

'PROBABLE SONS.'

(By the author of 'Eric's Good News.')

CHAPTER II.—David and Goliath.

(Continued.)

Sir Edward Wentworth was, as he expressed it, a 'confirmed bachelor,' and though during the autumn months he was quite willing to fill his house with his London friends, he was better pleased to live the greater part of the year in seclusion, occupying himself with looking after his estate and writing articles for several of the leading reviews of the day.

The advent of his small niece was indeed a great trial to him, but, with his characteristic thoroughness, he determined that he would make the necessary arrangements for her comfort. Accordingly he had a long interview with her nurse the following morning. It proved to be satisfactory. The nurse was a staid, elderly woman, who assured him she was accustomed to the sole charge of the child, and would keep her entirely under her own control.

'I expect you would like her to be sent down to you in the evening—at dessert, perhaps, sir?' she inquired.

Sir Edward pulled the ends of his moustache dubiously. 'Is it necessary? I thought children ought to be in bed at that time.'

'Of course it shall be as you like, sir. You do not dine so late as some do. I thought you would expect to see her once in the day.'

After a little hesitation Sir Edward gave his permission, and when he found that Milly neither screamed nor snatched for the fruit on the table, and did not herself engross the whole conversation, he became quite reconciled to the little white figure stealing in and occupying the chair that was always placed at his left-hand side for her.

Beyond this he saw very little of her whilst his guests were with him; but afterwards, when they had all left him, and he relapsed into his ordinary life, he was constantly coming across her. Sometimes he would find her in the stables, her arms round the stable cat, and the grooms holding a voluble conversation with her, or amongst the cows at the bottom of the paddock, or feeding the pigs and fowls in the poultry yard. Generally she was attended by Fritz, a beautiful collie, who had, with the fickleness of his nature, transferred his affection from his master to her, and though uncertain in temper towards most, was never anything but amiable when with the little girl.

Her uncle's form approaching was quite a sufficient hint to her to make herself scarce; she would generally anticipate the usual formula: 'Now run away, child, to nurse,' by singing out cheerfully: 'I am just off, uncle,' and by the time he had reached the spot where she was standing the little figure would be running off in the distance, Fritz close at her heels.

One afternoon Sir Edward was returning from a stroll up the avenue when he saw the child at play amongst the trees, and for a moment he paused and watched her. She appeared to be very busy with a doll wrapped in a fur rug which she carefully deposited at the foot of the tree; then for some minutes she and Fritz seemed to be having a kind of game of hide-and-seek with one another, until she pushed him into a bush and commanded him to stay there. Suddenly dog and child darted at each other, and then, to Sir Edward's amazement, he saw his little niece seize Fritz by the throat and bring him to the ground. When both were rolling over one another, and Fritz's short, sharp barks became rather indignant in tone, as he vainly tried to escape from the little hands so tightly round him, Sir Edward thought it high time to interfere.

'Millicent,' he called out sharply, 'come to me at once; what are you doing?'

In an instant Milly was upon her feet, and lifting a hot, flushed face to his, she placed herself in her favorite attitude when in his presence: her hands clasped behind her back, and feet closely planted together.

'Don't you know Fritz might bite if you are so rough with him? Were you trying to choke him?' demanded her uncle.

'Yes,' she responded, breathless from her late exertions, 'I was trying to kill him! He's a bear, and that's my lamb, and I am David; that's all.'

A child's games were beyond Sir Edward's comprehension. He looked down upon her with a knitted brow.

She continued:—

'You see, he has to do for both, a bear

and a lion, for they both came, and they both tried to get the lamb. Nurse was the lion one day, but she is too big; I can't knock her down, though I try hard.'

'I will not have Fritz knocked down in that fashion; he might hurt you,' said Sir Edward sternly.

Milly looked sorrowful; then brightening up, she asked:

'But I may kill Goliath, mayn't I? Do you know, that is one of my games. See, I'm David, and you see that big old tree standing by itself? That's Goliath. He is looking at me now. Do you see where his eyes come? Just up there—in those first branches. When it's windy he shakes his head at me fearful! He's a wicked, wicked old thing, and he thinks no one can knock him down. Do you remember about him, uncle?'

Sir Edward was becoming slightly interested. He leaned against a tree and took out a cigar.

'No, I don't think I do,' he said.

'Don't you remember? He stood up so proud, and called out: "Choose a man to come and fight me." He's saying that to me now. I'm David, you know, and I'm going. Just wait a moment till I'm ready.'

