submission which neither affection nor reason would give. "It *must* be, it *shall* be," said Mr. Lamson; and from this time there was no appeal.

"We must commence, at once."

When he met his daughter at breakfast, they discussed the matter; and, before noon, every servant, except Bridget, had notice to leave at the end of the month, sooner if they desired. They received the wages that were due, so there could be no complaint; and

Maud undertook a general oversight of the housekeeping.

Then Bridget showed herself invaluable, going from kitchen to nursery, and from the nursery to Mrs. Lamson's room. Maud had an opportunity for exercising the skill in cooking she had acquired with Mrs. Bascom, and, for a few days, things moved on smoothly.

But she had overrated her strength. The constant demand exhausted her, and poor Bridget looked on sorrowfully, as her young mistress grew weary and dispirited.

"If we had some one to mind the babies, we'd do well enough," she said, one day, when the work seemed more than usual. "I've a cousin, Nora Leary, would come to ye. She's just out of a place, and a clane, tidy body."

Maud was quite glad to avail herself of more assistance. Nora Leary came, and the additional feet and hands found ample employment.

While these changes were being made in the domestic arrangements, Mrs. Lamson rendered not the slightest assistance in the work

of the household. Occasionally she appeared at dinner, but only to find fault with the cooking and serving. She complained of the most dainty dishes, and protested that her health would soon break down under the hardships to which she was subjected. She neglected her children more than usual, and, in short, made herself as disagreeable and useless as it is possible for a vain, weak woman to be.

Her husband seemed indifferent to all complainings; but Maud felt them keenly. Work did not trouble her. She was naturally industrious, and soon learned to accomplish it without extreme fatigue. She managed to keep up a creditable appearance, and was "at home" to all callers.

It could not but be known that the establishment was much reduced, yet few guessed how near its owner had been to ruin. Even now, all danger was not over. Business required untiring application, and a close scrutiny of every detail.

Thus passed the winter, a holiday to the children, who enjoyed more of liberty than

ever before; but a winter of trial to the older members of the family.

When Maud had recovered from the first shock, caused by the intelligence of her father's situation, her thoughts reverted to herself. "Am I a Christian?" was a question often asked. Although not prepared to answer this in the affirmative, she was yet conscious of a peaceful trust in the love and care of our dear Heavenly Father. Her sins appeared no less; but the form of the dying Saviour sometimes hid them from her view, and his blood-red hand covered the page on which was the record of her guilt.

With no friend near, who sympathized with her religious feelings, correspondence offered the only means for seeking and receiving instruction. To Mrs. Lynde she wrote frankly, and was cheered by the return of wise and affectionate counsel.

"Keep near to God in prayer, and trust the all-sufficient atonement of Christ," was the advice of one who had passed through the deep waters of affliction. "Look away from

yourself; cherish no morbid feelings, and do your duty at whatever cost."

Maud pondered these words until she felt their full meaning. Not to think, but to do; not to regret, but retrieve,—should be the work of all who strive after holiness.

Crin, Frank Lynde, and even Mr. Burton himself, although not fully understanding her new position, sent her long letters of sympathy. There were many to think of her, lovingly and prayerfully. She was fondly remembered in the home of Uncle Rufus Lane, and Esther Simpson still murmured her name with a blessing. Life was worth the living, under these circumstances, even though it should involve much of toil and weariness.

Mr. Lamson had usually attended church, with his wife, who improved the opportunity for displaying a rich and elaborate toilet. But, after the embarrassment in his business, he gave up church-going, and spent the sabbath in sleeping and reading. His wife pleaded ill health as an excuse for following his example, although the truth was that she remained at

home, for want of means to make the display she desired.

Maud had no sympathy with the doctrines to which her parents had listened; but, rather than remain at home, she sometimes occupied the family pew. This state of things, however, could not last long when her heart and conscience prompted to a strict, religious observance of the Sabbath. To hear the truth faithfully preached would be of infinite benefit to her, and she decided that it was no longer her duty to deny herself the privilege.

Addressing her father, one evening, when he seemed inclined to conversation, she told him that she desired to attend some church where the preaching would be in sympathy with her own views of revealed religion.

"What do you mean, child?" he asked, in astonishment.

"I mean that I wish to be a Christian, and need to hear the truth," answered Maud.

"A Christian!" repeated her father.

"Yes, sir,—a follower of Christ," she replied, unheeding the angry flush with which

the announcement was received. "I know you think differently from me," she hastened to add; "but where my relations to God are concerned, I must act for myself."

Mr. Lamson made no reply. Perhaps he had never before understood the character of his daughter. He looked upon her as a child, to be cared for; but it had never occurred to him that the time might come when she would think and act independently,—in this matter, too, most of all, upon which he had always spoken so decidedly. A severe reply was upon his lips, when he remembered how much she had done for him during the past few weeks.

"We will talk the matter over," he said, at length, with forced calmness. "I am sure I can convince you that there is no need for changing your place of worship. I should be very sorry to have a child of mine deserve the name of fanatic."

"I have said nothing about being a fanatic, father. I told you that I wish to be a Christian."

"Well, I have no objection to that. Every good man and woman is a Christian."

"What do you mean by good?" asked Maud.

"A good man is one who does his duty," answered the father, after some hesitation.

"To God and man," added the young girl, who felt compelled to defend her position.

"Yes," was the reluctant reply. "I suppose we cannot separate the two. But you were speaking of Christ. Do you propose to worship two Gods?"

Maud had so often heard her father descant upon the idea embodied in this question, that she was not surprised when it was propounded. Moreover, she had expected sneers and opposition. But upon one thing she was resolved,—to give no opportunity for a prolonged argument. Not that she feared the result, so far as her own convictions were concerned; but it would be a useless waste of words, and she had no inclination to listen to shallow sophistries.

"I worship the triune God," she answered firmly, but respectfully.

"Where did you learn such folly? It is unaccountable to me," exclaimed Mr. Lamson.

"I learned it from the Bible," was Maud's answer; "and father," she hastened to add, "it will be best for us to talk no more about it. I have told you that I wish to change my place of worship. Duty to myself demands it."

"Duty! I have heard nothing but duty, since you came home," he replied, angrily.

"And I have done little but what I thought my duty. It has been a powerful motive with me."

"Well, child, I know you have been a good girl; but I can never give my consent to your following the bigoted teachers of a religion which will soon be obsolete."

The father seemed to consider this a conclusion to the whole matter; but Maud had a different opinion. Her manner betrayed it. The expression of her face, at first grieved and sorrowful, gradually changed.

Mr. Lamson took a book from one of the shelves which lined the room. "I wish you to read this," he said to his daughter. "You will find it instructive and convincing. I am sorry to deny you any gratification; but I do it for your own good," he added, as he laid the book upon the table beside her.

"I have no time for reading such books," she answered. "My duties are so numerous they leave me but little leisure, and that must be differently occupied."

Her father was an indulgent parent; but this firmness irritated him to positive unkindness. Maud listened to what he had to say, then rose and left the room.

Although hoping for a favorable result to this interview, she was hardly disappointed. She regretted the opposition of one to whom she owed a filial respect; but it did not change her purpose.

The next morning she commenced her household labors even earlier than usual, taking pains to prepare her father's favorite breakfast. This thoughtfulness had always be-

fore been gratefully acknowledged; but at this time she received not even a pleasant word. Her father evidently intended that she should feel his displeasure, and he was successful in the effort.

After this, everything seemed to go wrong through the day. The children were more troublesome than usual. The inefficient mistress of the house was in one of her worst humors; and, to increase Maud's discomfort, there was a succession of callers to be smilingly entertained. Not a moment had she at her own control, despite the kindness of Bridget and Nora, who were ever ready to exhaust themselves in her service. When dinner was ready, she could hardly command herself sufficiently to sit at the table.

Mr. Lamson, too, found the day unpleasant. The pale, sad face of his daughter haunted him; and, in his intervals of leisure he reflected upon what she had said the previous evening. He thought, too, of the many cares she had taken upon herself so bravely; of the actual

labor she performed, and the sacrifices she made.

All this tended to soften his feelings, and but for the presence of his wife, he would have met Maud kindly, perhaps affectionately. As it was, they only exchanged the ordinary greetings. There was no going to the library for a confidential talk in regard to business. On the contrary, the young housekeeper sat alone, with Bible in hand, looking to its promises for her only encouragement.

"Sure, miss, the baby seems to be hot and faverish. Would ye be afther coming to see him?"

Maud was wakened at midnight by these words, and, throwing a wrapper hastily about her, was soon by the bedside of her brother. "Has he been long awake?" she asked.

"He's been mostly sleeping; but restless like," answered Bridget. "I knew there was something wrong, yesterday, but ye had enough to fret ye."

"I wish you had told me," said the sister, as she laid her hand upon the flushed face,

and listened to the labored breathing. "I am afraid he is seriously ill, and I know but little of sickness. Father must be called."

The child moaned and opened his eyes. "Take Charley — Charley sick," he murmured.

Maud forgot all weariness in her anxiety. She folded him to her heart, seeking to soothe him with caresses and loving words; but he seemed unconscious of them.

"Father must be called," she said again to Bridget. "Rap at his door, and say that Charley is sick."

Mr. Lamson was a light sleeper. The first tap roused him, and the message was no sooner delivered than he was fully awake. "I hope Charley is not *much* sick," he said, as he entered the nursery and relieved Maud of her burden.

"I think a physician is needed," he added, soon after. "I am not a very good nurse, and your mother knows nothing about the care of children. I will go for Dr. Hermon."

It seemed long to those who waited, while

in reality it was but a short time before the doctor made his appearance.

"You have another boy," he said to Mr. Lamson.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Take him away to another part of the house. The scarlet fever is prevailing among children, and one cannot be too careful."

Guy was sleeping, and Bridget carried him to his sister's room.

"Who is to take care of this child?" asked the doctor, after a careful examination of the little patient.

"I," answered Maud, quickly.

"You look hardly strong enough for that," was the reply. "Nursing is hard work."

"I know it must be; but I can do it. Only tell me how."

Dr. Hermon administered some remedies himself, and then gave particular directions for further treatment. "More depends upon nursing than anything else," he said. "You must watch him closely, and, if there is any change, send for me."

By the time he left, Mrs. Lamson became aware that there was some unusual excitement in the house. Upon learning the cause, she wrung her hands and uttered passionate exclamations of grief, but gave no assistance in the care of her child. She even reproached her stepdaughter, attributing this illness to neglect.

"Sure, mistress, he's not been neglected," exclaimed Bridget. "I'd like ye to see the steps Miss Maud takes for ye all, and niver a kind word in return. There's not many the likes of her. Half sick is it, too, that she is, herself."

"Bridget has told the truth," said Mr. Lamson, to his wife. "Maud has taken the whole care of the family; and this is no time to find fault with her. In the morning, I will find a nurse for Charley," he added, turning to his daughter.

"I am not troubled about that," was her reply. "But the doctor said he must be kept quiet; and I can do all that is necessary to-night."

"Sure, I'll not lave ye," said Bridget. "If it's the faver, may the Houly Virgin kape us; but I'll stay by ye as long as I've strength."

Mrs. Lamson made some further demonstrations, and then followed her husband from the room. He returned soon, and dismissed Bridget, proposing, himself, to share the vigils of his daughter.

"You can lie down here on the couch," he said. "If anything is needed, I will call you. It would be very unwise to allow you to get sick, when you are our only dependence."

Maud lay down, glad to rest, while her father cared for Charley.

"You are not sleeping, child," he said, after a time.

"No, father; I can't keep my eyes shut long enough," she answered.

"I am sorry you are so worn out. We must make some new arrangement. Anything is better than to have you lose your health."

"I don't mind the work, but, —"

Here Maud paused, unable to control her voice.

"But what, child? I hope you haven't made yourself unhappy about our difference of opinion. I always felt strongly upon those subjects; and you took me quite by surprise."

His daughter was looking at him earnestly, as he said this; and her face expressed the disappointment she felt at his making no further concessions.

"I don't wish to be unreasonable," he continued; "but I do hope you will change your mind."

"I am certain that I never shall; and I must try and do what seems to me my duty."

Mr. Lamson looked at her, then at his baby boy. Affection triumphed over prejudice. "I will oppose you no longer," he said; "but never mention the subject to me again."

There was no opportunity for reply to this, as the speaker commenced humming a soothing lullaby; but Maud was too happy for

words. She lay quiet for some minutes, when the heavy eyelids drooped, and she slept.

"Maud, Maud, Charley is worse," exclaimed her father, after the lapse of an hour. "Can you do anything for him?"

She remembered the doctor's directions, and set herself, at once, to carry them out; but her utmost efforts were unavailing. The child remained unconscious, and just as morning dawned, Mr. Lamson went again for the physician.

He shook his head ominously. "It is as I feared. One of our worst cases, for which there is no accounting and small chance of help. But I will do my best. I think you will find Mrs. Baker at home," he said, in reply to the father's inquiries for a nurse. "She said she must rest, this week; but she will hardly refuse to come here, under present circumstances. The sooner you see her, the better; and no one should come into this room who is not really needed."

Maud was willing to incur fatigue; but even she acknowledged that some one more skilled

than herself was required. Dr. Hermon remained as long as his other engagements would permit, and, when he left, there was a slight improvement in the appearance of the sick boy.

