

ESTHER MERLE; OR THE NURSERY MAID.
CHAPTER II.

After drinking a little tea, Esther satisfied her sisters' curiosity by describing what she had seen, and what sort of lady Mrs. Parker was, and whether it was as fine a house as Squire Blissett's, and many other particulars.

Esther told them all this, and then, in a changed voice and with a heightened colour, added, "and I am to go next week."

This intelligence made the little party silent. Esther had been a good daughter and sister; they were an attached and united family, and late trials had drawn them all the closer to each other.

"Well, God grant it be for the best!" said the mother. "I was very happy when I lived in Mr. Good's family, where I first knew your poor father; and I was married from there. They were excellent people, but I know there are many temptations, particularly in town; but you have been well taught, and I hope, Esther dear, you will keep yourself up, and mind who you mix with, and try your best to give satisfaction."

"Esther is sure to get on," said Anne, the youngest girl. "She always was fond of children, and she has so much spirit like and fun, they will love her dearly, no fear."

"What ever will you do without your flowers, Esther?" said Margaret; "and how you will miss our quiet Sunday, and Mr. Grove and all!" And Margaret walked out into the little garden as she spoke, and hung over a rose bush to hide her tears. Margaret was Esther's darling; Esther loved her dearly, and Margaret had long been delicate, which made Esther cling the more to her; and she feared, though she did not say so, that consumption had already set its mark upon her.

Certainly there was a something about Margaret—a quietness and thoughtfulness, a love for serious things, which was different from most girls of her age. She never had Esther's spright, or health and strength; she was, as Esther laughingly called her, the "lady" of the family, and not born for rough work. "To see how tasty she was in making up a nose gay for Mrs. Grove, the clergyman's wife, though she was a poor hand at weeding or raking; and to see how neatly she could plait the frills, or 'get up' the fine things, though she could not wash or wring," said Esther very often, "sure one would think she had been brought up at a boarding school!"

That evening a neighbour came in; she was the mother of Esther's friend who had accompanied her into Redbridge.

"Well!" said she, "so you have got the situation—glad of it; but it seems to me you have undertaken a good deal, too. It would take much to make me nursemaid to four children, and keep the room and all that. My sister was nurse in London. Her time was never her own; always a bother with the children! Now a housemaid, or a cook, or a lady's-maid, has some time to herself. "When the work is done, why, 'tis done, you know."

"Esther was not fit for either cook or lady's maid, replied Mrs. Merle, "and she herself preferred a nursemaid's place. She was always fond of children, and she's used to hard work. I never brought up my girls in idleness, even at the best of times, and besides, I wished her to be in the nursery, for it may chance she'll be more under the mistress's eye, which for a young girl is a good thing, and she'll have less to do with the other servants."

Here Esther left the room, and Mrs. West said: "Do you think that Margaret will be able to take Esther's place at home? La! to my thinking, she's fitter to sit with her needle or her book than to work at washing. We were saying it was a pity you did not let her work at Mrs. Sharp's dress-maker's;—Margaret is handy at her needle."

"I do not like that place," returned the mother, "there is too much gossip there, and girls all dress out so, and lead one another into mischief; besides, active work is better for the health than confinement to a close room, and we've always managed for Margaret to avoid the hard work, you know. To be sure, I shall miss Esther greatly,"—and a tear came into her eye,—"but Anne is getting on and is a fine strong girl."

"Aye, so she is, indeed," returned the other; "you're lucky in your girls, anyhow, neighbour. Why every one says Esther is as likely a young woman as can be seen; and my Elizabeth told me she was sure the butler at the great house had taken greatly to her. Folks do say he's wild, but he is a fine looking man, and has, I am told, plenty of money."

"God forbid that a child of mine should fall in with him or such as him!" said Mrs. Merle; "he never enters a church door, and has far too dashy a manner for plain people. Esther is too young yet, and I am not sorry she is going out of his way."

The entrance of Esther herself put an end to this conversation. The week soon passed away—Sunday came, and on Monday Esther was to go. In the morning she stayed at home to cook their dinner while her mother and sister went to church, the latter being also punctual attendants at the Sunday-school. It was the last day she should spend in her own family for a long, long time.—Mean and poor as was their fare—hard as they

worked, and little as there was to find them clothing—it was her home; and Esther thought she even felt leaving this little cottage more than she had done leaving the farm. They had met with much kindness from their friends since their troubles, and had been more thrown upon their good clergyman and his wife. Then, the little garden was a source of much pleasure to Esther, and she was a capital gardener.

