

CHOICE LITERATURE.

THROUGH THE WINTER.

CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

We may laugh, if we please, at the readiness with which the young form attachments; from the heights of our worldly wisdom we may look down and moralise upon their transitoriness, upon the fading of spring-time loves with spring-time flowers. But would it not be well for us to remember that one of the sweetest, most faithful friendships the world has ever seen was formed in youth?—"When he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David." And might it not sometimes be good for us, as we feel our hearts hardening and know that we are losing

"The childish way of making friends in play,"

to ask ourselves what are we gaining? What of faith, and hope, and gladness, that can compensate for the loss of the quick sympathies that made fresh and beautiful our own young years?

To Mrs. Waldermar, whose character beautifully answered to Lowell's exquisite picture—

"She is a woman; one in whom
The spring-time of her childish years
Hath never lost its fresh perfume,
Though knowing well that life hath room
For many blights and many tears—"

It was a sincere pleasure to see the two young girls together. She hoped much from their companionship. Margaret's girlish unshadowed nature would act on Helen's as the sun acts on flowers that have been long in the shade; while Helen's gentle, womanly ways, her high sense of duty, her unselfish, self-sacrificing love for others, would rouse Margaret from her dreamy, self-indulgent life, as the bugle-call in the morning rouses the sleeping soldier from rest to exercise.

More than an hour had slipped away in the pleasant parlour, illumined with the red light of the fire, and the short winter-day had deepened unobserved into the gray of twilight. Ronald and Sibyl, happy over a large portfolio of pictures, which, as the daylight faded, they had brought to the fire to see, were kneeling on the rug.

"Nellie," cried Sibyl, "come here, please, and look at this picture of the fairies ringing the Christmas-bell."

Leaving her seat between Mrs. Waldermar and Margaret, Helen joined the children, and sitting down on a low ottoman, laid the picture in her lap. Sibyl knelt before it the better to see it, while Ronald stood by Helen's side, one little hand resting confidently on her shoulder. They formed a pretty picture themselves with the warm firelight flickering brightly over them—a picture all the prettier for their utter unconsciousness.

Helen looked and admired, answered questions, and explained, and it was not until, satisfied with that picture, the children went for another, that she looked up and saw that a gentleman had come in and was standing, quietly leaning on the back of Mrs. Waldermar's chair.

"Helen, my dear," Mrs. Waldermar said, at the same moment, "allow me to introduce to you my son, Dr. Waldermar."

It was with a lovely colour and winning modesty that Helen acknowledged the introduction. Before Mrs. Waldermar had ceased speaking, she had recognised the gentleman as the one who had been so kind on the sleigh-ride and on the beach.

Surprise, pleasure, and another feeling that was touched with the sad recollections of the past night, were all blended in her manner and expressed in her face: of words just then she had very few—a fact which, however, mattered little. With easy grace Dr. Waldermar drew up a large chair for her beside his mother, and said pleasantly:

"I am glad to see you, Miss Humphrey. I was not at all sure I would have the pleasure, for when I called at your door this morning with my mother's note your servant said, 'Miss Helen was all kind of drooping like.' I hope you are better now?"

"Much better, thank you. I had a headache this morning."

"Of which you have not the smallest shadow or hint left?" he questioned, looking at her gravely with a pair of very dark eyes, which, without being sharp or piercing, yet impressed you with their owner's power to see not only in the darkness but through the darkness, and made you feel it would be lost labour to seek to conceal from him anything he had a mind to know; while at the same time in their clear depths you read that he had nothing to conceal; that his life in its pure, noble manhood was open to the scrutiny of men and of angels.

"If I have, it is so very small I am hardly conscious of it," Helen answered. "I think the air and sunshine this afternoon scattered it."

"Air and sunshine are potent influences in dissipating most aches. I am glad your headache did not prove an exception," Dr. Waldermar said, pleasantly. "And what has this little sister of mine been doing for your amusement, Miss Humphrey?" he asked, laying his hand affectionately on Margaret's head.

"If you please, sir," Margaret said, demurely, "I would like the privilege of speaking for myself; and I'll answer your question in one word—talking."

"Talking all the time? Well, I know young ladies have usually important subjects to discuss when together; but wasn't it very bad for the headache, Miss Humphrey?"

"Oh, no," Helen answered, earnestly; "I think it was good." And with a pretty look at Margaret, she asked, "Wouldn't she come under the head of sunshine, Dr. Waldermar?"

"For brightness?" Dr. Waldermar questioned, with a smile. Then, as he played with his sister's soft curls, he added, "I don't know; perhaps she would. At least I

must confess she is a very good 'trap to catch a sunbeam' with."

"Where have you been all the day, Guyon?" Mrs. Waldermar asked now.

"On the beach, mother," he replied, quietly.

"On the beach all day? Were you needed there?"

"Yes," he answered, in the same quiet tone. "The sea has been giving up its treasures, mother—some of them: they have found six of those brave Indians."

