

WAS IT A LITTLE?

BY MRS. HATTIE F. BELL.

With hammer and mallet and chisel,
The work went steadily on;
And the walls grew higher, and higher,
Till the beautiful church was done,
E'en to the costly tablet
Recording the monarch's name,
As a signet to all the people
Of honor and glory and fame.
And the king, in his royal grandeur,
Looked up to the glittering tower
And smiled. "I built this structure
In the strength of my kingly power;
And I issued a royal edict
That nothing, however small,
Should be given by any other—
Mine, mine is the glory all."
But the night crept into his chamber,
And brooded above his head;
It brought strange dreams and fancies
As he lay on his royal bed.
He thought, as he gazed on the tablet,
An angel's hand erased
The name of the proud young monarch—
His name—with eager haste;
While in its stead was written,
In letters of burning gold,
The unknown name of another,
A widow—forsaken and old.

When the morn looked into his chamber,
Through the curtains' silken sheen,
He sent for the poor, lone woman
Whose name he had seen.
And when she stood before him
He angrily questioned, "Why
Did you disobey my bidding?
You surely cannot deny
You must have given some tribute,
Or helped in unknown ways,
To build that church, whose tablet
Heralds for me all praise."

She murmured, "Oh, forgive me,
Dear king, for it is true;
I felt so glad and happy,
I did, sire, pray for you,
And as the jaded horses
Went with the heavy stone,
I gave them but a wisp of hay—
Only a little one.
I knew some day a church, sire,
From out those stones would grow,
And I did it for my Master,
Because I love him so."

Into that royal bosom
God sent an arrow down;
Strange thoughts were flitting thro' it,
Strange thoughts before unknown
To him who wore a diadem
And sat upon a throne,
Strange thoughts and stranger feelings,
Promptings of good from heaven,
A page from his own selfish heart
For him to read was given.

"Blot out from off the tablet
The royal name," he said,
"And let this noble woman's
Be written in its stead."
With hammer and mallet and chisel
Down came the kingly fame,
And in beautiful golden letters
There glittered the widow's name.
"The Lord be praised for ever,"
The king said. "Let it be
Proclaimed thro' all my kingdom
What this has done for me;
The gift of a humble woman
Is the sweetest charity.
Her little in God's balance
Before the eternal throne,
Would far outweigh in worthiness
All I have ever done.
She did it for God's glory,
I did it for my own."
—Illustrated Christian Weekly.

HOW IT ALL CAME ROUND.

(L. T. Meade, in "Sunday Magazine.")
CHAPTER XXIX.—"SOMETHING BETTER FOR THE CHILDREN THAN MONEY."

After her newly found uncle had left her, Charlotte Home sat on by the fire; her face was very pale; she looked a quite broken-down and troubled woman. Little Anne, almost on tip-toe, crept into the room. She was all quivering with excitement. She expected her mistress to turn to her—almost to fling her arms around her neck—to thank her with the warmest expressions for what she had done.

"Anne," rehearsed the little maid, imagining Charlotte's words, "you have saved us all; you are our life-long benefactor. Henceforth partake of our wealth. Be not only our servant, but our friend."

This was how matters would have been managed in the *Family Herald*. Anne raised her expectant eyes to her mistress's face, but one glance at it scattered her golden visions. She softly lifted up the tea-tray and withdrew. Her faith and hope had gone down to zero. She was a very dispirited little girl as she returned to her kitchen. That uncle from Australia was not a rich uncle. Missis would never look so miserable if he was rich. As a poor relation he was no use whatever; and Anne had done nothing for the family she loved. Oh, how very disappointing life was after all!

Meanwhile what now troubled Charlotte Home had very little to do with Uncle Sandy's possible gold. She was solving another problem, and the task was a difficult one.

