

THE PLACE PREPARED.

St. John 14: 2.

Dear Lord, wilt thou indeed
A place for me prepare;
And fit it to my need
With tender care?

Within its ample space
There shall I find
All fair and lovely things
Just to my mind!

And will there be free scope
For every power
To perfectly develop
Shall my dower

Of birthright gifts
Which here I scarce have learned
To use aright,
To fullest use be turned!

As doth a loving bridegroom
For his bride,
Wilt thou recall each taste,
For each provide?

Ah, Lord! methinks
I do not greatly care
What thou prepar'st for me;
So thou be there.

If I may kiss thy feet,
May touch thee without sin,
I'll ask no more
Though word nor glance I win.

To see thy blessed face,
For me who lived, who died;
My master and my Lord:
I shall be satisfied.

—N. Y. Observer.

HOW IT ALL CAME ROUND.

(L. T. Meade, in "Sunday Magazine.")

CHAPTER XXII.—EMPTY PURSES.

It was not until Harold's life was really safe that his mother realized how very nearly he had been taken from her. But for Hinton's timely interposition, and the arrival of Doctor H— at the critical moment, the face she so loved might have been cold and still now, and the spirit have returned to God who gave it.

Looking at the little sleeper breathing in renewed health and life with each gentle inspiration, such a rush of gratitude and overpowering emotion came over Mrs. Home that she was obliged to follow Hinton into his sitting-room. There she suddenly went down on her knees.

"God bless you," she said. "God most abundantly bless you for what you have done for me and mine. You are, except my husband, the most truly Christian man I ever met."

"Don't," said Hinton moved and even shocked at her position. "I loved—I love the little lad. It is nothing, what we do for those we love."

"No; it is, as you express it, nothing to save a mother's heart from such breaking," answered Charlotte Home. "If ever you marry and have a son of your own, you will begin to understand what you have done for me. You will be thankful then to think of this day."

Then with a smile which an angel might have given him, the mother went away, and Hinton sat down to write to Charlotte. But he was much moved and excited by those earnest words of love and approval. He felt as though a laurel wreath had been placed on his head, and he wondered would his first brief, his first sense of legal triumph, be sweeter to him than the look in that mother's face this morning.

"And it was so easily won," he said to himself. "For who but a brute under the circumstances could have acted otherwise?"

In writing to Charlotte he told her all. It was a relief to him to pour out his heart to her, though of course he carefully kept back names.

By return of post he received her answer. "I must do something for that mother. You will not let me come to her. But if I cannot and must not come, I can at least help with money. How much money shall I send you?"

To this Hinton answered—
"None. She is a proud woman. She would not accept it."

As he put this second letter in the post, he felt that any money gift between these two Charlottes would be impossible. During little Harold's illness he had put away all thought of the possibility of Mrs. Home being entitled to any of his Charlotte's wealth. The near and likely approach of death had put far from his mind all ideas of money. But now, with the return of the usual routine of life in this small and humble house, came back to Hinton's mind the thoughts which had so sorely troubled him on the night on which Charlotte had told him Mrs. Home's story. For his own personal convenience and benefit he had put away those thoughts. He had decided that he could not move hand or foot in the matter. But in the very house with this woman, though he might so resolve not to act, he could not put the sense of the injustice done to her away from his heart. He pondered on it and grew uneasy as to the righteousness of his own conduct. As this uneasiness gathered strength, he even avoided Mrs. Home's presence. For the first time, too, in his life Hinton was beginning to realize what a very ugly thing poverty—particularly the poverty of the upper classes—really is. To make things easier for this family in their time of illness, he had insisted on having what meals he took in the house, in the room with Mr. and Mrs. Home. He would not, now that Harold was better, change this custom. But though he liked it, it brought him into direct contact with the small shifts necessary to make so slender a purse as theirs cover their necessary expenses. Mr. Home noticed nothing; but Mrs. Home's thin face grew more and more worn, and Hinton's heart ached as he watched it. He felt more and more compassionate as to his own conduct. These feelings were to be quickened into activity by a very natural consequence which occurred just then.

