

The Children's Hour.

The Story of The Pearl.

LITTLE MARGARET was sitting in the firelight on a footstool at her mother's knee. "I want to play with your rings, mother dear," she said.

Margaret's mother was quite used to this request, so she slipped her rings one by one off her slim fingers, and put them carefully in the little girl's pinafore.

"This one is to be mine when I am a big girl, isn't it, mother dear," said Margaret, as she held up a pearl circlet.

"Yes, my dear," answered the mother, "it is your own, my dear, but it means 'a

beautiful pearl.'" "Did it cost a great deal of money, mother?" "Yes, dear, a great deal. I do not know how much, because father bought it for me, but pearls are costly."

"Mother," broke in Margaret's brother Herbert, who was lying on the rug, "what makes precious stones so precious? I mean why are they worth more than bits of colored glass, which are almost as pretty?"

The mother thought for a minute, and then answered gently, "Though I do not quite agree with you, dear, that colored glass is as pretty as the real stone, yet there certainly are other reasons beside their beauty which make these jewels so costly. First their rarity. If pearls were as plentiful as pebbles they would not cost so much. Anything becomes costly when it is difficult and dangerous to get. You know that unlike other precious stones, the pearl is brought up from the bottom of the sea. It is found in the shells of oysters, in the Indian ocean, the Red Sea, and many other places. The work of diving for the pearl-bearing oyster is both difficult and dangerous. The divers tie large stones to their ankles and throw themselves into the water. They cannot stay below more than a minute and a half, and in this way they cut away ten or twelve oysters from the bank. Then they are pulled up again to breathe, and other men go down in their place. There are often hungry sharks about, of which the divers are very much afraid."

"Do the oysters make the pearls?" asked Margaret.

"Yes, Maggie, they do. When the water is quiet the oyster will often lie with the valves (the two sides) of its shell open, and apart from one another. But if a fish swims close by, he, perhaps, disturbs the water, which washes up a grain of sand or a tiny bit of wood from a wreck, into the oyster's mouth. Now the oyster being so soft himself, does not like to be touched by anything rough or hard. What can it do to get rid of this sharp thing which hurts it? It has no hands so it cannot push it away. I will tell you what it does. It covers up the sharp bit of wood or sand with a soft white covering, very like the material with which it lines its shell. Covering after covering is laid on until the hard rough sand has disappeared, and in its place a smooth round thing, which it does not hurt the oyster to touch, and which we call a pearl."

"I should not have thought an oyster would be so sensible, would you, mother?" said Herbert; "oysters look such stupid things."

"I suppose it is the instinct which God has given them, in order that they may protect themselves from injury," replied his mother. "I think we should be wise if we followed the oysters' example, and covered up our annoyances with a good firm layer of good temper, instead of irritating ourselves with them."

"I dare say," remarked Herbert, "that oysters think pearls very ugly things."

"Very likely," said the mother, "just as we think our troubles very ugly. But if we bear them rightly they may perhaps look as beautiful to the angels as pearls look to us."

Margaret looked long and thoughtfully at the beautiful circlet on her chubby finger, and then said, "Please tell us something else about my ring, mother dear!"

"Does my little girl remember the story which the Lord Jesus told: There was once a merchant who bought and sold precious stones. But most of all he liked to get hold of a fine pearl, for that was worth more than any stone. One day he heard of a man who possessed a very precious pearl, larger and more beautiful than any he had ever seen before. But this wonderful pearl was worth a great deal of money, and the merchant had not sufficient money to buy it. What was he to do? He must have that pearl. He went home and gathered together all the precious stones which he possessed—rubies, emeralds, and sapphires—and sold them all that he might gain money enough to buy this one beautiful pearl, which was finer than any he had known before. This is the story. What is its meaning? I think the precious stones which the merchant possessed at first must stand for power and wealth and learning and the Pearl of Great Price is the knowledge of salvation through Christ Jesus. Is the knowledge worth more than wealth, or learning, or power? Why yes! Which is better to know that one is sure of heaven, or to have money in the bank? Which is better—to have the forgiveness of sins, or to come out well in an examination? Which, Herbert?" Herbert rolled uneasily on the rug, but made no answer.

"And now another word for my little girl! I think it is a good thing to find out the meaning of our names, and then try and act up to that meaning. Now how can you, my little Margaret, be like your name? I will tell you. When the ancient Romans looked at a pearl, it made them think of three things—beauty, modesty and nobility. Then you may be like the pearl if you are beautiful, modest and noble. Do you think you can make yourself beautiful, my darling? You cannot alter your features, but a mouth that is never sour with ill-temper, a forehead that is never wrinkled with frowns, and eyes that are always shining with love and kindness cannot help but be beautiful."

"Then the pearl is modest; it does not flash with light like the diamond, or gleam with fire like the ruby. It does not attract attention to itself, except by its gentle shining. You may be like the pearl in this. Do not try to attract attention to yourself or your good qualities—be good but let other people find it out for themselves. Do your work well and quietly, then your light will shine, and people will see that you are one of God's pearls."

"The Romans would not allow anyone to wear pearls, unless he or she was of noble birth. But my Margaret may be noble without being a duchess. If she belongs to the Lord Jesus, she may be a daughter of the King of kings. And a girl who will not do a mean thing who will not tell even a white lie, who will never try to deceive is a noble girl."

"Will my little pearl try and be like her name? And now we must ring for lights, or father will come home, and find us in the dark."

So the children's hour ended with a loving kiss, and the whispered prayer that both son and daughter might be found of the Lord in that day when he reckons up his jewels.—*Grace Winter in the Christian.*

