

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## THROUGH THE WINTER.

## CHAPTER V.—Continued.

Crying bitterly, Helen left the room, and rushing upstairs fell on her knees by her bed. She could not pray. She could hardly think. She was conscious of but one thing: that she was very miserable and yet must not stay to indulge her misery. She must go to work; and, as she remembered all she had to do, Helen's head sank lower, and her very heart seemed to sob itself out, as she pleaded:

"O God, my Father in heaven, forgive me—have pity upon me—help me. I did so want to be a good child to-day, and do my work heartily, and now, at the very beginning, I have made this wretched failure. My Father, help me: take me in Thine arms, hold me close to-day, do not leave me to myself. Teach me to do my whole duty lovingly, heartily, and O—." With a great longing for refuge and strength, humbly and penitently, Helen remembered and whispered the words that in moments of pain she had heard her mother often murmur: "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

The prayer was heard; the storm of passion passed; Helen's sobs and tears ceased. For a few moments she rested quietly with her head bowed on the bed; then the memory of all she had to do came back, and she rose, bathed her face and smoothed her hair. Her little Bible still lay on the bureau open at the verse over which in the early morning she had lingered so gladly: "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice."

Helen remembered and shook her head.

"I have no call to rejoice," she said, wearily; "only to repent and be humble." Bright as a gleam of sunlight, breaking through the clouds of a stormy day, came as in a whisper,

"It is to you the call comes. Rejoice because you can repent, because you have a Saviour touched with the feeling of your infirmities. Yea, rejoice always."

Was it a new light upon a dark path?

"I must go to papa, now," she thought; but her first move was to the kitchen. There she found Ronald and Sibyl seated in their little chairs close by the stove, so impressed and distressed by the morning's trouble that they scarcely dared to speak; and, when Helen appeared, turned two little, pale, scared faces toward her.

"Why, you dear little children," she said, berding down and kissing them fondly. "Where are your boots and coats? On such a bright, beautiful morning as this you mustn't be crouching over the stove. Go, get your wrappings and sleds and run out; it is Saturday, and you needn't have any lessons. You may just play all day."

Cheered by her kind words the little ones ran off, and were soon out in the bright winter air, with all indoor troubles forgotten.

Helen's next act was to make two delicate slices of toast and a cup of her father's favourite tea, and taking them on a tray she went in and stood before Mr. Humphrey.

"Papa," she said, sweetly, "I am very, very sorry for what I said at breakfast, and for all I have done to displease you. Will you forgive me, papa? I will try and do better hereafter." She waited a moment; but, as her father only looked at her without speaking, she added, hastily,

"I am sorry the coffee was so poor; but I have made some tea and toast: will you take it, papa? Perhaps it will do your cold good."

With a cold "Thank you," Mr. Humphrey accepted her little offering, and with a lightened heart she went about other matters. The sitting-room was quickly put in pleasant order; on a little table near her father she placed his papers and magazines. Her plants were watered, the room upstairs arranged, and then with dainty hands, that seemed that day to have a secret understanding with flour and sugar that they were all to do their best, Helen went to her baking.

Pies, crackers, and cakes were all deftly and successfully made; even the bread rose up and gave unusual promise of lightness, sweetness, and goodness. Helen said to Matie that she had never baked so easily before, and secretly she wondered why it was. Had the morning storm cleared the atmosphere for the whole day? No, not the storm, but the lesson of humility which the storm had taught her.

At dinner-time Philip and Fred appeared; they had left the house immediately after breakfast and Helen had not seen them since. Their first look at her was an anxious one, but her bright smile reassured them, and they were soon talking and laughing gayly as usual.

"Helen," Philip asked, as they were leaving the dinner-table, "are you going to be very busy this afternoon?"

"I am afraid so, Philip, most of it—why?"

"Because it is such splendid sleighing now, and I thought if father was willing and you could go, Fred and I would get out the old sleigh and take you and the children for a ride. Can't you go, Nellie?"

Helen hesitated. "Have you asked papa?" she said.

"No; but I will, right away. If he says yes, will you go?"

"I will try to," Helen answered; "but it will be some time before I am ready."

"Never mind," Philip said, cheerfully. "Fred and I can wait. It will do you a world of good to go, and I think papa will consent. I'll ask him now."

Philip went back into the sitting-room, and soon came out tossing up his cap and whistling merrily.

"All right, Nellie," he cried, as he passed through the kitchen; we can go as soon as you are ready; hurry up, won't you? And, without waiting for her answer, he hurried out-doors, and his merry voice was soon heard shouting to Fred to come and help him with the sleigh.

The next two hours were very busy ones in Helen's little kitchen: she doubted very much if she ought to go; but Matie joined her persuasions to the boys. Ronald and Sibyl came running in, wild with delight at the prospect of

a sleigh-ride, and the thought of it was so attractive to Helen herself that she determined to dismiss her scruples, and take the pleasure offered her. Matie flew around putting things in order with twice her usual energy, and when Fred came to know if Helen was ready, her kitchen work was done, and there remained only the basketful of mending, which she said to herself she could do in the evening.

