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## The Favourite Child,

BY MRS. ELLIS.

It happens in many families, though rarely acknowledged by the parties concerned, that there is a favourite child; and what appears still more remarkable in such cases is, that the brothers and sisters of such children are sometimes so far influenced by the example of their parents, as willingly to contribute a more than just share even of their own favour and indulgence to the same object of tenderness and solicitude.

Thus it was in the family of Mrs. Vining, the widow of a wealthy merchant, whose youngest daughter, Isabel, had been born after her father's death. Whether from this circumstance, or from the extremely delicate constitution of the child, she became, from her earliest infancy, an object of intense interest and anxiety to her devoted mother, at the same time that she was most injudiciously made the pet and the plaything of the rest of the household. Nor was this the case with the servants alone, who might well be supposed to find their own interest in pampering her tastes, and humouring her wishes: but even with her brothers and sisters, she became also a sort of privileged being; and never was her infant voice on any occasion raised to the pitch of anger or distress, but succour and soothing were immediately brought from every quarter of the house; while the mother, incredulous as to the existence of any taint of evil in so sacred a mould, always persisted in believing that the child must have been a sufferer in one way or another; and was to any offender on whom her suspicions fell!

In this manner, the little Isabel advanced along the path of life, with feeble and uncertain steps; for, in addition to her constitutional delicacy, she had to contend with a will undisciplined, and with endless longings after personal gratification unchecked, unregulated, and consequently incapable of being gratified to their full extent.

It was no wonder that, under such circumstances, her mind, by nature more than commonly susceptible, received a melancholy bias, which never afterwards was overcome; for while her brothers and sisters were happy in their play, some fancied injury, some real disappointment, or some actual pain, would send her fretting to the side of her mother, to receive the never-failing caress, to lean her head upon her lap, and to wear away the remainder of the evening in a sort of vague and pensive musing, which often terminated in floods of causeless tears.

In what manner Mrs. Vining expected her daughter would be able to meet and combat with the difficulties of life, no one could imagine; and many were the sage exclamations of those visitors who administered bon-bons and flattery to the little darling, and went away, lifting up their hands with equal wonder and disapprobation at the blindness and folly of such a mother.

After all, poor Isabel grew up to be a more tolerable sort of girl than might have been expected. In spite of her natural share of selfishness, which had been so effectually fostered and cultivated, there was something winning in her looks and manners; and on the few occasions when she had been roused into acting for, and by herself, she had shown herself capable of high moral feeling.

These occasions, however, had been extremely rare, for

the greater portion of her life was spent in a kind of dreamy idleness, from which she was seldom roused, except by some awakening desire for personal gratification, some complaint of mental or bodily uneasiness, or some scheme for momentary amusement, which she was generally too languid or too indolent to carry into effect.

The consequence of all this was, that Isabel Vining arrived at the age of eighteen, a victim to dyspepsia, an amateur in medicine, a martyr to nervous maladies, and as elegantly discontented with life and all it had to offer, as any other young lady of her age could think becoming to her character and station. The worst of all was, that by this system of injudicious treatment, false taste had been created, unnatural cravings excited for bodily as well as mental stimulants, which under the names of cordials, tonics and restoratives, were but too plentifully supplied.

Isabel had not, like her sister, been permitted to go to school, though hers was a case in which school discipline might have been highly efficacious; she had not even been considered capable of enduring the usual process of mental instruction at home. Thus her education, even that inferior part which relates to the understanding and the memory, was as vague and irregular as could well be imagined. She was however, an extensive, though superficial reader; and those who conversed with her only for a short time, believed her to be a much better informed person than she really was.

We have said, that with all her disadvantages, Isabel was not absolutely disagreeable. So far from this, she generally attracted attention in company, by her easy and ladylike manners, and by a countenance which, perhaps, was less beautiful than interesting and expressive. Unsailed by any of those severe trials which put to the test the real principles upon which we act, she had not made the discovery herself, nor had any of her friends made it for her, that she was in reality selfish and unamiable; for while every one ministered to her gratification, she had only to express her gratitude, affect a little willingness to deny herself, and expatiate on her regret at being the cause of so much trouble, and all went on exactly as she wished—the trouble was incurred, the attempted self-denial was frustrated, and the kindness for which she expressed her gratitude was repeated and increased.

What a lesson do we learn by a sudden reverse of this order of things!—a lesson, perhaps the most severe that experience ever teaches; while at the same time, our dependence upon animal and selfish gratification, our irritability, impatience, and wounded feeling, when these are denied, shows us but too faithfully the living picture of those passions of which we believed ourselves incapable, simply because indulgence had hitherto lulled them to rest.

It was a fact by no means overlooked by the friends of Mrs. Vining, that while her daughter Isabel attracted more attention than her sisters, they were all respectably married before any one had ventured to make the same kind of proposal to her. It is said that every one, soon or late, however has her chance; her's came at last; and the proposal was from a spruce middle-aged man of business, who was looking out for a second wife.

"Astonishing!" exclaimed every one who heard of it. They would probably have been less surprised, had they known that Mr. Ainsworth was intimately acquainted with