

JANET MASON'S TROUBLES.

(From the Sunday Magazine.)

"Papa's cough was very bad last night," she would say sometimes to the rector's wife when that kind lady met Janet in the country lanes, and stopped to speak to her; but she never said it very sadly, for her father had had a cough for so long a time that Janet had grown quite accustomed to it, and very likely had come to suppose that coughs were one of the inevitable accompaniments of advancing years, like grey hairs or baldness. "Papa's cough was very bad in the night; it kept him awake for a long time," she would say in her unconscious little voice; and the rector's wife would pat her shoulder, and give her a sugar-plum from her pocket, and pass on, sighing to herself. "Poor thing, how little she knows! Ah, dear me, it's a sad world!" she would say, shaking her head.

For, though Janet did not know, Mrs. Jessop knew very well what the curate's bad cough meant. "I'm afraid he won't be able to hold out much longer, poor fellow," her husband said to her one autumn night. "Here is the winter coming on, and how he is to go through it I cannot think. It goes to my heart to see him tramping about in these wet days, doing work that he is no more fit for than Janet is. Really I don't know how it is to go on. If he could get a rest, and go somewhere for the winter, he might get better possibly; but how can he get a rest? He will just go on at his work till he drops."

"If he had any place that he could go to for a few months, of course I would gladly take Janet. But then how could you do without him? And how could you afford to pay him and to pay another curate too? Of course you couldn't do that," said Mrs. Jessop.

"No, I couldn't do that, certainly. All I can do is to make his work as light as I can. But the worst is that, light or heavy, it will be too much for him; and then, what is to come next?" said the rector.

Mr. and Mrs. Jessop were very kind to Janet, and the rector was fond of taking the child on his knees when he came to the cottage, and would talk to her, and tell her stories. Sometimes he used to make her say hymns to him, which Janet did not object to do, but sometimes also



(only happily this occurred rarely) he examined her in her catechism, and on one occasion there was rather a sad little scene, in which Janet broke down hopelessly over her baptismal vows, and retired from the apartment overwhelmed with humiliation. But this was a solitary instance of disaster, and in a general way the rector's visits brought nothing but pleasure to Janet, and she would run to meet him when she saw him coming, and slip her small hand into his, and all the little delicate face would brighten. "We must get some roses into these cheeks some day," the rector used to say as he patted them. But as yet the roses in Janet's cheeks had shown themselves shyer in blooming than the kind rector liked to see them.

It was at the beginning of the winter which followed her seventh birth-day that the rector and his wife had that talk together about the curate's health. "I am afraid he will never hold out till the spring," Mr. Jessop had said, but to everybody's surprise he did hold out. All through the long dark months he went on visiting and teaching, and writing his sermons in the little parlor, with Janet by his side.

"Really, he almost seems to me as if he were better," the rector would sometimes say, "for it is amazing what he can go through. If he could only get back a little appetite—"

But, alas! the curate, though he worked still with all his might, could no longer either eat or sleep. He used to lie awake with his hacking cough through hour after hour of the long nights. "I do think one good sleep would almost set me up," he said

one day to Mr. Jessop. But he never got that sleep he longed for till the sleep came at last that is quietest and longest of all.

One May evening, as the rector and his wife were just finishing dinner, a man from the village came to tell them that the curate was very ill.

"He's broken a blood-vessel, your reverence," the man said, "and there's nobody with him but the little miss and the servant girl."

"Bless me!—and have they not got a doctor?" cried the rector; and he seized his hat, and was down in the village and knocking at Dr. Fowler's door before Mrs. Jessop had tied her bonnet-strings.

Happily, however, before he had got to Dr. Fowler's door somebody else had been before him, and when Mr. Jessop reached the cottage he found that Dr. Fowler was already doing all he could for his poor friend.

"But we can't save him—there's not a chance of it—not a chance of it," said the good doctor, as soon as he and the rector were able to exchange a word.

"Ah, dear me!" cried the rector, "is it really so?"

"He couldn't have lived above a month or two more, whether this had happened or not. Why both lungs are gone. He never could have lasted through the spring."

"Poor fellow, poor fellow!" said the rector,

He and Mrs. Jessop had been standing by the bedside. The curate was lying with his eyes closed, half unconscious. They had not been able to undress him. He lay outside the bed,

with his face almost as white already as the white pillow it rested on; and by his side, coiled up into a knot, and white too and silent, sat Janet. They had found her there when they came, and Mrs. Jessop had tried to get her away, but she had not been able to do it.

"It isn't a fit thing for the child to be here. Dr. Fowler, I don't think you ought to allow it," she had said to the doctor almost severely; but Dr. Fowler had merely shrugged his shoulders.

"He likes her to stay, and I don't see, while she sits so still, that it much matters," he answered. "Poor child, she won't have a father to sit by many hours longer."

And then after he had made that answer Mrs. Jessop said nothing more; but she went to the child presently and stroked her hair, and put her kind arm round her.

Before he died the curate tried to rouse himself enough to speak to the friends who were watching round him. He had recognized the rector and his wife very soon after they came into the room, and had feebly moved his hand and smiled as they came up and grasped it. After a time he made a sign to the rector to come nearer, and Mr. Jessop came and bent over the pillow.

"You will write—to my brother?" he said faintly.

"Yes, certainly," the rector answered.

"Janet can tell you the address. He will come—and take charge of it all. If there should be—a few days delay—will you look after the child?"