

Children's Department.

My Lamp.

A number of little maidens were trooping along in the early spring morning. They were all alike clothed in white, but some of these children had kept their garments much cleaner than others: indeed some among them were so stained and soiled that at first sight they scarcely looked as if they had ever been white. Each child was crowned with a little wreath of flowers gathered by her own hands, and each carried in her hand, or safely fastened around her waist, a small lamp. Near to each child hovered a beautiful angel, who looked lovingly at the little one under his care. Sometimes the angel was over the child's head, sometimes before her as if to lead her on; and sometimes, if the child would do wrong and determine to have her own way, the angel would follow with clasped hands and with a sad and pitying face. It was clear that the children did not see the angels, yet now and then they seemed to know they were there, for if they needed guidance the angels would gently whisper to them, and the children would pause and listen, and it was well for them they followed the advice given them. Even when they were not tractable the angels never left their little charges, but always watched them tenderly.

Two of the little maidens were talking earnestly together. One was a steady looking child, with an earnest trustful gaze, and on her head was a wreath of the deep blue gentian. The part of her lamp which contained the flame was pierced, so that the light was seen through the holes; and like words of fire might be read, "Fight the good fight of Faith." The other child held her head very high, and talked in a loud voice; she had placed on her head a crown of scarlet poppies, and as she spoke her face seemed to

grow nearly as red as the flowers. Her lamp gave out no light, the words pierced through it were rimmed with rust all round their edges, and her angel looked at it with sorrowful eyes, as the words were a sad warning. "Speak no more so exceeding proudly." It was about these lamps that the children were speaking, and indeed the warning was much needed just then, for the words of *Pride* were grievous to hear.

"I am tired of my lamp, and of the words round it. Why should not I speak as I like! And as to lighting it, there's no need of that, I can do very well without."

"But," said *Faith* gently, "the King gave us our lamps, and He put the words round them. I think He knew best what words to put; and if the King's son were to come and find our lamps not lighted, what should we do?"

"Oh, as to that," answered *Pride*, "He won't come yet at any rate, and I shall do as I choose, and not spend so much time about my lamp as you do with yours. It is not at all necessary. I have a great mind not to carry my lamp at all." And a proud and defiant look was in her face which seemed to say, "I am, and there is none beside me." And her angel watched and listened with bent head and drooping wings, as if in shame at the bold look and words.

At this moment the sun burst forth, and while *Faith's* robe shone and seemed to sparkle in the light, the spots on that of *Pride* showed more clearly than before.

"What are you talking about?" asked another child, who came up and joined them. She had a mocking sneer upon her face: her head was wreathed with the fair but poisonous nightshade; she had her lamp, but alas! there was no light in it; the socket for oil was empty, and she seemed to take no notice of the words through which the light should have shone. They were, "Take heed, lest there be in you an evil heart of Unbelief."

"We are talking of our lamps," said *Pride*. "*Faith's* is trimmed and burning, as if she expected the King's Son to come now directly; but I say that the lamps are no use. What do you think?"

"Oh! I don't believe the King's Son will come at all," answered *Unbelief*; and her angel drooped his head, and hid his face in his hands in bitter grief when he heard the child's words.

Faith looked up and said in a firm but gentle voice, "He will surely come, He will not tarry."

"But," said *Unbelief*, "He has tarried. I see no sign of His coming, everything goes on just the same as it did when we were first told that He would come down some day. I don't believe He is coming." On the robe of *Unbelief*, just over her heart, was a large black stain which seemed to spread and become larger as she talked.

"No, He will not tarry," said *Faith*. "He will not tarry after the appointed time is come, but we do not know when that is."

Unbelief laughed; it was a scornful sneering laugh. "Well, do as you like," she said, "keep your lamp burning if you think 'tis any use." But she only said it to mock.

"I should be just as fit to meet Him without my lamp," said *Pride*, "as you would be with yours, so all your trouble goes for nothing."

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Faith looked at her lamp and read the words through which the flame shone. "Fight the good fight of Faith," and she signed herself with the sign of the Cross, in token that she was not ashamed to confess the Faith. And when the other children saw it, they turned and went away together, *Pride* with a toss of her head, and *Unbelief* with a jeering laugh. For a moment *Faith's* face was troubled; it was not that they had made her doubt, but it vexed her to hear such bold, sad words; and her angel came very near to her and looked at her tenderly. And all at once *Faith* raised her trustful eyes to the blue sky above and said in a low voice to herself, "From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead!" And the look of trouble was gone, and a sweet smile was on her face, and the angel spread his wings lovingly over her as if to shield her from the evil words of *Unbelief*.

Continued.

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