It was a happy party that crowded into the old sleigh; the pure winter air was simply delicious to breathe; the sunshine was bright, if not warm; and the cold wind, if it did play tricks with their wrappings, good-naturedly rouged their cheeks, brightened their eyes, and being in a frolic itself, soon put them in the same mood.

"We will go down to the beach first and see the wreck," said Philip.

So they drove gayly down to the beach, and halted for a moment on the white, shingly sands to look at a large, strong, noble-looking ship, which had been driven ashore in a hard storm two weeks before. A number of men, landsmen as well as seamen, were busily engaged in work connected with the unloading of the wreck. Among them were ten or fifteen stalwart, noble-looking Indians—the last remnant of a once powerful tribe that for many years had been settled on a large tract of waste and hilly country near Quinnececo.

With what a drowsy, gurgling sound the waters swashed up around the grounded vessel; with what merry shouts and good-humoured jokes the men saluted each other, as cheerfully and willingly they bent to their labours. One of them stopped to speak to the boys.

"She's all ready to go off," he said, in answer to some question asked by Philip. "The captain's only waiting for a tug: two or three days more of as fine weather as this," and he glanced up at the cloudless sky, "and they'll haul her off."

It was a pleasant sight, and they enjoyed it; but they were out for a sleighride, and it would never do to spend the afternoon on the beach; so the horses were turned, and away they flew through the main street of Quinnececo, meeting now and then some friend or acquaintance who wished them a pleasant ride, until the village was left behind, and they entered the beautiful woods which lay between Quinnececo and Riverton, a good-sized town, to which the boys proposed going.

How pleasant it was riding through those quiet woods! They did not feel the wind now, for the tall trees sheltered them from it. The snow lay deep and unbroken, with only here and there some tiny track of rabbit, bird, or dog, to tell of life that might be hungering near them. Helen enjoyed it with the zest of one who, after being for a long while half-fled, is suddenly provided with a rich banquet. She was a deep, passionate lover of nature, and since she had learned to look up from the beauty that thrilled and gladdened her soul to the hand that created it, and whisper "My Father," the world had seemed fairer than of old, and traced all over with hieroglyphics that, rightly read, told of Infinite Love watching with tenderest care his creatures and ordering all their steps.

"Helen," said Fred, breaking in on her musings as they came near Riverton, "what do you say to our going round by the old mill, and crossing the bridge, and going home the other way?"

"I think it will be very pleasant," Helen answered; "I always like to go by the mill; only take care, boys, that we don't get into any trouble."

"Trouble!" Fred repeated, scornfully. "Nellie, you are a perfect Godmother Fidget, with your take-cares and don'ts; what trouble can we possibly get into in going round by the mill?"

"I don't know," Helen answered, very meekly; "none, I hope."

"Don't you fret," Fred said, patronizingly. "Look out now, young ones, here we go. Now you'll see how we do it."

They were just opposite the old mill, which was working and grinding away, while the waters in the race were seething, and foaming, and fretting against the stones which pent them in. Some tall old trees hung over the race; soft masses of snow fell every few moments from their branches down into the brown, whirling waters beneath, while shadows and sunbeams played hide and seek around them. The road here made a sudden curve, winding round to the other side of the mill, crossed over a bridge into a pleasant country of level fields and upland green pastures. Quickly the horses flew round the curve, trotted the short distance down the road, and reached the bridge.

"Take care!" shouted a voice behind them; "the bridge isn't safe. Come back, come back."

The warning was too late: the horses had been trotting fast; they were excited and eager for a race; the cries behind startled them, and in spite of the boys' efforts to hold them, they reared and plunged violently forward into a broken place in the bridge, while the sleigh was thrown over on one side, and its occupants dropped out into the soft snow without regard to comfort or safety. Fortunately none of them were hurt. Helen's hat was knocked off her head, and blown into the river, where, as she picked herself up and turned to look for it, she could see it floating seaward with the current. Ronald and Sibyl thought it great fun to be so unceremoniously spilled out of their warm sleigh into a snow-bank, and sat there regarding the scene with great interest. Several men were running at full speed to assist the boys; a sleigh had driven down to the bridge just behind them, and the gentleman, having secured his own horses, was already on the spot, standing at the head of the floundering, frightened animals, controlling and soothing them.

Helen, knowing she could not help, and thinking they might be less in the way on the ground, called the children from off the bridge back to the road, where they stood watching and waiting the result of the accident.

"O Nellie, how funny you look!" Ronald cried, as his eyes left the horses and came back to his sister. "Your hair is white with snow, and it is blowing all over your head just like—like shooting stars," he concluded, remembering suddenly the meteors he had watched the night before.

"Can't help it, Ronald," Helen replied, gayly. "My fate and John Gilpin's are alike—we both lost our hats—"

"Away went Gilpin neck or nought,  
Away went hat and wig,  
He little dreamt, when he set out,  
Of running such a rig."

