

and her tiny hands forever out-stretched in giving.

Such a generous little creature you never saw! A spoonful of bread and milk had always to be taken by Mamma or nurse before Carol could enjoy her supper; and whatever bit of cake or sweetmeat found its way into her pretty fingers, it was straightway broken in half and shared with Donald, Paul or Hugh; and, when they made believe nibble the morsel with affected enjoyment, she would clap her hands and crow with delight: "Why does she do it?" asked Donald, thoughtfully; "None of us boys ever did." "I hardly know," said Mamma, catching her darling to her heart, "except that she is a little Christmas child, and so she has a tiny share of the blessedest birthday the world ever saw!"

II.—DROOPING WINGS.

IT was December, ten years later. Carol had seen nine Christmas trees lighted on her birthdays, one after another; nine times she had assisted in the holiday festivities of the household, though in her babyhood her share of the gaieties were somewhat limited.

For five years, certainly, she had hidden presents for Mamma and Papa in their own bureau drawers, and harboured a number of secrets sufficiently large to burst a baby's brain, had it not been for the relief gained by whispering them all to Mamma, at night, when she was in her crib, a proceeding which did not in the least lessen the value of a secret in her innocent mind.

For five years she had heard "Twas the night before Christmas," and hung up a scarlet stocking many sizes too large for her, and pinned a sprig of holly on her little white night gown, to show Santa Claus that she was a 'truly' Christmas child, and dreamed of fur-coated saints and toy-packs and reindeer, and wished everybody a "Merry Christmas" before it was light in the morning, and lent every one of her new toys to the neighbours' children before noon, and eaten turkey and plum pudding, and gone to bed at night in a trance of happiness at the day's pleasures.

Donald was away at college now. Paul and Hugh were great manly fellows, taller than their mother. Papa Bird had grey hairs in his whiskers; and Grandma, God bless her, had been four Christmases in heaven. But Christmas in the Birds' Nest was scarcely as merry now as it used to be in the bygone years, for the little child that once brought such an added blessing to the day, lay month after

month, a patient, helpless invalid, in the room where she was born.

She had never been very strong in body, and it was with a pang of terror her mother and father noticed, soon after she was five years old, that she began to limp, ever so slightly; to complain too often of weariness, and to nestle close to her mother, saying she, "would rather not go out to play, please." The illness was slight at first, and hope was always stirring in Mrs. Bird's heart. "Carol would feel stronger in the summer-time;" or, "She would be better when she had spent a year in the country;" or, "She would outgrow it;" or, "They would try a new physician;" but by and by it came to be all too sure that no physician save One could make Carol strong again, and that no "summer-time" nor "country air," unless it were the everlasting summer-time in a heavenly country, could bring back the little girl to health.

The cheeks and lips that were once as red as holly-berries faded to faint pink; the star-like eyes grew softer, for they often gleamed through tears; and the gay child-laugh, that had been like a chime of Christmas bells, gave place to a smile so lovely, so touching, so tender and patient, that it filled every corner of the house with a gentle radiance that might have come from the face of the Christ-child himself.

Love could do nothing; and when we have said that we have said all, for it is stronger than anything else in the whole wide world. Mr. and Mrs. Bird were talking it over one evening when all the children were asleep. A famous physician had visited them that day, and told them that sometime, it might be in one year, it might be in more, Carol would slip quietly off into heaven, whence she came.

"Dear heart," said Mr. Bird, pacing up and down the library floor, "it is no use to shut our eyes to it any longer; Carol will never be well again. It almost seems as if I could not bear it when I think of that loveliest child doomed to lie there day after day, and, what is still more, to suffer pain that we are helpless to keep away from her. Merry Christmas, indeed; it gets to be the saddest day in the year to me!" and poor Mr. Bird sank into a chair by the table, and buried his face in his hands, to keep his wife from seeing the tears that would come in spite of all his efforts. "But Donald, dear," said sweet Mrs. Bird, with trembling voice, "Christmas day may not be so merry with us as it used,

but it is very happy, and that is better, and very blessed, and that is better yet. I suffer chiefly for Carol's sake, but I have almost given up being sorrowful for my own. I am too happy in the child, and I see too clearly what she has done for us and for our boys."

"That's true, bless her sweet heart," said Mr. Bird; "she has been better than a daily sermon in the house ever since she was born, and especially since she was taken ill."

"Yes, Donald and Paul and Hugh were three strong, wilful, boisterous boys, but you seldom see such tenderness, devotion, thought for others and self-denial in lads of their years. A quarrel or a hot word is almost unknown in this house. Why? Carol would hear it, and it would distress her, she is so full of love and goodness. The boys study with all their might and main. Why? Partly, at least, because they like to teach Carol, and amuse her by telling her what they read. When the seamstress comes, she likes to sew in Miss Carol's room, because there she forgets her own troubles, which, Heaven knows, are sore enough! And as for me, Donald, I am a better woman every day for Carol's sake; I have to be her eyes, ears, feet, hands—her strength, her hope; and she, my own little child, is my example!"

"I was wrong, dear heart," said Mr. Bird more cheerfully; "we will try not to repine, but to rejoice instead, that we have an 'angel of the house' like Carol."

"And as for her future," Mrs. Bird went on, "I think we need not be over-anxious. I feel as if she did not belong altogether to us, and when she has done what God sent her for, He will take her back to Himself—and it may not be very long!" Here it was poor Mrs. Bird's turn to break down, and Mr. Bird's turn to comfort her.—*Kate Douglas Wiggin.*

(To be continued.)

No man is dissatisfied with the Bible unless he wants to live a bad life. No man grumbles at the God of the Bible unless he has a quarrel with purity. No man mocks at hell unless he finds himself on the way there, and is unwilling to accept repentance as the first step toward God.

If you are not living dependent on Christ Jesus there is not a sin into which any one can fall, but you may fall into it.—*The Gospel Trumpet.*