

## \* \* The Story Page \* \*

### Bessie's Sunday Dress.

BY EMMA C. DOWD.

Bessie longed to wear her Sunday dress to school. The more she thought about it the more she wanted to wear it. It was a very pretty dress of fine white material, with ruffles round the bottom and a yoke of embroidery and lace. But Bessie felt sure that her mother would not consent to her wearing it to school. There were to be visitors that day, Molly Waite's mother and grown-up sister, and foolish little Bessie thought it would be a fine thing to appear in her pretty dress. She was anxious to see Molly's mother and sister, for they had recently come from Paris where she had heard that very beautiful dresses were made, and she expected that they would wear something very different from what she had ever seen. So Bessie kept thinking about her Sunday dress, and trying to plan some way to wear it.

"After breakfast her mother said, 'Run upstairs, Bessie, and get ready for school!' and she went slowly up to her own room, thinking hard all the way.

Bessie opened her closet door, and took down her white dress. Its beauty decided her—she must wear it to school! She took the scissors from her little work-basket, and ripped three buttons off the back of her blue gingham. A pretty pink muslin hung next. She hesitated a moment and pinched up a bit of the front breadth with both hands, and pulled hard. She meant to tear only a little place, but the muslin was tender and a long rent was the result. She looked at it in dismay, but there was no time to mourn. The next hook held a light percale, a plain little frock of last year's fashion, but clean and whole. Bessie ran to her inkstand, intending to fling only a tiny dot of ink on the waist, but the pen held more than she supposed, and it made several ugly blotches. Bessie hastily hung the dress in its place. Then she took off the old brown gingham she had on, and which was too worn to be fit for school, and, arrayed in her white dress, she edged cautiously down the stairs. She hoped to get out of the front door without seeing anyone, but her mother was dusting the hall, and there was no escape for her. Mrs. Stroughton looked in astonishment at the little figure coming down the stairs.

Bessie's cheeks were very bright, as she said, "I had to wear my Sunday dress today, because there's something the matter with all my school ones. The blue gingham has some buttons off, the pink one is torn, and I got some spots on my percale, so this was the only one left for me to wear."

The mother looked searchingly at her little girl, and then said, "I am sorry. Well, you'd better stay at home today, for this isn't suitable for a school dress. Go into the parlor and amuse yourself until I call you. Nora will be sweeping the library and dining room, but you will get no dust in the parlor."

At first Bessie was rather pleased to be allowed to stay at home from school; still she was very sorry not to see Molly's mother and sister, and, after a time, she grew tired of the amusements the parlor afforded. She looked the books through. There were not many pictures in them. She wearied of drumming on the piano. At last she peeped into the library.

"Shut the door!" called her mother; "I don't want any dust to get into the parlor."

It was the longest forenoon that Bessie had ever known. At dinner time, her mother came in bringing a small tray.

"You'd better have your dinner in here," she said. "I didn't bring you any gravy, for fear you'd get some on your dress."

Then she went away, and Bessie, whom something had kept from speaking, looked at the tray, there were meat and potatoes, bread and butter, and a glass of milk. No dessert, though Bessie knew there was to have been tapioca pudding. A few tears trickled down her cheeks as she ate her dinner. It was not the kind of day she had expected when she had put on that dress.

Nora came and took away the dishes, and Bessie was again left with nothing to do. She was very miserable. She did not like to think of those dresses up in her closet; her white dress began to look hateful through her tears.

After a while her mother opened the door. The blue gingham and pink muslin lay over her arm. She carried Bessie's work-basket.

"I think you had better mend these," her mother said, "so that you will have something to wear to school tomorrow."

"I—I don't know how to darn," faltered Bessie. "I will show you," was the reply.

But the needle which went in and out so smoothly in the other fingers, seemed to take delight in following crooked ways when transferred to the small, unskilled hand. The thread knicked and knotted and broke, until the girl got tired out, almost with a sob, "I can never do it; I know I can't!"

The mother's gentle fingers smoothed out the muslin and straightened the thread, and Bessie went to work again, but it took a long part of that bright sunny afternoon to put the torn muslin into wearable condition. When, at last, it was completed, the little girl looked at it with many misgivings, for the darn was in the most conspicuous part of the skirt, and she wished—oh, how she wished!—that she had never made the mending needful.

When the buttons had been sewed on, her mother said, "Go upstairs and put on your brown gingham, and we'll see what can be done with the ink spots on the percale."

Bessie was glad enough to get off the new dress that had grown so unpleasant in its suggestions, but somehow she did not feel much happier in the old brown gingham.

In the kitchen she spent an hour or two with her mother, in learning how to extract ink from cotton, and not until the waist was free from stain and smoothly ironed was she released.

"That looks very well," said the mother. "You may go now, Bessie."

But Bessie was in no haste to leave. She hung round the kitchen, watching her mother, who was making rolls for tea. Finally she went straight to her mother's side.

"Mother," she began, "I—I ripped off those buttons."

"Yes, dear," was the gentle response.

"And I tore the muslin, and spotted the percale on purpose."

"Yes, Bessie, I know."

"Oh, mother," sobbed the little girl, "I am so sorry!"

"So am I, dear. It has been a hard day for both of us, hasn't it? But we are not going to have any more such days. Now run up to your room and get ready to see father when he comes home. He missed his little girl this noon very much."

The next day Bessie wore her blue gingham to school, and Molly's mother and grown-up sister were there, but, if they were Paris gowns, Bessie didn't know it, for she couldn't tell any difference between them and the kind the other little girls' mothers and sisters wore.—Sunday School Visitor.

### The Reason Why

BY LYDIA L. ROUSE.

