

herself to make any sort of Christmas for the children; and Davie's eager little face helped her to do it.

The active work was all done by tea-time, and after tea she sat down to sew. The children gathered round her, full of rejoicing that Davie was there too.

'How was it you could not come last time, dear?' she asked.

Davie colored up and did not tell, which made her anxious. She passed the matter over, at the time; but when he was in bed, before George had followed him, she went to his side in the dark, and drew the story out, her own heart shrinking and bleeding as she heard it. Davie had forgotten all his troubles in the bliss of being at home again, but they came back in all their vividness as he told his tale, and her arms held him closer and closer the while.

The story ended, and still he nestled to her, his cheek against her neck, and wished she need never put him down. She held him a long time in silence, then parted from him with a close, tremulous kiss, and he wondered to feel a tear upon her cheek.

The ice once broken, his brother and Nellie heard his troubles, and great consultations went on among the three. They went to church and school as usual, on Sunday. After tea, they all gathered round their mother again, and Nellie broached the subject on their minds.

'Mother, need Davie go back to Rakawahi?'

The mother started and pressed her hand tightly upon her heart. Davie's pleading blue eyes looked into hers.

'I could take all the clothes home, mother,' he said.

'I know you would, dear,' she answered.

There was a silence. The children heard their mother's hard breathing, and waited, afraid.

'I have been thinking of it, she said at last, 'and I see the time has come to tell you something none of you know, but George.'

Five eager pair of eyes were fastened on her.

'You know—you elder ones—that your father died in debt,' she continued. 'It was not his fault. He had to get things, to carry on the business, and he never lived to pay for them. There is money owed that he had not even an account for, except what he kept himself. His word was his bond, and every one knew that. There's not one of his creditors has pressed me for the money. They say, "We all know what your husband was, Mrs. Marriott, and we shan't trouble you. Don't you be afraid." They know I have given up everything but just what we must have to go on with, and they let us alone. But they've got the claim upon us all the same. And if they hadn't, I know what it means to forgive debts. I should have money enough from your grandfather to pay every penny owing of your father's, and start something for ourselves beside, if other people had paid him what they owed. There were some that wouldn't, and some that couldn't. But those that couldn't—that came to him in distress, and he took what little they said they could give him then, and crossed off the rest—I know what it was to see them afterwards, dressed so as we never were—going out for excursions and holidays we never took; we couldn't afford it—and never offering to pay up a pound. And I know what my father felt, when he saw his wife or children ill, and wanting things he couldn't get, because he couldn't pay for them, when those that owed him pounds and pounds that he had never crossed off seemed as if they could have anything

they wanted. Would you like any one to feel that of you?'

There was no answer, except from the little earnest faces upturned to hers.

'As long as we haven't a thing that we could do without, I shouldn't feel it,' Mrs. Marriott continued. 'But if we are prospered, and get on a little—every pleasure we took, every new thing you went out in, I should feel there were those that had a right to say, "There goes my money. I bore with their father, because I knew he would pay if he could. They're not their father's children.'

Again there was silence.

'Reach me down the Bible, George,' said Mrs. Marriott.

George obeyed. It was her father's family Bible, and the names of his brothers and sisters were written there—then his own children's—then, in David Marriott's writing, the names of the five children now looking at the page.

'You see those names—and those,' said Mrs. Marriott, laying her hand upon the first two sets. 'There's not one of them owed any man anything. They suffered by those that didn't pay their debts to them, but they paid their own. Would you like to be the first lot in the book to let your father lie in his grave with debts to his name?'

'No,' broke from every child.

'I have thought of this from the day when he was laid there,' Mrs. Marriott continued. 'I couldn't say anything till I saw whether I could so much as get bread to put into your mouths without coming upon anyone to help us; but from that day I have asked Almighty God that I might pay those debts, sooner or later. And I have one debt of my own.'

She paused, and drew from her pocket the envelope Mr. Foster had given her.