Little Harold's life was spared, and neither Daisy nor the baby had taken the fever. So far all was well. Doctor H—, too, had ceased his visits, and the little invalid was left to the care of the first doctor who had been called in. Yes, up to a certain point Harold's progress towards recovery was all that could be satisfactory. But beyond that point he did not go. For a fortnight after the fever left him his progress towards recovery was rapid. Then came the sudden stand-still. His appetite failed him, a cough came on, and a hectic flush in the pale little face. The child was pushing for a change of air, and the father's and mother's purse had been already drained almost to emptiness by the expenses of the first illness. One day when Doctor Watson came and felt the feeble, too-rapid pulse he looked grave. Mrs. Home followed him from the room.

"What ails my boy, doctor? He is making no progress, none whatever."

"Does he sleep enough?" asked Doctor Watson, suddenly.

"Not well; he coughs and is restless."

"Ah! I am sorry he has got that cough. How is his appetite?"

"He does not fancy much food. He has quite turned against his beef-tee."

Doctor Watson was silent.

"What is wrong?" asked Mrs. Home, coming nearer and looking up into his face.

"Madam, there is nothing to alarm yourself with. Your boy has gone through a most severe illness; the natural consequences must follow. He wants change. He will be fit to travel by easy stages in a week at latest. I should recommend Torquay. It is mild and shielded from the spring east winds. Take him to Torquay as soon as possible. Keep him there for a month, and he will return quite well."

"Suppose I cannot?"

"Ah! then—" with an expressive shrug of the shoulders and raising of the brows, "my advice is to take him if possible. I don't like that cough."

Doctor Watson turned away. He felt sorry enough, but he had more acute cases than little Harold Home's to trouble him, and he wisely resolved that to think about what could not be remedied, would but injure his own powers of working. Being a really kind-hearted man he said to himself, "I will make their bill as light as I can when I send it in." And he then forgot the poor curate's family until the time came round for his next visit. Meanwhile Mrs. Home stood still for a moment where he had left her, then went up slowly to her own room.

"Mother, mother, I want you," called the weak, querulous voice of the sick child. "Coming in a moment, darling," she said. But for that one moment she felt she must be alone.

Locking her door she went down on her knees. Not a tear came to her eyes, not a word to her lips. There was an inward groan, expressing itself in some voiceless manner after this fashion—

"My God, my God, must I go through the fiery furnace?" Then smoothing her hair, and forcing a smile back to her lips, she went back to her little son.

All that afternoon she sat with him, singing to him, telling him stories, playing with him. In the evening, however, she sought an opportunity to speak to her husband alone.

"Angus, you know how nearly we lost our boy a week ago?"

The curate paused, and looked at her earnestly, surprised at her look and manner. "Yes, my dearest," he said. "But God was merciful."

"Oh! Angus," she said; and now it died away to her, for as she spoke she began to weep. "You are good, you are brave, you could have let him go. But for me—for me—it would have killed me. I should have died or gone mad!"

"Lottie dear—my darling, you are overstrung. The trial, the fiery trial, was not sent. Why dwell on what our loving Father has averted?"

"Oh, Angus! but has He—has He," then choking with pent-up emotion, she told what the doctor had said to-day, how necessary the expensive change was for the little life. "And we have no money," she said in conclusion, "our purse is very nearly empty."

"Very nearly empty indeed," answered Angus Home.

He was absolutely silent after this news, no longer attempting to comfort his wife.

"Angus, God is cruel if for the sake of wanting a little money our boy must die."

"Don't," said the curate—God was so precious to him that these words smote on him even now with a sense of agony—"don't," he repeated, and he raised his hand as though to motion away an evil spirit.

"He is cruel if He lets our boy die for want of money to save him," repeated the mother in her desperation.

"He won't do that, Lottie—He will never do that, there is not the least fear."

"Then how are we to get the money?"

"I don't know, I cannot think to-night. I will go up to Harold now."

He turned and left the room with slow steps. As he mounted the stairs his back was so bent, his face so gray and careworn, that though scarcely forty he looked like an old man.

This was Harold's one precious hour with his father, and the little fellow was sitting up in bed and expecting him.

"Father," he said, noticing the anxious look on his face, which was generally as serene and peaceful as the summer sea—"what is the matter? You are ill; are you going to have scarlet fever too?"

"No, my dear, dear, boy. I am quite well, quite well, at least in body. I have a care on my mind that makes me look a little sad, but don't notice it Harold, it will pass."