Mrs. Lamson wearied herself and others with ceaseless inquiries, declaring that she could not live without her darling; but such love as hers is of small value, when care and labor must be given.

Bridget prepared breakfast; and, after many entreaties, Maud was persuaded to attempt eating. "Sure ye'll need the strength," was the kind girl's prevailing argument. She had done her best, and the broad face grew broader with smiles, as her cooking was complimented. "Sure, I think I'd never be tired working for ye, miss," she exclaimed, in the fulness of her love.

Before noon, greatly to the relief of the whole family, Mrs. Baker was installed in the nursery. Charley was no better; and, although while life lasts there is hope, no one could reasonably expect his recovery.

Skill and care were exhausted to save this sweet, young life; but, ere the week had passed, a shrouded form was enclosed in a miniature casket, ready to be borne to its last resting-place.

There were loud weeping, and frantic exclamations of grief; but the most sincere mourners touched the marble forehead with dumb lips. One raised her tearful eyes to heaven, rejoicing, even in her sorrow.

"I shall live with the angels, Sister Maud," Charley had said, at his hour of prayer, only the night before he was taken sick.

She had not thought he would go so soon; but it was well with the child, and she would not murmur. Mr. Lamson wondered, in his bereavement, that he could have been so overwhelmed at the thought of losing only money, when he would have beggared himself to retain Charley in his earthly home.

Attention, however, was soon diverted from him who had gone. Guy was prostrated with the insidious disease, and the greatest anxiety was felt lest he, too, might be taken from

them. Days and nights of weary watching were spent at his bedside, and not in vain. The hand of the death angel was stayed.

Health and strength returned slowly, but surely. Mrs. Baker, who had been unwearied in her attention, at length pronounced him out of danger. As the cold of winter yielded to the milder sway of spring, he breathed the pure, fresh air with freedom; and, when the days grew long and sunny, he was, to use his own expression, "almost well."

Through these trials of faith and fortitude, Maud received the sympathy of her absent friends. Her father, too, addressed her with unwonted kindness, and, at last, consulted her in regard to hiring a seat in church. "When you have decided where you wish to go, I will attend to it," he said, cordially.

She had been so long confined at home, that the prospect of once more hearing the preaching of God's word seemed the greatest blessing, and, before another Sabbath, her selection was made, and a seat secured.

This was a great deal for one like Mr. Lam-

son to do; yet, had he acknowledged the truth, he would have told of some secret doubts in regard to his old-time theories. Maud was forbidden to speak of the subject of religion in his presence; but Guy repeated the simple lessons she taught, and thus, unwittingly, became his father's teacher.

"Charley with the angels," was his constant theme, and commencing with this, he was sure to speak of Jesus, who "died to make little children happy."

"He died for the large people, too," he said, one day, "so he must have died for you and mamma. Don't you love him?" Then, receiving no answer to this question, he added, "I love him dearly, and so does sister Maud."

CHAPTER VI.

Faith lifts the veil, that mortal eyes
May look beyond the gloom ;
Beyond, to mansions in the skies,
Where every saint has room.

MAUD and Guy Lamson were going to Uncle Rufus Lane's for the summer,—an unexpected arrangement; but, on the whole, the very best which could be made. They were going, in acceptance of an earnest invitation, and it would be difficult to tell which of the two was most delighted. "Come early, and stay late," was Aunt Mary's injunction, and one likely to be obeyed.

The breath of June was wooing the rosebuds to unfold their petals, when Bridget and Nora took a tearful leave of their young

mistress, and returned to the kitchen, lamenting in true Irish fashion.

"Sure, I hope I'll live to see the day when she'll be back," exclaimed Bridget, "and I will, if the other mistress don't kill me, entirely, with her notions. There's just the difference of black and white between 'em, and it's aisy enough to tell the white."

Sorrow had not improved Mrs. Lamson. Even more inefficient and complaining than formerly, want of exercise, with an equal want of healthy stimulus for the mind, was beginning to have its natural effect.

Maud pitied her, and sometimes made a great effort to please and interest her; but this kindness was always ungraciously received. Guy reminded her so constantly of Charley that his mother was unwilling to have him in her presence; and the child soon learned that "mamma didn't want to see him."

Mr. Lamson was beginning to disentangle his web of difficulties, and there was a reasonable prospect of final success. Some heavy

bills were paid, others secured, and he breathed more freely. He had learned to think calmly of his lost boy, sometimes almost with pleasure; for, in the great hereafter, he might be permitted to claim *one* child unsullied by sin.

The hereafter! What knew he of it? The dim eye of reason cannot penetrate its recesses, nor the most daring hand of philosophy withdraw the veil which conceals its mysteries. Vague and uncertain seems the future world to one not trusting the sure word of prophecy; but, such as it is, each human soul must pass its boundary. Shrinking from it with fear and trembling, looking back to things of time and sense, or rushing, unbidden, into its limitless space, it matters not.

"On, on!" is the cry ever sounding in mortal ears; and time, stern taskmaster, compels obedience. No lingering in the plain, no idle waiting on the mountains. Years, days, hours, ay, minutes, are numbered; and, as each succeeds the other, a countless throng of undying spirits seal their destiny.

Mr. Lamson had never been utterly oblivious of this fact; but he found a conviction of its truth gaining firmer hold upon his mind. For some reason, the books he had once read with pleasure, and as he thought profit, no longer interested him. His lips could not curl in scorn, while Guy talked of Jesus, the children's friend. On the contrary, he half envied the simple faith which received, unquestioning, the story of life and death, which, if it be a legend, is the sweetest ever told.

When left with only a helpless wife and the two servants, it was necessary that something should fill the void in his home. The first evening of his loneliness, one book after another was examined, in the hope of finding what would command attention, and engross his thoughts. He was unsuccessful, and the volumes were replaced.

Why should he not read the Bible? He had purposed to do so many times, — From the first chapter, even to the last. In this way would he read it, if at all, and, after some

consideration, he opened the Bible which had lain, for many years, on his table.

Maud was thinking of him, praying for him, at that very hour ; and it may be this was the answer to her petition.

She had much to tell and hear in the home of her friends ; and when Guy was sleeping, she sat down by her Aunt Mary, ready for a long talk, despite the fatigue of her journey.

"Everything here looks just as it did a year ago," was her first exclamation. "I could almost fancy that you and Uncle Rufus have been standing still while the rest of the world moved on."

"We have been growing older, my dear," Aunt Mary replied. "Better, too, I hope," she added, looking toward her husband.

"We have been very happy, this last year."

"You may well say that, Mary. We have been blessed in basket and store. Sometimes our cup of mercies has seemed running over. Everything has prospered with us, and, above all, God has given us grateful hearts."

"I have sometimes thought the year must

have been one of trial to you," said Mrs. Lane, anxious lest their prosperity should make Maud's lot seem darker, by contrast.

"It has," replied the young girl. "I have often thought it was more than I could bear ; but strength has been given me, and now I feel as though I had reached a haven of rest."

"We will try to make it so," responded Uncle Rufus. "You shall do just what you please, while you are here. We will have you and Guy stronger and better than ever, before the cold winds blow, next fall."

"I hope so ; but I have been tired so long, I shall hardly recognize myself in any other condition. I tried to carry the burdens of the whole family, and they were too much for me."

"Of course they were too much for such young shoulders as yours," Uncle Rufus replied. "I was afraid that was the case, and thought this would be the best place for you."

"If I had taken counsel of selfishness, I should have been here months ago ; but I

was trying to do my duty. I believe this seems more like home to me than any other place in the world. It was here I learned my first lessons in doing good."

"But not the last," said Aunt Mary. "I guess you haven't done much else since you went from here."

"I've been trying to do good," was the modest answer; and then she told them of Charley's sickness and death, and of her own hopes of heaven.

"I thought you were almost a Christian when you went from here," said Uncle Rufus.

"I knew I ought to be a Christian," she replied. "But something held me back, and I only walk now in the light I have, from day to day, without knowing what will be on the morrow. I ask for new supplies of grace and strength, each morning, and, thus far, they have not failed me."

"And never will," responded Mr. Lane, emphatically. "I was over at Jared Simpson's, last week, and if anything was needed to convince me that God hears and answers

prayer, I should have found it there. You would hardly know that family. They don't seem like the same people."

"You wrote me so, in the winter," answered Maud, "and I should know from Esther's letters that there has been a great change. I must go over there soon."

"Yes, indeed; they are all impatient to see you; and it wouldn't be strange if they should come here to-morrow. The last time I saw John, I had a long talk with him. He told me that whenever the old, terrible feeling of shame comes over him, he asks God to take it away, and he said he had never asked in vain. His father said nearly the same thing. You know Esther attended school in the winter."

"She wrote me that she did, and enjoyed it very much."

"And improved it," was the response. "The teacher called her his best scholar; and, strange as it may seem, he and John became excellent friends."

Maud could have listened for hours to a

description of the Simpson family ; but she was mindful of others, whose acquaintance she had made the previous summer. Mrs. Brown and her unfortunate daughter were not forgotten.

"They had a hard time, last winter," said Aunt Mary, in answer to a question concerning them. "The weather was severe, and they felt the cold very much. Sometime in February, Nancy was taken sick, and she has been a great care to her mother ever since. It didn't seem safe to have them stay there ; but it was home, and Mrs. Brown thought she couldn't live anywhere else. So the people took hold and tried to make them comfortable. That woman is a true Christian. If she wasn't, she never could have borne her lot."

"We all have our trials," responded Maud ; "but hers is a terrible one. I am sure I never could bear it."

"I have often thought so, myself," said Mrs. Lane. "I never see her without feeling thankful that my lot has been different. The

least we can do is to provide for her wants. I haven't missed sending her something every week, for more than a year ; and now, I often go there myself."

Jubilant with praise seemed every created thing when the next morning sun flashed upon the distant hill-tops. Maud Lamson stood at a window which looked toward the east, and caught a glimpse of the glory, while her heart echoed creation's psalm. From nature she looked up to nature's God, inaccessible in his majesty, clothed with honor and power, having dominion over the whole earth ; yet manifesting himself to us, through his Son, our Saviour.

This thought was sufficient to make tolerable the humblest and most disagreeable details of her life. Not alone for herself she wrought ; not alone for earthly friends, whom she loved ; but for Him who dwelt among men, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Vanished her burden of care and weariness. It was a joy to live and labor.

Guy was early awake, and begged that he

might go below stairs, long before his usual time for rising. He, with his sister, went out on the piazza as Uncle Rufus was seating himself in the wagon.

"I was just wishing you would come," he exclaimed. "I am going over the ridge, and should like your company. There never was a better morning for seeing our finest view. We can count the lakes in this clear air; so put on your hat and shawl. There's nothing like a ride before breakfast for giving one an appetite."

Aunt Mary came to the door, and, with a few words, persuaded Guy to go in and see what she was doing, thus leaving Maud at liberty to accept this cordial invitation. Having reached the top of the ridge, she feasted her eyes upon the beauties spread before her. Broad belts of woodland, clothed in the richest green; far-off lakes, gleaming like molten silver, as they reflected the rays of the sun; hill, valley, and rivulet, — all these combined to form one of the most perfect pictures which ever gladdened a poet's heart.

Uncle Rufus, who had been familiar with the scene, from his boyhood, pointed out its objects of special interest; but, further than this, he made no remarks. It was a time for thinking and feeling, rather than speaking.

Maud Lamson could fully appreciate this glorious prospect, and, under its influence, she was in danger of forgetting all sublunary wants. Her companion looked at his watch, and this reminded her that time was passing.

"I have another mile to ride," he said. "When we come back, we will stop here again. I haven't seen it like this for a long time. I thought it was the right morning. You might come here a hundred times, and not see so much."

It was not only the right *morning*, but the right *moment*; for, when they returned, some parts of the picture, which had before stood out plainly, lay in deep shadow.

"See how it is changing," exclaimed Maud. "It looks now more as it did when I came here, last summer; but I shall remember it, at the best."

Another glance at the watch. "Breakfast is waiting," said Uncle Rufus. "Are you hungry?"

"No, indeed; hunger and breakfast have not entered my mind."

"We shall see," was the laughing reply. "I guess Aunt Mary will have something ready, to tempt even your dainty appetite."

Guy was on the piazza, with a basket of kittens in his hand, when Maud sprang from the wagon; and, if he was not a happy boy, his face was a false interpreter of his heart.

"Just see the darlings," he exclaimed. "Four of them, and all as pretty as can be. Aunt Mary says I may have them for my own, if old Mop is willing."

Here, old Mop came up, and, with a motherly mew, claimed the darlings; and as Guy was at the same time called to breakfast, he was quite ready to relinquish them.

Uncle Rufus heaped the plate of his niece with good things, declaring, as he did so, that there was nothing like substantial food for invigorating mind and body.

"I feel invigorated now," she responded. "Such a sight as I have seen this morning is worth more than all the food on the table." But, for all this, justice was done to Aunt Mary's cooking.

Maud found it impossible to confine herself to any one room, or her attention to any one thing, that morning. She missed her accustomed care. Guy was amused without any effort on her part. There was time for reading; but she had no inclination to improve it.

She wondered how matters were going at home, thought of her father, of Crin Burton, and each member of her family. Then she questioned if the promise made to Mrs. Lynde had been faithfully redeemed. This was not rest, but she hoped for it in due time.

