

JOE'S WORK.

FARMER DUNLAP arose from the rocking chair where he was resting after a hard day's work, and waiting for supper to be ready. Mrs. Dunlap hurried in from the kitchen, leaving the potatoes she was warming to burn fast to spider if they wanted to, and both stood with dismay on their faces, and anxiety in their eyes, listening and exclaiming, while Susie read the letter about Joe.

Poor Joe, the only son of the Dunlap family, who had gone but a few months before to the city to earn his living; for Farmer Dunlap was sick and unable to run the farm, and it had been rented for the next year. The little family was going to move into town for the winter, so there was no work at home for Joe to do: for which, truth to tell, he was secretly glad.

Joe was not fond of farm work, and had a chance to begin as errand boy in a store in New York, and he had ambitions which reached even to the ownership of that store, or some other one quite as large and grand.

A faithful boy had Joe been, and good accounts had come back to them during the very few weeks of his experience; but now here was a letter which filled them all with dismay. Joe was sick and in the hospital. A great stick had fallen upon him from the scaffolding of a half-finished building, as he was hurrying along intent upon his duties. The result was that he was carried to the hospital, and had been quite sick for several days, so the surgeon wrote, but was better now, and they apprehended no danger and looked for a speedy recovery. He wrote because Joe was anxious lest his mother should worry about not receiving her usual letters; and he was to say from Joe that there was no cause for worry at all. He was "getting along tip-top," and would be back in the store in another week. It wasn't a bad hurt, just a mere scratch; he wondered that it made him sick at all. As soon as he was well enough he would write all about it. That was the substance of the letter.

Nevertheless, no words can tell how Joe's mother's heart ached, or how many times she had to pick up her neat work apron to wipe away the tears as she went about putting the finishing touches to the supper that night.

As for Farmer Dunlap, he leaned back in his big rocker, put his feet up on a chair in front of him, shut his eyes, and drew from time to time long, weary sighs. Life looked very hard to Farmer Dunlap. Right in his prime, or when he ought to have been in his prime, and when the little farm which he had worked so hard to secure needed him most,

he had been laid aside by that long illness, and must give up any thought of hard work—so the doctors said—for months to come.

No wonder he sighed, poor man. It was hard to understand. Here were he and his wife and Susie and Joe, all honest and earnest servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, trying every day to do their work in the world. Why should they be so afflicted?

Why, for instance, should poor Joe, who was trying to his best to help along, be knocked down in the midst of his career, and be shut up in a hospital for nobody knew how long? "It isn't as if he was a hard fellow, and had got into mischief through his evil ways," thought the poor father. And then came one of his heaviest sighs. He did not understand.

Neither did Joe. He lay on one of the white beds in the hospital and thought about it.

There were rows and rows of beds all down the ward; people groaning and suffering and unhappy. "I seem to have the best of the bargain," said Joe to himself, looking all about him, seeing signs of pain on nearly all the faces; "I am getting along first-rate, the surgeon says; but I don't see why in the world I'm here. A whole week wasted; mother and Susie have cried I don't know how many times about it, and father has sighed and looked sorrowful. It's real queer. I wanted to do my work, I am sure, and do it the best I knew how. I cannot understand how I came to be sent up here."

There was a sudden change in the current of his thoughts. The nurse and the physician passed near his bed. The physician's tones were low, but Joe's keen ear caught the words: "No," said the nurse, "I don't think he can. It seems hard; he's all alone, and so hopelessly ignorant."

Joe's breath came in quick gasps. Could they possibly mean him? He was alone, and he was ignorant enough, certainly. "Not last till morning!" Was he going to die?

"If they mean me," said Joe to himself, catching his breath, and turning white in spite of his effort at self control. "they ought to have told me. Mother and father and Susie ought to have known. I am not afraid to die, but it is hard on them. Doctor!"

The doctor turned at the sound of his voice. "I heard what you said, sir. Do you mean me?" "Mean you? I don't understand, my boy. What did you hear?"

Joe repeated the words.

"O, no!" said the doctor, with a cheery smile. "I didn't mean you in the least. Why, my dear fellow, you'll be at work again in a few days more. Didn't I tell you so? I was talking about the little fellow next to you," lowering his tones. "Poor little Timmy, he is going. I hardly think he will last till morn-