

Choice Literature.

GRANDFATHER'S FAITH.

BY JULIA A. MATHEWS.

IV.

DAYBREAK.

"Charlie! Charlie! Go back and wipe your feet!"

The long walk home through the sweet summer twilight, with his heart full to overflowing with his new hopes and plans, had brought a look of unwonted quiet and repose to Charlie's face. As he had neared the house, firmly fixed now in his resolve to relinquish his own firm determination, and in its stead to follow out Hattie's wiser, but less pleasant suggestion, he had glanced up to see if his grandfather were seated in his favourite corner near the library window; and as his eyes rested on the white head leaning against the dark background of the great arm-chair, which was Dr. Mason's especial property, they brightened with eagerness, and with a leap and a bound he sprang up the steps, and into the doorway.

How the light and the gladness faded as Aunt Harriet's voice fell on his ear! With a very unusual attention to her wishes, growing out of his tenderness for his grandfather, he had paused at the threshold, for once remembering the oft-repeated and sharply-urged injunction to wipe his dusty feet upon the door-mat before entering the house. With a slower step he passed into the hall, making no reply to Miss Harriet's quick call.

"Charlie, go right back," she said, meeting him as he turned towards the library. "Ellen has waxed the halls and the stairs, and I will not have them soiled by your dusty boots."

Oh, harsh, impatient words, hastily spoken to those who are in fault! How often they turn back the first waves of penitence and contrition as they come rolling in after the tempest of passion and sin has passed over the soul of a child!

Without deigning a word in reply, Charlie turned abruptly toward the stairs, not choosing to say that he had already attended to her wishes, and went up to his room; his purpose of unfolding all his desires and hopes to his grandfather changed to a strong inclination to carry out at once his first hasty and ill-formed resolution to run away from home, and fight his own way through the world.

With a hopeless shrug of her shoulders, and a whispered, "Was there ever such a torment?" Miss Harriet went into the dining-room to see if supper were ready, and finding it already upon the table, sent the servant up to Charlie's room to call him down.

"I can't get no answer, Miss Harriet," said he, returning after some moments' delay. "Master Charlie has gone out again, perhaps. I knocked twice and he did not open the door."

"Is the door locked, Reuben?"

"Yes'm; and I didn't hear a breath when I listened for him. He might be asleep, may happen. If ye'd let him rest, ma'am, I could get him a bite, after a bit, when he wakens."

To tell the truth, old Reuben, a privileged servant in the family which he had served for the past fifty years, boy and man, with unfailing fidelity, had a suspicion of the true state of affairs, and always ready to shield the boy whom he loved, first for his mother's sake, and then for his own, had not urged Miss Harriet's desire with any great vehemence.

"I wish him to come down at once," said his mistress.

"Go up again, Reuben, and tell him that we are waiting for him."

"Master Charlie, dear," said Reuben, a moment later, with his lips at the key-hole of the closed door, after knocking in vain for admittance, "Miss Harriet bids you to come down. And the doctor's wantin' his tea, and waitin' for ye."

Still no answer.

"Master Charlie, you won't go for to fret your grandfather no more the day, sure. Come down, sir, and see what a nate pickin' I laid by for ye from the dinner. There's some salmon, and a bit of cold chicken, and such a pasty as'll make your mouth water to see it just. Nancy made it a purpose for ye. Come down now, there's a fine lad."

The door burst suddenly open; and Charlie stood before it, his eyes flashing, and his whole face in a blaze of wrath.

"Take yourself downstairs this minute," he exclaimed in a fury of passion. "Didn't you see that my door was locked because I didn't choose to be disturbed?"

"But, Master Charlie, dear," pleaded old Reuben, shrinking back before the storm which threatened him, "Miss Harriet bade me bring you for sure."

"What do I care for Miss Harriet's bidding? Go down and tell her!"

"Charlie Mason!"

The voice came up the stairs, and as it came he caught the sound of his grandfather's step crossing the hall toward the dining-room. The flush faded from his face and the warning tone fell on his ear, and without another word he turned back into his room, quietly closing the door behind him.

"Well?" said Miss Harriet, as Reuben re-entered the dining-room.

"I think Master Charlie's not wantin' any supper, ma'am. He bade me not disturb him," said the old man, with a careful softening of the facts of the case.

"I would not call him again, Harriet," said her father, as, with a deepened colour and a look of strong irritation, she rose from her seat.

"But he has eaten no dinner, father. He will surely be sick if he goes on in this way," and she turned to him with the expression of some anxiety in her face; for it was sore distress to Miss Harriet to have her nice viands unappreciated; and, in addition to the vexation caused her by Charlie's insubordination, she was really made unhappy by his refusal to eat. "He has not taken a mouthful since breakfast."

"One day's fast will not hurt him, dear; I think that I would leave him to himself."