Soon after dinner, Esther Simpson drove into the yard, looking quite unlike the timid girl, who, a year before, thought herself shut out from the world. "I knew you were expected yesterday, and I couldn't wait for you to come and see me," she exclaimed, as her

feet touched the piazza, and her lips met those of her friend.

"Why should you wait?" was the reply. "I am very glad to see you."

"Well, Esther, I thought we should see you, sometime to-day," said Uncle Rufus, coming up. "I knew you and Maud couldn't wait a great while to see each other. Might have sent her over to your house; but thought I'd wait and see if you wouldn't come here."

While this was said, he was taking the horse from the buggy, unheeding Esther's remonstrance. "I am only to stay a little while," she said. "John was so busy he couldn't come with me; so I was obliged to do my own driving."

"You seem to understand the business."

"Not very well; but father says I must learn. He thinks I ought to do what other girls can," she added, turning to Maud, who was looking at her with undisguised admiration.

"How you are changed!" was the criticism.

"Am I?" was the laughing response. "John says so, and I think it must be true. I know I am happier than I used to be," she said, in a lower tone of voice. "You have changed, too," and she scanned the face of her friend, eagerly.

There had been a wonderful transformation in the character and appearance of Esther Simpson, but she was still "a very little young lady;" although her more self-reliant manner would have deluded some into the belief that she had grown taller.

"You are going to stay a long time," she said to Maud, when they had entered the house, and seated themselves cozily upon the lounge in the pleasant sitting-room.

"Until cool weather comes," was the reply. "That is, if nothing particular calls me away. Guy is with me, and I have left my other cares at home. What are you all doing in your own home?"

"Reading, studying, and working. John has a book in his hand every minute he is in the house; and I try to keep up with him.

But he learns faster than I can. Father told me to ask you to come over and spend a week with us," added Esther, in her happiness, giving expression to her thoughts, without regard to sequences.

"Do you need any help?" asked Maud, pleasantly.

"Help in my studies, do you mean?"

"Help in anything," was the reply.

"I should like some things explained a little. Since school closed, there has been no one except John to answer my questions."

Maud now learned, for the first time, that Esther was pursuing a regular course of study, which had been marked out by her teacher of the previous winter.

"When I have my books before me, I forget everything else," said the young student. "Father says I shall have all the books I want; and he is going to send me somewhere to school, this fall. You must come over and see how happy we are."

"Certainly I will; and I may be able to

give you some assistance in your studies. But I must bring Guy with me."

"Of course. We shall expect him, too. I have not seen him yet. Where is he, this afternoon?"

"Gone to the field, with a boy who lives here. Aunt Mary said he would be safe, and I like to have him out-of-doors."

Mrs. Lane had just seated herself for an afternoon nap when Esther Simpson came, and therefore it was some time before she made her appearance.

She inquired for the family of their guest, and then asked some questions in regard to an old lady, who was their nearest neighbor.

"She is very weak," replied Esther. "Mother was there yesterday, and is going to take care of her to-morrow night. She doesn't expect to live but a few days."

"It will be a blessed release, when she goes," said Aunt Mary. "She has suffered a great deal, within the last few months."

"But she has been very happy," rejoined Esther. "She says Jesus has never seemed

so precious as since she was confined to her bed."

"Special grace, for special needs, always given in answer to prayer," said Maud. "Mr. Holbrook repeated that several times in one of his sermons, last winter; and I have never forgotten it. He said, also, that a true Christian asks, involuntarily for what he most needs, whether it be strength to do, or patience to bear. Some require one, some the other."

"I believe that is true," responded Mrs. Lane. "I see people going along cheerfully, with burdens that would crush me; and it must be they have special grace given them; for poor human nature could never bear so much, unaided. Mrs. Ward is a case in point. She has been one of the most active women in town; a great worker, up early and late, and always ready to go when called. She is nearly ninety years old, and has been able to walk or ride, until she fell and broke her hip, last November. Since then, she has been perfectly helpless; but no one has heard her

complain. Your mother has seen a good deal of her," she added, turning to Esther.

"Yes ma'm; father thinks we can never do too much for her. She spoke and prayed at the first prayer-meeting he attended last summer, and he always thought a great deal of her since; John likes to go and see her, too. He says she is so near heaven, that she can see the glory."

In the midst of this conversation, Guy came in from the field, fresh and rosy, his hands filled with flowers. He had seen a world of wonders, and was beginning to recount them, when he noticed the presence of a stranger.

He forgot this soon, however; for Esther, with her sweet, winning ways, was irresistible.

"Do you love Sister Maud?" he asked, after being told she was her friend.

"I love her very much indeed," was the enthusiastic reply; and this common love formed a link between the two.

Guy Lamson was a handsome boy. I have not said this before, for innocent childhood

has a beauty of its own, independent of feature or complexion. But Guy's face was one which might serve as a model for painter or sculptor. This was a passport to universal favor, making him sure of care and attention.

Esther petted and caressed him, until he felt quite at home with her, and talked freely of his angel brother. Thus entertained, the young visitor was unmindful of the flight of time, until the old clock in the hall struck five.

"I must go," she exclaimed, at that. "I ought to have been at home before now. What *will* Mrs. Lane think of me?"

"She thinks very well of you," replied Uncle Rufus, who was passing the window. "So do I, for the matter of that. You will stop and have supper with us; then you can go home as soon as you please."

Mrs. Simpson was not surprised at her daughter's long absence. "They would have so much to say, that I hardly expected her," she said to her husband. "Esther thinks the world of Maud; and a good deal has hap-

pened since they parted last fall. It don't seem possible, when I think of it."

"The first visit of Mr. Spaulding was the turning-point with us, though," said John. "I have been changing ever since then, growing stronger and happier."

"Yes, John: I believe you have," responded his father, looking upon him with pride. "We'll do something in the world, yet. It's not too late. Our little girl, too, I'll give her all the advantages she needs. She shan't be denied anything in my power."

More than an hour after that, "our little girl" came home, bringing some new books, a picture, and a happy heart.

"O mother, I didn't mean to stay so long," she said, as soon as within speaking distance. "But I forgot all about the time, until supper was ready; and then they kept me. I am very sorry."

"It is no matter," was the pleasant reply. "I didn't much expect you. I know how 'tis when girls get together. They talk about 'most everything."

The picture Esther had brought home was framed, and it was assigned a place in the room now dignified by the name of parlor.

There was no elaborate grouping in this picture; only two faces, one that of a child, the other, of a woman in the rich maturity of life. This face told of conflicts passed, of peace after tumult, and trust after trial. The child's hand was clasped in one of hers, while the other pointed upward to a star upon which their eyes were fixed.

"Wasn't Maud kind to bring it to me?" asked Esther, when she had drawn back the curtains, to give it the best light. "She said she saw it in a shop a few days ago, and bought it on purpose for me. I know John will like it. He has been wishing we had some pictures."

John Simpson's taste was now in sympathy with his sister's; and he looked forward to the time when their home should be beautiful, as well as comfortable. "We are poor folks" was no longer the excuse for rude surroundings.

Esther wished for a carpet on the parlor-floor, and this, to her father, was sufficient reason why it should be purchased. The lounge required but small outlay, and afterwards a few articles of ornament had been added, until the room was really attractive.

The picture, however, was its crowning glory; decided to be so by the unanimous voice of the family.

"I shall come in here and look at that woman's face, when I am tired," said Mrs. Simpson, the next morning; perhaps not understanding *why* she should do this, only certain she should feel refreshed.

John was conscious of the same feeling, deepened and intensified by his own past experience.

A new influence had entered that home. Only a picture; but it could speak to the inmates, and whoever or whatever can do that, wields a mighty power.

"I must sit where I can see it," said Esther, as she placed her rocker opposite, and

studied first her book, and then the calmer, grand face.

But to return to the giver of this treasure. Mrs. Lane found employment for her that morning. "Maud, dear, I wish you would go up to widow Brown's," she said. "I must send to her, and you seem to be the only one at leisure. She'll be glad to see you, and you'd better go in a few minutes. A little talk will help her through the day."

Maud was soon ready for the ride, Guy accompanying her. The same basket which had so often been emptied of its contents in the little pantry, was stowed under the seat, and the same slow climbing brought them safely to the cottage. Nancy was not on the bench to watch their coming; but Mrs. Brown came to the door, smiling as ever.

"I think I'll leave my brother outside," said Maud, in answer to the cordial invitation to come in. "You see Aunt Mary has sent her basket, as usual."

"She always sends it," was the reply of



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the poor woman. "She'll have her reward for all the kindness she does."

Nancy was lying in a bed, in a little room opening from the kitchen. "How is your daughter?" asked Maud.

"No better," was the reply. "If anything, she is growing weaker. She hasn't been able to sit up at all, for more than a month; and it takes all my time to make her comfortable. She sleeps a good deal nights, so I get some then. If it wasn't for that, I couldn't get along at all. But there is always some way provided," she added.

Nancy turned at the sound of her mother's voice, and, seeing company, drew a book from under her pillow. She was too weak to lift it from the bed, and Mrs. Brown, understanding her wishes, gave it to Maud, with the request that she would read a chapter.

"It's all the poor child seems to know," she said. "At first I didn't like to have her keep the Bible in the bed, but folks told me I'd better humor her; and, when this was worn out, I could have another. So, now,

she always has it in her hands, or under the pillow."

The cover was much defaced, and the edges of the leaves soiled ; but Maud took it, and read, as she had been desired.

"Will you pray?" then asked Mrs. Brown.

One thought of the reproof she had received from Burt Lester, the year before; one glance at the motionless figure on the bed, and Maud knelt. More eloquent prayers might have been offered in that cottage, but never one more sincere.

"Thank you for praying with us," said the mother, as they rose from their knees. "It has done me good to hear you. Nancy would thank you, too, if she knew how. The poor child is 'most through with this world, and I can't help thinking there'll be a place for her in heaven."

"I trust so," replied her companion. "She is accountable for only the talents God has given her."

"Mr. Spaulding has often told me that I used to feel bad because I thought she never'd

know enough to love God ; but I've given it all up. He'll do right, and I can trust him."

Nancy now required attention ; and, while Mrs. Brown was occupied with her, Maud went to look after Guy. He was amusing himself with some smooth stones he had found near the bench, and hoped they were not going quite yet. After a few minutes, she went back to the house to talk with its lonely occupant.

"You didn't pray with us last summer," said Mrs. Brown, by way of introducing a subject which never seemed out of place there.

"I was not in the habit of praying anywhere, then," replied Maud.

"And you have learned, since."

"I have tried."

"I don't know how people live in this world, without prayer," remarked the Christian woman. "If they are rich, they are not free from sorrow ; and if poor, they certainly need God's help. Then it's such a comfort to pray for others. I hope you won't take it

amiss if I tell you I've often prayed for you since the first morning you came here."

"I thank you for it," replied the young girl, in a voice full of emotion.

This conversation was prolonged, until Maud felt obliged to leave. "It will be nearly noon when I get home," she said. "I will come again soon; and Aunt Mary wished me to tell you she should come up the first opportunity."

Guy was still playing with the stones, when his sister was ready to go.

"You can take them with you," said Mrs. Brown, who had come out, for a moment, to speak to the child. "Nancy picked them up, but she never'll want them again."

"Thank you," he answered, when Maud had given him permission to accept them.

Mrs. Lane wished to know all about Nancy and her mother. "The poor child is 'most through with her sufferings," she said, in reply. "It will be a mercy when she is taken away; but her mother will feel as though she had nothing to live for, then."

"She may find something," suggested Maud.

"True. I had forgotten that. There is always work for the willing, and she is no idler."

From this time, Maud accepted the visiting of Mrs. Brown as one of her duties, while life moved on in the old farm-house as usual. Guests came and went, letters were received and answered, and hearts beat sometimes with joy, sometimes with sorrow.

It had been something of a sacrifice for Maud Lamson to give up her proposed visit by the sea; and she had done so, only in consideration of Guy. As she could not be with them, Crin Burton and Frank Lynde endeavored to give her as full a transcript as possible of their daily life.

They had carried a large supply of books to old Aleck, who was hale and hearty as on the previous summer.

"Father went to see him the first day he was here," wrote Crin. "The old man fairly wept for joy, when he told me about it."

"He says we are none of us drifting, now. All steering straight for heaven. Isn't it a beautiful thought?"

"I mean to be better acquainted with the old man, before summer is over; and Frank is going to ask him if I may see Molly's Bible."

How much Maud would have given to be there, only for a single day! Yet she had many pleasures where she was.

She, with Guy, had spent a week at Jared Simpson's,—a bright week, too; for it was full of usefulness and happiness. She was just in her element, when John, after some hesitation, asked her assistance in the solution of a problem, over which he had puzzled in vain.

"I remember it very well," she exclaimed, at the first glance. "It cost me some hard study, and I must go over it again, before I can explain it thoroughly to you."

This she did so quickly as to astonish her companions.

"I never forget what I have once learned," was her reply to their expressions of surprise;

and then, in a clear, lucid manner, she explained the process of solution.

"I ought to have seen that before," said John, somewhat mortified.

"I am not sure of that," replied Maud. "I puzzled over it a long time, when I had nothing else to occupy my mind. The wonder to me, is, how you accomplished so much, with books, when you have so little time to devote to them."