'In your father's illness,' she said, 'Mrs. Barton lent me a pound. I have never been able to pay her; and her husband has been ill, and the children had measles, and she must want it, I know.'

She took from the envelope a one-pound note and two half-crowns.

'That must go for your boots, Davie,' she said, laying down the silver. 'This'—taking up the pound-note, 'this is the first money I have had since that day, that I was not obliged to spend directly I got it, for something we couldn't go without. What shall I do with it, Davie?'

'Pay her, mother,' exclaimed all the children.

The widow's eyes kindled. 'I knew you would say it,' she said. 'I knew you would rather do that than have Christmas presents. We can't have a merry Christmas this year, but it will be a happy one, if we pay off the first of our debts. And Davie has earned the money.'

Davie's heart swelled with mingled pride and awe.

'It is four months now since we were left,' said Mrs. Marriott. 'It is a little over ten weeks since we came here. I have never spent a penny I could help. I felt I must have black for myself, but I have not bought even that for you. Friends were kind, and sent me the things you are wearing. And already, in these ten weeks, we have earned more than we need to spend for our keep and clothes. It's the new things I have had to get, in starting the laundry, that have kept us back. I think we are pretty well set up now. And if we can do as well as we have in the first ten weeks, we ought to do better as we go on. I believe God has heard my prayer, and that he means to help us to pay up all we owe.'

Another pause.

'Will it take long, mother?' asked Nellie. 'That's according to how we get on,' said Mrs. Marriott. 'Some day I will tell you older ones more about what there is to do, but not now. I wouldn't have brought this up on a Sunday, only we have so little quiet time, all together; and it does belong to our duty towards God and our duty towards our neighbor. But how we are to do it, belongs to the week's work; and if ye don't want to get like so many others, all taken up in getting money, we must keep it out of our Sundays. We won't settle, to-night, what is right to do about Davie. Leave it till to-morrow. See, it is just upon church-time, and we have not sung any hymns. Whose turn is it to stay in?'

'Mine,' said Ellen. She and George took it in turns to stay at home with the little ones on Sunday evenings, while their mother went out.

'There would be time for a short hymn,' said Mrs. Marriott.

'May we have "O God of Bethel," mother?' asked George.

For a moment she shrank before it, feeling as though her voice must fail her; but only for a moment.

'Yes, dear,' she answered. 'Get the book for Lily and Tottie; the rest of us know it. We'll stand up to sing that.'

They stood round the Bible open at the family page, and sang, in their little corner of the new land, the words which have been sung from generation to generation in God-fearing households in the old country:

'Our vows, our prayers, we now present  
Before Thy throne of grace:  
God of our fathers, be the God  
Of their succeeding race.

'Through each perplexing path of life  
Our wandering footsteps guide:  
Give us, each day, our daily bread,  
And raiment fit provide.

'O spread Thy covering wings around,  
Till all our wanderings cease,  
And at our Father's loved abode  
Our souls arrive in peace.'

The widow walked to church with her two boys, and in the service that same hymn was sung. It came like a seal on their resolve.

### CHAPTER III.

Next day came Christmas—'Christmas Day, all in the morning,' and such an early morning, exactly at midsummer! No fumbling in the dark to feel if little stockings had filled out in the night: it was all broad daylight, and the sunshine streamed over roses and strawberries in leafy gardens.

No little stockings were hung up in Davie's home; nevertheless, five happy faces gathered round the cheap breakfast of porridge and treacle. Milk was scarce and dear in the towns in those days.

Mrs. Marriott had long dreaded Christmas Day; and after poor little Davie's outpouring to her, she had wept through the long night watches, not knowing how she could ever rise and meet the children with a cheerful face again. But in the day itself she woke with a feeling of perfect peace. The gift of gifts had come to her—Christ's peace, on this poor, dark earth. She lay thinking what it really meant, for the Lord Himself to have come and lived in a poor home, with parents who had to struggle and work hard; and that he had childish memories of his own, when he took the little children in his arms and blessed them! Surely he would be taking hers this day.

The light of peace was on her face when