

CHOISE LITERATURE.

THROUGH THE WINTER.

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

Late in the afternoon, while she sat alone with her sewing brooding over her perplexities, a lady called—a Mrs. Waldermar—who the summer before had purchased a cottage in Quinsecoco, and liked her life there so well that, instead of returning to the city when the first cold winds blew, she decided to remain for the winter. She had been very kind during Mrs. Humphrey's illness, calling frequently to inquire after her, and sending baskets of flowers and fruit to refresh her. But Helen, though she had seen her often and felt very grateful to her, did not feel that she knew her, and it was with a shy, embarrassed manner that she went forward to meet and welcome her. She did not like to meet strangers; she shrank with a nervous dread from doing so; and did not regard Mrs. Waldermar as a friend and a neighbour, but rather as a strange city lady, between whom and herself there could be nothing in common. She was mistaken, as we so often are, in our first impressions and opinions of people and things. Through all her after years Helen looked back to her first conversation with Mrs. Waldermar as to a golden hour in her life. "She came to me very much as the angel came to Hagar in the wilderness," she said once to a friend. "And she helped me to see that humble though my life might be, it was still one over which God watched, and one for which He would never forget to provide the well in the wilderness, or the sheltering shrub in the desert."

"You look pale, my dear. are you well?" Mrs. Waldermar asked in gentle, motherly tones, as she took the young girl's hand and drew her kindly to a seat by her side. There was something in the lady's tone and manner that reminded Helen of her mother, and her eyes were misty with unshed tears, her voice faltering as she said:

"I am quite well, thank you."

It was all she could say; she found it hard to utter even that little sentence, for the touch of a hand so like her mother's, and yet not hers, had awakened a host of bitter-sweet memories that bowed her head and almost broke her heart.

Yet she shrank sensitively from letting another, and a stranger, see her grief, and struggled bravely for composure.

Mrs. Waldermar saw it all; she had a daughter of her own, and her heart yearned over the motherless girl; tenderly she drew her closer and brushed back her hair, but she did not speak for a few moments; then she said softly:

"As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you," saith the Lord. My dear Helen, is there no balm for you in that precious promise?"

"Sometimes," Helen answered through her tears.

"But not always—not to-day?" Mrs. Waldermar questioned, in a low, sweet voice.

"I am very weak to-day," Helen said, timidly. "I miss mamma so much, and I make so many mistakes. It is so hard to do right, and often I do not even know what is the right thing for me to do."

"Trust me, Helen, and let me help you if I can; will you, my dear?"

"You have helped me already," Helen answered, gratefully. "I thank you for coming, Mrs. Waldermar."

"I am glad," Mrs. Waldermar said, kindly; "but, my dear, are you alone now? Isn't your aunt with you? I heard she was."

"Aunt Sarah left several days ago; I am housekeeper now, Mrs. Waldermar."

"My poor child, I do not wonder you are tired," Mrs. Waldermar said, compassionately; "but, Helen, I think you have been trying to-day to bear your burdens alone. You will not do that again. I know of but one way in which to live and work in this world, without tiring or growing discouraged: and that is by leaning hard on Him who says, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' Do you remember this, Helen?"

"When obstacles and trials seem
Like prison walls to be,
I do the little I can do,
And leave the rest to thee."

That is the language of a trusting heart, my dear; of a heart that can work without fainting, and rest in the midst of its hard working."

"That is beautiful," Helen said; "but, Mrs. Waldermar, do you think we always have a right to rest upon the promises? I don't dare to; it sometimes seems like mockery."

"Mockery, perhaps, in those who are not His children, and do not seek to do His will," Mrs. Waldermar answered thoughtfully, "but never in His children. I am a mother, Helen; I know how a parent feels. I know how tender we are, how easy to be pleased, how ready to forgive, when we know how our children love, and want to serve and please us, though in their efforts to do so they make many mistakes, fail utterly sometimes, or even seem to act contrary to our wishes. If we who are human feel so, Helen,

"Shall the tender heart of all
Be less kind than we?"

My dear," Mrs. Waldermar added, earnestly, "never doubt the promises, nor feel afraid to plead them. 'The Lord knoweth them that are His; and unto them He says: 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.'"

"Have I touched the source of your troubles, my dear Helen? I feel as if I had been talking in the dark; perhaps I might help you more if I had a little more light."

"Thank you," Helen said; "I do very often feel puzzled and ignorant, but I think I can learn to do things, Mrs. Waldermar, better and easier than I can learn how to take care of people."

"And the people in this case are your father and brothers, are they not?" Mrs. Waldermar questioned, pleasantly.

"Yes, mamma, especially my little brother and sister. I make so many mistakes in taking care of them; I do

not know how to govern them, nor how to teach them." And to illustrate what she meant—drawn on by Mrs. Waldermar's sympathy and interest—Helen related her morning's experience with Sibyl.