"I try to do the best I can," answered the young man modestly. "I hope to make the knowledge I gain, of some practical use to myself and others. Besides, study keeps me from thinking of the past."

Mr. and Mrs. Simpson could hardly do enough to express their pleasure in having Maud Lamson for a guest. To see her treat their son as an equal, and their daughter as a much-loved friend, gave them hope for the future.

As the father had said, "It was not too late to do something in the world." Many plans were formed for Esther's improvement.

"I hope we shan't spoil you," said her mother. "When I was young, 'twould have been thought a strange thing to let a girl have her own way so much as you do."

"Such a *little* girl, too," added her father, laughing. "But you see, mother, her way is about right, so we won't worry about it."

The amount of work done in those long, summer days was truly wonderful. Some was necessary, some, ornamental; but all useful, since it contributed to the happiness of the family.

Maud Lamson and her brother were not the only persons entertained in that isolated home, during the summer. The people of the town were beginning to treat Mr. Simpson with respect and attention; some relations from a distance visited him, and his children were welcomed wherever they chose to go.

"A different state of things, altogether, from what there was a year ago," said Uncle Rufus, when speaking of them. "They won't be contented to stay on that back farm much longer. I've heard something about their

going West, and it would be just the place for them. They would start fair, among strangers, and I shall be disappointed if John doesn't make a smart man."

"They will have friends anywhere, East or West," responded Maud. "Mrs. Simpson is one of the kindest women I have ever seen. She spends a great deal of time with old Mrs. Ward, and she was talking of going to see Mrs. Brown."

This incidental mention of Mrs. Brown gave a new turn to the conversation. Nancy was failing, and some one had been provided to stay with the nearly exhausted mother.

But, contrary to all expectation, the poor unfortunate lingered until some time in August, when she died, with the Bible clasped in her hands.

"We tried a good many times to take it away, after we thought she didn't know anything," said the woman who assisted in caring for her. "It was no use though. She only held it the tighter, and made a dreadful noise."

Even after death, it was with difficulty that the bony hands were unclasped, and made to relinquish their treasure.

There was no lack of suitable provision for the last sad offices. Friends and neighbors contributed cheerfully, and then came to listen to the lesson taught by this instance of mortality. A long procession followed the body to the village burial-ground, and saw it deposited in its narrow bed.

There was no occasion for mourning. Even the mother smiled through her tears, as faith whispered of that better land wherein is no darkness.

"What will you do, now?" asked a kind-hearted neighbor.

"Go home, and wait," was the expressive reply..

A few days after the funeral of Nancy Brown, another grave was opened to receive its precious trust. Mrs. Ward, she whose Christian experience extended through more than half a century, had passed the river.

The sands of her life dropped slowly; the

cords which linked soul and body were parted, one by one; and long after consciousness of the outer world seemed lost, her heart throbbed on.

Those who stood around her bed, at the close of a summer day, talked of Jesus, the Saviour. Unstopped were the ears, unclosed the lips, which had so long been silent. "Jesus, *my* Saviour," murmured the aged saint.

Never, again, was that voice heard on earth; but one more swelled the song of the redeemed, in the upper temple. She had borne the cross; she went home, to wear the crown. In life and death, she had witnessed a good profession, trusting in Jesus, the Saviour.

These two deaths made a deep impression upon the community in which they occurred. The Sabbath services were better attended, and even a casual observer could see that the truth was heard with more interest. It needed only that this impression should be followed up by Christian labor, in order that rich fruit should appear.

Mr. Thayer exerted himself to call upon the distant members of his parish; urged the establishment of neighborhood meetings; exhorted the sisters of the church to feel a responsibility in this matter; and last, but not least, prayed for his people, with renewed fervor.

In the midst of this labor, he received unexpected assistance. Frederic Spaulding came, again, to the country town, and, although intending to remain but a few days, he was ready to do with his might whatever hand or heart found to do.

"Your coming is providential," said the old minister. "I have thought of you many times within the past few weeks, and wished you could be with us."

"My coming is providential," was the reply, "or, rather, providence made it necessary that I should leave my field of labor for a time. Then, I could hardly deny myself the pleasure of seeing, again, these grand, old hills, and looking into the familiar faces of your people."

His field of labor was in the West, where towns sprung up as by magic. To make for himself a home in one of these towns, had been Frederic Spaulding's intention since he first decided to enter the Christian ministry.

His preparatory training and discipline had well fitted him for the kind of labor he would be called upon to perform in such a place. An intuitive knowledge of human nature, quick sensibilities, and ready sympathy, opened a way to the hearts of those with whom he came in contact. No man could be better fitted for pastor, or missionary.

The death of a cousin, the mother of Anna and Burt Lester, was the cause of his coming East so soon after entering upon his ministerial labors. This cousin had spent much of her girlhood in his home, and as this was at a time when he was peculiarly susceptible to outer influences, she had no little to do with the formation of his character. Several years his senior, and a devoted Christian, she was able to inspire him with something of her own enthusiasm in the Great Master's work.

"You will have a broader field of labor than I," she would say to him. "See to it that you leave no duty undone."

After this, when a happy marriage had given her a home of her own, there came a time when she was able to return some of the kindness she had received. The mother of Frederic Spaulding died, leaving him with no nearer ties of kindred than those which bound him to Mrs. Lester, and both she and her husband assured him of a constant welcome beneath their roof. Many of his vacations in his early student life were spent there, and he was largely indebted to his cousin for counsel and kindness, which only a true-hearted woman can give.

Ministering, and ministered unto. This is the record of all human lives, with the living.

Mr. Lester died when Burt was but two years of age, and then the widow turned to cousin Fred for sympathy and aid.

He gave this, cheerfully, unselfishly; relieved her from all care of business, and did much to render her lonely condition more

tolerable. The children clung to him, and, when their mother's failing health made change of scene and freedom from all responsibility imperative, he found them a home, with Aunt Mary Lane.

Under this relaxation, and with judicious care, the health of Mrs. Lester was so much improved, that she insisted her cousin should be no longer detained from his work by her.

So, in the autumn, he bade her adieu, and went out hopefully, trusting that the hand of God would lead him where a laborer was needed. He found this soon; but still pressed forward to more destitute fields, preaching occasionally, laboring always, to save souls.

At length he reached a small settlement, occupying a fine location, and exhibiting unmistakable signs of thrift. Several men were standing about the post-office, as the stage drove up, and, as there was to be some delay, he resolved to make their acquaintance. It was easy for him to do so. They, or their parents, had come from the East, and were

glad to talk with one who had just left its homes.

At first, our traveller had noticed, particularly, an old man, who stood apart from the rest, silent; but listening eagerly to all that was said.

"How far are you going, stranger?" asked one.

"I am not certain about that," was the reply. "I am looking for a home."

"Better stop here, then," exclaimed half a dozen voices, and immediately he was assured of a welcome to their homes. "Good land, here,—first-rate for farming. But you don't look as though that was your kind of work."

"What might your business be?" asked one, more bold than his companions.

"I am a preacher," replied the stranger.

"A preacher," repeated the old man, now coming forward. "Then stay and give us one sermon, at least," he added, with much emotion. "I've been here three months, and not a meeting in all that time. God must have sent you."

"We've got a pretty good school-house for these parts, here," spoke up another. "You can preach there, and the folks 'll be glad to come."

This was sufficient; and the stage went on, with one passenger less.

There was some discussion as to who should entertain the preacher; but it was finally agreed that Mr. Scales, the old man who was so anxious to hear a sermon, had the strongest claim.

"He is one of your kind of folks," remarked one who had said but little during the interview. "You can do good there," he added, in a lower tone. "His son is sick, and needs some one to talk with him."

"How is it about the-preaching?" was asked. "Are we going to have a sermon, to-night?"

"Perhaps it will be best to wait until to-morrow, for that; but I have some tracts in my pocket, I should like to distribute. Will you accept them?" asked Frederic Spaulding, taking a package from his pocket.

"Take 'most any kind of reading, here," was the reply. "Books are mighty scarce in this settlement."

"I declare that looks like home," exclaimed one, as he glanced at the simple offering. "I've seen my mother read such a tract, many a time. I'll come to the meeting, sure."

Thus was the work commenced. Messages of truth were read in a dozen families, that evening; and more than one eye grew moist, as mother's religion was brought to mind.

Mr. Scales, who had secured the young minister as guest, led the way to a small house, not far distant, and, opening the door, bade him welcome. There was no one in the room they entered, but voices were heard from one adjoining.

"Did you get a letter, father?" was asked, directly.

"No," replied the old man; "but I found what is better;" and he left the stranger alone. He returned soon, with a young woman, whom he introduced as his daughter.

Any one, acquainted with New England

faces and manners, would have recognized her, at once, as belonging to this section of the country. She seconded the welcome given by her father, assuring their guest that he could have found no place where he was more needed.

"Our accommodations are not very good," she said. "I should be glad to do more for you than I can, as we are now situated; but we will make you as comfortable as possible."

Mr. Spaulding had not, as yet, heard the name of his new-found friends; and he now inquired, giving his own name in return.

"There were a good many Spauldings in our town," said the old man. "May be you are kin to some of them;" and with the curiosity so common to elderly people, he inquired concerning the parentage of this young minister.

Great was his pleasure to learn that he had been correct in his surmise, and he again offered his hand in token of friendship.

"My husband would like to see you," said

the young woman, coming from the inner room. "He has been sick now for several weeks; and we are getting anxious about him," she added, in a lower tone.

The sick man looked up smilingly.

"Not a very good place here; but you are welcome," was his salutation. "If I was able to be about, things would look a little better."

"Sickness comes to us all," was the reply.

"We need patience to bear it; but it sometimes proves a great blessing."

"I don't mean to complain; but it's been pretty hard for me; and Sarah, too," he said, glancing at his wife.

"Nothing will be hard for me, if you only get well," she replied, and then went out to prepare supper.

It required but a short time for Frederic Spaulding to learn the principal events in the history of the sick man. John Scales, such was his name, hoping to improve his condition, had left the old homestead eight years before, and, after working for a time in different places, had finally bought the land he

now occupied. Here he built a house somewhat better than those about him, and went back for her who was waiting to be his wife. Father and mother were left behind, too old to think of changing homes.

The young couple were prospered. Plenty rewarded their labor, and, although missing old associations, and deprived of many privileges, they were happy.

About a year before this visit of Frederic Spaulding, the elder Mrs. Scales had died. Then John wrote to his father urging him to come and make his home with them. These two were all he had; so, disposing of his little property, the old man went to the new country.

Here he had been three months pining for the familiar scenes and faces of the past, but most of all for its religious services. He was a sincere Christian, yet he needed sympathy to make his daily life bright and cheerful. His children respected religion; but they had no personal knowledge of its power, and in

this they failed to satisfy the wants of their father.

Such was the family in which Frederic Spaulding found himself a welcome guest. A slight knowledge of disease and medicine, learned by observation more than study, convinced him that the invalid was suffering for want of proper treatment, and he ventured to make some suggestions to that effect. These were kindly received, and the accompanying advice promptly obeyed.

"God must have sent you," was often said, during the evening; and, after a few days spent in the settlement, the young man accepted this conclusion.

The "preaching meeting" was a decided success, the school-house being well filled with an attentive audience.

"Stay with us," was the unanimous voice.

"We don't want to live like heathen," said one. "We need a minister, and we'll do the best we can for you."

This young minister was not entirely dependent upon his salary for support; and,

after prayerful consideration, he decided to make this place his home.

Great was the rejoicing when this decision was announced; and in no family was it more sincere than in that of Mr. Scales. A physician to both soul and body, his influence there was unbounded.

Sickness had led the young man to think, seriously, of interests beyond those of this life; and judicious teaching brought him to a full conviction of his duty.

He consecrated himself to God, promising humbly, yet in unwavering faith, that henceforth he would so live as becometh one who must give an account.

His wife was not long behind him; and when she, too, expressed a hope that her sins were forgiven, the father's cup of happiness overflowed.

Less than a year had Frederic Spaulding occupied this field. In that time, a church had been organized, and preparations made for building a house of worship. Souls had been given as seals of a faithful ministry;

and, through all that section of country, the enthusiastic young preacher was looked upon as a model Christian gentleman. Only a sense of duty would have called him away from such a harvest as seemed waiting for the reaper.

Mrs. Lester's rapidly failing health warned her that death was near, and she wished to leave her children in the care of one whose friendship had never failed her, and in whose judgment she had the fullest confidence.

He came, at her summons, in time to hear her dying wishes, accept the trust she gave, and minister to her last necessities.

Anna and Burt, now his wards, must be trained for usefulness and happiness. His plans in regard to them were not fully matured, when he visited Mr. Thayer. He hoped, eventually, to have them with him; but that could not be for some time to come. Meanwhile a home must be provided where they would receive tender and loving care.

A distant relative of Mrs. Thayer had recently come to reside with her. This relative

was a woman in middle life, well educated, accomplished, and a Christian. She had been a teacher for several years, and was well qualified to act in that capacity.

When Frederic Spaulding first saw her, he was inclined to think that she was the very person to take charge of his wards; and, after consultation with Mr. Thayer, he brought the matter before her.

