

A Prayer.

If any little word of mine
 May make a life the brighter :
 If any little song of mine
 May make a heart the lighter,
 God help me speak the little word,
 And take my bit of singing,
 And drop it in some lonely vale
 To set the echoes ringing '
 If any little love of mine
 May make a life the sweeter ;
 If any little care of mine
 May make a friend's the fleetier ;
 If any lift of mine may ease
 The burden of another,
 God give me love and care and strength,
 To help my toiling brother !

"Probable Sons."

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST PUNISHMENT.

Slowly but surely little Milly was advancing in her uncle's favour. Her extreme docility and great fearlessness, added to her quaintness of speech and action, attracted him greatly. He became interested in watching her little figure as it flitted to and fro, and the sunny laugh and bright childish voice about the house were no longer an annoyance to him.

One day he was moved to anger by an accident that happened to a small statue in the hall, and Milly was the delinquent. Her ball had rolled behind it, and both she and the dog were having a romp to get it, when in the scuffle the statue came to the ground and lay there in a thousand pieces. Hearing the crash, Sir Edward came out of his study, and completely losing his temper, he turned furiously upon the child, giving vent to language that was hardly fit for her ears to hear. She stood before him with round, frightened eyes and quivering lips, her little figure upright and still, until she could bear it no longer; and then she turned and fled from him through the garden door and out upon the smooth grassy lawn, where she flung herself down face foremost close to her favourite beech-tree, there giving way to a burst of passionate tears.

"I didn't mean it—oh! I didn't mean to break it," she sobbed aloud. "Uncle Edward is a fearful angry man; he doesn't love me a bit. I wish I had a father! I want a father like the probable son; he wouldn't be so angry!"

And when later on nurse came, with an anxious face, to fetch her little charge in from the cold, wet grass, she had not the heart to scold her, for the tear-stained face was raised so pitifully to hers with the words,—

"Oh, nurse, dear, carry me in your arms. No one loves me here. I've been telling God all about it. He's the only One that isn't angry."

That evening, at the accustomed time, Milly stole quietly into the dining-room, wondering in her little heart whether her uncle was still angry with her.

As she climbed into her chair, now placed on the opposite side of the large table, she eyed him doubtfully through her long lashes; then gathering courage from the immovable expression of his face, she said in her most cheerful tone,—

"It's a very fine night, uncle."

"Is it?" responded Sir Edward, who was accustomed by this time to some such remark when his little niece wanted to attract his notice. Then feeling really ashamed of his outburst a few hours before, he said, by way of excusing himself,—

"Look here, Millicent, you made me exceedingly angry by your piece of mischief this afternoon. That statue can never be replaced, and you have destroyed one of my most valuable possessions. Let it be a warning for the future. If every you break anything again, I shall punish you most severely; do you understand?"

"Yes, uncle," she answered looking up earnestly. "You will punish me most severely. I will remember. I have been wondering why I broke it, when I didn't mean to do it. Nurse says it was a most 'unfortunate accident.' I asked her what an accident was. She says it's a thing that happens when you don't expect it—a surprise, she called it. I'm sure it was a dreadful surprise to me, and to Fritz too; but I'll never play ball in the hall again, never!"

A week later, and Sir Edward was in his study, absorbed in his books and papers, when there was a knock at his door, and, to his astonishment, his little niece walked in. This was so against all rules and regulations that his voice was very stern as he said,—

"What is the meaning of this intrusion, Millicent? You know you are never allowed to disturb me when here."

Milly did not answer for a moment, she walked up to her uncle, her small lips tightly closed, and then, standing in front of him with clasped hands, she said, — I've come to tell you some dreadful news."

Sir Edward pushed aside his papers, adjusted his glasses, and saw from the pallour of the child's face and the scared expression in her eyes, that it was no light matter that had made her venture into his presence uncalled for.

"It's a dreadful surprise again," Milly continued, "but I told nurse I must tell you at once. —I felt so bad here," and her little hand was laid pathetically on her chest.

"Well, what is it? Out with it, child! You are wasting my time," said her uncle impatiently.

"I have—I have broken something else."

There was silence. Then Sir Edward asked drily,—

"And what is it now?"

"It's a—a flower-pot, that the garden-er's boy left outside the tool-house. I—I well, I put it on Fritz's head for a hat, you know. He did look so funny, but he tossed up his head and ran away, and it fell, and it smashed to bits. I have got the bits outside the door on the mat. Shall I bring them in?"

A flower-pot was of such small value in Sir Edward's eyes that he almost smiled at the child's distress.

