

CHOICE LITERATURE.

THROUGH THE WINTER.

CHAPTER XIX.—Continued.

Not more closely had Helen watched the fire while speaking than Dr. Waldermar watched her. He contented himself with asking, quietly:

"Do you regret this change very much, Miss Helen?"

"I did," she answered, truthfully. "It was very hard to consent to it at first; and now, when I think of all we are leaving, and of how we are all to be parted, it seems very sad. But changes we do not make for ourselves, and that we have no power to hasten or prevent, must be ordered and meant for us, I think; and so," and she looked at the doctor with an April face, in which smiles contended with shadows, "I am trying to feel that it is all right, all best as it is. I think I would not mind leaving Quinneccoco so much if we could only all stay together; it is when I think of my brothers that I feel as if I cannot bear it; and then," and her voice grew sadder, "I can feel glad when I remember Ronald, and think how safe he is."

"Yes," Dr. Waldermar answered, "at home in the Father's house, to go no more out forever, Ronald is safe. But why do you feel so very anxious for Philip and Fred, Miss Helen?"

She looked at him as if surprised at his question.

"It is hard for me to answer," she said; "but I think you must know. The world is so full of dangers and temptation; and they are only boys, and thrown upon themselves so early without a home, without a mother; how can I feel sure that they will fight a good fight?"

"Miss Helen, if you can only believe, only feel sure of the things that you can see and handle, then I agree with you. You can see and handle, then I agree with. You can feel sure of nothing respecting your brothers' future, and you have perhaps, as much to fear as to hope. But if you believe that you have a Father in heaven, watching with tender, ceaseless vigilance over your brothers' lives and your own, then I think you may dismiss every fear, for you have everything to hope. I have been a school-boy myself, Miss Helen," he said, kindly; "it is by the light of my own experience that I now read the future of your brothers. Believe me, school-life, for even a young boy, is far from being the unmitigated evil your imagination is picturing it."

The door opened suddenly and Sibyl came running in, carrying something in her apron with great care.

"Helen," she cried, eagerly, "see; just see my beautiful kittens. Dr. Waldermar," as the gentleman caught and drew her to him, "don't hurt them, don't hurt them. will you?"

"Not for the world," he answered, with an earnestness equal to her own; and very cautiously Sibyl loosened the corners of her apron, and revealed three fluffy, downy snow-balls, that, but for their quivering, trembling motion, might have been mistaken for soft masses of cotton, instead of the kittens Sibyl so proudly proclaimed them.

"Helen," she asked, after her treasures had been duly admired and petted; "Helen, do you think Aunt Sarah will raise if we take these kitties with us when we go there?"

Helen's low sigh did not escape Dr. Waldermar's attentive ear.

"I don't know, dear," she said; "but I am afraid they would be a trouble there; you must love and play with them all you can before we go."

Sibyl's rosy lips assumed a very decided pout.

"I sha'n't do it, Helen," she said, emphatically. "Do you suppose God made these kitties for me just to love them a little while, and then, when they would know and miss me, leave them? They are my kitties, and I must take care of them, and if Aunt Sarah won't have them, she sha'n't have me, either."

And with a toss of her golden curls that plainly said there was no estimating the direful loss that would, in the latter case, befall Aunt Sarah, Sibyl turned to Dr. Waldermar and began to stroke the soft fur of the kitten in his hand.

"Wouldn't you be very sorry yourself, Miss Sibyl, not to go to your Aunt Sarah's?" he asked, playfully: "don't you want to see her very much?"

"No," said the uncompromising little truth-teller, and with all her faults Sibyl was really that; "no, I don't want to go. I've seen her 'nough times."

It was impossible not to smile at the child's frankness, and encouraged by Dr. Waldermar's look of amusement, and coolly disregarding Helen's warning, the little girl went on, giving him her deepest confidence:

"I don't like Aunt Sarah," she said; "she's prim and thin, just like a bean-pole, Matsie says, and she wears specs, and she's always looking for dust and dirt, and if you look for them you'll always find them, Fred says, and when she finds them she scowls, and draws up her mouth, and says, 'Oh, dear,' just like this."

And Sibyl contracted her pretty forehead, and pursed her lips, and whined forth the words with a mimicry very comical, if not very praiseworthy.

"Sibyl! Sibyl!" Helen said, earnestly.

And Dr. Waldermar, who, though he had his own private reason for being glad of her confidence, yet felt it was wrong to encourage her in any spoken or acted disrespect towards her aunt, tried gently to stop her.

"There, Miss Sibyl, I know all about it now," he said, as he kissed her.

But Sibyl had the floor, and was not inclined to leave it until she had fully relieved her mind.

"No, I don't like her," she repeated, with still more emphasis. "She's always saying little girls should be seen and not heard; and little children should never speak until they are spoken to—as if I always wanted to wait for that—and then Helen," and here Sibyl drooped her voice and and looked very seriously at the doctor, "she's always scolding H. . . . cause she don't do things just as she did

when she was a girl: and she used to make Helen cry almost every day when she was here. No, I don't like her: Matsie says, pur—pur—purgatory would be a paradise to living with her, and I guess it will."

