



BY LOUISA M. ALCOTT.

"They are never alone that are accompanied with noble thoughts."—SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

"I've finished my book, and now what can I do till this tiresome rain is over?" exclaimed Carrie, as she laid back on the couch with a yawn of weariness.

"Take another and better book; the house is full of them, and this is a rare chance for a feast on the best," answered Alice, looking over the pile of volumes in her lap, as she sat on the floor before one of the tall book-cases that lined the room.

"Not being a book-worm like you, I can't read forever; and you needn't sniff at my book, for its perfectly thrilling!" said Carrie, regretfully turning the crumpled leaves of a cheap copy of a sentimental and impossible novel.

"We should read to improve our minds, and that rubbish is only a waste of time," began Alice, in a warning tone, as she looked up from "Romola" over which she had been poring with the delight one feels in meeting an old friend.

"I don't wish to improve my mind, thank you; I read for amusement in vacation time and don't want to see any moral works till next October. I get enough of them in school. This isn't 'rubbish'. It's full of fine descriptions of scenery—"

"Which you skip by the page; I've seen you do it," said Eva, the third young girl in the library, as she shut up the stout book on her knee and began to knit, as if this sudden outburst of chat disturbed her enjoyment of "The Dove in the Eagle's Nest."

"I do at first, being carried away by my interest in the people, but I almost always go back and read them afterward," protested Carrie. "You know you like to hear about nice clothes, and this heroine's were simply gorgeous; white velvet and a rope of pearls in one costume; gray velvet and a silver girdle another; and Idalia was all a 'shower of perfumed laces,' and scarlet and gold satin mask dresses, or primrose silk with violets, so lovely! I do rovel in 'em!"

Both girls laughed as Carrie reeled off this list of elegances with the relish of a French modiste.

"Well, I'm poor and can't have as many pretty things as I want, so it is delightful to read about women who wear white quilted satin dressing gowns and olive velvet trains with Mechlin lace sweepers to them. Diamonds as large as nuts, and rivers of opals and sapphires and rubies and pearls, are great fun to read of, if you never even get a look at real ones. We never see such languid swells in America, nor such ladies, and the author scolds them all, and that's moral, I'm sure."

Carrie paused, out of breath; but Alice shook her head again, and said in her serious way:

"That's the harm of it all. False and foolish things are made interesting, and we read for that, not for any lesson there may be hidden under the velvet and jewels and fine words of your splendid men and women. Now this book is a wonderful picture of Florence in old times, and the famous people who really lived are painted in it, and it has a true and clean moral that we all can see, and one feels wiser and better for reading it. I do wish you'd leave those trashy things and try something really good."

"I hate George Eliot,—so awfully wise and preachy and dismal! I really couldn't wade through 'Daniel Deronda,' though 'The Mill on the Floss' wasn't bad," answered Carrie, with another yawn, as she

recalled the Jew Mordecai's long speeches, and Daniel's meditations.

"I know you'd like this," said Eva, patting her book with an air of calm content; for she was a modest, common-sense little body, full of innocent fancies and the mildest sort of romance. "I love dear Miss Yonge and her books, with their nice, large families, and their trials, and their pious ways, and pleasant homes full of brothers and sisters, and good fathers and mothers. I'm never tired of them, and have read 'Daisy Chain' nine times at least."

"I used to like them, and still think them good for young girls, with our own 'Queechy' and 'Wide, Wide World,' and books of that kind. Now I'm eighteen, I prefer stronger novels, and books by great men and women, because these are always talked about by cultivated people, and when I go into Society next winter I wish to be able to listen intelligently, and to know what to admire."

"That's all very well for you, Alice; you were always poking over books, and I dare say you will write them some day, or be a blue-stocking. But I have another year to study and fuss over my education, and I'm going to enjoy myself all I can, and leave the wise books till I come out."

