

The Family Circle.

A PRAYER.

Plan thou my path, O Lord,
And let me see
No future good or ill
Not best for me.
Go with me through the dark,
And through the light:
Thy presence will suffice
For deepest night.

The child doth never fear
Though storms betide,
Whoever nestles near
His father's side:
Oh, in the storm of life,
Let me not stray
Beyond thy loving care
Through all the way.

And when I have fulfilled
Thy perfect will,
And thou dost to the storm
Say, Peace be still;
Be with me when friends watch
My latest breath.
And guide me through the calm
That we call death.

—Ez.

A SEED OF TRUTH.

BY ADELINE SERGEANT.

"Where is papa this evening?" asked little Janet Aylmer, looking round the drawing-room as if in search of him.

"Gone out," said an elder sister, who was reading in an arm-chair.

"Where has he gone, mamma?" was the next question.

Mrs. Aylmer was also reading, but she glanced up at her little daughter with a tender smile as she answered—

"He has gone to a meeting, dear, where he is to make a speech, and he will not be home until his little girls are in bed and fast asleep."

"Minna will be asleep, perhaps, but I always hear the door open and shut," said Janet with dignity, as she sat down on the floor at her mother's side. Mrs. Aylmer stroked the little girl's hair, and went on reading to herself.

"What are you reading, mamma?"
"A book on the same subject as that which your papa is going to speak about to-night, dear."

"Oh, I know," said Janet. "About temperance. Is it an interesting book?"

"Very interesting," replied her mother. And then there was a long pause.

Presently, however, Mrs. Aylmer roused herself to say,

"Have you nothing to do, Janet dear? Where is Minna? Why don't you have a good game together?"

"I left Minna in the nursery," said Janet slowly. "She wouldn't play at what I wanted, so I came down-stairs. But she said she would come too, by-and-by."

"What did you want to play at?"

"It is such a nice game," said Janet, with a sigh. "It was to be a meeting, and all the dolls were to be people listening to a lecturer, and I was to have been the lecturer and Minna to take the chair, and the two boy-dolls were to come and sign the pledge."

Mrs. Aylmer could not forbear a smile. "And what did Minna want to play at?" she asked. But before an answer could be given, the door was burst open unceremoniously, and a little maiden of seven years old dashed into the room with as much noise as her tiny hands and feet could make. She was round, and short and fair; she had wide-open blue eyes, light curly locks, and rosy cheeks—in fact, she presented the strongest imaginable contrast to her nine-year old sister Janet, who was tall for her age, thin, dark and anxious-looking. She came in with some disturbance over a rattle which she had dropped on the floor, tight in her fat arms, and which she was trying to pick up. She did not however, for a

a cry, shook out her frock, and backed against the door to shut it.

"Gently, darling," said her mother, "do you want Janet?"

"Yes, I'll play at her game now," said Minna. "Come along Janet, you've got to be the lecturer—leechur, haven't you?" Minna's speech was not as yet quite perfect, and the word "lecturer" was quite beyond her. "Come and play. I'll take the chair." And Minna solemnly planted herself in the biggest chair in the room.

Janet rose without much alacrity, and began to play, but the game proved to be one of such absorbing interest that her face soon grew bright and happy, and the two little sisters had a very merry time together, while their mother and elder sister quietly pursued their own occupations.

Mr. and Mrs. Aylmer had long been engaged in furthering the work of the Temperance League at every opportunity. Mr. Aylmer was in great request as a speaker at public meetings, and Mrs. Aylmer had written much and successfully upon the subject. Their house was situated in a very central part of London, and was sufficiently large and convenient to afford ample space for drawing-room meetings, committee-meetings, and all other kinds of meetings for the welfare of the cause in which they were interested. Thus it happened that the children of the family knew a great deal more about the subject of temperance and the evils of drunkenness than most children, and were profoundly interested in it too. Even their childish games consisted often in imitation of the meetings held by their elders, and it was on these occasions that Janet would repeat the facts and arguments that she had overheard, with an earnestness and precision that sometimes almost startled her hearers.

When Minna had gone to bed on the evening of which we speak, Janet came down from the footstool where she had been standing to address the assembled dolls, and uttered a deep sigh.

"What is the matter, darling?" said Mrs. Aylmer. "Are you tired?"

