

JANET MASON'S TROUBLES.

(From the Sunday Magazine.)

"I say, Janet, you'll have to be a little more careful," said her uncle. "Why, at your age you don't want to be fed, do you, like a baby?"

"I'll feed her, if you like," cried Jack, and gave a great guffaw.

"We'll all feed her," cried Bill.

"Oh!" cried Janet again, and made a jump into the air, for Dick at this moment (he was the longest legged of the boys), having got his feet under her chair, gave a sudden bump to the wooden seat of it, which sent her up like an indian-rubber ball. This feat was, of course, received by Dick's brothers with a new burst of applause; but, unhappily for Dick himself, his attitude—for, in order to get himself well under Janet's chair, he had had to sink to an unnaturally low position on his own—betrayed him, and before he could bring himself back to his proper level he was greeted by his father with a box upon the ear that resounded through the room.

"Will you have done with your tricks, Dick?" cried Mr. Mason. "I tell you what, if you go on like this I'll get a horse-whip to you."

"Shall I go and buy one?" asked Dick saucily.

He had nearly lost his balance when his father struck him, but he had recovered that and his self-possession too with great rapidity.

"Now, Dick, you hold your tongue," said his mother.

"Do they always go on like this, I wonder!" poor Janet was thinking, in a terrified way, to herself. She was a quiet, shy child, who had always lived with grown up people, and had never known what it was to have rough companions. She looked at her cousins, and shrank into herself with a terror that turned her sick. She almost felt as she might have done if she had been shut up with three wild animals. She looked up once, and Dick began to make faces at her across the table-cloth, and then all the three boys began to make faces till the poor child's cheeks were crimson with distress and embarrassment. Once she dropped her fork, and when she rose to pick it up, they all began to shift it about, so as to hide it from her, and kick it this way and that till the hard heels of their

boots struck her fingers; and what with shame and pain and vexation, the tears started to her eyes, and she went back to her chair again sobbing in her helpless trouble.

"Well, you are a baby, if you cry just because you've dropped something on the floor," Mrs. Mason said contemptuously when this had happened; but the boys sat still and stared at her in open-eyed amazement.

"Jolly! if two big tears didn't fall down into her plate," Dick said afterwards. "Well, she's the rummest piece of goods I ever saw. I'd like to make her cry again," cried Dick, with the natural eagerness of a great mind to enjoy the repetition of a new experiment; and indeed, to do Dick bare justice, he did not rest satisfied with the mere expression of this wish, but on many future occasions did make Janet cry again, till, in fact, that enjoyment almost palled upon him; for unhappily, even the most admirable pleasures may lose their zest for us after a time, if we indulge in them too lavishly and Dick was young yet, and had not learnt the wisdom of using his enjoyments in moderation.

It seemed a long meal to Janet; she was glad when it ended, and Mrs. Mason rose briskly from her seat.

"Now, then, boys, five minutes to two," she said. "It's time for you to be off to school."

"No it ain't," replied Jack, in answer to this admonition; "that clock's fast."

"Fast! Stuff and nonsense! If you tell lies, Jack, I'll cane you," answered his mother,

"I ain't telling lies," said Jack.

And then a little passage at arms ensued between the mother and son. But Jack, I am happy to say, got worse in the conflict, and was driven at the end of a minute, howling, to the kitchen door. This little scene had a wholesome effect upon Dick and Bill, who forthwith shouldered their books and followed their brother pretty quietly into the lobby; and then Mr. Mason took his pipe, and announced that he too was going out; and in a minute more Janet and her aunt were left alone in the kitchen.

The child had got up from her seat at the table, and was standing helplessly at the window, not knowing to what occupation to betake herself—not knowing what to do or say, or where to go to, any more than if she had been dropped into that place from the sky Mrs. Mason was

already tucking up her sleeves.

"Now, I can't have you standing there, child," she said sharply to Janet. "If you do you'll make me sick. You can't be no help to me, so all I can say is, you'd better get out of the way, and not be a hindrance. You can't mend stockings, I suppose? Ah, no! I thought as much. What do you say?—you can hem? I don't care whether you can hem or not when I want you to darn. Hemming won't darn holes, will it?"

And then, with this contemptuous enquiry, Mrs. Mason turned away and set about her afternoon's work, and Janet went away too, and wandered up-stairs again to the attic where she was to sleep, and sat down on her mattress sad and stupefied. She was so young that she did not know how to grasp this thing that had happened to her—how to measure the bitterness of it—how to look forward to any possible change that should make the life before her more endurable. She sat down upon her mattress, and then presently laid down her head upon her pillow.

"Oh, papa! papa!" she began to sob.

What would her father have suffered if he could have seen her? Those who are dead have need often to be held safe in God's keeping, with the eyes with which they face eternity turned far from this world, I think. Was it not well for the curate that he could not see his little daughter as she lay upon her bed, crying and calling to him?

CHAPTER IV.

JANET had not known what to do with herself on the first day that she spent in her uncle's house, but after a very little

while, whatever else she might have to complain of, at any rate she had not any longer to complain of having much idle time upon her hands. She was a deft little maid, with a light step and useful fingers, and Mrs. Mason, who was a stirring, woman soon began to find plenty of occupation for her. If she could not darn stockings, at any rate she

could wash up cups and saucers; she could answer the door and run messages; she could do a score of odd jobs in the house or out of it; she could wash the potatoes, and turn the roasts, and fill the skuttle.

"Why, you're beginning to find her quite useful," Mr. Mason ventured to say to his wife rather cheerily one day. But when he said this Mrs. Mason knitted her brows, and made a reply that caused Janet to hang her head in humiliation.

"Humph! Useful, do you call her?" said Mrs. Mason. "It will be many a day before she earns her salt." And then she turned sharply to Janet, and rebuked her for something she was doing amiss, in a tone that made the poor little soul shake in her shoes.

But still, though Mrs. Mason was harsh enough to Janet, she was not a bad woman altogether; she would not have starved the child, or beaten her, or ill-treated her. If she would not acknowledge that she was of any use, that was not because she wanted to be specially unjust to Janet, but because she thought all children—or, at any rate, all girls—ought to be kept under, and have conceit well knocked out of them. Janet was not worse than other girls, perhaps, but, take them in all, they were a poor lot, and she thanked goodness she had none but boys. "For, dear me, if a boy is bothersome, you can always turn him out of the house," she would often say in a tone of selfcongratulation, "but a girl has to be kept at your apron string, as if she was tied to you." And, indeed, to do her justice, Mrs. Mason let her practice agree so thoroughly with her theory that she turned Jack and Bill and Dick out of doors whenever their condition seemed to her motherly eye to require that treatment, with a readiness and decision of touch that were quite delightful to witness.

I think, as far as Janet was concerned, the terms on which she soon got to stand with her cousins were, more than anything else I know, like the terms on which a kitten stands with three big dogs who are worrying it. When dogs are worrying kittens they only mean their worrying for play, perhaps, but it is such cruel play that the poor cat gets scared almost to death, and loses its wits with terror. And so Janet used to get scared, and to lose her wits when Jack and Dick and Bill