Dr. Mason's manner of making a suggestion in a case like this was in itself a command, and Miss Harriet seldom thought of opposing her will to his. Her father was the

very idol of her heart, and, to do her justice, her hard feeling towards Charlie was greatly owing to her intense affection for the doctor. Devoted, body and mind, to his service and comfort, she resented the anxiety and the grief which Charlie caused him, with angry bitterness, and thought no severity and harshness too great to be used towards one, who, in spite of the care and love lavished upon him, could wantonly bring a cloud upon her father's beloved face.

"Harriet, my dear."

"Yes, father."

They had returned to the library, and Dr. Mason was sitting in his corner by the window, taking a little rest preparatory to starting out once more on his round. As his daughter spoke, she left her seat, and coming up behind him, which he greatly delighted. Looking up at her now with a smile, he took in his own hand which was threading its fingers through the snowy locks, and, drawing her forward until her face met his own, said,—

"My dear, I want to talk to you about our boy. I don't think that you quite understand him."

"And you think that I am unkind and cross and unwise with him," said Miss Harriet, her pale face flushing as she spoke. "You are quite right. But father," and her voice faltered a little, "perhaps I try to bear with him more than you think I do, judging from the results of my efforts."

"I know you do, my dear; and I know how sorely he often tests your patience. I have noticed,—and I thanked for it now,—and he drew her face down upon his breast, and kissed it,—I have noticed that you have not reproached him for last night's escapade. It was better so, much better; reproaches would only have vexed and hardened him. But, my dear, if you could be more patient with the trifles, Charlie would, I think, be less headstrong and obstinate with regard to your wishes. You speak to him with the same severity when he fails through forgetfulness or carelessness to attend to some minor duty as you would use in blaming him for a heinous offence. Ah, Harriet, my dear, if you had seen the bright, eager, yet half-uncertain, deprecating face which caught my eye as Charlie sprang up the steps this evening, it would have grieved you to the soul, as it did me, to have hall, and to have heard the defiant tone in which he answered your summons to the tea-table. If I have any power in reading human faces, that boy came home penitent, and hopeful of a better future. I think that the sudden lighting of his face when he saw me was the promise of good things for us all. I may be wrong, my child, in my surmises; but the step with which he went up the stairs was painfully changed from that with which he bounded up to the piazza; and I doubt the face was as sadly changed as the tread."

"He must necessarily be checked in so many ways," the doctor went on, after a pause for an answer which he did not receive, "that if we reprove him for all his less grave faults, he will hardly hear us speak of anything but misdemeanours from week's end to week's end; and that will be very hard upon him, if he hates to be found fault with as much as his grandfather does. Suppose we try, my little girl,—and he stroked the dark hair already lightly touched with gray as tenderly as if she had been the little child he called her,—to pass over all these minor annoyances and irregularities indulgently and kindly."

"You would not have him grow up a rough, unpolished man, father?" said his daughter, lifting her head to look into the face of the courtly old gentleman, in whose eyes she knew that a breach of good manners was intolerable.

He took the upturned face in his hands, looking long into it before he answered her.

"Hattie," he said at last, and his voice was so deep and solemn that the tears rose in her eyes as they gazed into his, "if our boy grows up into a man who is worthy to be called a man at all, I shall feel that God has been very good to us. Let us help him, my dear, with all our strength, for the battle will be hard and long, and he is not fitted for the strife. With patient, helpful hands let us lead him up the difficult path; with glad, joyous voices let us welcome every advancing step; with lips quick to praise and slow to blame, let us cheer him on his toilsome way. For, Harriet, my dear, you and I do not know the strength of his temptations, nor the power of that evil life to which he has been trained."

Miss Harriet made no reply; but when, a little later, the doctor had gone out, she crept softly up to Charlie's room, and peeped cautiously in at the door. He was lying on the bed, as if he had thrown himself down in weariness, and had fallen asleep with one arm thrown carelessly above his head, the hand nestled in his brown curls. But as she stole nearer to him she saw that his face was flushed, and his hair lay in damp masses over his forehead, as if it had been tossed and disordered in a fit of impatience. She could easily imagine him wandering restlessly about his room, and finally flinging himself angrily down upon the bed, chafing and fretting against herself, and dropping off to sleep when his passion had spent itself. She had seen him in such turns before, and pathizing word or look. But to-night she was in a softer mood.

For a few moments she stood watching him with a grave, troubled face; then she bent down, and lifted the heavy hair touched it. The boy stirred and muttered in his sleep, and Miss Harriet sped away as if she were afraid to encounter the glance of his waking eyes. The touch had roused him about him; then rose, and with slow, hesitating movements, as if he had not quite decided whether to do so or not, began to prepare himself to go to bed in earnest.

But the short sleep in which he had fallen seemed to have broken his rest. Hour after hour he lay there, listening to the different sounds in the house until all was still. He heard the servants go up to their rooms; then his grandfather came in, very late; and, shortly after, Aunt Harriet, who always waited for him, went upstairs, leaving him below. Four hours he had lain there since at nine o'clock he had gone to that his grandfather was alone, and that he might go to him and tell him all that was in his heart, and there would be no one to disturb him. Should he go down? Should he resolve, once for all, to make a bold stand for the right, and ask his grandfather's help and counsel?