For the past month Charlotte had been making up her mind to a certain line of action. Before she left Torquay her resolution was formed. She had been over four weeks there, and during those four weeks she and her boy had lived on Charlotte Harman's money. That money had saved the life of her child. When she first saw it and thanked for it, and each succeeding day, each succeeding hour, as she saw the color which was health, and the appetite which was life, returning to her darling, the conviction was growing upon her, that her hand could never inflict a blow upon the woman who had done so much for her. Her children wanted money, and her husband wanted money, and she herself too! A little dip into this world's softness, she owned, would be very pleasant; but, for all that, her hand must be still: her lips could not speak to cause pain and agony to one who had done so much for her. Miss Harman was going to be married. Was it possible that on the eve of her marriage she, Charlotte Home, could deal to her so cruel a blow? No, it was not possible. For Charlotte's sake, her father and uncle might keep their ill-gotten wealth. Mrs. Home believed more and more firmly that she and hers were robbed of their money. But now she could do nothing. She had been so treated by her enemy's daughter that to appear against that daughter's father would be impossible. As this conviction came to her, and she resolved to act upon it, and to let all chance of recovering her lost wealth go, a wonderful peace and calm stole over her. She almost used to fancy she heard the voice of God saying to her—

"I will provide for your children, I can give them riches. There are better things to be won for those little ones than what money can give. There is such a thing as a heavy purse and a poor and empty heart. Suppose I fill those hearts with goodness, and greatness, and generosity and love; is not that a better portion for these creatures who are to live for all eternity than the gold which lasts only for a time?"

Yes, Charlotte felt that it was a better portion. And such peace and contentment came to this woman during the last week at Torquay that she thought it the happiest week of her whole life. But now—now she sat by her own hearth in a troubled maze. She had come back to find her resolve sorely shaken. With no one to help her, she had resolved to let her chance of riches go. She came back to find an unexpected deliverer come to her. A strong, brave, practical man had appeared. This man was her own uncle—her beloved mother's brother. He knew how to act. While she alone must stumble in the dark, he would know what to do. He would—he could get her back her own. It seemed hard to reject such help; and yet her resolve was scarcely shaken, and the temptation though severe, was not allowed to prevail. The voice of God was still talking to the woman, and she was not turning from Him.

Since the life of her child had been given back to her, a great softness and sweetness had come to Mrs. Home; she had tasted of a mother's bitterest cup, but God had not asked her to drink it to the dregs. Her dark eyes, always beautiful, had now grown very lovely, being filled with a tenderness which not only took in her own child, but, for his sake, all the other children in the world.

Yes, Charlotte loved God as she had never loved Him before, and it was becoming im-

possible for her to do that which might pain Him. After a time her husband came in, and the two sat and talked for some time. They had a great deal to say, and the hours flew on as each poured out a full heart to the other.

After a time Charlotte told of her visit from the uncle whom she had supposed for so many years to be dead. Mr. Home was interested, and asked many questions. Charlotte repeated, almost word for word, what Uncle Sandy had said. Her husband regarded her attentively. After a time he spoke.

"Lottie, you remember when first you told me that queer story about your father's will?"

"Yes," she said.
"I own I did not believe it; I own I thought very little about it. I ask your pardon, my dear. I now believe you are right."

"Oh, Angus!" a great flood of color came up to her face. "Oh! why," she added in a voice of pain, "why do you say this to me now?"

"Partly from what your uncle said to-night; partly from another reason. The fact is my dear wife, while you were away I had a visit from your half-brother, Mr. Jasper Harman."

"Angus?"
"Yes, he came here one evening. He told a tale, and he made a proposition. His tale was a lame one; his proposition scarcely came well from his lips. He evidently thought of me as of one unworshipful and unpractical. I believe I am unpractical, but he never guessed that in my capacity as clergyman I have had much to do with sinners. This man has a conscience by no means void of offence. He is hardened, Charlotte, when I saw him, I instantly believed your story."

Mr. Home then told his wife the whole of his interview with Jasper Harman, and the proposal he had made to settle on Charlotte and on her children the three thousand pounds which had been her mother's for that mother's lifetime.

"I gave him no answer, my Lottie," he said in conclusion. "I told him you were away—that I would tell you all on your return."

"Then the decision is to rest with me, Angus?"

"Yes, I think it must."
"You do not mind whether I decline or accept?"

"I trust you absolutely. You shall do as you think best."

After this Mrs. Home was silent for a moment or two; then she got up, went on her knees by her husband's side, and, laying her head against his breast, said—

"We will be poor, my darling—poor and blessed. I will not touch their gold."
"My Lottie!" he answered. He did not quite understand her, but his heart began to beat.