"Have they?" Mrs. Waldermar said, in a voice full of interest and sympathy; "how thankful I am for their poor friends! But," with a loving look at her son, "it must have been a very sad, wearing day for you, Guy."

"A busy, solemn day," Dr. Waldermar said, gently; "but it was hardly very sad: for ever and anon, as I looked at those lifeless forms, I was reminded of St. Paul's grand word of assurance, 'These all died in faith'; and believing that, there were moments when it seemed to me more a time for giving thanks than for mourning and regretting. Can you imagine, Miss Humphrey," he said, turning with a look of great sweetness to her, "how beautiful, after last night's storm, the sunshine of eternity must have seemed to them this morning?"

Too deeply touched for words, Helen could only shake her head, but Margaret said, softly:

"I think I can—almost—Guy. Do you remember, mamma, once when I was a little girl and papa was coming home from Europe, how we looked for him the whole of one day, until night came and it was my bed-time, and you said I must not sit up longer? I tried hard not to go to sleep, but I had to; and the first thing I saw in the morning, when I opened my eyes, was papa bending over me. It seemed almost like heaven to me then; and often, while I was sick in the fall, and thought perhaps I would never get well, I would think I need not be afraid to die: it is only lying down in the dark to sleep through the night, and waking in the morning in the full smile of the Father's face."

No one answered Margaret. Her words had touched tender chords in all their hearts. Mrs. Waldermar's thoughts had gone back far through years to the husband, so warmly welcomed home then, but who now was waiting to welcome her in a home where the gladness of meeting would never be shadowed by the dread of some future farewell. Helen was striving to be calm and choke back the coming tears, when Ronald and Sibyl, who had been carrying on a low conversation by the window, came to her.

"Helen," said Sibyl, "if Ronald and I could pile all the houses in the world on top of each other, couldn't we reach the sky then?"

"And on a sunbeam will I climb to thee," Dr. Waldermar said, quickly; "that would be the easiest way, my little lady. Come here." And drawing her to him, he said, in a pretended whisper, "I think these ladies have been very impolite, not to introduce us, don't you? But, now, if you will tell me your name, I will tell you mine; will you?"

Sibyl looked up at him. "I know yours," she said, shyly.

"And so my offer to tell it isn't any inducement to you to reveal yours? Well, I shall have to put on my guessing cap, and try if by its agency I can enlighten my ignorance. I guess you are the namesake of a very wise lady who once had nine precious books that she wanted to sell to a great man, and because he wouldn't buy them, she tore them up, until there were only three left. Were you named for that famous lady? and have you any knowledge of those lost sibylline leaves?"

"I don't tear books," Sibyl said, eyeing him with curious composure, "and I wasn't named for a lady. I was named for my great-grandmother."

"And did your great-grandmother, with her name, hand you down her old lady's mantle?" Dr. Waldermar asked, with a smile.

"No," Sibyl answered, gravely, "she didn't have a mantle; she had a long, red cloak; and it is too large for me; it hangs in the garret at home."

"Does it? Well, Miss Sibyl, if you are wise, I am wiser; for I know your name, you see, without being told it. I think I must have been named for my great-great-grandfather, don't you?"

Sibyl looked at him seriously. "I think," she said very slowly, "I think your great-great-grandfather must have been a very queer man."

Dr. Waldermar laughed. "I shan't tell you what I think of your great-grandmother," he said, rising as the tea-bell rang; "but if you will let me, I shall have the pleasure of breaking bread with her granddaughter. Do you know what that means, Miss Sibyl?"

"No, sir," Sibyl said; "what does it?"

"Only this," he answered, as he placed her in a chair beside himself at the table; "if you break—that is, eat bread with me, Miss Sibyl, it means that you are always afterward to be my very good friend."

Dr. Waldermar was silent for a minute, and then, with reverent confidence, asked the Father's blessing on the table. His bounty had prepared for them. Soon after, as he passed the bread to Sibyl, he asked:

"Will you do it, Miss Sibyl?"

The little girl looked at him wonderingly for a second; then, as she caught his meaning, she said:

"I will, if Helen will."

"Miss Humphrey," the doctor said, turning to her, "I am at your mercy. I can only beg you to decide in my favour."

Helen favoured him with a very frank blush and smile. "I will not be Sibyl's conscience-keeper in this matter," she said; "she can do as she likes."

"I will undertake to be her keeper," Mrs. Waldermar said. "Guy, you shall not tease that child any longer; let her eat her supper in peace."

"Your most obedient, mamma," he answered, with a smile. "Pray, Miss Humphrey, do you require, as the Pope does, that all your subjects shall believe you infallible?"

If the question was peculiar, the tone and manner were too pleasant for Helen to feel any uneasiness.

"Sibyl would tell you," she said, "that I give her a great many hard lessons, but never any as hard as that."

He smiled. "You must pardon my question," he said; "I own it was quite unnecessary. Whatever Miss Sibyl has been taught, it is very easy to see what she believes."

