

LITTLE FOLKS

New Paths.

(‘Early Days.’)

It was the 25th of June, a beautiful Sunday evening. The whole country lay bathed in soft golden sunlight, with a Sabbath stillness reigning over all, scarcely broken by quiet voices of worshippers on their way to the house of God. Overhead sailed great heaped-up masses of white frothy clouds, already showing, as the sun neared the west, faint streaks of yellow and pink upon their crimped edges. Many heads turned to cast a backward glance at the beautiful scene ere they entered the church door; then the organ sounded the first deep note, and loiterers hastened to take their places.

Effie Harris, sitting with her father and mother, was not paying much attention to the service this evening. She was thinking of her white rabbit, which she had quite forgotten to feed, and wondering whether there would be time to gather some parsley after church, unnoticed by Harry and Meg, who, if they saw it, might possibly tell tales. The problem fully occupied her mind for some time, and was only dismissed when, half way through the sermon, a sentence, very earnest and very quiet, suddenly caught her ear.

‘Why will you not ask the Lord Jesus to take you to-night as his own for ever? Would you not like to feel, as you walk this world from day to day, that he is beside, within you, guiding controlling and blessing you: life?’ Effie listened. Times without number she had heard the message but it had never seemed to touch her. Now there arose in her heart a longing, a kind of wild desire to possess this thing. As she pondered, the beauty and happiness of this life grew in upon her consciousness, and with almost a bounding heart she knelt at the close of the service, and straightway gave herself to the Lord Jesus.

The congregation streamed out and turned homewards, Effie amongst them. She was deeply happy. It seemed to her as though, without any exaggeration, she had entered upon a new and wholly different existence, a life of sunshine and power unspeakable. She felt almost an eager desire to meet and conquer the old foes who had held her so long enthralled. Effie knew

them well. Selfishness—how often she used the word ‘can’t,’ and how slow to run and spare other feet, tired though they might be! Sharp words—how quickly they came out, sometimes upon the smallest provocation! Untruthfulness—a sudden question, with maybe a swift punishment depending upon the answer, or, quite as often, careless exaggeration. These things would be different now.

The twilight was stealing over all as they walked home, and now and again a breath of soft sweet air, deliciously cool as only country air can be, fanned their faces. All was peace, and Effie, passing into the house, was about to betake herself upstairs, when suddenly there flashed into her mind the remembrance of the starving rabbit, untouched since early morning. ‘What shall I do?’ was the instant thought. ‘Father and mother are strolling in the garden, and if they see me gathering food they will ask me why I am doing it, and then I shall be punished for cruelty. Perhaps I had better wait until it is darker, and then they will go in, and nobody will see me.’

How Satan loves to use the trifles of daily life to tempt and distract us! The temptation was fierce, and almost the little servant’s foothold had slipped in this her first encounter; but she looked away, looked upwards, and the strength came. She went into the garden, gathered bravely several handfuls of green-stuff, and was carrying it off when, with a great start, she heard the dreaded sound.

‘Effie,’ her father called, ‘what have you there?’

‘Food for my rabbit, papa.’

‘Why are you feeding it now? Did you not give it anything when I told you it was starving this morning?’

A moment’s silence, then—

‘No, papa.’

‘And why not, Effie?’

‘I quite forgot.’

‘I have spoken to you several times about this carelessness, which is cruelty,’ said her father sternly; ‘yet it seems to have no effect. If such a thing happens again, your rabbit must go; as it is, I cannot allow you to spend the afternoon with the others at Mrs. Thorpe’s house on Tuesday.’

In silence Effie turned away, but

her heart was almost bursting with disappointment, and she could scarcely see for tears to unfasten the door of the hutch.

Was this, she thought, to be the invariable end of every effort to do as she knew the Master would have her do?

An afternoon spent with the Thorpes—nobody knew better than Effie herself what a time of unalloyed pleasure it always was. A hot flush of shame burned in her cheek as the thought came, adding double bitterness to the loss.

‘What will they think of me when they hear that I cannot come?—for Mrs. Thorpe is certain to ask the reason.’

But soon returned the remembrance of him whom she had just promised to serve, and clasping her hands in the darkness, Effie lifted her tear-stained face and sent up an earnest cry for help and guidance, come what might. She finished the task which had cost so much, and then went quietly into the house and up to bed.

Meg, with whom she shared a room, was seated at the dressing-table trying on a hat and veil which Winnie, her eldest sister, had carelessly left there, instead of consigning to her own apartment. Harry, who in passing the door had caught sight of proceeding operations, and idly entered to offer remarks, was sitting, doubled up and speechless with laughter, upon a chair; for Meg, in trying to adjust ‘the machine,’ had punctured a huge hole just above the nose, and her look of horror, with the nose extending the fissure, was beyond all gravity. But Effie’s entrance stayed the laughter, as Harry, seeing the tear-stains which she had vainly tried to wipe away, immediately became anxious to know the cause.

‘What’s up, Eff?’ he asked. ‘Have you broken anything, or what?’

Effie divested herself of her hat before answering; then, with a strong effort to speak calmly, she said:

‘I am not going to the Thorpes’s on Tuesday.’

‘Not going! Why ever not?’ said the amazed Harry.

‘Because I forgot to feed my rabbit, and papa said I should not go.’

There was silence for a moment; then Meg, whose conscience reproached her for the manner in