"I will tell you all in a few words, Angus. I longed for money—be my reason base or noble, I longed for money. A month ago how sorely we needed it! God saw our need and sent it to us. He sent it through a channel and by a means which tried my proud heart. I accepted the gracious boon, and when I accepted it, instantly loved the giver; I loved—I love Charlotte Harman. She is innocent of all wrong. Angus, I cannot disturb her peace. My uncle has come home. My uncle, with his knowledge and his worldly skill, could now win my cause for me, and get back for me and mine what is ours. I will not let him—for Charlotte's sake, I will not let him. These old men may keep their ill-gotten wealth, for I cannot break the daughter's heart. I made my resolve at Torquay, Angus; and, though I own I have been tempted to-night—yes, I believe I have been sorely tempted—still I must let this money go. I will leave those wicked men to God; but I cannot take their punishment into my own hands. And, Angus, cease, neither can I take that small sum of money; for, though I cannot prosecute, neither can I accept a bribe. This money comes as a bribe. Is it not so?"

"Yes, Lottie, I fear it is so."

"I am right not to take it?"

"You are absolutely right."

"Then we will not touch it. I and mine can live without it."

"You and yours can live well and nobly without it, my most precious wife."

"Ah! there is rest and peace in my heart; and the little house, though so poor, and shabby, seems very home-like. Angus,

I am so tired after all this! I will go to bed."

Long after his wife had left him, the husband remained up. He had gone down on his knees, and he remained there for some hours. He had to thank God for his Charlotte, but even while he thanked a weight was heavy on his heart. Sin was very terrible to this man, and he feared that a very grievous sin had been committed. Long, long into the night he cried to God for these sinners.

CHAPTER XXX.—SHE COULD NOT POSTPONE HER ENGAGEMENT.

Mr. Harman felt himself growing weaker and weaker. The disease which was to lay him in his grave was making slow, but steady progress. It was just possible that, had his mind been at rest, the weakness of body, the pain of body, the slow decay might have been, not removed, but at least arrested. Had Mr. Harman been a very happy man, he might have lived, even with so fatal a malady, for many years. He had lived a life of almost perfect physical health for over sixty years, and during all that time he had been able to keep mental pains at bay; but in his present weakness he found this impossible. His whole nervous system became affected, and it was apparent even to his daughter's eyes, that he was a very unhappy man. For her sake, however, he still did wonders. He dragged himself up to breakfast morning after morning, when he would have given worlds to remain in bed. He still went every day to his office in the city, though, when there, he sat in his office chair dull and unmindful of what was going on. Jasper did the work. Jasper was here, there, and everywhere; but it had come to such a pass with John Harman, that he now almost disliked gold. Still, for Charlotte's sake he went there. Charlotte on the verge of her marriage must suspect nothing. In the evenings he sat with his daughter, he looked with apparent interest at the many presents which came pouring in, he made her show herself to him in each of the new dresses, and he even went himself with her to choose her wedding wreath and veil. But all these things had become such a weariness to the man that, dearly as he loved this one precious daughter, he began to look forward with a sense of relief to the one week of her absence. During that week he need disguise nothing, he need not go to the office, he need not put on this forced cheerfulness. He might stay in bed all day long if he pleased.

That week was near now, for it was the twelfth of April. In another eight days the wedding morning would dawn.

Charlotte was very busy. What young woman is not busy at such a time? Friends poured in, presents arrived at all hours. There were dressmakers and milliners to see and consult, from morning to night. Then Hinton took up some of his bride elect's time, and the evening hours were given to her father. Seeing how much he liked having her all to himself after dinner each night, Charlotte had begged her lover not to come to see her at this particular time.

"You will have me for all the rest of my life, John," she would say, "and I think it does my father good to be quite alone with me. It reminds him of old times." Then, when Hinton had acceded to her request, she often added, "My father puzzles me. Is it the parting from me makes him look so ill and sad? I often fear that there is more the matter with him than he lets appear. I wish he would consult a good doctor."

Hinton dared not tell her that he had consulted the very best. He could only try to turn her attention, and in this he believed he had succeeded much better than he really did. For when the night came after these quiet evenings, Charlotte found that she could not sleep. Was it excitement at her coming happiness, or was it anxiety?

Anxiety was new to this happy nature—new to this prosperous life. She shuddered at the grim thing, as it visited her night after night, in the solitude of her luxurious room. But shut her eyes to it, fight against it, as she would, it could not be got to depart from her. The fact was, a dreadful thing had happened to this frank and loving nature, she was beginning to suspect the father whom she loved. These suspicions had first come into play on the night when he had fainted in her presence. Some words he had used that night, some expressions which