

DAPH.

(From the Children's Friend.)

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

CLOUDS.

The children were quietly slumbering near her; she had extinguished the candle, that it might not waste its feeble light, and, with her head on her hand, she began to consider seriously the situation in which she found herself. The present was dark enough, but what was she to think of the gloomy future?

Where should she look for the work she would so willingly do? How could she leave her little charge, even if that work were found.

A sense of utter helplessness came over the poor negress, and hot tears poured down her cheeks.

A sudden thought struck her: there was One all-powerful, and to Him she would go. She fell on her knees, and uttered her first simple prayer: "Will de great Lord gib poor Daph something to do?"

Overpowered by the effort she had made, and fearful there was something presuming in a poor creature like herself daring to speak to the Lord, she so revered, Daph sank down on the floor, in a position of silent humility. A conviction that she had been heard and forgiven for the boldness of her prayer stole over her, and she stretched herself as usual on the bare floor, and was soon in a sound sleep.

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW PATH.

Daph rose the following morning, at her usual early hour, and went to perform her customary ablutions beside the well, keeping, however, a sharp look out for Mrs. Ray, to be ready to beat a retreat as soon as that formidable person should make herself heard. No Mrs. Ray appeared, and Daph's curiosity tempted her to take a peep into the room which served as kitchen, parlor, and general abiding-place for Mrs. Ray and Mary, though they slept in the loft above.

Mary was diligently ironing, at this early hour, giving from time to time dolorous glances at a great basketful of damp clothes, which seemed to diminish but slowly under her efforts.

"Where's your ma?" said Daph, as she thrust her head



"DAPH, REVIVED BY THE WELCOME HEAT, WAS IRONING AWAY."

fairly in at the door, regardless of consequences.

"Mother's very sick this morning," said Mary, sorrowfully; "she can't even turn herself in bed, and all these clothes must go home to-night; we have had to keep them too long now, it has been so wet."

"Nebber fret 'bout de close," said Daph, cheerily; "I'se held a flat 'fore dis! Do Daph good to work a little,—she mighty tired, sittin' up all day like a lady. Spose I jus steps up to look at your ma. Maybe I might do somewhat for her, to make her feel some better."

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed Mary, hastily; "she might not like it." "Nebber you mind dat!" said Daph; "you jus show me de way."

Mary pointed to the door that led to the narrow staircase, and Daph needed no further guidance.

"Ye's mighty sick, isn't ye, Miss' Ray!" said Daph, compassionately, as she stepped to the bedside of the sufferer,

Mrs. Ray turned her head to the wall and groaned, but Daph was not to be easily disconcerted.

"Spose I jus' makes you a little warm drink, and kinder helps you to frow off dis ere sickness?" said Daph, insinuatingly.

"Oh, my back! my bones!—they ache so!" said the poor woman.

"It's jus bein' out in dis wet wedder, jus a-comin' from dat awful hot fire into de swash down rain," said Daph. "White folks isn't used to such hard work. You jus' can't bear it, dat's it."

Daph had struck the right chord, and Mrs. Ray answered, "No, I ain't used to it, that's true enough; but who have I got to help me, but just that slip of a girl? Oh, if my boy had only lived!"

Daph did not wait to hear more of the complaints, which were the burden of Mrs. Ray's daily talk. She hastened to the kitchen, and, with Mary's help, she soon prepared a steaming

bowl of herb-tea, which Mrs. Ray took from her hand without a word. She would have resisted, when Daph proceeded to bathe her feet in warm water; but the kind-hearted negress went steadily on, regardless of opposition, saying, "You'se so very sick, we's mus jus take care of you, same as if you were a bit of a baby. There now, let me jus put the cubber over you," she said, as she released the restive foot. "Now, if you could jus git a little sleep, while I go dress de babies, I'se do believe you would feel mighty better."

Mrs. Ray did into a quiet sleep, the more sound from the night of wakefulness and pain she had just passed. When she awoke, she heard unusual sounds in the kitchen below, and if she could have peeped down the stair-way a pleasant scene would have met her eyes. A cheerful fire roared up the wide chimney. Daph, revived by the welcome heat, was ironing away at the great table, with real heartiness, while little Mary, at her side, tried to move her slender arms in the same

energetic manner. Charlie was seated on the table, a happy spectator of these proceedings, while Louise stood by him, sprinkling and folding a bit of rag again and again, not doubting that she was amazingly useful.

"Mary! Mary!" said a voice from above, feebler and a little less sharp than usual, "who's down there with you?"

"It's jus me and de children, Miss' Ray," said Daph, putting her head fearlessly up the stair-way. "Dat big basket o' clothes wants 'tention, and I'se jus thought I'se better be ironin' a bit, to git de tings out ob de way."

Mrs. Ray made no answer, and Daph, after satisfying herself that the patient was a little better, stepped quietly back into the kitchen.

Daph really enjoyed her busy day, and it was followed by sound, natural sleep, instead of hours of wakefulness and anxious thought.

It was more than a week before Mrs. Ray recovered from the violent cold which had so sud-