The clergyman and his wife were willing to receive the children into their family, if Miss Bates would assume the care of them. She hesitated, not quite sure of her ability; but, at length, persuasion and pecuniary considerations prevailed.

This relieved the young guardian of much perplexity; and he hastened to bring his cousins to their home. They were satisfied to be anywhere with him. He remained until they had made the acquaintance of Miss Bates, and overcome all feeling of shyness in their new position.

They visited at Uncle Rufus' where Cousin Maud and Guy entertained them in a most

delightful manner. The two boys seemed perfectly fascinated with each other, and wished they could live together always.

Observers thought Mr. Spaulding was as well entertained as the children, although in a way entirely different; yet he was not unmindful of his work. One of his first calls was at the house of Jared Simpson. How great the change there witnessed! A lifetime of labor would be well repaid by such a sight, and such expressions of gratitude and affection as greeted him.

Under God, this family owed their present happiness to him. He had not been mistaken in his estimate of the son's abilities, or the father's true character. Esther had developed into a charming young lady; enthusiastic, and resolved upon improvement.

"We need you in our town, out West," said Mr. Spaulding, after a long conversation, in which much personal experience had been related.

"We shall be glad to come," was the father's reply. "If it wasn't for Esther,

we'd go next spring, if I could sell my farm. She needs to go to school and learn a good many things before she leaves this part of the country."

"You needn't stay for me," answered the young girl. "I can learn anywhere I can find a teacher. Brother John wishes to go, and it would be best for us all."

This subject was dropped for the time; but it was afterwards discussed before Mr. Spaulding took his leave.

Mrs. Brown was waiting in her lonely home, when she received a visit which cheered her through many coming months.

School opened in the village, on one of the last days of August, Esther Simpson and Anna Lester being two of the pupils. Esther boarded at Mr. Thayer's, so there was quite a family of young people in the old parsonage.

It was the place for Esther. Nothing reminded her of the hopeless past; everything lured her onward to a bright future.

She studied, she read, she took lessons in

music. Not a word spoken in her presence was lost. When with Maud Lamson, she asked many questions upon subjects which were just beginning to interest her; and what she heard, she remembered, to be repeated at home.

Summer leaped into autumn, yet Uncle Rufus kept his "children." The cold winds blew, and the ripened leaves fell gently to the ground; or, like so many bright-winged birds, skimmed lightly through the air.

"Do you wish me to come home?" Maud had often asked her father, and invariably received the same answer.

"If you are well and happy, remain where you are as long as you please," he wrote.

She judged, from his letters, that his business prospects were improving; but she knew little of home matters. His wife he seldom mentioned, and then only casually. Her health had not improved, and she had a servant to attend her wants.

Bridget and Nora retained their places in the kitchen, looking anxiously forward to the

return of young mistress. When lonely and tired, Bridget would exclaim, with characteristic earnestness, "Sure, I'd not stop here another day, but for my promise. It's almost killed I am; but I promised Miss Maud, and I'll not go back on my word."

Mr. Burton's family had, long before this, returned to their home, and, in October, Maud Lamson received an invitation to go there. This invitation was signed by the four members of the family; and a postscript, added by Crin, entreated her to come, if only for a week.

"Come, as soon as possible. We wish to see you, and we wish to see Guy."

Maud consulted her father, and he desired her to do as she pleased. "I wish very much to see you," he wrote; "but I know how gloomy and desolate it will be for you here."

"My business occupies most of my thoughts, and, when at home, my time is spent in the library. Your mother desires to see no company, consequently we live quite by ourselves."

"If you wish to visit at Mr. Burton's, I shall be glad to have you do so. After that, I hope I can make our home more pleasant for you."

Maud's last visit, before leaving Uncle Rufus', was at Mrs. Simpson's. It was Saturday, and Esther was at home; but father, mother and brother, shared the visit.

She then heard that it was fully decided they should go West in the spring, and settle in the town where Frederic Spaulding had found a home.

"Mr. Spaulding is going to board with us," said Mrs. Simpson. "So Esther can go on with her studies, and he says it won't be very long before they'll have a good school there."

"How I wish you could go, too!" exclaimed Esther. "Then we should have our two best friends with us."

"We haven't talked much about this, yet," said Mr. Simpson. "Mr. Lane knows we intend to go, and thinks it's the best thing we can do. Mr. Spaulding wrote to us, last week,

that he had bought some land; so I suppose we shall go out in season to get the crops into the ground."

Maud rode thoughtfully home from this visit, musing, somewhat, of the past; but more, of the possible future.

"If your father's claim upon you was not stronger than mine, you should never leave us," said Uncle Rufus, the next Monday morning, when the old family wagon was about starting for the nearest railroad station.

Aunt Mary kissed her young friends again and again; and Guy, at the last moment, was quite undecided which would be best, to go or stay.

Their reception to the home to which they went, lacked nothing of cordiality. Maud and her brother, at once, took their places as members of the family.

"This is coming home, indeed," said the young girl, after evening worship. "I have anticipated so much happiness in being here again, that it seems almost like a dream to

have it realized so soon. I had no expectation of seeing you this autumn," she added, turning to Crin.

"I intended to see you," was the reply. "If you had not come here, I should have seen you, somewhere."

Mrs. Lynde was first to observe the change which time and discipline had wrought in the face of Maud Lamson. The expression of her mouth was firmer, and yet far sweeter. Her eyes seemed looking inward rather than outward; questioning, rather than accepting.

The quick flushing of cheek and brow no longer betrayed each varying emotion.

Yet she was, herself, hardly conscious of this change. She only knew she had striven to do her duty, curbing every feeling of impatience and weariness, until duty had become a pleasure, and self-denial now unheeded.

Frank, who had never forgotten the wild burst of music Maud had once given them, begged that it might be repeated.

"That would be impossible," she replied. "I am in no such mood as I was then."

"Then please to give us the mood of *this* evening," said Mr. Burton.

Questioning, not quite at rest, yet treading firmly, the way as it appeared before her. All this was expressed in the melody which charmed her hearers.

It would be pleasant to linger over each of these autumn days, to recount the amusements and employments which left no idle hour, from morning until dewy eve.

Frank Lynde took Guy under his especial care; and when he was engaged in study, some one was always ready to pet and amuse the beautiful boy. Maud and Crin had each their experiences to relate, both of inner and outward life.

There had been care and trial for one, while the other basked in the sunshine of prosperity. One looked forward, confidently; the other, with a half-defined fear.

"I have missed you, all summer," said Crin, to her friend. "I did so wish you to see old Aleck, and hear him talk. He knows

very little of any book, except the Bible; but that he knows thoroughly."

"And you saw Molly's Bible."

"Oh, yes. I saw it in the hut, one day, with Frank, when he asked the old man to show it to me. It was wrapped in the shawl he had bought for Molly, and he seemed to uncover it reverently. Only a common Bible, much worn, and yellow with age; but my feelings were so in sympathy with the owner, that I could not look at it without tears."

Maud wished to hear everything relating to this strange old sailor, and Crin continued.

"He said when he was lonely, he always read Molly's letter, and looked out the passages she marked for him in her Bible. He thinks it will be but a little while, now, before he shall go home to see her. Father made him a long visit, the day before we came away; and he talked almost constantly of heaven."

"Will he teach the children, now it is cold weather?"

"Yes. He has as many, every Sabbath, as can find room in his hut. We carried him a

large supply of books and papers, so that he feels quite encouraged. Frank has heard him talk to the children, and he says all his illustrations are drawn from the sea, or sea-faring life; and this makes a strong impression upon them."

In return for this account of old Aleck, Maud could tell of Jared Simpson's family, and their improved condition; of Nancy Brown's death, and Mrs. Ward's last expressive words. All this was heard with interest, for these names had been often spoken in the home of Crin Burton.

Maud Lamson had several protracted conversations with Mrs. Lynde, in regard to her own religious feelings.

"I have tried to fulfil my promise," she said. "If I know my own heart, I have sought to learn my duty, and then to do it. That is all. Not a very striking experience," she added, with a sad smile; "but it is all I have to relate."

"You have been happy in doing this," responded her friend.

"I have not been unhappy," was the reply. "But when I read of others, almost overpowered with joy in view of Christ's love, I fear I am not a Christian."

"You can trust the Saviour. You know that he died for you, that he lives for you, and loves you. There must, of necessity, be a great variety in Christian experience, for no two characters are alike. *You* receive few things on trust."

"Perhaps not enough," answered Maud, for the first time beginning to comprehend her difficulty. "When I have been ready to give up all anxiety in regard to the forgiveness of my sins, — indeed, when the Saviour has quite hidden them from me, — I have looked for a reason for this, until I lost all joy and confidence. This has happened to me, more than once," she added, making a full confession of what now seemed weak and sinful.

"Then, have faith for the future, and bid adieu to all doubting."

"I will try ; but, —"

"God's word is sure," said Mrs. Lynde,

solemnly. "Christ came into the world to save sinners. He who gives you strength to go forward in the path of duty, will also blot out your transgressions."

This sweet lesson of faith and confidence is learned by some as the child learns to love the mother who watches over it. Others learn it, only when the weary spirit is well nigh fainting under its burden of guilt and sorrow.

CHAPTER VII.

"Christ died for us." Oh, matchless words!
The strangest history
Which pen can trace, or life unfold;
Earth's greatest mystery.

MAUD LAMSON spent six happy weeks with her friends, during which time there dawned a new light upon her pathway.

Months before she had looked to her Heavenly Father for strength, and he had not denied her prayer. She had asked that her sins might be forgiven, and she knew that the blood of Christ cleanseth from *all* sin; yet she had sometimes feared to accept this truth as applied to herself.

Once, only for a day; but *now* for all time and eternity: she was strong in faith and

hope. It mattered little where or what her lot on earth. There was a home for her in heaven, where, after a few short years, Jesus, the Saviour, would welcome her.

She needed some assurance of future good, when, at the close of a dark, gloomy day, she reached her father's house, and found that no one had expected her coming.

Bridget and Nora were overjoyed at seeing her; but they could not repress their complaints.

"Sure, miss, I'd gone long before, but for my promise; and when you lave again, I'll not be spinding another night here. It's not aisy to find what's wanted, and, when done, it's not right;" and here poor Bridget gave up all attempts at composure.

Maud saw, at once, that matters had not improved during her absence. She assured the discouraged servants of her sympathy, and proposed that nothing more be said of the past.

"Sure, I'll agree to that," replied Bridget, good-naturedly, "and I'll be soon having a

nice warm dinner or supper for ye, whichever ye plaze to call it."

"What time will father come?"

"He's not regular. Not often here to dinner, except on Sundays, when I does my best," replied Bridget, with pride, as she remembered how often her Sunday dinners had been complimented.

Guy sat at the table, with his sister, while Nora, delighted, waited upon them. The child was then so sleepy and tired that he could only keep awake to repeat his evening prayer and bestow his good-night kisses.

When he first came home, he inquired for mamma, and Maud sent to ask if she would see him. Word was returned that she was unable to see any one, and, after this denial, Guy said no more about her.

Later, Maud met the servant who attended her, and asked, particularly, in regard to her health.

"I don't know that she improves," was the reply. "Her nerves are very weak, and she gets but little sleep."

This was said, coldly, and with an air which showed that the speaker expected neither sympathy nor kindness for her patient.

"I am very sorry to hear she is no better," replied the stepdaughter. "I hoped to find her in better health and spirits."

"If that's a hypocrite, I'm mistaken," said Mrs. Eames, to herself, as she looked after the retreating figure of the young girl. "Maybe I've heard only one side of the story."

Mr. Lamson came in late, that evening, and found Maud waiting. "If I had known this, I should have been here, long ago," he exclaimed, as he clasped her extended hands. "It is a great pleasure to see you; but I had no heart to call you back, when I knew you were so much happier, away. How is Guy?" he asked, with the next breath.

"Perfectly well. You will hardly know him, he has grown so."

"Tell me about your visit," said Mr. Lamson, after turning to the table, and, without

apparent intention, closing the Bible which lay upon it.

"I will do so," father, answered Maud. "But, first, please tell me of your business."

"Prospering," was the reply. "A few months more, and there will be no need of economy. We might live differently now; but I am still indebted to Mr. Harding. I hope I have sent you what money you needed."

"Yes, indeed, and more too."

"I never heard of a woman having more money than she needed," he rejoined, with some bitterness, and was about to continue this strain of remark, when some thought suddenly checked him. "Have you seen your mother?" he asked.

"No, sir. She sent me word she was unable to see any one."

Mr. Lamson uttered an exclamation of impatience. "The same story," he said. "She never will be able to do anything so long as she continues her present mode of life."

"Let us not talk about that, father. I

must tell you of my visit;" and Maud succeeded in gaining his attention.

"Everything seems to go right with Burton," he said, in reply to her account.

"Yes, everything. He is a very happy man."

"He always was, so far as I could see; working away, as if there was nothing beyond this world."

"He works differently now. He has become a Christian, and made a profession of religion. His pastor says he is one of the most useful members of his church."

"And has Burton come to that!" exclaimed Mr. Lamson. "He is the last man of whom I should expect such a thing. What wrought the change?"

"God's spirit," answered Maud, softly.

The conversation proceeded no further in this direction. It had reached a point beyond which the father did not care to go; and, soon after, he was left alone.

