

STEPPING-STONES.

"Heigh-Ho! a weary life I lead of it!" thought Martha Bean, as she crossed the brook, carrying home her milk-pail. "I'm sure 'tis work, work, from morning till night; I might as well be an African slave. There's poor mother crippled with the rheumatism, not able to rise from her chair without help, much less to look after the half-a-dozen children that my brother has landed upon us, so all the trouble and nursing and work come on me. I'm sure that to be kept awake half the night with a squalling baby, when I've to labour hard all the day, is enough to drive a girl wild. It's never a holiday I get, and as for a new dress or bonnet, where's the money to buy it, with all those children to feed and clothe? It's a weary life," Martha repeated, as she entered the cottage where her sick mother sat wrapped up in flannels by the fire, with the baby asleep in a cradle beside her. Mrs. Bean was weak and full of aches and pains, but from those gentle lips no murmur ever was heard.

"Well, Martha, you're home early," she said, greeting her daughter with a smile.

"Yes, mother, because I have not now that long way to go round by the bridge."

"It was an excellent plan of the squire to put those convenient stepping-stones across the river," said Mrs. Bean.

Martha set down her pail on the brick-paved floor, and threw herself on a chair with a weary sigh. "I wish that there were stepping-stones over the river of trouble," cried she, "for I don't see how poor folk like us are ever to get across."

"There are stepping-stones, dear Martha," said her mother; "and many a one has found them that would have been drowned in trouble without them."

"Stepping-stones! what do you mean?" cried Martha, looking with surprise at the quiet sufferer as she spoke.

"There are three, my child, that God Himself has set in the dreary waters, that His people may pass in safety over the difficult way. They are—prudence, patience, and prayer. By *prudence* we shun many a trouble which overwhelms the careless and giddy. By *patience* we get over those troubles which God sends to

prove and to try us. And when the bitter waters rise high, and we feel as if we must sink beneath them, then the Christian, trembling and weary, finds firm footing in prayer."

Dear reader, at some period of your journey through life, you will have to pass the river of trouble; may you then seek and find these safe stepping-stones—

PRUDENCE, PATIENCE, and PRAYER.

—A. L. O. E.

Who are these and whence came they?

Not from Jerusalem alone,
To heaven the path ascends;
As near, as sure, as straight the way
That leads to the celestial day,
From farthest realms extends;
Frigid or torrid zone.

What matters how or whence we start?
One is the crown to all;
One is the hard but glorious race,
Whatever be our starting-place;—
Rings round the earth the call
That says, Arise, Depart!

From the balm-breathing, sun-loved isles
Of the bright Southern Sea,
From the dead North's cloud-shadow'd pole,
We gather to one glad some goal,—
One common home in Thee,
City of sun and smiles!

The cold rough b'low hinders none;
Nor helps the calm, fair main;
The brown rock of Norwegian gloom,
The verdure of Tahitian bloom,
The sands of Mizraim's plain,
Or peaks of Lebanon.

As from the green lands of the vine,
So from the snow-wastes pale,
We find the ever open road
To the dear city of our God;
From Russian steppe, or Burnian vale,
Or terraced Palestine.

Not from swift Jordan's sacred stream
Alone we mount above;
Indus or Danube, Thames or Rhone,
Rivers unsainted and unknown;—
From each the home of love
Beckons with heavenly gleam.

Not from gray Olivet alone
We see the gates of light:
From Morven's heath or Jungfrau's snow
We welcome the descending glow
Of pearl and chrysolite,
And the unsetting sun.

Not from Jerusalem alone
The Church ascends to God;
Strangers of every tongue and clime,
Pilgrims of every land and time,
Throng the well-trodden road
That leads up to the throne.

—Bonar.