

CHOICE LITERATURE.

THROUGH THE WINTER.

CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

It was with a sigh of mingled weariness and relief that Helen leaned back against the soft cushions of the doctor's carriage. Physically she was very tired, while mentally excited. Aunt Hagar's words had stirred her deeply, and yet she was not sad. She felt as if the wings of some great, solemn joy had touched her; almost as if she had been standing for a little while where Bunyan's pilgrims stood—on the hills from whence they caught a far-off gleam of the gates of the Celestial City.

And yet, so strangely mixed were her feelings, she dreaded to have Dr. Waldemar speak of Aunt Hagar. It seemed to her she could not repress tears and even sobs if he should.

Was it due solely to his skill as a physician that he understood her, and, as they started toward home, changed the current of her thoughts by saying, pleasantly:

"The storm this morning was a great disappointment to Margaret, Miss Humphrey. She was very anxious to visit you this afternoon, and only my mother's express command could keep her at home. You know she is yet very far from strong, and we have to be careful of her."

"I know," Helen answered. "I wanted very much to see her, but I knew she could not come out in such weather."

"How came you to be out in it?" Dr. Waldemar questioned, kindly. "Are you so strong that you do not consider it necessary to be careful, or are you enough of an Undine to enjoy battling with wind and water?"

Helen's cheeks flushed painfully. "I don't think I know what you mean by Undine," she said, humbly; "but I came out this afternoon because Aunt Hagar sent for me."

A bright, pleasant smile answered her first, then Dr. Waldemar said:

"So forgetful of your own comfort, you came out to give comfort and sympathy to another? That is better than being an Undine, Miss Helen. She was only a beautiful water-sprite, an imaginative character in a very pretty German story. You must read it some day. But now tell me what you, who have been doing your duty so bravely this afternoon, think of this," and Dr. Waldemar repeated a few lines of Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty":

"Stern Lawgiver! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace:
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face;
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds;
And fragrance in thy footing treads;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
And the most ancient heavens, through
Thee, are fresh and young."

They were two very earnest, radiant eyes into which Dr. Waldemar looked as he ceased.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

"I can't tell you. I don't want to say that it is beautiful: I want a newer word than that—a holier word."

"You like it, then?"

"Yes, much; very much," Helen repeated with emphasis. "Who wrote it?" she asked in a moment, in a different tone—one that seemed touched with a hint of sadness.

"Wordsworth, an English poet."

"Did he write other things as beautiful?"

"He wrote a great many poems: some, perhaps, more beautiful: others very inferior. But his writings abound in thoughts that are like gems for their purity and clearness. You will read him some day, I hope, Miss Helen."

"I don't know," Helen answered in a quiet voice, out of which the animation had quite died.

Dr. Waldemar looked at her with kind, thoughtful eyes, and quietly said,

"Let not your heart be troubled. We sometimes come to hard places in life, where inclination urges us in one way and duty calls us strongly in another. Following duty we may have to leave many pleasant, many desirable things behind, it may seem to us forever. But the promise stands sure, Miss Helen: 'all these things shall be added.' Not to-day, perhaps, nor even to-morrow, but in His own best time."

But Helen said: "We do lack a great deal here: we have to wait a long while sometimes before we can eat bread without scarceness, before we are satisfied."

"Are you sure?" he asked, giving her another of his pleasant smiles. "I do not believe, do you, that the children of a King—a King who has such rich provisions stored up in His treasure-houses, are destined to go hungering all their days on earth? Do you know what makes a cross, Miss Helen?"

"I don't think I can explain it," Helen answered.

"Neither could a little boy of whom I once read, and so he took to his father the question over which he had been pondering."

"Papa, what makes a cross—a Christian's cross?"

"And the father took two pieces of wood and laid them parallel."

"Is that a cross?" he asked.

"Oh, no," said the little boy, "the sticks lie the same way now—to make a cross one must cross the other."

"And the father said: 'Just so, my boy, is it with a Christian's will and God's. When they lie the same way there is no cross. It is only when our will crosses our heavenly Father's that we are conscious of being cross-bearers.'"

"And, Miss Helen, I believe it is possible to come so close to the Master, to lay our wills so contentedly, cheerfully by the side of His, that to bear the cross after Him will become a sacred joy, and not a mortal pain."

Helen did not answer, and Dr. Waldemar did not speak again until they were near her father's; then he said:

"You are almost home, Miss Helen: can you forgive my

preaching you such a long sermon? a sermon I do not really think you needed."

Her smile, bright, though a little moved, answered him; she only said:

"I thank you, Dr. Waldemar. Are you going to see Aunt Hagar to-night?"

"Yes, I am going back there very soon. May I tell Margaret you will be ready to see her to-morrow?"

"If she can come I shall be very glad to see her."