For more than an hour Dr. Mason had been sitting before the bright wood-fire in the library. The night was damp and cool, and coming in somewhat chilled and tired, he had put a match to the logs which lay ready on the hearth, and established himself before them to enjoy the soft warmth. As the silence of night had settled down over the house, his thoughts had gone up to the boy who lay in the room above him, asleep, as he supposed. He had turned over in his mind a hundred plans for his good, none of which seemed to fit the case in all its bearings; and, at last, with a sigh over his doubt and perplexity, he rose to go to his room. As he moved, he caught the sound of a step behind him, and turned quickly, somewhat startled, knowing that all the different members of the family had retired long ago.

"Charlie! Why, my son, what are you doing here at this time of night? It is nearly two o'clock."

"I know it, Grandpa; but I wanted to tell you—I wanted to say—Oh, Grandpa, I'm so sorry I am so bad!"

Dr. Mason laid his hand on the boy's head as he bent it to hide his quivering face; but he did not say a word to stay the tide of his repentant grief. After a little, he drew him to the sofa, sitting down beside him there, but still he did not speak. By and by, Charlie lifted up his face, and glanced timidly at him. He was looking steadily at the bright logs on the hearth, beating gently with one hand upon the arm of the sofa, and did not turn to meet the troubled eyes which were raised toward him.

"Do believe me, Grandpa; I am true this time," faltered the boy. "I can't say 'on my word,' nor 'on my honour,' for you think I have neither; but I do mean what I say. Oh, Grandpa, do look at me, and listen to me."

"Listen to you, my son," said Dr. Mason, as if wakening from a reverie. "My heart has been listening for you all day long, Charlie."

He laid his hand on his head again, and bending it a little back, looked down into his face.

"Believe you!" he said. "Oh, if you only knew how I long to believe you! And I do; yes, I do, my boy. You cannot mean to deceive me now, I know you cannot."

Charlie nestled close within the clasp of the arm which was thrown around him. Neither spoke for a few moments. The boy broke the silence at length by asking abruptly—

"Grandpa, would it cost a great deal of money to send me away to some school where they look out pretty smartly for the fellows?"

"No," said Dr. Mason, very much surprised. "Do you want to go to boarding-school?"

"I want to go away," replied Charlie, speaking very slowly. "At least, I want to try my very best to do right; and I think I'd do better away from all the fellows I've been cutting up with, and away from—from Aunt Harriet," he broke out bluntly. "I don't mean to excuse myself," he went on rapidly, "for I know I'm as bad as I can be; but I do think, Grandpa, that it's a great deal harder for a fellow to do right in great things, when he's dinned at from morning till night about a whole pile of little things that he can't possibly remember. I'm sorry I plague her so sometimes; but then again, to tell the real truth, I'm often glad of it, and just run foul of her to torment her. But, anyway, it keeps me in a fret all the while; and then there are all those fellows that I've got in with, too, as I said before. If I could be away from them, I think I'd run a better chance of—of—keeping up your faith in me. That's what's the matter with me, Grandpa. I heard you tell Aunt Harriet that you would never despair of me; and you shan't; indeed, indeed, you shan't."

As the head which had been lifted from his shoulder as the boy spoke, nestled down again to its place, Dr. Mason stroked it tenderly.

"What put this idea into your mind?" he asked. "Was it your own thought?"

Charlie coloured with the sudden appreciation of the distress which his first plan would have brought to his grandfather.

"It's rather a long story," said he; "but I'd like to tell you about the whole day, if you're not too tired to listen."

"I would sit up until sunrise to know what you have thought and felt to-day," said the doctor.

So the story was told; how, lying beneath the old willow, he had heard the conversation between his grandfather and his aunt, and how it had touched him to the very heart to find that, bitter as had been his grandfather's grief over his sin, he could yet trust in him; how, vexed with Aunt Harriet, he had deliberately disobeyed her; how, delighted with his own plan for a new and better life, he had gone with it to Hattie Raymond for her sympathy and aid, and how she had disappointed him and changed his purpose; how he had come home penitent, and eager at once to give his grandfather the comfort of knowing that he was both sorrowful and hopeful; and how he had yet, on slight temptation, yielded to his pride and passion.

Nothing was hidden, veiled, or even extenuated. Dr. Mason, sitting beside him, looking steadily down into the upturned, earnest face, saw that, for once at least, the boy was telling the whole truth.

The morning light was breaking in the east when the story was ended.

"See," said the doctor, a smile rippling the grave lines of his face as Charlie ceased speaking; there is my hope in you, Charlie. So far it has been but a grey, misty light struggling against the surrounding darkness; but it is brightening now; and, tended by the Master's careful hand, will kindle into the glory of the perfect day. May 'He who hath begun a good work in you, perfect it unto the end.'"

(To be Continued)

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