

Blythe's Message

('Zion's Herald,')

Ester Vane sat in a sheltered nook a little apart from the groups that were scattered over the beach. There were sharp lines of pain chiseled on the face that was turned toward the ever-restless sea with a look that seemed to sympathize with its unrest. A pair of crutches lying in the sand beside her explained the look of longing in the rebellious gray eyes.

As a gay little group of young people drew near she dropped her eyes frowningly upon her book, but nevertheless her sensitive nerves could feel their curious and pitying glance as they passed by. The frown deepened between her eyes. Why couldn't they leave her one little quiet nook in peace? Why must they mock her with their health and strength, and torture her with their pity and curiosity?

As their voices died away she leaned back in her invalid's chair once more and idly watched the tossing waves. It was almost her one occupation through the long, weary days. She could not interest herself in the light forms of fancy work that she was able to do; even books failed to take her out of herself. She shrank from all contact with the people about her. Every look of pity or of compassion seemed like a blow to her. Often some kindly-disposed person would stop for a few moments' chat with her, but she invariably withdrew within herself and soon chilled the friendly intention.

This day the burden of life had seemed more unbearable than ever. The pathos of the restless longing in the grey eyes grew deeper as they roved over the wide expanse of the sea. Why was she cut off from every pleasure in life, from all usefulness, from all hope or ambition? Ever since she was a child that tragic 'why' had been the cry of her soul.

By-and-bye a slight sound attracted her attention, and she turned toward the intruder with a frown. A merry little face framed in wind-tossed curls looked up into her own. The sight of the two tiny crutches on which the little figure leaned changed the frown on Ester's face into a deeper look of pain. She looked in some wonder at the happy little face. How could that face and those crutches go together? 'Poor child!' she thought, compassionately, 'she doesn't realize yet what a dreary life she has to face, tied to those crutches.'

The little one settled herself comfortably on the sand near to Ester, evidently quite confident of a welcome. At her throat she wore a pin formed of a slender gold wire fashioned into a name. Ester mechanically noticed it. 'Blythe! What a mockery,' she thought, 'to name a crippled child Blythe!'

'Aren't you glad it's such a nice day?' Blythe observed presently.

Ester did not answer for a moment, and the discontented lines deepened about her mouth as her eyes wandered from the bright, glittering, beautiful waves to the happy, merry groups scattered about the shore; but the beauty and the brightness only seemed to mock her own dreariness.

'Aren't you glad?' persisted the small questioner.

'I never was glad.' Ester could not keep the hard ring out of her voice.

The blue eyes searched her face wonderingly, then slowly travelled down to the despised crutches lying in the sand. She

reached out a thin little hand and touched the polished wood gently. 'Is that why you aren't glad?' she asked softly.

Ester nodded.

Blythe did not answer at once. A shadow seemed to have fallen over her own bright little face; but it was the shadow of another's pain, and not her own. 'I didn't use to be glad either,—at first, you know,' she said at last.

'But now you are glad?' There was a sharp note of longing in Ester's voice.

Blythe looked up with a happy light in her eyes. 'Oh, yes,' she exclaimed, 'I'm always happy now since I know that God sent me my crutches.'

'God sent you your crutches?' The hard, rebellious look deepened on Ester's face. But Blythe did not notice it this time. She was looking dreamily off over the sea.

'I'll tell you about it,' she said, presently. 'It was awful at first, you know, when I knew that I couldn't ever run and play any more, or anything; and I just screamed and cried all the time. Mamma couldn't do anything with me. I'd just think, think, all the time how awful it was going to be to just go round on crutches all my life, and I'd think of all the lovely things I'd planned to do when I grew up, and now I couldn't ever do any of 'em; and I couldn't go to sleep nights for thinking of it, and I cried and cried all the time. They brought all kinds of nice things for me to eat and pretty things for me to play with, but I wouldn't look at any of them. And the little girls all came to see me, but I wouldn't speak to any of them—I'd just turn my face to the wall and cry on.'

Ester's eyes were wet; she understood the feeling only too well.

'But one day Auntie came,' Blythe went on. 'Auntie and I had always been great chums, you know. She knows everything, I guess; and she always has time to tell you about it, no matter how busy she is. She was away when I got hurt, and didn't return for weeks. I tell you I was glad when she came; for some way nothing ever seemed quite so bad after you'd talked it over with her. She just held me in her arms a long time and let me cry all I wanted to. By-and-by she said she wished to show me something, and she took this pretty pearl out of a little case; then she told me all about the poor oyster that made the pearl—how he had been hurt, maybe by a big grain of sand getting into his shell and irritating him; so he just covered it with this beautiful pearl. And if it hadn't been for his getting hurt, the pearl never would have been made. Then Auntie said that may be my crutches were like that little grain of sand, and God had sent them to me for some beautiful reason. She had this little pearl set in a ring for me, so I'd always remember about it. I never have hated my crutches since then the way I used to; and I'm always wondering what they mean.'

Ester sat looking thoughtfully at the little pearl ring with the old questioning look still in her eyes.

Blythe sprang up in answer to a call, and nodding a merry good-bye, she flitted away on the little crutches. Ester watched the tiny figure until it disappeared from sight, then she turned her eyes back to the sea once more; but the story of the little pearl stayed in her mind, and would not be forgotten.

As the days went by she found herself watching for Blythe's little figure and listening for the click of her tiny crutches.

She watched her sweet, unselfish ways. She noticed how every face brightened as she drew near, how the most surly had a smile for her, and the busiest found a moment in which to do a service for her. She seemed to bring out the best in every one with whom she came in contact. 'Dear child, she has indeed transformed her affliction into precious pearl,' she at last admitted.

But it took a long battle even after that before she was at last willing to say, 'Father, I take these crutches from thy hand; I believe thou hast given them to me for a purpose, and thou canst transform them.'

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