And with this clear statement of her opinion Sibyl suddenly became conscious that her kittens wanted attention, and picking them up, walked off with them in triumph.

If over some portion of Sibyl's story Dr. Waldermar had been compelled to smile, the last bit of information left him very grave indeed. There was no smile on his face as his eyes met Helen's, and he looked more displeased than she had ever seen him look before.

"I am very sorry for what Sibyl has said," she began, and stopped in great distress.

"I am not," Dr. Waldermar answered, gravely. "I shall always love the child better for the confidence she has given me to-day."

Then, as he saw how pained Helen looked, his manner changed.

"Can you not trust me with this little bit of Sibyl's mind, Miss Helen? Can you not trust me?" he asked again. "Miss Helen, I do not like to waste my thoughts on things that are not worth while, but before I promise to place this matter under that head, will you answer one little question for me? Will you tell me frankly, as a true friend, whether it is your own choice to go to your aunt or not?"

Helen would much rather not have answered that question; but she could not refuse to do so when Dr. Waldermar was looking at her with eyes whose very kindness compelled her to trust him.

"It is papa's wish," she said, simply; and he did not need more words to tell him how little voice the daughter had had in the matter.

"Thank you," he answered in his usual quiet way. "Miss Helen, is all that china to go back into the closet to-night?"

Helen looked first at him, then at the table with its piles of dishes, and then at the disordered shelves of the closet, and laughed.

"I had forgotten all about it," she said, frankly. And Dr. Waldermar rose up to say good-bye.

"I see it is," he said, with a smile, "and under such circumstances it would be cruel for me to detain you longer. My mother will come to see you to-morrow."

In the pleasant light of the march afternoon Dr. Waldermar rode thoughtfully home; and once there, instead of stopping to rest in the library, walked immediately upstairs.

His low tap on his mother's door was answered by her gentle "Come in," and entering, he dropped wearily down on the sofa by her side, in the glad, restful certainty of one who knew that comfort and counsel were not awaiting there.

Mrs. Waldermar dropped the light work with which she was occupied, and turned with hand and smile to welcome him.

"Are you very tired, Guy?" she asked, as her hand rested fondly on his head; "did you have a pleasant call?"

"Yes," Dr. Waldermar answered.

"Suppose you tell me about it," Mrs. Waldermar said, softly.

"I don't know what you can do unless you consent to adopt another daughter."

"Well," Mrs. Waldermar replied, with undisturbed composure, "as I am not yet in the uncomfortable position of the old woman who lived in a shoe, I don't know that the addition of one, or even two daughters to my family would distress me much. But let us talk frankly with each other, Guyon; quit giving me conundrums to guess, and tell me plainly all that is on your mind."

A long and earnest conversation followed; plans were formed, arrangements made, and promises given.

The next day Mrs. Waldermar's carriage was seen waiting a long time before Mr. Humphrey's office; and when that gentleman went home at night, it was with a brighter face and pleasanter smile than he had worn for many days.

"Did Mrs. Waldermar call here this afternoon, Helen?" he asked his daughter at tea-time.

"Only for a few minutes, papa; it was quite late, and she could not stay; but she asked me to take tea with her to-morrow."

"Yes, that is well," Mr. Humphrey replied, contentedly, as he sipped his own tea. "You promised to go, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, if you did not object."

"I? certainly not. Friends like the Waldermars are not quite as plentiful in this world as the clouds in a March sky. You cannot care too much for them, nor see them too often."

Helen's eyes sparkled at her father's generous praise of her friends, but the smile was quickly followed by a sigh, as she remembered how little time remained for her to enjoy their society, and how soon to them, as well as to her old home and nearest earthly kin, she must say good-bye.

It was the evening for the weekly prayer-meeting, and with a longing for comfort, a painful consciousness of her own insufficiency to meet life's changes and bear life's trials, Helen went with Philip.

A stranger was in the pulpit; one Helen had never seen before, was never to see again; but the Bible-words he had chosen as the theme for the evening meditation came to her as a special message from her Father in heaven.

Early in the afternoon of the next day Helen started for Mrs. Waldermar's. She went alone; Sibyl, for once, preferring to remain at home, because, as she said, the packing of Celestine Angelica's trunk took so much time she should never get it done if she didn't make a beginning; and, having decided to make a beginning that afternoon, she was not to be moved from her purpose by the prospect of a visit, however pleasant.

It was seldom Helen left her, and it was with a feeling of regret that she kissed her good-bye that afternoon.

But once out-doors, with the spring air fanning her cheeks and promises of spring all around her, in the ground on which

she trod, and in the sky to which she looked, Helen could not feel sad.

