

Patronised.

(Light in the Home.)

The church clock was chiming half-past four as Elsie Thomson stood before the master's desk, repeating a punishment lesson.

It was winter time—a week or two before the Christmas holidays. The wind, which had been sighing uneasily about the school-house all day, had risen, and was rattling the small diamond-shaped windows and swaying the tops of the great trees outside, whilst every now and then a sudden gust would blow a cloud of smoke down the chimney out into the darkening room.

'It blows like snow,' said the master, as he closed the book. 'You must make haste home. And, mind, another time don't be so idle.'

The child, whose usually shinning-clean

ing! Th' master had no call to keep me in wi' such a storm coming.'

Whilst she was speaking the new-comer had taken her umbrella and satchel.

'Now thee can wrap thee hands in thee cloak,' she said. 'I'll carry the things. Never mind the master; he's naught but an ill-grained thing at the best of times. There—let us get on; we'll soon be home if we make haste.'

Elsie wrapped her hands in her cloak, though she had already a pair of woollen gloves on, and Mary Scaife none, and they started. She did not thank her companion; she was too used to her attentions, and accepted them now as a matter of course. Theirs was a strange friendship. It had begun with their first day at school, when they had sat side by side on the bench in the infants' class. Mary had shyly stroked Elsie's pretty plaid frock, and openly ad-

in the countryside, whereas Mary's mother was dead, and the beer-shop profited the most by her father's earnings. Elsie was an only child, Mary one of many; and whilst in the one home there were comfort and comparative ease, in the other were bad management, untidiness, waste, and too often want.

Even as the children walked along together their appearances spoke volumes. Elsie's well-shod feet tripped along lightly enough over the snow-covered ground. She was a pretty child, and the red hood and cloak she wore well became her round, fair face. Poor Mary trudging along at her side in heavy, ill-shapen boots, armed with the big umbrella and the satchel, looked clumsy—almost grotesque—in comparison. She was wearing a jacket that had once been her mother's, and which, as Mrs. Scaife had been exceedingly stout, whilst Mary was as spare, fell about her in the oddest way possible. All the same Mary was very proud of her jacket, particularly of the rabbit fur that her sister had stitched on to hide the ragged edges of the cuffs. Surmounting the jacket was a felt hat, long, battered out of its original shape, and adorned with the remains of a pheasant's wing.

Mary's face had no beauty. It was plain and homely, with rosy cheeks that sometimes looked sadly pinched, and bead-like eyes that glittered beneath the tangle of her hair. Her hair was a great trouble to her. No amount of water would ever prevail upon it to lie smooth, and even though screwed behind in the tightest of pig-tails tied with white cotton, in front it was always flying about her face and over her eyes. The hands that grasped the satchel and umbrella were not like Elsie's, soft and pink, but hard, chapped, and red, and usually dirty, for soap was a luxury in Scaife's cottage.

The two went along in silence. It was about two miles across the moor to their homes, and already the thickly falling snow was hiding their path; the light was waning dimmer and dimmer, and the few trees on the bleak hillside loomed through the blurr of the storm like giant figures with outstretched snatching arms.

The village was out of sight before Elsie spoke again.

'The master had no right to keep me in wi' such a storm rising. We shall lose our way, we shall, an' then what 'ull we do?'

The words ended in a whine. Elsie was not a brave child at any time, and alone on the moor with Mary in the growing darkness she began to feel terribly forlorn.

'Oh, we'll none get lost,' replied Mary cheerfully; 'I think I could almost find my way blindfold. Tak' haid o' my hand—it's very slape; an' don't thee worry now, for we'll none lose oursels, we shan't.'

So they trudged on, Elsie clinging to Mary's hand. Something dark, and seeming very big, rose up in front of them and scuttled away with a hoarse cry.

It was only a sheep, but Elsie screamed aloud.

'Whisht! Elsie, ye maunt be feared; we sall be seeing the lights in a minute.'

But many minutes elapsed and no lights appeared. They had got off on to the turf and could not find the path.

'I wish we'd gone round by the road,' muttered Mary; 'but wi' being so used to coming this way I never thought on it.'

'Nor I,' groaned Elsie.

So they went on, hand in hand, Elsie half crying, Mary comforting her with hopeful words that yet could not still the fears in her own brave heart.



face was stained with tears, and her mouth disfigured by an ugly pout, did not answer him, but, going out into the lobby, began hastily to put on her things. It was not the work of many minutes, but before the white comforter was tied to Elsie's satisfaction the snow had begun to fall, and as she closed the wicket gate the wind blew a blinding sheet of it into her face. Elsie stood a moment disconcerted. Her home lay across the moor, and she did not fancy the walk alone through the storm and—worst of all to her—the rapidly increasing gloom. As she still lingered another child touched her on the arm.

'Oh, it's you, is it, Mary Scaife?' Elsie exclaimed, in a tone of relief. 'I thought you would wait for me. Just look how it's snow-

mired her fair curls and her blue eyes, and Elsie, who above all things loved to be admired, had graciously accepted her homage. From that time Mary was her slave and confidante. It was she who sharpened Elsie's pencils, cleaned her slates, bore the brunt of any scrape that befell them; it was she who always took Elsie's part against the other children, and who was always the first to kiss and make up in their own private quarrels. And yet down in the bottom of Elsie's little selfish heart there was a lurking feeling of shame—shame at being seen so much in the company of one so shabby, so poor-looking as Mary Scaife.

They were both the children of shepherds; but John Thomson was noted for his steadiness, and his wife as one of the thriftiest