Mrs. Waldermar listened quietly, but instead of looking shocked, as Helen expected, both eyes and lips were smiling when she finished her story. "It is a serious question," the lady said, brightly; "I am not sure but a course of instruction in Mother Goose would suit your little sister better than anything else; how old is she?"

"Five," Helen answered.

"And your little brother? I forget his name."

"Ronald; he is seven."

"And you are trying to teach them, what?"

"To read, and write, and add a little. I thought I ought; it seemed as if I was neglecting them not to do so," Helen answered, timidly, almost fearing Mrs. Waldermar was laughing at her.

"Yes, I understand; you are quite right; they are old enough to be taught a little. I do not believe in letting children lose all the first years of their life; there is less danger of crowding in their older years when a small beginning is made while they are young. Only, Helen, we must be content with small beginnings and slow, almost imperceptible growth; we must not want to see Jonah's gourd in our nurseries."

"No," Helen answered, smiling now in her turn; "I don't think I do want that, exactly, but I do want to teach them what is right; to fill mamma's place to them so far as I can," she added, softly.

Once again Mrs. Waldermar's hand lingered tenderly on the girl's bright hair.

"I know," she said; "I believe you are doing so, Helen."

I am not afraid for the little ones in your care. Your love, and earnest desire to do them good, will overcome the deficiencies arising from inexperience. Only let me tell you this—one of the lessons learned from my own experience in early life, both in my children's nursery and school-room—do not be anxious to see results following your labours. Remember the duty only is yours, the result is God's, and safe with him. Pray constantly, Helen, but never worry. Sibyl seems to me like a little girl with a good deal of self-will, and I think there is as much in the training of a child's will as there is in the mode of curbing it. As you grow more accustomed to your cares, you will learn how, often, to yield a point without weakening your authority or influence, and with none but good results to the child. Insist always on obedience, when once the question is raised, but let the occasions for such insistence be rare as possible.

"I must not detain you longer, nor," Mrs. Waldermar added, with a smile, "let you keep me; but before I go tell me when I may hope to have my visit returned. Can't you come very soon and take tea with me? I want to introduce you to my daughter. She has been very sick, and does not go out yet; but she would be very glad to meet and know you: how soon will you come, Helen?"

"I don't know," Helen answered, with a little hesitation; "you are very kind, Mrs. Waldermar. I should dearly love to come, but I cannot leave home. They need me here, especially at tea-time and in the evening."

Mrs. Waldermar looked at the fair, girlish face, growing pale from care and confinement, and her resolution was taken. Just so far as she had power and influence, she would use them in brightening and giving pleasure to that young life. But she only said:

"I know they need you here, Helen; and it is for that very reason, among others, that your friends must insist upon your going out more. We can only give out what we draw in: there must be sunshine in our own hearts, before we can hope to make other hearts bright. It will never do for you to make a nun of yourself, and forget that there is a world outside of your own home. I will not urge you longer now, but I shall see you soon again, and shall hope for an early visit from you." And with a gentle good-bye, Mrs. Waldermar took her leave.

CHAPTER IV.—A FIRELIGHT TALK.

"Wouldst thou go forth to bless, be sure of thy own ground,
Fix well thy centre first, then draw the circle round."

—Trench.

"Well, mamma," cried a sweet voice, as in the deepening twilight of the winter afternoon Mrs. Waldermar entered her own parlour. "Well, mamma, I began to think you never were coming home. You don't know how long the time has seemed without you, nor how glad I am to see you again." And the speaker, a pretty, delicate girl, sat up among the pillows of her sofa, and leaned eagerly forward to take her mother's hand and a kiss.

"My darling." And Mrs. Waldermar sat down by her daughter and took her in her arms: even tenderer than usual was her manner, but her words were very few. Perhaps she was thinking of the motherless home she had just left, and of the girl whose heart yearned so passionately for the mother's arms so far beyond her reach—for the mother's kiss that in all this life she would never feel again. Perhaps she was breathing a silent thanksgiving that in her own home the tie was still unbroken, and the treasure of her heart, after a long struggle with disease, had been lovingly spared. But whatever her thoughts she uttered none of them, and only a long-drawn breath of deep content told how glad and welcome was the rest of her own happy fireside. But though silence might suit Mrs. Waldermar's mood very well, it did not suit her daughter's.

"Come, mamma," she said, playfully. "I want to hear all about this long afternoon: where you have been, what you have done, whom you have seen. I know you have been playing the Good Samaritan somewhere—to somebody—and I want to hear the story. Did you go to see that young Miss Humphrey you were asking Mrs. Davies about yesterday?"

"Yes, Margaret."