"Yes," said she to herself as she stood at the door watching for their return from church, "many's the time I shall wish to be here, and I guess I shall be wanting too, for mother is getting on in years, and trouble has shaken her sadly, and Anne is but a child, and then, Margaret, she gets thinner and thinner."

But notwithstanding these regrets, it must not be supposed that Esther did not also feel some satisfaction in the thought of "doing for herself." She had no objection, either, to seeing something of the world. She had sometimes felt discontented at her present lot, and if the truth were known, had sometimes fancied she should be much happier if she could afford to dress better.

And Esther had naturally high spirits, and did not feel that diffidence or fear which many others might have done in her situation. She had no doubt of being able to fulfil her duties as nursemaid. Perhaps she did not sufficiently consider what was the nature of these duties—perhaps her standard was a low one—perhaps Esther Merle, with all her good qualities, confined her views too much to this life, and considered a certain performance of a few duties—the being industrious, honest, and keeping "herself up," from bad company,—was all that was required. Many think this, but neither for poor nor rich is this enough; we must be all this and something more too.

On this day Esther's sorrow at parting from her friends was uppermost, and she almost wondered at herself for feeling it so much. She could hardly command herself as Mr. and Mrs. Grove bade her good-bye in the church-yard, and they were all very silent as they crossed the meadow, which in fine weather was their shortest way from church to their cottage.

Margaret held her sister's hand, and sometimes Esther felt her press it tightly; at last she said, "Let us have a walk, Esther, round the green lane, and home by the church-yard."

"Ah! yes," said Esther, "I meant to visit the graves, too—but then we shall leave mother."

But on hearing what they were talking of, Mrs. Merle said she would go as far as the end of the lane, for she wanted to call in and see a sick person who lived there. So they went on, and leaving their mother in the cottage, the three sisters proceeded to the church-yard. There was a nice row of yew-trees, which gave a pleasant shade; the church itself was a very pretty one, and standing on rather high ground, it overlooked the little straggling village. The parsonage shrubbery joined the church-yard, and the smoke as it rose from the cottages, and the distant hum of voices from the village, were very pleasant to see and hear. In one corner were the graves of their father, brother, and sister;—simple mounds of earth with but one head-stone for all, which were evidently taken care of—the grass was clipped round, and some flowers which Esther had planted were flourishing round them. To this spot the sisters went, and sat down.

After a short silence, Margaret said, "I wonder if it was on purpose that Mr. Grove preached that sermon, Esther!"

"I am sure I don't know, may be he did, and it was a very beautiful one anyhow for me, but I don't quite mind the text—where was it taken from?"

"I think it was the Epistle to Titus," said Margaret. "I don't know exactly the chapter or the verse, but I know the words: 'Exhort servants to be obedient unto their masters, and to please them well in all things, not answering again.'"

"Second chapter and ninth verse," said Anne quickly, "but do you know, Esther, I think you'll find it hard not to answer again."

"How do you mean?" asked Esther.

"Why, I mean, you are hasty and warm in temper, and if you are found fault with, ten to one if you don't answer, and every body isn't so quiet as mother, you know."

"Poor mother!" said Esther, "poor dear mother! I have given her many a hasty word, so I have!—and she so gentle and meek always! How different people are! there's you and I, Anne, so quick and uppish, and Margaret and mother just as meek as lambs; but, however, I'm not afraid; as Elizabeth said, we've been well brought up, and I know my duty, and I don't mind work, and though hasty I am not sulky, so all will be right, no doubt."

After a little more conversation they left the church-yard, and reached home just as their mother was unlocking the door.

It was a sorrowful evening; and at last, when Margaret put into Esther's hand a favourite hymn-book of her own, and told her to keep it for her sake, Esther could restrain herself no longer; she burst into tears and left the room.

The next morning she had just time to pack up her small box, to receive the last nosegay from Margaret, and a blessing from her mother, when

the cart that was to take her to Redbridge drew up at the door. Very soon Ellerton church was out of sight, and Esther exerted herself to conquer her low spirits, for she thought she should feel ashamed of weeping eyes among strangers and in a new abode.

(To be continued.)

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July 5, 1845. 21

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Will leave Lewiston and Queenston for Toronto about half-past Eight o'clock in the Morning; and will arrive in time to meet the Mail Steamers for Kingston at Twelve, Noon.
Cabin Passage (Meals extra one Dollar).
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Returning, will leave Rochester for Toronto, calling at Cobourg and intermediate ports every Monday, Wednesday and Friday Mornings at half-past Eight o'clock.
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THE STEAMER ECLIPSE,
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