"I wish, mother mine, that you would not consider yourself bound to help all the poor women in our town. I am getting tired of seeing you come in so weary that you are almost ill."

The speaker was a beautiful young girl, who sat reading in a luxurious chair, in a pretty sitting-room.

Frank Alcott, her brother, a bright boy of fifteen, sat near. He too, had been reading, but, hearing his sister's remark, he dropped his book and joined her in protesting against his mother's anxious care of certain poor families in their vicinity.

"I think, as Grace does, that we ought to have something to say about this. A fellow doesn't want to see his mother tire herself out for people who would as soon rough it as not. They are ungrateful, no matter how much one does for them. There is old Mrs. Hardy. You sent me to her house the other day with a pitcher of nice hot beef-tea, and she said, snappishly, 'Sit it down.' It was little thanks I got."

"Yes," added Grace, "and yesterday, when I took that lovely warm wrapper to Mrs. Stowell, she looked it over, then said: 'It is nice, very nice, but I wish it had been drab-colored.'"

"Didn't she so much as thank you?" asked Frank.

"Yes, she thanked me. But the idea of her finding fault with the color! Mother would better take her shopping and let her make her own selection the next time she gives her a dress."

Mrs. Alcott smiled and said: Of course she preferred drab. It was thoughtless in me to forget it. I knew that the dear old lady is a Quakeress."

"You always find some way to blame yourself, mother. I think that poor people should take what is given them and accept it gratefully, instead of being choosers."

"That is what I say, Grace," responded her brother.

Mrs. Alcott did not reply to these remarks of her children, but there was a perceptible quivering of her lips. Both Grace and Frank saw it, and spoke together. "We did not mean to hurt your feelings, mother."

"I know it, my dear children, but I wish that you would cease to speak of the poor as if they had no fine feelings, as if anything is good enough for them. It is only because we are more highly favored than they are that we can give them help."

"I have a story to tell which may help you decide this question. Not many years ago a young widow was suddenly thrown upon her own resources. She had been the only child of fond parents, who had shielded their daughter from labor and from every anxious care. Con-

sequently she was not able to do anything particularly well.

"The daughter's marriage was an early and a happy one, and when, a few years later, the parents died, they were comforted concerning her, for they believed that she would always be tenderly cared for by her faithful husband."

There was a long pause, and again the quivering mouth told the son and daughter that the mother was telling the story of one in whom she was deeply interested. At length she went on, "I must pass over some years, happy they were, but following them came death, bringing the desolation of widowhood, and with it the knowledge that poverty stared her in the face. She had two children in whom her life was centered, and for their sakes she tried to forget the dark grave which held her husband, and made an effort to be cheerful."

"It was a vain attempt, for as the dainty little garments became thin and faded and the little shoes wore out, without means of replacing them, her heart ached too much for smiles. Nor was this all. Food was scanty and the children were cold as well as hungry. Former friends of the family said, 'It is too bad; it is a sad case,' but they offered no assistance. Perhaps they thought the widow would resent offered help."

"So passed two long years. Hard application to the homely task of plain sewing kept the family from starvation. At the end of that time there came a change. A good, motherly woman came to the one-roomed home to leave some work, and seeing at a glance that the little group was hunger-wasted and the mother utterly hopeless, she went to the disconsolate woman, and, putting her arms about her, said: 'Poor little sister! You are scarcely more than a child yourself, and yet you are crushed with care and trouble. Take your children and come home with me. Do not hesitate; I have some means and I am alone in the world. I was helped once, and now I see an opportunity to help in turn.'

"There was no need of a second bidding. A great, warm heart had acknowledged the sisterhood of women. The world did not seem so cold and dreary. The pressure of the tender, loving arms had won the widow's heart, and she followed her newly-found friend to her comfortable home, leading her shivering children through the chill and gloom of a winter twilight into warmth and light and plenty."

"Now rest till you are yourself again," were the welcome words which greeted the poor woman's ears as she settled herself in an easy chair, and never was rest sweeter. A new day had dawned for them, and the dark night of sorrow slowly receded from the memory of the children. But the widow has never forgotten that time, and she never will."

There was another pause in the story, and then the mother continued: "There is more to tell, more credit to give to the generous-hearted old lady who opened her home to the friendless ones. She saw some lines in which the widow had given expression to her sorrow, and she said: 'They are very sad, but they show talent. You could write for publication, perhaps. If you will make the attempt, I will provide for you and the children. You can only fail at the worst. Try it.'

"You are so good," was all that was said in reply, but the matter did not drop there. There were many disappointments, yet in the end the plan succeeded. Now the widow lives in a comfortable home of her own and she is able to help others. This she tries to do, for this reason: she has known the bitterness of want and the blessedness of a friend in need."

When the story was ended, Grace and Frank exchanged glances, and Frank said:

"Mother, were you that poor woman?"

Mrs. Alcott bowed her head in reply and slipped out of the room.—Christian Intelligencer.

### Johnnie's Picnic.

An Incident from Life.

BY J. FRED SMITH.

"Are you going to the picnic? Why, Johnnie, you've left your shoes at home?"

"Yes, I'm going, Billie," said Johnnie bravely, as he hurried on toward the big wagons.

Billie stopped to speak to Jimmie Wilson, and let Johnnie go on alone. When he thought he would not be overheard, he said to Jimmie:

"He wouldn't go if I was superintendent of the Sunday school. It isn't nice for boys to go barefoot to picnics." He then looked with childish pride at his nice shoes and stockings.

"That's so," answered the other, trailing along. "I pose we speak to Mr. White about it; he may not see Johnny in the crowd. My mother'd be shocked to have me ride with a barefooted boy through town."

Billie assented, and they hurried round to the side of the hall to speak to the superintendent before the school

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