"And did you see her? Was she at home? Did you like her, mamma? Do you know," the girl went on in a pretty, careless way as she nestled her head closer against her mother, "I can almost guess what your call on

her was like, mamma. I can imagine just how you drew her to you and made her almost believe she had found another mother. What is she like, mamma? when you come close to her, I mean. You know I saw her once at church in the summer and thought her just lovely. But people, when you sit near them and hear them speak, don't always look as they do when you watch them across the aisles of a church. Sometimes they put away their good looks with their Sunday clothes, and in their week-day dress and manners they are not half so winning. I hope Miss Humphrey isn't that kind of a girl, is she, mamma? Won't you tell me about her? You don't know how curious I feel, almost as if, in some way, she belonged to us; funny, isn't it? And I don't even know her name yet: what is it?"

"Helen."

"Helen—I think that is such a beautiful name. I wonder if I will ever know her well enough to call her by it. You like her, mamma?"

"Yes, very much, my daughter."

How lovingly Mrs. Waldermar's voice lingered over that last word, daughter; and how well the girl in her arms seemed to understand her thought, as, in a way that spoke volumes for the close sympathy between mother and child, she whispered,

"Mamma," and laid her arms around her neck. For a moment she was silent; then the gentle voice began again.

"If you like her I know I shall, ever so much. Isn't she coming here soon, mamma? You don't know how I want to know her."

"I want her to come; I want you to know her, Margaret; I shall be glad to have you become warm friends. But Helen has so many in her home depending upon her for comfort, her life is so full of care, that when I asked her to come she could only thank me; she could not say when it would be possible for her to do so; but I mean—" and Mrs. Waldermar's voice, gentle as it was, was also very resolute.

"I mean to have her here very soon. She needs care and sympathy herself. She needs to come in contact with other lives and other interests than those that fill her home. She is worn and subdued now with the sorrow and care that have fallen upon her; she needs wise, true friends, and genial, sunshiny influences to act upon her as a kind of mental tonic, to enliven her spirits, and strengthen the tone of her mind. And, Margaret, your feeling that she belongs to us is not confined to yourself. While I sat with her this afternoon it seemed as if I heard her mother saying, 'Mother, be tender to my motherless girl.' And I resolved, Margie, that we would do all we could—I know you would want to be included, dear—to help and encourage Helen in the difficult way before her."

And Mrs. Waldermar repeated, in a way habitual to her of making home applications of Bible words, and which was the outgrowth of long course to and loving study of the Scriptures,

"You know the old word, Margaret—'Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?'"

"Mamma," and Margaret Waldermar raised herself and clasped her mother's face impulsively in her hands. "Mamma, do you know I think you are the truest, noblest woman in this world? I don't believe there will be another like you."

"Not quite so fast, Margie," said a young man, who had entered the room several minutes before without their observing him, and who now came forward and stood before them in the bright firelight. "Not quite so fast. Don't you know I have fully decided that Mrs. Waldermar, junior, shall be just such a woman as our mother? I have firmly resolved never to marry until I find her," he added, lightly, as he stooped down and kissed Mrs. Waldermar's cheek.

"Guyon, what a boy you are!" Mrs. Waldermar said, with a smile, while Margaret laughed gaily.

"You'll never find her, Guy. You might just as well never begin to look. And you are so faithless you won't even take the trouble to look at them."

"Ah!" her brother returned, half lightly, half earnestly; "you don't know how much I look at them, how closely I sometimes study them, nor how convinced I am from my study, that my father found the one woman among a thousand; nor how strong my faith is, that among another thousand there must be another woman waiting for my father's son."

"Well," Margaret said, cheerily, "until my father's son finds her we'll keep him here—mamma and I; won't we, mamma? O Guy," she said, suddenly changing her tone, "you ought to have come in sooner; mamma has been telling me about her: call this afternoon. She has found a new friend for me—Miss Humphrey. Have you ever seen her, Guyon?"

"No; I know her father, though, slightly."

"And don't care to know him any better, you look as if you would like to say."

"Do I? I am sorry," and Guyon Waldermar spoke seriously. "I really know nothing about Mr. Humphrey I should be very sorry to prejudice you against him, either by word or look. I believe his wife has recently died."

"Is Helen a Christian, mamma?"

"I think so, Margaret; an earnest, devoted Christian."

CHAPTER V.—HEARTILY, NOT WEARILY.

"Daily struggling, though unloved and lonely,
Every day a rich reward will give;
Thou wilt find, be hearty striving only,
And truly loving, thou canst truly live."

Saturday morning dawned clear and bright, and icy-cold, with a wind that seemed to have swept down from the mountain peak—

"From the snow five thousand summers old."

It was a holiday for the boys, but for Helen it was baking and cleaning day, as well as the time in which all the odds and ends of housekeeping, that during the week had somehow been unravelled and left neglected, must be neatly wound up and properly disposed of. It was with a weary