She darted away to where her doll was, and soon returned with a tiny calico bag, which she opened very carefully and disclosed to her uncle's puzzled gaze five round stones.

'You see,' she went on, 'it's a pity I haven't a sling, but Tom in the stable says he will make me a catty-pot; that's a lovely-sling, he says, which would kill anything. But it's all right; I pretend I have a sling, you know. Now you wait here; I'm going to meet him. I'm not a bit afraid, though he looks so big, because David wasn't, you know. God helped him. Now, Goliath, I'm ready!'

Sir Edward looked on in some amusement as Milly stepped out with regular, even steps until she was about twenty feet from the tree, then suddenly stopped.

'I hear what you say, Goliath. You say you'll give my body to be pecked at and eaten by the birds; but you won't do that, for I am coming, and I am going to kill you.'

And then with all her strength the child flung her stones, one by one at the tree, pausing for some moments when she had done so.

'He's quite dead, uncle,' she said calmly, as she retraced her steps and stood before Sir Edward, again looked up at him with those earnest eyes of hers, 'quite dead; and if I had a sword I would play at cutting off his head. I suppose you wouldn't lend me your sword hanging up in the hall, would you?'

'Most certainly not,' was the quick reply; then taking his cigar from his mouth, Sir Edward asked: 'And does all your play consist in killing people?'

'I only try to kill the bear and lion and Goliath, because they're so wicked and so strong.'

Milly continued:—

'This is such a lovely place to play in—trees are so nice to have games with. Shall I tell you some more? You see that little tree over there? That's where I sit when I'm the probable son, and when I've sat there a long time and been very miserable, and eaten some of the beech nuts that do for husks, then suddenly I think I will go home to my father. It's rather a long walk, but I get happier and happier as I go, and I get to walk very quick at last, and then I run when I see my father. Do you see that nice big old tree right up there with the red leaves, uncle? That's him, and I run up and say, "Father, I have sinned; I am not fit to come back, but I am so sorry that I left you," and then I just hug him and kiss him; and, do you know, I feel he hugs and kisses me back. He does in the story, you know. And then I have a nice little feast all ready; I get some biscuits from nurse, and a little jam, and some sugar and water, and I sit down and feel so happy to think I'm not the probable son any more, and haven't got to eat husks or be with the pigs. Don't you think that's a beautiful game, uncle?'

'Do you get all your games from the Bible?' inquired Sir Edward. 'I somehow think it is not quite correct,' and he looked very dubiously at his little niece as he spoke.

'Well,' said Milly, the earnest look coming into her eyes again, 'I love the Bible so much, you see. Nurse tells me the stories ever so often, and I know lots and

lots of them. But I like the probable son quite the best. Do you like it?'

Sir Edward replaced his cigar in his mouth and strolled on without a reply. His little niece's words awakened very uncomfortable feelings within his heart. Years before he had known and loved his Bible well. He had been active in Christian work, and had borne many a scoff and jeer from his companions when at Oxford for being 'pious,' as they termed it. But there came a time when coldness crept into his Christianity, and worldly ambition and desires filled his soul; gradually he wandered farther and farther away from the right path, and when he came into his property he took possession of it with no other aim and object in life than to enjoy himself in his own way and to totally ignore both the past and future. Beyond going to church once on Sunday he made no profession of religion, but that custom he conformed to most regularly, and the vicar of the parish had nothing to complain of in the way in which his appeals for charity were met by the squire.

It is needless to say that Sir Edward was not a happy man; there were times when he could not bear his own thoughts and the solitude of his position, and at such times there was a hasty departure for town, and some weeks of club life ensued, after which he would return to his home and engross himself in both his literary and country occupations with fresh vigor.

(To be continued.)

'FOLLOW ME.'

In Grandma's Bible here I see
That Jesus whispers, 'Follow me.'

May little children, weak and small,
Obey the loving Saviour's call?

Yes, darling, yes! for long ago
He called them lambs, he loved them so!

But everything that's good and true
His little lambs must try to do.

Their hearts should be in his dear sight
Like spotless lilies, pure and white.



READING IN GRANDMA'S BIBLE.

No naughty ways nor foolish pride
Must lure them from the Shepherd's side;

But every little word they speak,
Be gentle, loving, kind and meek;

Their actions thoughtful and polite,
Their minds intent to do the right;

To follow Jesus every day
Each little child should humbly pray;

And that kind shepherd of the sheep,
Those little lambs will safely keep.
—'Sunbeam.'

'He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar.—1 John ii., 4.'