

FAMILY DEPARTMENT.

LENA'S FAULT.

CHAPTER I.

"Was it not kind of the lady, grandpapa? Such a beautiful little carriage it was! and such lovely little cream-colored ponies. And they flew along like the wind! Oh, I did enjoy it!" with a long breath, and nestling closer to her grandfather as she spoke, while her feet beat a soft tattoo on the worn carpet. "Oh, grandpapa," she went on the next moment, "I wish we need not always live in such a dull place as Heathside, and that I could go out for a drive like that every day. And when the lady put me down she said that I was the nicest girl she had ever seen, though"—with a little stammer—"I believe she thought that I ought to have been more fashionably dressed."

The old farmer put her a little away from him and looked at her; then he drew her nearer than before, and sighed. How could he rebuke her? She had put a coloring of her own on all that had been said and done, he knew; but was she not the little one of his old age? the only child of his only son, who was far away under the burning sun of India. How then could he speak even one harsh word to her?

But when his own son had first left him, years and years before, the old man had adopted a promising boy, the orphan child of an early friend. Lena had seen much of him at different times, and had been taught to call him "Cousin Edward." But, of course, he was much older than herself—indeed, he was "grown up, and a clergyman," as the little girl informed her friends, and he was at this time working hard as a children's mission preacher in the East of London.

But—and what a happy "but" it was, both to Lena and her grandfather!—Cousin Edward was expected to arrive this very evening—Saturday, the 12th of July—and then what a happy Sunday they would have to-morrow. The old man began to talk about it.

"Oh, grandpapa!" said Lena as he paused, and giving a sudden spring of delight at the thought, "don't you think that I may go and meet him now, at once, all by myself? It's such a little way to the station."

Her grandfather thought she might, and away she ran.

CHAPTER II.

And what a lovely walk she had! But why did her face presently begin to cloud, while her steps grew slower and slower?

"I wish," she said aloud at length, as she climbed upon a stile, and sat looking up at the dog-rose spray that waved over her head, "I wish—" but here she paused, and her wish did not get put into spoken words for the present.

"He will find me out," she went on again by-and-by, with a frown. "I am sure he will, this time! And to think that while I was talking to grandpapa it never once entered my mind! Oh, I do wish—" but here she stopped once more, and presently her eyes filled with tears. But time was passing, and the tears had soon to be brushed away; and putting her anxieties on one side for the time, Lena jumped down from the stile, and hurried now in the direction of the little country station, for she could see the white smoke of the train in the distance.

And soon, very decorously, and trying to behave as much like a grown-up young lady as possible, she entered the general waiting-room, and sitting down upon one of the benches, watched for the train through the window. It was not long before it came up.

"Cousin Edward generally has his little walk alone," thought Lena; "he will be glad to see me. There he is! how handsome he is! better looking than anybody else I ever saw—Cousin Edward!" as with a long stride or two he was passing through the station, "don't go without me; I came to meet you."

The young man stopped to greet and kiss her, and then the two made their way together along the pleasant country road.

"Well, Lena, and are you all quite well? and have you got a good number of children to promise to come to-morrow?"

"Yes, we are all well, thank you," rejoined Lena; "and all the schools are coming to hear you preach to-morrow. And mamma told her girls that they should sit round the pulpit whenever you came again, and so they are going to to-morrow. And I am going to sit just underneath the pulpit, opposite mamma and grandpapa, for I don't like looking at clergymen when they are preaching. I am always thinking," with a tremble in her voice, "that they are going to say something about my faults, for of course I have a great many. And we are going to let little Mary Green sit up close by you, because she likes you so much!"

And so Lena chatted on; but Cousin Edward seemed rather tired.

"And so you have got a houseful of company, Lena?" he said, as they were nearing the pretty, old-fashioned house, with the vines creeping over the front; and his half-sigh seemed to say that he would have been better pleased with only Lena and her mother and grandfather for company.

"Oh, no!" and the little girl suddenly danced away from his side to gather dog-roses. "They are all gone—the company, I mean. And there were not really very many people, Cousin Edward."

He was waiting for her, and looking towards her; and her face was covered with hot, burning blushes. How could she turn it to him, to meet his questioning gaze?

"Why, Lena!" he said at length, "what is the matter, child? And don't tug so at those prickly things; you will tear your fingers. The company all gone, did you say?" in a tone of quiet relief. "But I thought," he added then, "that they were to stay for some little time?—Why, here is grandpapa!"

The old man appeared delighted to meet his adopted son, and had many questions to ask; and Edward said no more for the present to Lena. And she quickly recovered herself, and passed, after all, a fairly pleasant evening.

