

WHERE THE FAULT WAS.

"The most disobedient child I ever knew." The words were uttered in a languid tone, and the speaker pressed her hand on her throbbing brow, as though she would still its beating.

A few minutes later Mrs. Elbert repeated the same words to her husband. "He must be sent to school, Grant," she continued, "such a racket would drive me crazy."

The subject of these remarks was at that moment engaged with a company of miniature soldiers, and a small pop-gun, which he was using with considerable dexterity, for several of the wooden warriors lay with their faces to the floor; and every new downfall was greeted with a burst of boyish laughter, which fell discordantly on his mother's ears.

"Send him out-doors for a romp, Mary," good-naturedly suggested Mr. Elbert, "boys will make a noise."

"And this is all the sympathy you have for my nerves, Grant? Send him out-doors, indeed! perhaps the next moment to hear of his having fallen into the creek. No, I will not think of such a thing! As long as the children are out of school, they must remain with me. I should not have a moment's comfort otherwise."

"Yet I am sure, Mary, neither you nor they are quite comfortable as it is; I cannot imagine how your sister, Lucy, manages, with small children."

"Lucy again," returned Mrs. Elbert sharply—"I don't think, Grant, you need be constantly holding up Lucy as a pattern for me to copy."

"Yet you allow, Mary, that Lucy is an admirable manager," said Mr. Elbert, in a conciliatory tone.

"She has never had any ill health to contend with. There, go away, Minnie; don't trouble me with your doll. Do you hear me! Go, play in the corner."

The little girl moved away slowly, and her evident reluctance was, as usual, construed into that rebellious spirit which Mrs. Elbert had persuaded herself existed in her children, to a large degree.

"Mrs. Colton, marm, sent over to know if you'd step over, if you felt well enough?" said an Irish girl, thrusting her head into the drawing-room.

The lady hesitated before replying, and the girl continued, "It's in trouble the lady is, marm; the docther has been thar twice this mornin', on' ov the young uns is down with the croup."

Mrs. Elbert had not visited her sister for

several weeks, excusing herself with the plea of ill health, though it must be confessed that other causes had something to do with her absence. The truth was, these visits had only served to make her more dissatisfied with herself; for while she acknowledged her sister's superiority, she did not care to have a second person remind her of it; and the well-meant allusions of her husband proved to be particularly annoying.

Still Mary Elbert was not a bad-hearted woman,—and Lucy in trouble awakened feelings which Lucy in prosperity had failed to do.

Hastily throwing on a shawl, and bidding the girl attend to the children, she turned her steps towards her sister's residence. With a noiseless tread she entered the dwelling, and repaired to the sick-chamber, where she found her sister seated near the couch of her youngest child, who was breathing painfully.

For several days she remained an inmate of the dwelling, sharing the midnight vigil, and doing all in her power to relieve the little sufferer, who rapidly continued to grow worse, and finally breathed its last in her arms. Yet, though this period was passed in benefiting others, it proved of rare value to herself; she could not but acknowledge that in the activity which the circumstances demanded, she had forgotten many of her own ills,—nor was this all.

It was the day before the funeral,—the little waxen form, with its violet eyes calmly closed, lay like a lily-bud on its pearly bed; and as Mrs. Colton gazed with tearful eyes on the little figure, the thought of her other children crossed her mind.

"Where can Willie and Emmie be?" she said, turning to her sister, "I have not seen them since breakfast."

"I will go and see," Mrs. Elbert returned, and she left the room, expecting to find them engaged in some childish mischief.

"Is that you, auntie?" said a childish voice, as the lady passed through the dining-room.

"Yes, Emmie. What are you doing? Where is your brother?"

"Willie's doing his work, and I'm keeping house for mamma."

"Keeping house for mamma!" Mrs. Elbert continued, in a puzzled tone. "What do you mean, child?"

"It's my hour to help mamma," continued the child in her artless way: "I fold the napkins, dust the chairs when Betsey's