"How well you look!" Margaret said, as she met her at the door, and led her into the parlor. "I wanted to send the carriage for you, but Guy wouldn't let me; he said the walk would be just what you needed; and I really believe you were right, Guy," the impulsive girl added, as she turned to her brother.

He smiled as he shook hands with Helen. "I didn't think Miss Helen could afford to lose, and I didn't want her to lose, the exquisite pleasure and joy in the consciousness of life that comes to one when out-doors in these early spring days," he said quietly.

"Why, isn't the pleasure just as great at other seasons?" Margaret asked, as she tossed Helen's wrappings on to the sofa.

"Maybe so, but to my mind there is a fullness, a newness of life about the spring-time, no other season has."

"'Tis as easy now for the heart to be true,
As for grass to be green or skies to be blue.
'Tis the natural way of living."

Miss Helen, and he turned to Helen, who had been speaking to Mrs. Waldermar, and now was standing before the cheery wood-fire, "will you be kind enough to do for me what my arm will not allow me to do for you—bring that chair here and sit down?"

With a smile and blush Helen brought the chair to which he pointed, and sat down. She looked happy, but of words she appeared to have very few, and for a while she was suffered to rest in quiet, while her friends showed their pleasure in her company more by their looks and gentle attentions than by their questions. But this could not last long.

"Helen," Margaret asked, suddenly, "have you the least idea how glad—how very glad—we are to see you to-day?"

Helen smiled. "I think I have, Margie," she said, quietly; "perhaps, by my own gladness, I can interpret yours."

Margaret's sweet laugh echoed through the room.

"No, you cannot, you cannot," she said: "that's a very pretty answer, my dear, but it is as far from being the truth, as this March day is from being June, though Guy," and she glanced mischievously at her brother, "does apply a June description to it. You are going away very soon, aren't you, Helen?"

"Yes," was all Helen answered.

"And then you know you'll have to say goodbye to us all, don't you?"

Helen's bright face had changed, and her "Yes" came this time slowly and reluctantly.

"Margaret," Dr. Waldermar exclaimed, sternly, as he started up, "what are you about?"

"Nothing—keep still, Guy—mamma said I might—"

Margaret answered, in quick, hurried words.

"Helen," and she knelt down by Helen's chair, and twining her arms round her, kissed her fondly again and again, "I said you couldn't begin to know how glad we are to-day, and I am sure you don't feel as glad; because, Helen, you think you are going away, and going to say good-bye to us, and we know that you are not going to say good-bye—you are not going to leave us. Helen, you are going to live with us always, and be mamma's daughter and my sister, and oh, I am so glad! so glad!"

Helen had listened to Margaret's first words in utter amazement, but as the affectionate girl went on with her revelations her head drooped, and when Margaret ceased she was weeping violently.

"Margaret, how could you?" Dr. Waldermar said, reprovingly, as he started to go to the weeping girl.

But it was Mrs. Waldermar who put them both by and folded Helen in her own motherly arms.

"Mamma said I might tell her, Guy," Margaret said, with tears in her own eyes; "and I thought she would be so glad. Helen," and she knelt by her again, "won't you speak to me? won't you tell me you are glad?"

Helen raised her head and looked first at Mrs. Waldermar and then at Margaret.

"Is it true?" she asked. "I don't think I understood."

"Yes, you did, Helen," Margaret answered, joyfully; "and it is all true. Mamma, tell her."

"Yes, it is true, Helen," Mrs. Waldermar said, with great tenderness, as she kissed her. "You are to be my child now; your father has promised to give Sibyl and you to me when he leaves Quinneccoco. Look up, dear, and tell us, as Margaret says, if you are glad."

Glad! Was it possible for that little word of four letters to express Helen's joy? Was it not all a delusion? would it not prove the idle fancy of a dreamy moment? could it be true that she was really going to belong to them? Instead of the separation she had dreaded, was she to be drawn more closely to them? Instead of the cold, unsympathetic protection of her aunt, was she henceforth to be shielded by their tender care?

Yes, it was all true. The very pressure of Mrs. Waldermar's arms as she held her said so, and with one glance into her smiling face, Helen put her arms around her neck, and, resting her head on her shoulder, sobbed like a child for very fullness of content and joy.

Fortunately tears of gladness, like April showers, are soon dried; and in a few moments Helen was able to look up, and with smiles and grateful words assure Margaret of her pleasure in the new arrangement.

"We are to be sisters now, you know, Helen," Margaret said, in evident delight and pride; "and Guy will be your brother just as much as he is mine. There, Helen," Margaret said, "let us sit down and talk things over calmly."

And, suiting her actions to her words, Margaret gently pushed Helen back into her chair, and sat down by her in a bird-like flutter of interest and pleasure; and with all the freedom and sweetness of a bird she chattered for a while giving full vent to her own bright hopes and anticipations for the future, and not minding—in truth scarcely knowing—that Helen was very silent.

It was all so strange, so sudden to Helen, she longed to