"No, mamma," said Janet, crossing the room to her mother's side: "at least, I am tired of making believe so much."

"How Janet?"

"The dolls can't understand what I say," continued Janet, plaintively, "and they couldn't drink if they wanted to, and Minna is much too young to care. Yet what I tell them is all true, isn't it, mamma?"

"Yes, dear, I was listening to you. You remember what papa said the other evening very nicely."

"But what is the good of remembering it?" said Janet, in a sort of passion of impatience; "What is the good of telling it to the dolls, mamma? I want to do something real."

"Plenty of time for that," said her mother. "When you are older, you will find more work ready to your hand than you have time to do."

"Then why shouldn't I begin at once?"

"Patience, darling. You are beginning when you take an interest in this great work that we are trying to do, when you pray for all the people who do it, when you help me to sort out tracts and books for distribution, when you go to your Band of Hope meeting and help the children to sing the pretty temperance hymns—in all these ways you are helping, and doing something real."

"I believe you would like to speak at meetings, like papa," said Janet's elder sister, looking up from her book and laughing. She often did laugh at Janet, and the child reddened and turned appealingly to her mother.

"No, mamma, you know I shouldn't like that. But I should like to write books and verses as you do, for I know you do such a lot of good. When I grow older mayn't I write books, too, mamma?"

"If you can, darling, certainly you may."

"How old were you when you began to write stories, mamma?"

Mrs. Aylmer laughed. "I was not very old," she said; "I wrote stories for my own amusement when I was only your age."

Janet rather over-awed. And she looked up with rather a dis-

trustful look. "I am dreadfully backward in writing and spelling. My mother says, I'm afraid I can't write a story or a tract, nobody would read it, the writing would

be so bad." And the tears came into Janet's dark eyes.

"You must try and improve," said her mother gently. "You want to do too much at once, little Janet. Taking pains with your writing and spelling is one of the ways in which you may fit yourself for higher work by-and-by. Don't despise little things. And now good-night, for Minna will not go to sleep until you are with her."

So Janet went off to bed quieted and comforted by her mother's words, as well as by a new idea that had occurred to her—an idea which she did not like to unfold in the presence of her critical sister Kathleen, but which was destined to bear fruit afterwards in unexpected ways.

For the next few days she was seen to be very busy. She crept into corners with pencil and paper, and sat there alternately writing and staring before her with wistful eyes and chin supported by her hand. "Webster's Dictionary" was not far off at such times, neither was a bundle of tracts and stories which Mrs. Aylmer had given into the children's charge for distribution among the scholars of Kathleen's class in the Sunday-school. Sometimes she would beg to be told how to spell a long word, and sometimes she would be seen tearing up her pieces of paper and committing them to the flames, as if she were tired of her work or dissatisfied with what she had done. But no one was taken into her confidence, and her sisters were so well accustomed to "Janet's odd ways," as they called them, that these actions did not excite any particular attention. Only her mother wondered what was passing in the child's mind, but she waited patiently, knowing that the time would soon come when her little daughter would tell her about it.

But one unlucky morning the discovery was made all too soon. Mrs. Aylmer was busy in her little sitting-room, which was separated from the drawing-room by folding doors. Suddenly she heard the sound of raised voices of laughter, then of something very like a scream and a sob. She opened the folding-doors and looked in.

A visitor had appeared on the scene, none other than Mr. Aylmer's youngest brother—Uncle Sidney, as the children called him. He was only three-and-twenty—five years older than his eldest niece, Kathleen—and had always been more like a playfellow than an uncle to the young Aylmers. His coming was greeted with shouts of joy, and was generally the signal for games and merrymaking of all kinds. He did not come very often, although he did not live far from Mr. Aylmer's house, but the fact was that Sidney Aylmer had been brought up by his grandfather on a totally different system from the one of which his elder brother approved, and the consequence was that he had learned to scoff at self-denial and self-restraint, that he had no sympathy with the methods by which Mr. Aylmer and his friends were trying to suppress vice and implant habits of temperance and sobriety among the people, especially the poor, with whom they came in contact, and that he declared that a good education and a strong will was quite sufficient to prevent a man from giving way to temptation. These opinions formed something like a barrier between him and his brother's family, and it was comparatively seldom that he came, as on the present occasion, to spend a whole day with them.