"But, Carrie, there won't be any time to read them; you'll be so busy with parties, and beaux, and travelling, and such things. I would take Alice's advice and read up a little now; it's so nice to know useful things, and be able to find help and comfort in good books when trouble comes, as Ellen Montgomery and Fleda did, and Ethel, and the other girls in Miss Yonge's stories," said Eva earnestly, remembering how much the efforts of those natural little heroines had helped her in her own struggles for self-control and the cheerful bearing of the burdens which come to all.

"I don't want to be a priggish Ellen, or a moral Fleda, and I do detest bothering about self-improvement all the time. I know I ought, but I'd rather wait another year or two, and enjoy my vanities in peace, just a little longer." And Carrie tucked her novel under the sofa pillow, as if a trifle ashamed of its society, with Eva's innocent eyes upon her own, and Alice sadly regarding her over the rampart of wise books, which kept growing higher as the eager girl found more and more treasures in this richly stored library.

A little silence followed, broken only by the patter of the rain without, the crackle of the wood fire within, and the scratch of a busy pen from a curtained recess at the end of a long room. In the sudden hush the girls heard it and remembered that they were not alone.

"She must have heard every word we said!" and Carrie sat up with a dismayed face as she spoke in a whisper.

Eva laughed, but Alice shrugged her shoulders, and said tranquilly, "I don't mind. She wouldn't expect much wisdom from school-girls."

This was cold comfort to Carrie, who was painfully conscious of having been a particularly silly school-girl just then. So she gave a groan and lay down again, wishing she had not expressed her views quite so freely.

The three girls were the guests of a delightful old lady who had known their mothers and was fond of renewing her acquaintance with them through their daughters. She loved young people, and every summer invited parties of them to enjoy the delights of her beautiful country-house,

where she lived alone now, being the childless widow of a somewhat celebrated man. She made it very pleasant for her guests, leaving them free to employ a part of the day as they liked, providing the best of company at dinner, gay revels in the evening, and a large houseful of curious and interesting things to examine at their leisure.

The rain had spoiled a pleasant plan, and business letters had made it necessary for Mrs. Warburton to leave the three to their own devices after luncheon. They had read quietly for several hours, and their hostess was just finishing her last letter, when fragments of the conversation reached her ear. She listened with amusement, unconscious that they had forgotten her presence, finding the different views very characteristic, and easily explained by the difference of the homes out of which the three friends came.

Alice was the only daughter of a scholarly man and a brilliant woman; therefore her love of books and desire to cultivate her mind was very natural, but the danger in her case would be in the neglect of other things equally important, too varied reading, and a superficial knowledge of many authors rather than a true appreciation of a few of the best and greatest. Eva was one of many children in a happy home, with a busy father, a pious mother, and many domestic cares as well as joys already falling to a dutiful girl's lot. Her instincts were sweet and unspoiled, and she only needed to be shown where to find new and better helpers for the real trials of life, when the childish heroines she loved could no longer serve her in the years to come.

(To be Continued.)

DAN'S APRON STRINGS.

BY MINNIE E. KENNEY.

"Dan, we've got some fun on hand for to-night. Don't you want to come along with us?"

"What are you up to now?" and Dan looked up from the pencil he was elaborately sharpening.

"Well, old Mr. Walton has some water-melons that are just in splendid order, and we are thinking of a moonlight expedition that will wind up in the neighborhood of his melon patch. Come on, and we'll have lots of fun. There are only four going, besides you and I."

Dan hesitated. It was his great weakness that he could not say "No" manfully, and stick to it, when he was asked to do anything which he knew to be wrong, and his companions were so well acquainted with this trait in his character that they knew a little persistence would finally make him yield to any suggestion, even if he did weakly oppose it at first.

"I don't believe I care much about going this time," he said, as Howard waited for an answer. "I'm too fond of my bed after I once get there to care about leaving it again, and I don't think mother would like the idea of taking Mr. Walton's melons anyhow."

"Tied to her apron strings, are you?" said Howard scornfully, using the argument which boys usually find so potent. "Don't be so foolish, Dan. Come on, and have some fun. We enjoy things twice as much when you're around; you're such a jolly fellow. You'll have a good time if you come."