For some minutes he sat gazing absently into the fire, then turned to the table and

opened his Bible. He was almost through with its reading. The Old Testament, so full of history and poetry, of startling incident, and strange mysterious prophecy, had been carefully perused.

The New now claimed his attention. He had traced the life of Christ from his birth in Bethlehem, to his death on the cross. Then his resurrection and glorious ascension. He closed the book, not with a prayer, but a question.

Was it all true? If so, surely human power wrought no such miracles; human wisdom uttered no such holy teachings. Was this Christ, God, manifest in the flesh, sent to redeem the world?

No sneer, now, upon his lips. It might be he had cherished a delusion.

He thought of his daughter, and wondered if she remembered him in her prayers. He need not have wondered. She could not forget him. Her last waking thoughts framed themselves into a petition for his salvation.

Bridget wished for no assistance the next

morning. "Sure, miss, we can do it all," she said. "Only give the orders, and it's meself will carry them out."

Mr. Lamson really looked cheerful as he sat down to breakfast opposite Maud.

"This is better than eating alone," he remarked pleasantly; "but I am afraid you will find it very dull here."

"I hope not *very* dull," was the reply. "The care of Guy will occupy a good deal of my time, and I shall be glad to have some, for reading. Then I shall go to church, and, perhaps, attend lectures, if you are not too busy to accompany me."

"That would be a good idea," said her father. "I wonder I had not thought of it myself. I used to enjoy hearing lectures. We will talk more about it, this evening. I shall be home to dinner," he added, as he was closing the door.

Maud had risen with the determination to see her mother; and, in pursuance of her plan, met Mrs. Eames in the hall.

"I hope my mother will be able to see me

this morning," she said, after a pleasant greeting.

"I don't know how she will feel about it," replied the woman. "She has had a restless night; but I can ask her, if you wish."

"I think I will take the liberty of going to her room, without permission," said the daughter.

"That would be better," answered Mrs. Eames. "And you might as well go now. She is sitting up, and the room is in order."

Maud tapped lightly, and a moment after, opened the door. "Good morning, mother," she said, cheerfully. "I could wait no longer to see you."

"I see no one, now," responded Mrs. Lamson, in a languid tone, as she suffered her stepdaughter to take her passive hand. "You are looking very well," she added, after scrutinizing the face before her.

"I *am* very well; and so is Guy. You would hardly recognize him, he has grown so tall and handsome."

"Is he handsome?" asked the mother, with a slight manifestation of interest.

"He is considered so," answered Maud, glad if even this would recommend the child to her notice.

"I would see him; but he reminds me so much of Charley, it brings back all my grief."

"We all loved Charley, and it was sad to have him leave us; but if both the boys were gone, the house would seem more desolate. Guy wishes to see you," added his sister.

"Then he may come," was the reply. "I have been shut up here so long, it may do me good to see him. Tell Mrs. Eames I shall not want her at present."

Maud hastened to call her brother, and convey the message.

"Are you going with me?" asked Guy.

"No, dear," answered his sister. "You can go alone."

"And will mamma be glad to see me?"

"I think so, if you go quietly, and are careful not to trouble her."

The child opened the door, and stepped

noiselessly into the room. "Mamma, dear mamma," he called, in a voice scarcely above a whisper, "may I come and kiss you?"

The mother's heart was touched.

"Come, darling," she answered, as her arms clasped her beautiful boy.

During the next half-hour, she had neither thought nor care for aught else.

"Do you love me?" he asked; and received such reply as fully satisfied him. "Love Charley, too, with the angels," added Guy.

"Don't you know Charley has gone to live with the angels?" he asked, as he noticed his mother's look of surprise.

"He was an angel while here," she replied, impetuously.

"Sister Maud says he is an angel, now; and I shall be one sometime. Won't you too, mamma?"

She made no answer to this, and Guy, fearing he should be troublesome, asked if she was tired.

"Not much," she replied, with a fond caress.

Maud shared her brother's fear, and came to call him away; but his mother was not willing he should leave her.

"You have taken good care of him," she said to her stepdaughter, in a voice quite unlike that with which she usually addressed her. "I am under great obligations to you."

"Sister Maud could make you well too," exclaimed Guy. "She knows how."

"I wish she did. I am tired of being shut up here. But the house is hardly opened now," she added, turning to Maud. "Your father pleads poverty."

"I think father's business is improving," was the answer. "I will try to have the house more cheerful. I wish you were able to come down to dinner. Bridget and I are going to do our best, and we intend to have quite a feast."

"Oh, yes, mamma: do come," pleaded Guy. "Sister says I may come to the table."

"I will think of it," at length said Mrs. Lamson. "But I have taken my meals here,

alone, for so long, it will seem very strange to go to the dining-room."

Maud flitted away, but Guy remained; and Mrs. Eames wisely absented herself.

"I think mother will come down to dinner," said the daughter; "and we must have something nice. I wish you would tell me what she likes best."

"That I can do easily, and cook it too," answered the woman. "I'm not sure but your coming home was just what she needed."

Mrs. Eames found time to prepare some dishes for dinner, and give advice to others, so that a very tempting meal was served.

Mr. Lamson came home in good season, and Guy sprang into his arms. "Mamma has come down stairs," was the boy's first salutation.

A cloud gathered on the father's face at this reminder of his wife; but the caresses of his child, *their* child, quickly banished it.

The long separated family met around the table; and, if this reunion lacked something of cordiality, it was really far more pleasant

than could have been expected. Mrs. Lamson had dressed herself becomingly, and made some effort to be agreeable. Maud seconded her, and Guy, who was in blissful ignorance of domestic troubles, smiled upon all alike.

The parlors had been thrown open, and everything arranged to give them an air of cheerfulness. After dinner, Maud invited her parents there to see how like old times it would seem; and Mr. Lamson was so influenced by his surroundings that he became quite social.

"This is like living, again. Your coming home is a good thing," he said to his daughter. "I really believe it has benefited your mother, as well as me."

"I am feeling better to-day," replied his wife, while one white hand toyed with the curls of her child. "Guy has cheered me up wonderfully."

This evening was the beginning of better things in the home of Maud Lamson. Mrs. Eames' position soon became a sinecure, and she was engaged in the capacity of servant.

It was a pleasant arrangement to all, since it relieved Maud, and gave an air of greater respectability to the establishment, and gratified its mistress.

She now began to see people at home, went out when the weather was fine, and complained less of ill health. Her husband was more tolerant of her faults, and, when obliged to deny her some gratification, did it with kindness. He found time to attend lectures whenever his daughter wished to go, and was a far happier man than he had been for years.

Thus the winter passed. In the early spring, Crin Burton came to visit her friend. Mr. Lamson was particularly desirous that her stay with them should be pleasant; and his wife, too, was anxious that she should receive all proper attention.

Some habits of the young ladies quite surprised her. She wondered how they could find so much pleasure in church-going, and the attendance of other religious meetings;

but she was careful not to express this in a way which might give offence.

Maud had made no public profession of her faith, yet it was understood by every member of the household that she intended to lead a Christian life. She made no secret of this, and all could testify to her consistency. Even her mother told Mrs. Eames there was something about her she was unable to understand.

"It's easy to see," said the housekeeper. "She acts like a Christian, and if there's one in the world, she is. I've watched her, and heard the way she talks to Guy. It's better than preaching, any time. She ought to be a minister. That's my belief."

There was now nothing to prevent the two friends from visiting Mrs. Bascom; and, after being assured that she was ready to receive them, they left home, and soon found themselves at the familiar station.

It is not necessary for me to describe the meeting between these young girls and her who had seemed to them almost like a mother. All can imagine what it would be.

"Your chamber is just as you left it," said their hostess, when the first flow of words had ceased. "Shall I go up with you?"

"No, indeed, auntie: let us go by ourselves just as we used to."

They went up by themselves, yet not "just as they used to." We may tread the same paths, but not in the same way. Life never repeats itself to those who make progress.

The occupants of Mrs. Bascom's pleasant chamber recognized something of this. They were conscious of a slight feeling of disappointment.

"I must have changed," said Maud, who was first to give expression to this feeling. "I have thought, sometime, if I could come back here, and look from these windows, I should be like a child again, and desire nothing more."

"I have thought so, too," responded her companion. "And it is pleasant, but not all I expected. We were very happy here," she added.

"Yes; but the old life would not satisfy us

now," replied Maud. "We can never be children again."

Their voices had an undertone of sadness as they thus talked, and it was well that the tea-bell called them below stairs.

"Does it seem natural?" asked Mrs. Bascom, as they sat, each in her accustomed place, at the table.

"It could hardly seem otherwise," replied Crin. "Do we seem natural, Auntie Bascom?"

"Yes, indeed," she answered; and then, scanning their faces more closely, she added, "You have both changed since you left me. Maud looks as though she had been doing some hard studying."

"I have," was the reply. "Trying to solve the problem of life."

"And have you succeeded?"

"Not exactly; but I have gained some light, and hope for more."

This was like some of Maud Lamson's old speeches, which Mrs. Bascom never attempted to understand, and she was content to let

them pass without comment. It was such a pleasure to have these girls with her again, that she had no wish to do anything but enjoy their society.

"When you left me, I little thought it would be so long before we should meet again," she said, later in the evening.

"I was certain we should be here again, in a few months," responded Crin.

"And I was as sure of it, as of living," echoed Maud. "Yet two years and a half have passed. It seems hardly possible, although I have lived a great while, in that time."

Mrs. Bascom knew something of the change which had taken place in the religious views of her young friends, for their letters had not been wholly silent upon the subject. In this visit, she learned still more. She could not but see how Christian principle controlled and regulated every act, and how, underlying all apparent motive, was the one great desire to glorify God.

Discussion of serious subjects was not her

taste. She carefully avoided it; but she could not fail to be impressed with the earnest piety of her young guests. They did not intrude its manifestations upon her, and this fact gave them a deeper significance.

Meanwhile, the visit drew to its close. The old school-room had been visited, old haunts explored, and acquaintances renewed. Maud and Crin had attended the same church where they were led when children, and listened to the same preacher, who, during the last years of their stay in the village, had read essays to the people.

Through all, not one word was spoken to Mrs. Bascom upon religion, as applied to herself, and, with strange inconsistency, she wondered at the silence.

When her guests were gone, she learned that this was not the result of indifference or forgetfulness. A note left upon the dressing-table in their room, contained a most affectionate and earnest plea that she would think prayerfully of her duty as an accountable being. The names of both friends were

attached to the note; but the reader knew, at once, that it had been written by Maud.

There was no labored argument to prove the existence of a duty. The appeal was to the heart, rather than the head; and these written words had a power over the lonely woman. They could be neither misunderstood nor forgotten. Prayer had consecrated them; and this thought, above all others, gave solemnity to their meaning.

Upon her return from this visit, home was more pleasant to Maud Lamson than ever before. Her mother met Crin and herself cordially. Guy had long stories to tell of mamma's care and kindness.

"I stay with her 'most all the time, and she wants me too," he said. "We talk about Charley, and sometimes she asks me about heaven."

"You have no reason to complain of her reception," said Crin, to her friend, when they were alone, for a short time before dinner.

"I have reason to be thankful for it," was the reply; "and I believe I am. It is a great

contrast to what I have experienced before, and I know father will be glad to see me."

Indeed he was. Even more glad than he expressed; and he expressed enough to satisfy his daughter.

Everything moved on harmoniously. The anxious look had gone from Mr. Lamson's face, and the frown from that of his wife. Both had learned some lessons, for which they were better and happier. Guy had taught one, and let us hope the teachings of the Bible were not lost upon the other.

Various plans were suggested for the summer. Maud had permission to consult her own pleasure. "Do just as you please," said her father. "You have sacrificed yourself for others quite enough for the last two years. I intend to take a long journey with your mother and Guy. We should be happy to have your company; but I have no desire to influence you against your own wishes. Do just as you please."

She wished to go to the seaside. Mr. Burton, however, intended to visit some relatives,

and would not establish his family in their old quarters for the summer.

"Frank and I might go down with you for a week," remarked Crin, when the matter was up for discussion. "I am quite sure we could, and the days would be something to remember all our lives."

The result was that Maud Lamson went home with her friend, and Mr. Burton made arrangements to accompany the young ladies. Frank was of the party; but Mrs. Lynde felt obliged to forego this pleasure.

"What a glorious view!" exclaimed Maud, when they first strolled to the beach. "It is more than I expected."

Then she stood, lost in thought, looking far, far off, on the sea, until Frank called her attention to some floating planks.

"Old Aleck would say they are drifting like human souls, with no sure hope of heaven."

"Thank God, none of *us* are drifting," responded Mr. Burton, reverently. "Nothing ever impressed me like that one idea," he added. "I think of it when walking the

streets, or riding in the cars. There are always before me some faces upon which 'drifting' is written so plainly, that I cannot but read."

"It is a terrible thing to drift on the ocean of time," said Maud, absently; and her companions knew that she was thinking of the loved ones at home.

Mr. Burton wished to make his first call upon old Aleck, alone; so, in the morning, before others had quite shaken off their slumbers, he started for the hut. When he came within sight of it, he observed a woman standing at the door. Directly a man joined her, and they seemed to converse earnestly.

He quickened his steps, sure that something was wrong. "How is Mr. Wilde,—old Aleck?" he asked, hurriedly, of these two.