CHAPTER III.

Sunday afternoon came.

All the neighboring schools had been marshalled in order to the picturesque old building, for the Rev. Edward Ryan was very popular in the place where he had been brought up. And there were the girls of Mrs. Mayley's class ranged round the pulpit, as Lena had said they would be. And Lena herself had the seat she had declared she wished for, just under the pulpit. Mrs. Mayley was seated opposite her class, with her father-in-law, old Farmer Mayley, beside her.

The bell stopped ringing, and the simple, happy school service commenced.

And, at last, the Rev. Edward Ryan, in black gown, made his way up into the pulpit and gave out his text: "Speaking the truth in love."—Ephesians iv. 15.

And then, very easily and simply, yet very solemnly and impressively at the same time, he began and continued his discourse; every now and then laying his hand on little Mary Green's small, hooded head, as she sat close beside him.

And oh, how much that he said sank down deep into Lena's heart; and how she sat through that sermon she never knew. And more than once, with hot cheeks and fast-filling eyes, she furtively glanced up at her mother, and grandfather, and the girls; but oftener she sat with downcast face and a nervous finger on her lips, feeling that every eye was upon her, and that she was being despised by everybody.

All the children were listening very attentively; and even though they might already have learned carefully to speak the exact truth always, many a one, among young and old, had yet to learn to speak it *in love*.

There was Hetty Lawrence, sitting with innocent, childish blue eyes looking straight before her, while she, almost unconsciously, gained "here a

little and there a little." There was Katy Hardress, too, in the loose, ugly jacket, and black-bound sailor hat; and she was listening also, and comprehending a good deal; but oh, she was not touched for shame and inward confusion as Lena was! For, how many, many solemn texts Cousin Edward read. And presently he quoted Psalm xv. 1, 2: "Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart."

CHAPTER IV.

Directly the service was over, and Lena could get away by herself, she did so, taking the path that led through a quiet shady wood. And by-and-by, sitting down upon the stump of an old tree, she let her shamed, sorrowful thoughts have their way for awhile; and then, slipping down to the mossy earth and hiding her face in her hands, she wept aloud.

"Oh, dear, dear!" she sobbed, while the green boughs waved gently over her head, and the birds twittered gaily, and golden sunbeams were playing at hide-and-seek all around her. "I never saw before how wicked I have been! No wonder that mamma is not to me as other girls' mothers are! and that dear, kind grandpapa looks at me the way he does!"

"Why, Lena, my poor child! What can be the matter?"

Lena sprang up; and there was Cousin Edward. He, too, had sought a place for quiet thought, and had found—Lena.

"Oh, Cousin Edward!" and she rushed to him, and he sat down upon the old tree-stump, and took her in his arms. "Oh, Cousin Edward, why did you preach all that long, terrible sermon at me? Oh, why could you not have told me when we were alone? I would have listened to you, and have done all you wished! It was very, very cruel of you!"

"I preached a sermon at you, you poor child! I do not understand."

"Oh, you must have known that I did not speak—the truth—always—in love! Oh, what shall I do? When we were in India, papa was often angry with mamma because of things I said—little things—that were not exactly true. And that was the reason why at last we came to live altogether with grandpapa—dear, darling grandpapa, who is never angry with me, though he knows very well how wicked I am! And oh, Cousin Edward, I wrote you that long letter, and told you all about a lot of imaginary company! Oh, what shall I do? I shall always be wicked now!"

"No, no, dear! You can begin from this moment to speak the truth for Jesus' sake," answered Mr. Ryan, softly stroking her hair as he spoke—her hat had fallen off long ago. "He died for you, dear Lena. Can you not do this one little thing for Him? And if you will—asking His help every moment—it will bring you great happiness here (as the smallest thing done for Jesus' sake always does), and happiness eternal hereafter."

Lena wept in silence for a little while. Then she said, still keeping her face hidden—

"And if I do it for Jesus' sake—I must first tell mamma all the wrong things I have said! And I must write and tell papa too, and everybody whom I have deceived; and I must bear everybody's hard looks for Jesus' sake, and that will make them easier to bear. And then," with a fresh sob, "when I do really speak the truth, you will think of me as you did before, will you not, Cousin Edward?"

But now, having at length poured out all her trouble, Lena learned that Cousin Edward had not observed her want of truthfulness; but that some trifling incident which had occurred after one of his East London services had led him to preach as he had done.

"So you see, Lena, dear," he presently said, "it was as though the Lord Himself spoke to you. And you may be thankful that He did; for who can say whether your fault, unchecked, might have led you?"—*The Quiver*.