Thus ridiculed and flattered in the same breath, Dan could not resist the temptation to yield to Howard's invitation, though he would gladly have been left out of the proposed expedition, if it could have been accomplished in any easier way than by saying "No."

Twelve o'clock that night saw him stealing noiselessly down stairs, his shoes in his hand, lest he should awaken any of the household. Opening the back door quietly, he crept out into the quiet moonlight as silently as a thief, and joined the rest of the party, who were waiting for him at the gate. It was quite a walk to the melon patch, and Dan had begun to enjoy the excitement by the time they reached the fence, and the uncomfortable reminders of conscience had ceased. No more favorable night for an expedition could have been chosen, the boys thought, as they scaled the low fence and began to cut the melons. They cut into the largest and finest, throwing them aside if they were not fully ripe,

without any regard for Mr. Walton's feelings when he should find the results of their night's work.

"At last they found one that they unanimously agreed was just ready to eat, and they had gathered about it to begin their feast when they heard a loud, hoarse baying and the rattling of a chain. They sprang to their feet in alarm.

"Old Cicero has broken his chain, I do believe," cried Howard. "Quick, we must get up in that tree or he'll attack us."

The melon lay untasted and forgotten while the boys rushed to a place of safety in the branches of a large apple-tree, as they saw the dark figure of the dog coming toward them in great bounds, the chain rattling as he dragged it over the ground. Dan was the last to reach the tree, and he had just drawn himself up into the lower branches when Cicero sprang at him. Fortunately he was just beyond the reach of the old mastiff's sharp teeth, and he trembled as he looked down at the furious dog, who barked loudly as he sprang in vain at his prisoners.

"He'll bring Mr. Walton down after us if he keeps this barking up," Howard said, angrily, as he tried unsuccessfully to soothe the dog by coaxing words. His fears were justified, for presently, in the clear moonlight, they could see Mr. Walton with his stout stick in his hand walking down the field.

The boys drew back among the thick, sheltering leaves, hoping that they would not be seen and recognized, but Mr. Walton quickly guessed that Cicero was guarding the tree to some purpose, and without trying to identify the prisoners, whose boyish figures he could but imperfectly see, he bade Cicero guard them, and walked leisurely back to the house.

At first the boys were relieved at the thought of escaping immediate detection and punishment; but as the hours wore slowly away, they grew stiff and cramped in their uncomfortable positions, which they dared not change lest they should fall and be in Cicero's power, and they began to wish that Mr. Walton had called them down, for there was no hope that the faithful mastiff would desert his charge and let them escape. They began to blame each other for the predicament they were in, and quarrelling did not make them any more comfortable.

The long night wore away and morning dawned, but still Cicero lay watchful at the foot of the tree and Mr. Walton did not come. Not until the old gentleman finished his breakfast did he go down to relieve his prisoners.

A shame-faced set of boys descended the tree when he called Cicero off, and when the old gentleman saw their mortification and remembered the long hours of suspense they had endured in the tree, he concluded that they had been punished enough, and let them off with a sharp reproof.

"I didn't want to go from the very first, I truly didn't," Dan said that night when he was telling his mother all about it. "But, you see, the boys teased me about being tied to your apron strings, and so—"

"And so you thought you would rather be tied to theirs, and they led you into trouble and disgrace," said his mother. "Dan, dear, after this stop and think where the apron strings will lead you before you yield to them, and if they draw you anywhere that you know is unsafe ground, break away from them. I don't want you but that you will find your mother's apron strings the safest for some time. Don't desert them until you find safer ones, or you will not lead you astray."

I think this is good advice to all boys.—*Christian Intelligencer.*

HOW IT PAID.

Specific instances are often more effective than generalizations, however stupendous. Is not the following suggestive? At Clarinda, Iowa, the year before prohibition there were five saloons paying a license of \$500 each. Besides this a tax of one percent was called for to pay the running expenses of the town. At the end of the year the town was in debt, but the next year, after the saloon was outlawed, a one half percent tax paid the running expenses of the town and left a surplus in the treasury.—*National W. C. T. U. Bulletin.*