"I will bring her, then. I think we have the promise of a lovely day to-morrow. See how red the sky is. May I presume, as a physician, to give you a little advice?" he asked, with a smile, as he helped her to alight.

"If you think I need it," she said.

He smiled. "Doctors seldom give advice unnecessarily, Miss Helen. Mine is very simple. It is that you neither use mind nor hands this evening, but as soon as possible close your eyes and enter dreamland. Will you follow it?"

Helen laughed. "Do doctors always have to be answered with yes or no?" she said. "I am afraid I cannot promise, Dr. Waldemar, but I am grateful."

"You must prove your gratitude by following my prescription," he said, gently. "Good night."

The next day was mild and sunny, more like an April day that had lost its way than a mid-December one, and early in the afternoon Dr. Waldemar's little carriage stopped before Mr. Humphrey's gate, and Margaret alighted.

"Come at last, Helen," she said, in her soft, glad voice, as Helen met her at the door. "I began to think I should never see you again, but I've come now to stay the whole afternoon, or until Guy comes back; and I am so glad."

The gladness was mutual. Helen took her visitor into the warm sitting-room, gently removed her wraps, and seated her in the most comfortable chair, talking in her own pleasant winning manner all the while. Ronald and Sibyl came in, very anxious to see the pretty young lady who had been so kind to them on their visit; but they soon stole off to their play, and the two girls were left alone.

They chatted together in their bright, girlish fashion for a while, each fresh young heart quick to understand and respond to the other, and each exerting an influence on the other of which she little dreamed. Helen was cheered and animated by Margaret's playfulness and vivacity; while some of Margaret's purest and truest impulses were roused by what seemed to her the beautiful unselfishness of Helen's life; and she inwardly resolved she would do more for others and less for herself in future. Resting comfortably in her easy chair she watched Helen, whose hands, even while she talked, were busily employed on the white apron she was making for Sibyl.

"Are you always busy, Helen?" she asked.

"Yes, almost," Helen answered, with a smile. "I have to be, you know."

"You are worse than a sermon for idle girls, who do nothing but fancy work. I can't sit here with folded hands any longer: do give me an apron string to hem."

Helen laughed; but on Margaret's insisting, the string was given; and while their bright heads bent cosily over their work the two girls grew more confidential and intimate. Margaret looked up after a while and glanced out of the window.

"It will soon be sundown," she said; "Guy will come for me before long. Helen, my most important business with you hasn't been touched on yet. Have you made any plans or arrangements for Christmas day?"

"No," Helen answered, with a touch of sadness in her voice; "the day will be much like other days here, I fear. Mamma always made it cheerful and pleasant for us, but now it will be very quiet." And Helen's eyes told how much she yearned for the mother, whose words and deeds of unselfish love had never failed to make sunshine for her children. Margaret's hand lay tenderly on Helen's for a moment, but her voice was cheerful and glad as ever.

"That was one thing I wanted to see you for, Helen," she said. "We have planned—mamma and I—to have a real, merry old-fashioned Christmas; and we want you, and Sibyl, and your three brothers to spend it with us. You are to come Christmas eve, and spend the night; will you do it, Helen?"

"What, all of us?"

"Yes, all of you," Margaret repeated. "The cottage is large enough, and our hearts are larger yet; there will be plenty of room for you all. You will come, Helen," she urged; "you will spoil all my plans if you don't say yes!"

Helen grew thoughtful. "I am afraid papa will be very lonely," she said.

"Oh, Mr. Humphrey is to dine with us on Christmas day; that is, if he will confer that pleasure on us. It won't be any use for you to make any objections, or try to excuse yourself, Helen: you must come."

"I will if I can," Helen answered. "Margaret, you do not know how much I appreciate your kindness, nor how glad I shall be to accept it, if I can; but you know I have to consider a great many things beside my own pleasure."

"Well, I hope you don't see any impossible mountains rising in your way. It is something gained to know your own pleasure would induce you to come; and for the rest, I shall have to send mamma to use her influence. You will find us a very determined family to deal with, Helen. We intend to have you with us on Christmas day whether you will or no, so you may as well begin now to make your arrangements work towards that end."

Before Helen could answer the door opened, and Sibyl ushered in Dr. Waldemar.

"Guy," cried his sister; "how could you come so soon? I am not half ready to go yet."

"Are you sure Miss Humphrey isn't quite ready to have you go?" he retorted pleasantly. "Miss Helen," he said, as he shook her hand, "I am afraid you did not follow my prescription faithfully last night. How do you do to-day?"

"I think I am very well, Dr. Waldemar. I don't think I was in any need of your prescription."

"You think," he said, with a smile. "Well, thinkers disagree sometimes, Miss Helen; and not always because they stand on opposite sides of the shield either."

"Guyon, you are always talking in riddles," said Margaret. "Just what do you now mean?"