"You needn't plume yourself on possessing any wonderful power of discernment, Guy," Margaret broke in; "I think it is usually very easy to see what most people believe."

"Do you, my little sister? Then you must either, like Goethe's Bettine, have the gift of second sight, or else mankind for you must wear their heart upon their sleeve."

"You are laughing at me, Guy, but I know you agree with me, and so do Helen and mamma."

"Do they? Miss Humphrey, you have heard the accusation; do you plead guilty or not?"

Helen smiled. "I am afraid I can do neither," she answered; "isn't there a little neutral ground somewhere that I can stand upon?"

Dr. Waldermar shook his head. "You must define your position more clearly, Miss Humphrey," he answered, gravely.

Helen hesitated. "I don't think it is usually easy for me to tell what people believe," she said, "unless I know them well, or unless they choose to let me see into their hearts, and read there their Articles of Faith. The good and bad people, that I just meet and pass by, look much alike to me. I do not think it is easy to tell them apart."

"Mamma, what do you think?" Margaret asked, earnestly. "Don't you believe, with me, that we can no more help showing what we are than the sun can help shining?"

Mrs. Waldermar was helping Ronald to jelly. She looked up, with her sweet, grave face, and said, gently,

"I would fain believe that the Lord has jewels we know not of. It is true there were hypocrites of old, and mournfully true that there are hypocrites to-day; the Master knows and judges them; we may not. It is true, too, as Helen thinks, that, as we meet, and jostle, and pass one another in the hurry and rush of life, we cannot see below the surface; we cannot tell in what hearts angels are singing, nor in what ones fiends are plotting. In spite of the conformity to the world's manners and fashions, which makes us all outwardly so much alike, in spite of the reserve which makes us, like sensitive plants, shrink from opening our minds and revealing our inner lives to the gaze of the curious and inquisitive, it is still true of the Master's faithful followers, as of himself in the coasts of Tyre—they cannot be hid."

It was in a restful atmosphere of peace and content that the little company finished their tea. When they rose from the table Dr. Waldermar said:

"Now, Miss Sibyl, though you won't tell me anything of those lost books I was speaking to you of, or whether there is anything in a name you ought to know all about, I am going to be very forgiving and show you all my books." And taking the little girl's hand, he led the way to the library. It was a very beautiful room, with its hangings of soft, dark red; its dark wood cases, filled with carefully selected books; its charming paintings; and its brackets, with their marble figures, the polished expressions of poet-dreams and artists' labours.

It was a lovely room; but Dr. Waldermar saw with surprise that Helen's first pleased glance around it was followed by a sad, wishful look; yearning, hungry, almost hopeless, it seemed to him. Why was it? He was so intent in his effort to understand it, so interested in watching Helen, as, unconscious of his scrutiny, she stood by Margaret before one of the book-cases, that he forgot his little companion and his promise; but Sibyl did not suffer his attention to wander long.

"Are these all your books, Dr. Waldermar?" she asked. "Yes," he said, pleasantly, turning to her; "mine, and my mother's, and sister's. Do you like them, Sibyl?"

Sibyl shook her head affirmatively.

"Can you read them all?" Ronald asked.

Dr. Waldermar nodded.

"I wish I could read," Sibyl said.

"Why, you don't like to read one bit," Ronald exclaimed, in astonishment.

"I don't like to learn how, Ronald," Sibyl corrected, with great dignity; "but if I knew how, then I could read myself to sleep every night just like Aunt Sarah. I think that would be nice."

Dr. Waldermar listened with a look at once amused and investigating.

"And your sister, Miss Helen," he asked, quietly; "does she read herself to sleep like Aunt Sarah?"

"Oh, no," Sibyl answered, promptly. "She don't read at all."

"She doesn't have time, you know," Ronald explained. "She has to keep house, and take care of us. And then she teaches Sibyl and me every day: that takes all the time, don't you see?"

"Yes, I see," Dr. Waldermar answered, more soberly than it seemed to Ronald the occasion required.

"What is that picture, Dr. Waldermar?" he asked, pointing to a painting that hung opposite them. It was a remarkable picture, on which older eyes than Ronald's had often gazed with interest.

"What is it? Who is it?" Ronald asked again.

"That?" Dr. Waldermar said, rousing himself; "that is the picture of our Saviour's temptation in the wilderness, Ronald. Do you know what that means?"

"Yes," Ronald said, in an awe-struck tone. "Helen told me, and we had the lesson in Sunday school."

The two children looked at the picture in silence for a few moments; then Sibyl, who by everything she saw and heard was pretty sure to be in some way reminded of something concerning herself, said,

"O Ronald, I didn't tell you, but I had a temptation—a real temptation, Saturday."

"You did?" Ronald asked, breathlessly. "What was it?"

"Why, it was the machine. You know, Ronald, Helen says we must never touch it, and Saturday she went out of