"You have a care on your mind!" said Harold in a tone of surprise. "I know mother often, often has, but I did not think you had cares, father."

"How can I help it, boy, sometimes?"

"I thought you gave your cares to God. I don't understand a bit how you manage it, but I remember quite well your telling mother that you gave your cares away to God."

The father turning round suddenly, stooped down and kissed the boy.

"Thank you, my son, for reminding me. Yes, I will give this care too to God, it shall not trouble me."

Then the two began to talk, and the son's little wasted hand was held in the father's. The father's face had recovered its serenity, and the little son, though he coughed continually, looked happy.

"Father," he said suddenly, "there's just one thing I'm sorry for."

"What's that, my boy?"

"There were a whole lot of other things, father; about my never having gone to live in the country, and those gypsy teas that mother told me of. You light a fire outside, you know, father, and boil the kettle on it, and have your tea in the woods and

the fields. It must be just delicious. I was sorry about that, for I've never been to one, never even to one all my life long— and then there's the pretty lady—I do want to see my pretty lady once again. I was sorry about those things all day, but not now. 'Tisn't any of those things makes me so sorry now."

"What does make you sorry, Harold?"

"Father, I'm just a little bit jealous about Jesus. You see there's always such a lot of us little children dying and going to heaven, and He can't come for us all, so He has to send angels. Now I don't want an angel, I want Him to come for Himself."

"Oh, father! when you are giving Him your new care to-night, will you just ask Him not to be so dreadfully busy, but to try and come Himself?"

"Yes Harold," said the father.

After this promise little Harold went to sleep very happily.

CHAPTER XXIII.—"THY WILL BE DONE."

"You always give your cares to God," little Harold had said to his father.

That father, on his knees, with his head bowed between his hands, and a tempest of agony, of entreaty in his heart, found suddenly that he could not give this care away to God. For a moment, when the boy had spoken, he had believed that this was possible, but when little Harold had himself spoken so quietly of dying and going to Jesus, the father's heart rose suddenly in the fiercest rebellion. No; if it meant the slaying of his first-born he could not so quietly lay it in the hands of God and say, "Thy will be done." This uncharitably man, who had always lived with a kind of heaven-sent radiance round his path, found himself suddenly human after all. His earthly arms clung tightly round the earthly form of his pretty little lad and would not unclasp themselves. It was to this man who had so serenely and for many years walked in the sunshine of God's presence, with nothing to hide his glory from his eyes, as though he had come up to a high, a blank, an utterly impenetrable wall, which shut away all the divine radiance. He could neither climb this wall, nor could he see one glimpse of God at the dark side where he found himself. In an agony this brave heart tried to pray, but his voice would not rise above his chamber, would not indeed even ascend to his lips. He found himself suddenly voiceless and dumb, dead amidst stealing over him. He did not, however, rise from his knees, and in this position his wife found him when, late that night, she came up to bed. She had been crying so hard and so long that by very force of those tears her face was lighter, and her husband, when he raised his eyes, hollow with the terrible struggle within, to her face, looked now the most miserable of the two. The mute appeal in his eyes smote on the wife's loving heart, instantly she came over and knelt by his side.

"You must come to bed, Angus dear. I will have arranged with Mr. Hinton, and he will sit up with our little lad for the next few hours."

"I could not sleep, Lottie," answered the husband. "God is coming to take away our child and I can't say, 'Thy will be done.'"

"You can't," repeated the wife, and now her lips fell apart and she gazed at her husband.

"No, Lottie; you called God cruel downstairs, and now He looks cruel to me. I can't give Him my first-born. I can't say 'Thy will be done;' but oh!" continued the wretched man, "this is horrible, this is blasphemous. Oh! has God indeed forsaken me?"

"No, no, no!" suddenly almost shrieked the wife; "no, no!" she repeated; and now she had flung her arms round her husband and was straining him to her heart. "Oh, my darling! my beloved! you were never, never, never, so near to me, so dear to me, as now. Oh, Angus! let us both kneel here and say, 'Thy will be done,' for I believe the will of God will be to save the child."

A great faith had suddenly come to this woman. She lifted her voice, and a torrent of eloquent words, of passionate utterances, rent the air and went up to God from that little room, and the husband stole his hand into the wife's as she prayed. After this they both slept, and Lottie's heart was lighter than it had ever been in all her life before.