"'Most through," was the reply, as they stepped aside, allowing him to enter.

Old Aleck lay upon the bed, and by his side was a boy, who occasionally moistened his lips and wiped the death-damp from his brow. Recognizing Mr. Burton, he pro-

nounced his name, and the old sailor opened his eyes.

A smile of joy lighted up his face, as he extended an emaciated hand. "God is good to send you here," he said.

"I had hoped to find you well," responded his friend.

"It is well," was the answer. "I am almost home. I shall soon see Molly and heaven."

It was only with a great effort he was able to speak; and these few short sentences quite exhausted him; but he soon rallied, and inquired for "Master Frank."

"He came down with me yesterday, and will be here to-day;" said Mr. Burton. "No one knew I was coming here this morning."

"He will be too late," whispered old Aleck, still more faintly.

"I will go for him," said the boy, quickly. "Dame Miles will take my place."

"I can take your place," replied Mr. Burton. "Hasten as much as possible; and tell Frank he must stop for nothing."

Frank Lynde was out upon the beach when he saw this boy in the distance, running at full speed.

"Come! come!" he shouted. "Old Aleck is dying, and wants you."

Stopping to hear no more, he walked rapidly towards the boy, who, now that his message was delivered, had thrown himself upon the sand.

"Do you say old Aleck is dying?" asked Frank, as he paused for a moment.

"Yes, sir," was the reply; "and the gentleman said you must stop for nothing. Your uncle is there, sir," he added. "I'll overtake you, when I've rested a bit."

Mr. Burton began to look for his nephew long before it would have been possible for him to come.

"Molly's Bible," whispered old Aleck. Dame Miles took it from a shelf opposite the bed, and placed it in his hands.

He looked at it wistfully.

"The letter."

This was given him.

"Master Frank."

"Yes," said the woman, "I understand. Shall I tell him?"

A sign of assent, and she informed Mr. Burton that this Bible, with the shawl which had enveloped it, was to be given to his nephew, as a keepsake. "He told us all about it, when he was first taken sick; and the letter is to be buried with him."

They were talking of this when Frank entered. For a moment he bent over the dying man, his eyes filling with tears, and his hands trembling with emotion.

"Molly, heaven," whispered the sailor; and then beckoned to Dame Miles.

"He wants you to have the Bible and shawl," she explained.

"Keep them?"

"Always," replied Frank, to this last injunction. "They shall be sacredly treasured."

Again the lips moved; but no sound. For more than an hour the watchers kept their places.

"He is gone," at length said the woman,

and turned away to tell those who stood without the door.

A good man had passed away. Poor, and little knower, but one of God's chosen ones; heir to a heavenly crown, starred with precious jewels.

"Let us pray," said Mr. Burton; and they knelt there together, these rude fishermen, with their wives and children, and these other two, to whom had been given wealth and culture.

It was a fitting place for prayer, hallowed oft before; and those who listened, half forgot their grief, in thankfulness. A life of toil and weariness on earth, — a life of glorious blessedness in heaven. Was not the exchange a happy one?

Old Aleck, anticipating his death, had given directions for his burial, and the disposal of his little property. There remained enough of his savings to pay all necessary expenses, and Dame Miles and her husband had been selected to carry out his wishes.

Mr. Burton was told these particulars, and

he then asked if he could render any further assistance.

"We've been thinking of a minister," said the woman. "It's far to come; but t'would seem better for one like him."

"Tell me the time for the funeral, and there shall be a clergyman here," was the reply.

It needed but a short consultation to decide this. Everything was ready; even the garments in which the poor body was to be clothed, and the coffin that was to enclose it.

At two o'clock, the following afternoon, a small company, consisting of a clergyman, Mr. Burton and his family, with a few others, met a motley group of persons by the hut of old Aleck Wilde.

The coffin was placed on a table, just outside the door, and a few chairs were arranged near it. On the foot of the coffin lay a Bible,—Molly's Bible,—which the clergyman opened reverently.

He had been told the history of this Bible,

and now, for the first time, it was repeated to those who stood around.

Aleck Wilde had thought his experience too sacred to be often told by himself; but now that he had reached heaven, and Molly, it was well to retrace the way in which he had been led.

Speaker and hearers were deeply affected. One common sympathy united them. The veil was lifted from the past, and those who had questioned of old Aleck's early life, were answered. He had loved and lost; yet *not* lost, for there lingered ever near him an angel face, while he read, again and again, the last fond words of her who had only gone before.

A simple story, but an eloquent sermon was this experience; and, when the preacher closed, he had drawn so lifelike a picture of the meeting of these two long-separated ones, that tears were wiped away.

"Aleck Wilde had another friend in heaven, more dearly loved than Molly," he added, after a short pause.

Having thus riveted the attention of his

audience, he told them of their elder brother, their Saviour, Priest, and King. "He loves you with an infinite love, has purchased your souls with an infinite price, and now waits for you in heaven, asking only that you love Him in return. Can you refuse to do this?"

Streaming eyes were raised to the questioner, as his gaze rested upon one and another of the group which surrounded him. He waited a little, and then, uplifting his hands, invoked the blessing of God upon them.

After this, all looked at the face of their old friend; and one little child, held in the arms of its mother, pressed her warm, red lips to the cold brow. The coffin lid was screwed down, and the rude bier brought forward to receive its burden.

Silently and orderly, the company formed itself into a procession, and followed the bearers to the spot which had been chosen by Aleck Wilde as his last resting place. There they buried him out of their sight, but turned

away to remember him with a sincere affection.

Mr. Burton lingered to speak a few words to these humble people, while Frank addressed himself to the children, many of whom he had seen in the old sailor's Sabbath school.

"We shan't have any more books now," sobbed one.

"Nobody now to tell me about heaven," said another.

Frank comforted them with the assurance of books, and the promise to come down, the next day, and see what could be done about a Sabbath school.

Dame Miles and her husband went to the hut. Molly's Bible and shawl were given to Frank Lynde — a precious legacy. Then, Mr. Burton, and those who accompanied him, walked back across the sands.

Maud Lamson had seen old Aleck, cold and silent, yet speaking, bidding her labor on, hopefully, trustingly, even to the end. The week spent by the sea was not what had been anticipated; but it was rich in experience, and

full of subdued happiness. The children received their books; some one was found willing to continue the Sabbath school; and much good seemed to be accomplished.

A few days at the home of her friend, and Maud left for her own home. Here she found several letters awaiting her; among them one from Uncle Rufus, and another written by Esther Simpson. This last was very long, covering an experience of months. Two or three notes had been received from her during the spring; but this was the first epistle worthy of being called a letter.

The family were settled in their new home, which was even more pleasant than they had anticipated. Many improvements had been made in the settlement within a year. A house of worship was nearly completed, and the people began to think of beautifying their dwelling houses.

"Mr. Spaulding boards with us," wrote Esther, "and he seems to know how to do everything. It is fortunate, too, that he does;

for everybody consults him, and follows his advice.

"Our house is not done; but, before winter, we hope to have it finished and furnished. Mr. Spaulding has two rooms, and they are in pretty good order, only needing paint and paper. Some of the people consider us quite extravagant; but we must have a comfortable home.

"Mr. Spaulding has, lately, had a large number of new books, and is studying very hard. I study too; and—would you believe it?—I am teaching school. I never thought of such a thing, until the people began to talk about it; and then I told them I was too ignorant. But they insisted, and Mr. Spaulding said he was sure I could teach any one who would come this summer. So I commenced, and really like it.

"You ought to see John, he is so happy and hopeful; so much respected too. You would be surprised at the amount of reading and studying he does. Mr. Spaulding says it is wonderful; and father says he does more

work than he ever did before. If you were only here, I should have nothing more to desire. Perhaps you will make us a visit sometime. I certainly hope so."

A faint flush crimsoned the cheek of Maud Lamson, as she read this, and closed the letter for a moment. It was soon opened, and she read on.

"Father and mother send love, and wish me to tell you that they remember all your kindness." John says 'Give my love to Miss Maud, and tell her if she wishes to see the finest country in the world, she must come West.' Mr. Spaulding is not here, or I am sure he would send some message, for we often talk of you."

Uncle Rufus' letter was next opened. It contained sad news. Aunt Mary had been thrown from a wagon, and severely bruised. No bones were broken; but she was confined to her bed, with no prospect of being able to walk very soon.

"I wish you could come to us," wrote the old man. "You could do her more good than

all the doctors. Mrs. Brown is here, and takes the best care of her; but we old folks need somebody to cheer us up. Anna and Burt Lester were over yesterday, inquiring for Cousin Maud.

"Let me hear from you as soon as may-be, and come, if consistent."

Maud carried the letter to her father.

"Do you wish to go?" he asked, after perusing it.

"Yes, sir: I think I ought to go, if I am not needed here. They were very kind to Guy and me, last summer, and now I might do something to repay them."

Mrs. Lamson came in, and she took a different view of the case. For some reason, her stepdaughter had gained new interest in her eyes. She was beginning to regard her with a little of motherly pride, and she really enjoyed her society.

Guy had done something to bring this about; but no unprejudiced person could be long with Maud Lamson, without acknowledging her superiority. Then, too, she was a

magnificent looking girl, one who would attract attention anywhere; and, truth to tell, this last had much to do with Mrs. Lamson's previous coldness. She considered herself beautiful, as what vain woman does not, and she could brook no rival. But, as I said before, she had changed.

"I think Maud should travel with us," she said to her husband. "She has seen very little of the world; hardly been introduced into society yet. She is older now, than I was, when we were married; and we shall be losing her, soon, unless we take care."

She was getting excited, and continued, without waiting for a reply, "It was all very well for her and Guy to go into the country last summer, and I am very much obliged to these people; but I have other plans for her now. Besides," and here she paused a moment, "I have not done my duty by Maud, and I wish to make amends in some way."

"Mother!" exclaimed the girl, advancing towards her, with outstretched arms. An embrace sealed their new relation; and hence-

forth there was neither jealousy nor coldness between them.

"You will love me a little, now, mother," said Maud, when she found voice.

"Love you! Yes, if you will but forgive me."

The husband and father could not see this, unmoved. His arms enfolded both, and upon each fair brow he imprinted a kiss. "Our home will be a happy one, now," he murmured.

"It shall be, if any effort of mine can make it so," replied his wife; and Maud slipped away, that she might not hear the explanation which followed.

She almost wavered in her decision. It would be such a pleasure to travel with her parents, and see the various works of nature and art they proposed to visit; but,—it was duty against pleasure, and her promise was binding.

Uncle Rufus welcomed his niece, and Aunt Mary was cheered by her presence. If her life here, during the summer, seemed a little

monotonous, as sometimes it would, when compared with what it might have been, she had only to remember the time when she had come to this home, for the love denied in her own.

Anna and Burt Lester were still at Mr. Thayer's, delighted when Miss Bates allowed them to spend a day at Uncle Rufus'. As ever, they talked of Cousin Fred, anticipating the time when they were to live with him.

"He says we shall always live with him, when he gets a new house," said Burt, who was more communicative than his sister. "I mean to write, and ask Cousin Fred to build his house next year. I want to go quick. Shouldn't you like to go, too, Cousin Maud?"

Maud had asked herself this question before; but a trifling remark turned the attention of the child, and he ran away to Aunt Mary, who, now that midsummer had passed, was once more about the house. Not that she regained her usual health and strength,—perhaps this would never be; but, with the

aid of a crutch, or friendly arm, she was able to walk a short distance.

Mrs. Brown, still a member of the family, had found her work. Wherever there was sickness, she went, tender and unwearied in her care, ministering to the dying, and comforting the mourner.

The little cottage on the hill was unoccupied, except as she went there occasionally, for a short rest from labor. Uncle Rufus offered her a home, and urged its acceptance upon the plea that she was really needed.

"Mary and I are getting old," he said, "and we want somebody to look after things, and take care of us when we are sick."

Mrs. Brown was, herself, past fifty; but her gentle manners and cheerful disposition, which she had retained through all the years of trial, gave her an appearance of being younger.

"I hope you will stay here through the winter," Maud said to her one day. "I am afraid Aunt Mary will never be very strong; and you can take better care of her than any one else."

"I shall stay if I am needed," was the reply. "When Nancy died, I knew what my work was as well as I do now; and I am ready to do it."

Mr. Lane had been less cheerful than usual, during the summer. He lived in such sympathy with his wife, that, when she suffered, he suffered with her. Maud was the only one who could rouse him into anything like his old mirthful humor; and her challenge sometimes failed to meet a hearty response. In their drives together, he often seemed to forget that she was with him.

As before, Maud Lamson's mail was the wonder of the village postmaster. Such packages of letters quite astonished him, and it was but natural that he should scan their superscriptions somewhat narrowly. In doing this, he made the discovery that "Mr. Spaulding wrote to that girl that stays up to Uncle Rufus Lane's, so much." He told his wife, and straightway it was noised abroad, until it reached the ears of Uncle Rufus himself.

"That's nothing strange," he replied coolly.

"She likes to write, and has more correspondents than we could attend to, if we should do nothing else."

Every word of this was true. A correspondence between Maud Lamson and Frederic Spaulding was *not* strange. Their tastes and habits of thought were in sympathy. Duty was her watchword as well as his; and, when he knew that, he dared to indulge the hope that he might welcome her to his western home.

