

"Yes; we were children at that time."

"About the age of our children now. Do you imagine that Frank could walk as you did then?"

"I am afraid not."

"Well, well, I will not say as I have heard some people, that what is done cannot be undone, but will try and help you to undo it as fast as possible. Look at the boy now! instead of playing about like other children, there he is lying under the trees reading. William, you will be very sorry for all this if you should lose your child."

"I am sorry now," replied the sick man, meekly. "You are right, dear sister. I am afraid that I have been very thoughtless and selfish. God forgive me! You will stay here a little while, will you not, and help me to amend the past?"

Mrs. Mortimer was touched by his gentleness and forbearance, and with much kindness of manner promised not to leave the Grange until they were both better.

Mrs. Mortimer was several years her brother's senior, and had always exercised upon him that influence which a strong mind invariably possesses over a weak one, until his marriage, which, as before stated, she had opposed. It matters little now what her reasons were for this opposition: she thought herself right at the time, but was very sorry for it afterwards, and when, alas! it was too late. She wrote and told her brother this, but, with his loss still fresh upon his mind, his reply to her letter was such as prevented all intercourse between them for some years.

Beneath a somewhat rough exterior, Mrs. Mortimer possessed a kind heart, and much practical good sense, which only required at times to be exercised in a gentler spirit. At the period of which we are speaking she was a widow, with one son, Frederick, and a little girl whom she had called Helen, after her sister-in-law. Mr. Netherton was pleased when she told him of this mark of attention and begged earnestly that the child might be sent for, and that Frederick might also be permitted to spend his holidays at the Grange; to all of which Mrs. Mortimer willingly agreed.

"I am so glad that you are come," said he. "It was very kind of you after that cruel letter. I have often thought of sending to ask you, but I put it off from time to time, and should have done so, I believe until it was too late. I used to think, When I am dying she will not refuse to forgive and come to me again."

"We were both to blame," answered Mrs. Mortimer, with tears in her eyes: "I the most so; but my little Helen must plead for me. Now do not let us say anything more about it," added she, observing that her brother looked pale and exhausted; "and I will write at once and make arrangements for her coming."

But before Mrs. Mortimer began to write, she went into the garden and took Frank's book away, bidding him run about, and not lie there on the damp grass.

"Have you a hoop?" asked she.

"Yes, aunt, I believe so."

"Well, you must look for it; and when your cousin Frederick comes, he will teach you all sorts of games. Shall you not like to have some one to play with?"

"Yes, very much," answered Frank; "but I like being with my father."

"Are any of these flower-beds yours?" inquired his aunt.

"No, the gardener takes care of them."

"We must ask your father to give you one to dig and plant, and do what you please with—shall we? And a little rake, and a hoe, and a watering-pot?"

Frank's eyes glistened with pleasure.

"That would be delightful!" exclaimed he, and then slipping his hand into Mrs. Mortimer's, he added, in a confidential tone, "It is very strange, but I was just reading about flowers when you came into the garden; and how some bloom till December, while others perish in May. I think that if I were a flower, dear aunt, I would rather die in May, when everything looks so bright."

"But as you are not a flower, Frank, but a little boy, I do not see any use in thinking about it."

"One cannot help thinking," said Frank.

"What a little, old-fashioned thing he is!" murmured his aunt. "But then Frederick might have been the same if he had no mother:" and passing her hand carelessly over his long hair, which she inwardly determined should be cut off the first opportunity, and cautioning him not to remain after the dew began to fall, she went into the house to write her letters.

CHAPTER II.

BRIGHTER DAYS.

WHEN Frank returned to the study, he found his father still sitting where he had left him, with his face bent down and buried in his hands.

"Are you ill?" asked he, gently. Mr. Netherton started, and drawing the boy towards him, embraced him in silence.

"Papa," exclaimed Frank, after a pause, "you are thinking of what my aunt said just now about me; but indeed I do not want to live after you are gone."

Mr. Netherton aroused himself at the voice of his child, and, struggling against his own weakness, both of mind and body, answered cheerfully:—

"You must not say that, Frank. I hope, if it be God's will, that you may live to be a great and good man, and do good to others."

"Like Howard, for instance, who went about visiting all the prisons: how much good he did!"

"Yes; you must study hard while you are a boy—that is, not too hard; and when you are a man there is no fear but what God will give you something to do for himself and others."

"I should like to be a missionary, such as Henry Martyn, whose life you were reading the other morning."

"There is time enough to think what you will be ten years hence. And now I will tell you something that I think will give you pleasure. You remember the pretty bay pony which you admired so much the other day?"

"O yes, to be sure I do!"

"Well, it is yours; and to-morrow you shall begin to learn to ride."

Frank clapped his hands for joy.

"But will you not ride too, papa?"

"Yes, as soon as ever you are able to accompany me."

"How delightful that will be! how kind of you to think of it!"

"It was your aunt who first thought of it, Frank; so you must thank her. I need not tell you to be very obedient to her, and to do all that she bids you, for I am sure that it will be for your good."

Frank promised that he would. And then he related to his father what she had said about the garden, and obtained his willing consent to a small portion of it being allotted to Frank's peculiar use.

"I will see the gardener about it the first thing to-morrow morning," said Mr. Netherton, "and order him to procure tools suited to your size and strength, and whatever seeds or cuttings you may require."

"I must ask my aunt about that," said Frank.