

IN A MOTHER'S STEAD.

By A. M. BELLERBY.

CHAPTER II.



ER post turned out to be no sinecure, though she soon won her little pupils' hearts; for youth and inexperience are not generally possessed of a great stock of patience, so blunders were made; there was sometimes strictness where there should have been leniency, and mistaken indulgence

where discipline was needed. Neither was the young governess in her first engagement reassured, when Edwin calmly remarked one day—

"I don't think mother cares much for you" (for that young gentleman could never sound his r's). But she struggled on prayerfully and hopefully, in spite of, every now and then, a day when the little ones had been so fractious or troublesome, that Katharine felt the burden of her daily cross was too heavy to be borne, but when it reached that climax it was always lifted for her and she went on bravely again.

Few evenings passed that Mr. Mathew did not visit the nursery; sometimes questioning the children on their lessons, and evincing his quiet satisfaction from time to time, for almost preternaturally quick, they made rapid progress.

Once, much later than usual, he had come to see them, but Katharine had coaxed them to go to bed, and with the door of communication between the two nurseries slightly ajar, he could just see her, with Stephanie at her knee in the midst of her evening prayer.

"Lord on the Cross Thine arms were stretched,

To draw Thy people nigh,
O teach us then that Cross to love,
And in those arms to die."

said the little voice, helped here and there; then going on to pray for her father and mother, Edwin and "Kattie," as they begged to be allowed to call her. Then came Edwin's turn, adding the quaintest requests of his own to his orthodox prayers; but the father turned away silently, thinking how he and the mother of his children lay down night after night, without a prayer themselves, or troubling whether or no the little ones said theirs.

It had been different with him once, but his marriage to a careless wife had made him careless too.

Katharine would have been lonely indeed during those first months from home, but for the love of her pupils; for, except when sending her on commissions during the daily walks; or to uncompromisingly interrupt

lessons for the children to have their innumerable new frocks tried on, Mrs. Mathew did not trouble to see her, and, of course, she was introduced to no one.

The children with their pretty quaintness, were sometimes sent for to show off to visitors, but the governess was not required to go down with them; thus it came to pass that Katharine had been home for an all too short holiday before speaking to anyone outside the house. She was greeted with rapture by the children.

"Oh, I do love you, Kattie," said Edwin almost suffocating her with his caresses.

"So do I," said Stephanie from the other side, "and I've got a bad finger, and Dr. Drew's attending to it," with a great air of self-importance, holding out the tiny, bandaged member.

"How did that happen? What have you done to it?"

Stephanie looked at Edwin, who hung his head and blushed, then bravely recovering himself answered—

"I was a coward and I did it; I was angry with her, and ran my pen into it."

"Oh, Edwin, how could you be so ungentlemanly and so cowardly; but there, I see you are sorry and I am sure Stephanie has forgiven you."

"Twite," replied the injured damsel, as clearly as a mouthful of the chocolate Katharine had brought them would allow her.

"And I asked God to forgive me, when I was good again," said Edwin gravely. For after any special naughtiness she would take them away quietly, talk to them, and kneel down and pray with them; and her loving influence was already beginning to make itself felt.

It was too late for lessons that day, so a game of blindman's buff, with Katharine as blindman, was in too full swing for the trio to hear a knock at the door, which was consequently opened; and Dr. Drew with an amused smile, signing to the children not to betray him, stood watching, till Katharine in her search tripped over a footstool, and would have fallen, had not a strong hand caught her. Snatching off her bandage she found herself face to face with a stranger, her own flooding with the deepest blush her wild-rose cheeks had ever taken.

"Forgive me, Miss Skrine, I could not interrupt such an interesting game, and it was well I was here, or you might have required my attention as well as Stephanie. Mrs. Mathew was out, so I came on up. How's the finger, little patient?"

That duly investigated and pronounced satisfactory, the doctor seemed in no hurry to go, but invited himself to the nursery tea which was just then brought up, bowing his head reverently during the grace Katharine would not omit because he was there, while she inwardly wondered what Mrs. Mathew would say to his proceeding.

"Dr. Drew's stayed with us often lately," said Edwin, in happy ignorance that Dr. Drew was Machiavellian enough to have done so during the holidays, that he might be justified in also doing so after the return of Miss Skrine, to whom he had for long been vainly endeavouring to obtain introduction.

"Yes, and I love him," said Stephanie complacently, "don't you, Kattie?"

At which innocent, but distinctly awkward question, Kattie would have felt thankful to sink into the floor, but Dr. Drew hastily said—

"Stephanie, so much jam is not good for your finger," for the young lady was unlaw-

fully helping herself, and he set to work to attend to her, until Katharine had recovered from her confusion, when he went on. "My mother and I have noticed you trotting these scaramouches down to the children's service, Miss Skrine, and she would be very pleased if you would come to tea with us next Sunday; she would like to know you."

"She is very kind," said Katharine, with that uncomfortably ready blush again; "if Mrs. Mathew has no objection I shall be most pleased."

"We too?" inquired the small made-moiselle.

"You too, certainly."

"Oh, you are a nice man," ejaculated Edwin, "I think I'll be a doctor when I grow up. Owen says you are like a byother to the poor people."

It was Dr. Drew's turn now to feel confused, and he made the discovery that it was high time to go.

Katharine lost her heart to Mrs. Drew that next Sunday afternoon; the sweet little old lady had long noticed the young governess, who, she had guessed, was left so much to herself, and who now received an invitation to come in as often as she liked.

"Never think you or the children will trouble me, my dear, I like young people about me."

So Katharine was only too glad to have a friend in such a home-like dwelling as the Drews', where the children would be taken off her hands by the comfortable old housekeeper, and she herself had many a talk with the little lady who encouraged her to open her heart to her; while Dr. Drew's was in great danger of slipping out of his keeping in another direction.

But Mrs. Mathew was one of those people who became jealous if anyone within her circle of acquaintances—let alone that contemptible creature a governess—was better liked than herself. Mrs. and Dr. Drew with their high breeding had always rather held aloof from her indefinable vulgarities, and she felt it intolerable that "this chit of a girl," who dressed like a dowdy, and blushed whenever spoken to unexpectedly, should be preferred to herself.

Wherefore on one of those rare occasions, when, having no one else to speak to, she sent for Katharine to come down to afternoon tea, she seized the opportunity to remark—

"Mrs. Drew seems to have taken a great fancy to you, Miss Skrine."

"Indeed, she is very kind," was the earnest reply.

"Yes, it is nice for her to take you up like that, but I wouldn't go too often if I were you."

"Oh, do you think I am taking advantage, that I shall worry her? she said not," was the disturbed answer.

"I didn't mean that exactly," went on Mrs. Mathew remorselessly, "but you see Dr. Drew is generally there at the time you call, and it may be said you are running after him."

Surprised to receive no reply to this delicate remark, Mrs. Mathew turned to see the reason.

"Goodness, child, don't look like that, there's no need!"

For the hot blood which had swept over Katharine's face had given place to an unearthly pallor, and a cold hand seemed to clutch at her heart; she could neither move nor speak in answer to the miserable taunt.

Mrs. Mathew was alarmed and for once