

CHAPTER XVII.

“The twig is so easily bended,
I will banish the rule and the rod ;
I will teach them the goodness of knowledge,—
They will teach me the goodness of God.”

CHARLES DICKENS.

The next thing I had to consider was how to get rid of one or two of those dreary reading lessons and brighten up the rest. As we had occasionally to have recourse to an interpreter, I determined to have a lesson in English instead of one of the reading lessons. I had some opposition from the children themselves, who were wedded to the four lessons ; but, as they felt their progress in the language, and tested its usefulness when occasion arose, they became gradually reconciled, and the English lesson became a recognized institution. As soon as I was sure they understood me, I often told them little bits from history, as how easily the Picts and Scots harassed, and the Saxons conquered the ancient Britons because they were divided among themselves ; and how, on the contrary, England was unconquerable in the time of the great Elizabeth, because that great Queen and her people were united. These lessons always ended with a little talk about the honor of the school. I told them of the dreadful riot I had heard in a school which I passed on my way to Glenshie. The teacher was speaking to some one at the door and the scholars, caring nothing for the reputation of their school, were trying to see who could make most noise, and how glad I was they were not my scholars. “If any one came to speak to me,” I said, “I would like you all to remember the motto, ‘Study to be Quiet,’ and go on with your studies, keeping so still that you might hear a pin fall.”

Remembering the pleasure Bible stories gave me when a child, I thought to wake up an interest in the Bible lesson, and wanting a gorgeous back-

ground for my first attempt, I chose the book of Esther as our reading lesson. I had some difficulty about enough Bibles, but I overcame it, thanks to Squire McPherson. They had always been accustomed to a Scripture lesson, so that was no innovation, but they had not taken any interest in it, partly from being deficient in the language. To interest them, I did not confine myself to the text but heightened the splendors of Shushan, the palace, by descriptions of oriental luxury borrowed from the Feast of Roses. Then we read the lesson and every one gave an opinion of what we read. All their sympathies went with the disobedient Vashti. Alice Morrison thought Vashti was afraid to go to the king. “After drinking for seven days they would be dreadful,” she said, “They are bad enough here when they drink for one day.”

As the interest deepened about Esther’s fate, they became more earnest with their other studies to have more time for the Bible lesson. I must confess these were precious half hours to me, and I took as great an interest in the stories as when I heard them first in the Manse at Grey Abbey. One day during Bible lesson, when we had just hanged Haman, to the great satisfaction of the boys, a rap came to the door. I pointed to the motto “Study to be Quiet” as I went to open it. It was the good minister of Blair Athol on horseback, followed by a shaggy grey dog, which had a strong resemblance to himself. He would not alight or come in, being bound farther, but had brought me a work on education, which he thought might be useful to me. He enquired kindly how I was getting on, and then said suddenly, “Why, have you no school to-day?”

“Oh, yes, I have school, and my scholars are increasing every day. There are fifty-eight present to-day,” I said.

He never said a word, but dismount-