"You don't want me to tell you the story of the two knights between the shield, do you?"

"No, it is as old as Methuselah; do spare our ears its repetition; but what do you mean by quoting it to Helen?"

"Nothing very serious," he said, with a smile. "Only I, as a physician, look on Miss Helen and think at once she needs something for her health which I take the liberty of prescribing. She, on the other hand, doesn't look on herself, but off—at the moon or stars, perhaps—and thinks she has no need of my advice. Both of us cannot think correctly; and I shall not own myself in error until Miss Helen's cheeks bear a fainter resemblance to white roses than they do to-day."

"Oh, is that it? Helen, you may as well do as Guy wants you to: people always do."

"Do they?" he said; "then, my little sister, will you please put on your wrappings and let me take you home?"

While Margaret was preparing for her ride Dr. Waldemar turned again to Helen.

"Miss Helen," he asked, "have you any engagement for Thursday?"

"No," Helen answered, in some surprise at the question.

"Then will you give my mother, and Margaret, and myself a great pleasure, by spending the evening with us? I will come for you at any time you will appoint, and bring you home in good season."

The light in Helen's eyes was very bright for a moment, and her cheeks lost the resemblance to white roses Dr. Waldemar had just suggested.

"Thank you," she said brightly; "I shall be—"

She stopped suddenly, and a shadow flitted across her face.

"May I finish your sentence for you?" Dr. Waldemar asked. "You will be happy to give us all so much pleasure. Is not that what you would say, Miss Helen?"

"I am afraid not," she answered, quietly. "I don't think I can do it, Dr. Waldemar. I belong to my brothers in the evening."

He looked at her as much as if he thought there were other claims that had a right to indulgence, but he only said, gently:

"I am very sorry, but some other time, Miss Helen, I hope you will be able to come."

"I am ready at last," said Margaret, warm and cosy in her furs. "Guy, I am sorry to interrupt you, but I feel like a huge polar bear in all these furs. Don't keep me waiting now in this warm room. Helen, if you and Guy cannot agree to think alike, I trust at least that we can."

Christmas eve, remember, if not before, you are to come to us."

And so, with bright words and brighter anticipations, they parted.

Helen addressed the little ones, told them the "night-cap story" they always wanted, and, kneeling by their bedsides, heard their childish prayers.

"Nellie," whispered Ronald, "you are sure God heard?"

"Yes dear. Why?"

"Because, Nellie, I prayed something in my heart. I didn't speak out loud. He doesn't want us always to pray so everyone can hear, does He?"

"No, dear, if our heart prays, God will hear, though our lips are still."

"How good He is," Ronald said, as he turned drowsily on his pillow.

While Helen had been occupied with the children, the door-bell had rung, and Fred, in great delight, had admitted Dr. Waldemar, and led him into the sitting-room.

"Where is Helen?" asked Mr. Humphrey, after greeting his guest politely.

"Up-stairs with Ronald and Sibyl," answered Philip; "shall I call her?"

"Not for me," interrupted Dr. Waldemar: "I can wait: do not disturb her. Mr. Humphrey," turning to him, "what do you think of the presidential election?"

It was a question in which Mr. Humphrey was greatly interested, and he was soon launched on a sea of argument. Quiet note, in the meanwhile, Dr. Waldemar took of the room and its furnishings and occupants. The plants, carefully tended in the window; the perfect order and yet homelike cosiness of the room; the bright-eyed boys; the table covered with school-books, and papers, and games, all told a story Dr. Waldemar read slowly and thoughtfully, while at the same time he listened with polite if not interested attention to Mr. Humphrey. And so, when Helen came quietly in with her work-basket, she was surprised to find him.

"You know the old saying, Miss Helen," he said, as he shook hands with her: "If the mountain will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain." Margaret wished me to be the bearer of this little box," he added.

"It contains some views of the Holy Land, illustrating the Sunday school lesson. She thought you would like to see them."

"How kind—how very kind she is," Helen said, delightedly. And then, with a pretty, modest grace, she asked:

"Would she like you to bring them back to-night? Shall we look at them now?"

He smiled. "As you please, Miss Helen. I do not believe she is in any haste for their return; but if your brothers would like to see them, you might look at them now. I have visited some of the places, perhaps we might all study the lesson together in this way."

"Hurrah!" cried Fred, enthusiastically, "that's just the thing. Phil and I know our lessons, Helen, and we were ready for a game of Muggins; but this will be better than all the dominoes in the country."

The table was quickly cleared, and the little group gathered round it. Even Mr. Humphrey was soon drawn to it by the magic of Dr. Waldemar's manner, and still more by his lucid, graphic explanations. He had travelled and read much, and of all his studies, the Bible had ever been to him the freshest and dearest. He was well fitted now to lead his hearers over the ancient land, and make them feel that it was holy. His sincere, reverent faith