I'll tie my scarf over my head, if I can find it when we get back in the sleigh. I wish I knew if the horses are hurt, and if there is any hope of our soon getting on. Stay here, Ronald—you and Sibyl—and I'll go and ask."

Leaving the children, she stepped lightly on the bridge, but stopped, as she saw Philip coming to meet her with a stranger.

"Are you both safe—are the horses hurt, Philip?" she asked eagerly, as he came up to her.

"Not much, Helen; it is nothing serious; but the men say Jumping Jack is a little lame; he has hurt his ankle, I believe. We'll have to drive home very slowly—Fred and I; and it will be a very long and cold ride for you and the children; so, Nellie, this gentleman has offered to take you home, and I think you had better go."

Blushing deeply, Helen glanced up at the gentleman. She did not like being transferred to a stranger's care; she dreaded troubling and inconveniencing him. Perhaps, though her lips were silent, her face spoke for her; for, with a bow and a smile that at once quieted all her fears, the gentleman said:

"I shall be very glad to take you and your little brother and sister home, Miss Humphrey. My sleigh is roomy, and my way will take me past your father's. Will you allow me to put you and the little folks in the sleigh at once? It will be better for you than standing on this cold ground. And then in a few moments, as soon as I have seen your brothers started, we will be off."

"Thank you," Helen said, with a pretty dignity; "thank you, you are very kind."

And then, as she turned to go with him, thoughts and eyes went back to her brothers.

"Philip," she said anxiously, "you are sure—perfectly sure—Fred and yourself are unhurt?"

"Perfectly sure, Nellie," Philip answered with an affectionate smile. "But, Helen, what have you done with your hat?"

"Sent it on an exploring expedition, perhaps, to find the northwest passage," she said, lightly. "Don't look grave, Phil, dear. I am glad there is nothing lost but my hat."

"But you will take cold; you can't go home without it."

"I can because I must," she answered, with a smile; "and I won't take cold, Philip: I never felt less like it. Somewhere among the robes, if it hasn't followed my hat, there's a scarf. If you will find that, Philip, I will tie it on my head, and it will be better than my hat. You know Aunt Sarah said there was about as much warmth in that as in a Pharisee's charity."

Philip's only answer was to run and look for the scarf; and Helen, calling Ronald and Sibyl, walked with them to the gentleman's sleigh. They were soon seated, and kind, thoughtful hands tucked them in and arranged the soft furs around them so that no wind could reach them. Helen had never had just such care taken of her on a ride before, and even in the hurry and excitement of the moment she felt it, and thought what happy girls that gentleman's sisters—if he had any—must be.

Ronald and Sibyl were won at once by his pleasant smile and voice, and let him seat and do with them as he pleased, Sibyl saying, as he left them to speak to the boys,

"I s'pose Jesus sent him, Helen, and I guess he's very good."

Philip came back with the scarf, reported they were quite ready to start, and with a pleasant word of encouragement to him, the gentleman took his seat, touched his horses lightly, and they were off.

It was growing late; dark it could not be, for a full-moon threw its brilliant light upon their way, and combined with the snow-covered ground and leafless trees, with their long swaying branches to show them wonderful pictures of light and shade.

Now that the excitement was over the children were very quiet, and Helen was conscious of feeling very tired and a little troubled as she thought of the accident to the lame horse. She did not feel like talking; it would have been somewhat trying to have had to keep up a conversation with a stranger, though he had shown himself so kind, and she was grateful that, beyond a question or two as to her comfort, and one or two little things done to increase it, he made no demands upon her thoughts or words.

Her thanks were very gratefully given when she reached home, but she was answered in a manner to relieve all sense of obligation and convey the impression that he felt himself the one indebted; and with the hope that they would none of them receive any injury from their accident, and a pleasant good-night, he left her.

Sibyl was the first to run into the room where, alone in the deepening twilight, buried in sombre thought, Mr. Humphrey was sitting.

"O papa!" she screamed, "the horses got into a deep hole and upset us, and a kind, good, beautiful gentleman brought us home in his sleigh, and oh," she said, ending her story with a long-drawn sigh, "I'm so tired and hungry."

Mr. Humphrey had risen and stood now by the shelf, looking with gloomy eyes on his three children. In justice to him, it must be owned his first thought was for them.

"Were any of you hurt?" he questioned. "Helen, are you all safe? Where are the boys?"

"Yes, we are all safe, papa," Helen answered, trying to speak calmly. "The boys will be here soon. The bridge by the mill was broken, and the horses got into a hole, and Jumping Jack is lame a little—not seriously, the men said who helped us, but the boys had to drive him very slowly; and a gentleman, who was just behind us, offered to bring us home in his sleigh. And I am very thankful we have escaped so well," she added, timidly.

"Escaped so well!" Mr. Humphrey repeated. "I dare say Jumping Jack will never be able to trot another rod; a good three hundred dollars this ride of yours will probably