Mrs. Aylmer watched and listened for a moment. Sidney was laughing heartily and Kathleen was speaking to Janet, whose flushed cheeks and flashing eyes showed that she did not consider the matter so lightly as her sister and uncle seemed to do.

"Come, Janet, let us see it," Kathleen was saying. "You have been writing it so long that it must be ready for publication now."

"No, no, no!" cried Janet; "it isn't ready; you shan't see it, give it me back. I will have it back," and she made a frantic clutch at the paper that Kathleen held in her hand.

"Give it her back, Kathleen," said Uncle Sidney, laughing. "Don't tease the poor child."

"No, let us read it first," said Kathleen, mischievously. "Now, Jenny, shall I begin?"

Janet burst into an angry flood of tears; and at that moment Mrs. Aylmer advanced into the room.

In a short time quietness was restored. Janet was comforted by regaining possession of her treasured papers, and sent away to

recover calmness in the nursery, while Kathleen was gently reproved for inconsiderateness.

"But mamma, she has been so ridiculous," said Kathleen, excusing herself hastily. "When she was asked what she was writing, she said it was a temperance tract—as if such a mite as Janet could write anything worth reading! She is merely wasting her time and growing conceited."

Mrs. Aylmer made a quiet remark on the beauty of patience and kindness, which rather discomfited her daughter. Kathleen was not of an unloving disposition, and the idea that she had been thoughtless and unkind soon sent her in search of little Janet, whom she petted and comforted until the child's grievance was forgotten. Meanwhile Sidney was left alone with Mrs. Aylmer.

"I wonder what the monkey has been writing," he said, as he stooped to pick up one of the torn and crumpled scraps of paper which had been dropped in the skirmish. "Is it a breach of confidence to read these few lines? I should like to know what she has been after."

Mrs. Aylmer took the paper from him and read what was written on it, then returned it to him with a smile.

"Certainly," she said. "I will tell Janet we have seen it, and I think she will not mind."

So Sidney read aloud the written words; blotted, confused, almost obliterated as they were, he was able only with difficulty to decipher them.

"Bad people drink too much wine and spirits." Thus Janet's childish essay began. "I should like to tell them how naughty it is of them to do so. Some people say they cannot stop drinking, or doing anything bad, when they have once begun. But that is not true. God's Holy Spirit always helps people to do right and to leave off doing wrong, if they ask for it. He would make them able—"

And there the words stopped abruptly, and the paper was torn across.

Sidney Aylmer looked up with a smile. "You have taught her well," he said rather mockingly. Her father himself could hardly preach better. What will you make of her when she grows up—a female lecturer?"

"I hope she may always be as earnest as she is now," said Mrs. Aylmer.

"Her zeal has been too early kindled," said her young brother-in-law. "It will wear itself out before she is fifteen."

"I trust not," said Mrs. Aylmer. "But she could say no more, for the door opened to admit an invasion of the two younger children, Willy and Baby, from the nursery, and her attention was thenceforth absorbed by them. She did not notice that Sidney carefully folded up the piece of paper and thrust it into his pocket.

She did notice, however, that he was unusually silent for the rest of the day, and that instead of romping with the children, he was found several times to have fallen into the deepest of brown studies, from which he had to be roused by sundry repetitions of his name and many playful shakes and nudges.

In the course of the afternoon he drew Janet into a corner and took her on his knee.

"Shall I tell you a secret, Janet?" he said.

"Please, uncle Sidney."

"Well, then, I read part of your temperance tract."

"Oh, uncle Sidney."

"Don't you think you wrote what was true? Don't you believe it all?"

"Yes," said Janet, looking astonished.

"Then, little girl, you must not be ashamed of what you wrote."

"I'm not ashamed of what I meant," said Janet coloring; "but I am ashamed of the bad writing, and the bad spelling, and all that. Miss Merton says it is disgraceful for a girl of my age." And Janet's tone grew sad.

"Never mind the writing and the spelling," said Sidney. "I am thinking of what you meant. You believe it all, Janet?"

"Please would you tell me what part you read?" said Janet, timidly.

Sidney drew out the paper and held it before her eyes. She blushed deeply as she read it, but answered with more firmness than he expected—

"It's quite true, uncle Sidney."

"But suppose I don't believe it?" said uncle Sidney.

He was not prepared for the look of utter incredulity and amazement with which she met his eyes.