A letter written to Esther Simpson, soon after the death and burial of old Aleck, was made his excuse for addressing Maud. He wished a more minute description of this death and burial, and would consider it a great favor if she would transmit to him what might be a fitting sequel to "Molly's Bible."

She could not refuse this request. She prepared a sketch, and its reception was acknowledged with many thanks.

The correspondence thus commenced made no great drafts upon the time of either party; for their letters were neither very long, nor

very frequent, only sufficient to make sure of a mutual remembrance.

The letters Maud received from home were of an entirely different character,—long and frequent. Her father and mother both wrote; and, although Mrs. Lamson had no particular gift for this kind of literary labor, she made an effort to do her best.

"We miss you. Do, please come home," she wrote, soon after they returned from their journey; and the entreaty was repeated almost weekly. It was ^{*}October, however, before Aunt Mary would consent that Maud should leave her; and then she exacted the promise of another visit, during the winter, if she should be confined to her room.

A grand reception was given the returning daughter. The house and its occupants were in holiday attire. Mrs. Eames prepared her best dinner, while Bridget and Nora had scoured, scrubbed, swept, and dusted, until door-knobs were miniature mirrors, and the soft, velvety carpets lay like beds of fresh-blown roses.

Nothing cold or cheerless. Warm, loving hearts prompted loving greetings. From kitchen to drawing-room there was rejoicing, which would have reached the nursery, had it not been deserted.

Mr. Lamson, who had met Maud at the depot, looked on smilingly, while she received and returned the caresses of the household.

"I shall consent to no more leaving home, for you, this winter," said Mrs. Lamson, looking admiringly at her stepdaughter, as they sat around the table. "I promise myself the pleasure of making your acquaintance, and giving my friends the same privilege."

"The pleasure can be yours," was the reply. "I have no desire to leave home."

"I hope not," responded Mr. Lamson. "We have seen but little of you, and that little has been under circumstances not calculated to give you a pleasant impression of home."

This was not intended as a reflection upon his wife; neither did she so receive it. All differences between them had been settled

long before, and they were done with recriminations.

In her happiness, Maud would have forgotten to eat, had not others reminded her that she was doing injustice to Mrs. Eames' dinner.

"It must be that food for the heart supplies all wants," she said, laughingly, after refusing any further addition to her supply of good things.

The evening was spent in relating incidents of travel, and recounting their varied experience. Guy fell asleep in his sister's arms, and was carried to bed by Nora. Later, Maud knelt by his side, and prayed for a blessing upon him. In this prayer, father and mother were not forgotten. Her faith was strengthened by what she had seen and heard, until she hoped, nay, confidently expected, they would, one day, acknowledge Christ as their Saviour.

More than once had the thought occurred to Mr. Lamson that his daughter might be praying him out of his difficulties; and, when his

old indebtedness was entirely cancelled, as it had been a few days before her return, he was half inclined to ask her the question. He remembered the scene in the library, when he found her upon her knees, and judged rightly, that the petition then uttered might have been daily repeated.

During her absence, Maud had decided to unite herself with the church so soon as an opportunity should occur; and she informed her father of this intention.

"I hope it will meet your approval," she said, in conclusion.

"I shall make no opposition," was the reply. "I hope you have considered it seriously."

"I certainly have, father, and prayerfully."

"Then do what you think best. It is not for me to dictate."

Her pastor noticed her re-appearance in church; and called upon her the following week. Mrs. Lamson was present during the call, and treated him cordially.

"I believe I shall go to church with you, next Sabbath," she said to Maud, after Mr.

Wells had left. "Your father is not inclined to go at all; and I am tired of going alone."

"I should be very glad to have your company," replied Maud; "but I never thought of asking you. Mr. Wells' preaching is very different from what you have been accustomed to hear."

"I suppose it must be," was the answer; "and it might be well for me to hear something different. Your father used to talk a great deal about such things; but he never does now. I think Charley's death has made a difference with him, as well as me. I never expect to be as good as you are," she added, after a pause; "but I do hope I am growing better."

The next Sabbath morning, Mrs. Lamson listened to a sermon from Mr. Wells, and found it, as she expected, very different from what she usually heard. But she was pleased and interested. "I shall certainly go again," she said to her husband. "I don't wonder Maud enjoys it."

"I believe my family are all taking up new

views, quite opposite to mine," said Mr. Lamson, in reply.

"I have thought that perhaps *you* have changed. You don't talk as you used to."

"I have had other things to think of," was the evasive reply. "My business has engrossed my whole attention for the past two years."

Mr. Lamson said more than he intended; for, while it was true that business had been uppermost in his mind, he had thought seriously upon subjects quite foreign to it. His *own* views, if not entirely changed, were greatly modified.

Mrs. Lamson knew the day when her daughter was to come forward and make public consecration of herself to the service of God; but the father heard nothing of it until the evening before. Then Maud told him, and expressed a strong desire that he would be present.

"I will think of it," he said, for want of a better reply; and then she went out and left him alone.

His wife soon entered the library, to speak of the same matter. "I hope you *will* go to-morrow," she urged; "it would look strangely for you to stay away. Maud considers this joining the church a solemn affair, even if you do not; and we ought to give it the sanction of our presence."

He did not wish to be present in church the next day; but various considerations induced him to go there. He sat through the services, maintaining an outward composure, with great effort, while his wife was more deeply moved than himself. Then they walked home together, silently, Guy being the only one who ventured a remark; and he, looking up to his sister for a reply, saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

The winter was all it had promised. Mr. Lamson's establishment was put upon its old footing, and retrenchment was over. His wife was at liberty to entertain her friends as she pleased, and the brilliant talents of his daughter received their due meed of praise.

The parents were gratified; but Maud cared

little for the idle show. She made some valuable acquaintances; yet too many of those she met were drifting on the surface of society, careless of the deep under-current of life, which stirs the pulse of every disciplined heart. Her beauty, accomplishments, and position made her the object of marked attention; and, before the winter festivities were over, more than one had sought her hand in marriage.

Perhaps there was danger that the pleasures and pomps of wealth might ensnare her. She sometimes feared it, and carried the burden of her fear to God, in prayer.

"Most girls would have their heads quite turned by so much attention; but she is different from any one I ever saw."

Mr. Lamson had been speaking of Maud, when his wife made this remark.

"Mrs. Eames accounts for all her goodness and strangeness, by saying she is a Christian; and if that is the reason of it, more is the pity we are not all Christians."

"I believe Maud is a Christian," was the

reply. "She has some extreme ideas of duty; but, on the whole, I could hardly wish her different. Her standard of rectitude is very high. The man who can realize her ideal, must be well nigh perfect." Little thought the father, when he said this, what was to come.

Summer plans were again under discussion, when Maud Lamson received a call from Frederic Spaulding. He was on his way to visit Anna and Burt Lester. Miss Bates wished to be relieved from further care of them; but, judging from the prolonged stay of their guardian, in the city, there was no immediate haste.

Mrs. Lamson had heard of this same Mr. Spaulding; knew that her daughter corresponded with him, and had read some of his letters; but, never, for one moment, dreamed that he was the one to whom she must resign the idol of their home.

When she saw him, some doubts intruded, for he was one to please a woman's fancy. His manners were above criticism, and his

conversational powers rarely equalled. Mr. Lamson was decidedly pleased with him. Maud thought he had never been more agreeable. She thought more than this; but we will not anticipate.

Mr. Lamson was surprised, when, the day before he proposed leaving the city, Frederic Spaulding asked for a private interview. It had never occurred to him that his daughter would consent to spend her life in a western settlement. He was mistaken. She had consented, and waited her father's approval.

"I must take time to think of it," he said. "I have educated my daughter for a different position, and I wish her to be happy."

"You *cannot* wish so more sincerely than I," urged the suitor. "If I did not believe she would be happy with me, no power could induce me to take her from your home."

Mr. Lamson went in search of Maud. She was with her mother, and it was easy to see how matters stood.

"So you wish to leave us," he said, with an attempt at pleasantry. "Tired of your home.

It might be better ; but I doubt if you'll find one better out West."

His daughter was in no mood for replying lightly. "You know I am not tired of my home," she said.

"But you wish to leave us."

If he expected a reply to this, he was disappointed ; and, after some delay, he added, "There seems very little for me to say. It is all settled, and I must acquiesce with the best grace I can muster. However, I will say, that I was never more astonished in my life ;" and with this he returned to Mr. Spaulding.

The best grace he could muster was but sorry ; and no one could better appreciate the sacrifice he was making, than his future son-in-law.

"I must look to my wife for consolation, after this," said Mr. Lamson, "and Maud may comfort you, if she will."

Small comfort did the young man need in his present circumstances ; but Maud's presence was welcome.

Anna and Burt Lester were visited. Miss

Bates was persuaded to continue her care of them until autumn ; Uncle Rufus and Aunt Mary listened to a story which made them very happy ; and the good people, all, heard two of Mr. Spaulding's best sermons.

On his return, he spent two days, as guest, in Mr. Lamson's family ; and, no sooner had he gone, than, to use Bridget's expression, "piles of cloth were brought into the house."

"We will have one journey together yet," said the mother ; and in the midst of sewing and general preparation, a month was spent in delightful travel. Then came Crin Burton to stay with her friend, till the autumn flitting. They made a short visit to Mrs. Bascom, and found her more mindful of religious duty, yet not wholly decided to renounce her early faith.

Mrs. Lamson decided that her daughter's bridal should be a brilliant affair ; and it was so. Hosts of friends were invited, and entertained sumptuously. Some were there who had talked of Maud Lamson's burying herself in a log-house. Others wondered she could

make such a sacrifice as to marry a western minister; but these were all silenced by the gentlemanly bearing of the bridegroom.

This display was not at all to the tastes of those for whom it had been made, yet they yielded, gracefully, to the wishes of their parents.

Maud received many valuable presents, in addition to the generous outfit, provided by her father. Uncle Rufus and Aunt Mary, too, added of their abundance.

"You shall want for nothing which money can buy," said the old man, placing a well-filled pocket-book in the hands of his niece. "Not a word," he added, in anticipation of her remonstrance. "If you don't need it for anything else, invest it in land when you get out West."

Anna and Burt Lester were as happy as two children could be; for they were going to live, always, with Cousin Fred, and Cousin Maud.

Maud spent one more week at her father's, and then commenced the journey westward.

This was full of interest and incidents; but our travellers were looking to the end.

The minister's house was finished, and one part, at least, furnished. Kitchen and pantry were crowded. Mrs. Simpson declared there was more food, cooked, than could be eaten in a month. Mrs. Cahill and her daughter, whom the minister had put in charge of the house, were in a state bordering on distraction. Their arrangements were entirely set aside; and they had nothing to do but look on.

"Never mind," said Esther Simpson, "Mrs. Spaulding will not be troubled, and no one will blame you."

"I'm sure, I hope not," replied the woman, "but I never saw the like, before."

Maud was more amused than troubled, when she found time to look around, quite ready to agree with her housekeeper, that the like *was* never seen before. This, however, did not occur until the day after her arrival. So many were waiting to see her, she could only attend to the people.

When the large boxes of furniture arrived from the east, there were ready hands to put everything in its place, and then really commenced the home life of Frederic and Maud Spaulding.

Years have passed since then. The western settlement has grown to be a thriving city; but those who welcomed and loved the *young* minister, love him all the more, now that time has left a gleam of silver in his hair. Anna and Burt Lester have gone from under his roof, she to make sunshine in another home, while her brother pursues his studies in a distant university. Other children sit upon the minister's knee and call him "father;" and Maud Lamson, of the olden time, has added to her other endeared names that of "mother."

Friends, tried and true, gather round them. Jared Simpson and his wife, old people now, visit their minister often. Somewhat in their dotage, they talk much of "our John" and "*our little girl*;" but those who know them wonder not at their fondness.

John Simpson occupies an honored position, and is the owner of a beautiful home, where loving wife and children make him forget the wretched past. Esther, too, is surrounded by all of beauty and luxury she can desire, lavished by one who claims, in return, a love, dearer than she had known before.

When Maud Lamson left her parents, she felt that she was going far away; but steam annihilates distance; and the family have met more frequently, than many dwelling in the same State.

Crin Burton spent several months with her friend; and Frank Lynde has preached in Mr. Spaulding's pulpit. Mrs. Lynde occupies the same home to which her brother welcomed her long ago, and hither comes, almost daily, the daughter of the house with her children.

"The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

Mr. Lamson read this passage many times, before he accepted it as infallible truth.

Maud and her husband respected his wish never to be addressed upon the subject of re-

ligion ; but his wife led him in a way he knew not. She persuaded him to attend church with her ; at first, occasionally, then constantly, until he ceased to make any objection.

Mrs. Lamson was not one to conceal her feelings. When with her husband, she talked of what most interested her, and he became accustomed to hear her speak of religion. At length he discovered that she was in the habit of praying with Guy.

From that time, the thought of his own duty pressed heavily upon him. He took counsel with no human being. Alone, with God, he settled the great question. Christ, the once despised, and oft rejected, became to him, at last, chief among ten thousand, and the one altogether lovely.

In a burial place, among the hills, there is a monument, upon which are engraved the names of Rufus and Mary Lane. Beneath these names is a touching record,

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