"Well, well, you must learn not to touch the flower-pots in future; now run away, and do not disturb me again."

But Milly stood her ground.

"I think you have forgot, Uncle Edward. You told me that if I broke anything again you would punish me 'most severely.' Those were the words you said; don't you remember?"

Sir Edward pulled the ends of his moustache and fidgeted uneasily in his chair. He always prided himself upon

silence. There was commiseration in her tone. The situation was becoming ludicrous to Sir Edward, though there was a certain amount of annoyance at feeling his inability to carry out his threat.

"Nurse told me," continued his little niece gravely, "that she knew a little boy who was shut up in a dark cupboard for a punishment, but he was found nearly dead, and really died the next day, from fright. There is a dark cupboard on the kitchen stairs, I don't think I should be very frightened, because God will be in there with me. Do you think that would do?"

This was not acceptable. The child went on with knitted brows. "I expect the Bible will tell you how to punish. I remember a man who picked up sticks on Sunday; he was stoned dead; and Elisha's servant was made a leper, and some children were killed by a bear, and a prophet by a lion, and Annas and Sophia were struck dead. All of them were punished 'most severely,' weren't they? If you forgave me a little bit, and left out the 'most severely,' it would make it easier, I expect."

"Perhaps I might do that," said poor Sir Edward, who by this time longed to dispense with the punishment altogether; "as it was only a flower-pot, I will leave out the 'most severely.'"

Milly's face brightened.

"I think," she said, coming up to him and laying one hand on his knee—"I think if I were to go to bed instead of coming down to dessert with you this evening, that would punish me; don't you think so?"

"Very well, that will do. Now, run away, and let this be your last breakage. I cannot be worried with your punishments."

"I will try to be very good, nurse, always," said Milly whilst being tucked up in bed that night, "because Uncle

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"I DIDN'T MEAN TO BREAK IT," SHE SOBBER.

being a man of his word, but much regretted at the present moment that he had been so rash in his speech.

"Oh! ah! I remember," he said at length, meeting his little niece's anxious gaze with some embarrassment. Then, pulling himself together, he added sternly,—

"Of course you must be punished; it was exceedingly careless and mischievous. What does your nurse do when she punishes you?"

"She never does punish me—not now," said Milly plaintively. "When I was a very little girl I used to stand in the corner. I don't think nurse has punished me for years."

Sir Edward was in a dilemma: children's punishments were quite unknown to him. Milly seemed to guess at his difficulty.

"How were you punished when you were a little boy, uncle?"

"I used to be well thrashed. Many is the whipping that I have had from my father!"

"What is a whipping—like you gave Fritz when he went into the game wood?"

"Yes."

There was a pause. The child clasped her little hands tighter, and set her lips firmer, as she saw before her eyes a strong arm dealing very heavy strokes with a riding-whip. Then she said in an awe-struck tone,—

"And do you think that is how you had better punish me?"

Sir Edward smiled grimly as he looked at the baby figure standing so erect before him.

"No," he said; "I do not think you are a fit subject for that kind of treatment." Milly heaved a sigh of relief.

"And don't you know how to punish?" she said, after some minutes of awkward

Edward is very puzzled when he has to punish me. He doesn't know what to do. He looked quite unhappy and said it worried him."

And Sir Edward, as he finished his dinner in silence and solitude, muttered to himself,—

"The child is certainly a great nuisance at times, but, upon my word, I quite miss her this evening. Children after all are original, if they are nothing else, and she is one of the most original that I have ever met."

It was Sunday morning, and Sir Edward was just starting for church. As he stood over the blazing fire in the hall buttoning a glove, a little voice came to him from the staircase: "Uncle Edward, may I come down and speak to you?"

Permission being given, Milly danced down the stairs, and then, slipping a little hand into her uncle's, she lifted a coaxing face to his.

"Will you take me to church with you? Nurse thinks I'm almost big enough now, and I have been to church in the afternoon sometimes."

Sir Edward hesitated. "If you come, you will fidget, I expect. I cannot stand that."

"I will sit as still as a mouse; I won't fidget."

"If you behave badly I shall never take you again. Yes, you may come; be quick and get ready."

A few moments later, Sir Edward and his little niece were walking down the avenue, she clasping a large Bible under her arm, and trying in vain to match her steps with his.

The squire's pew was one of the old-fashioned high ones, and Milly's head did not reach the top of it. Very quiet and silent she was during the service, and very particular to follow her uncle's example in every respect, though she

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(To be continued.)