

"Of course it ought, and I have written to that effect to Johnston. But he tells me that he can get no more; indeed, that now the children—the boy—should be put to earn his living."

"Wouldn't it be better, father, if you wrote to this uncle, or whoever he is?"

"I would willingly, my dear, if I know where to write."

"Did Mr. Johnston never tell you?"

"When the children came to us it was a time of such confusion with him that I am not surprised many things were forgotten. You and your dear mother, Marian, were concerned only to comfort and feed the poor things."

A flush of gratified as well as tender recollection was on Mr. Hope's cheek as he spoke of his dead wife. They were very simple and unworldly in all things, and the fact of having rescued Norry and Mysie from an infancy of neglect and a training of vice, was such a permanent consolation. That the calculation of the addition to the butcher's and baker's bill were never made until the long illness of Mrs. Hope and the increased requirements of a growing boy and girl had forced it on their attention. Then Mr. Hope had written to Johnston, and asked, for the first time, the name of the children's uncle. He received a letter with a Montreal postmark, in which Johnston said he had again moved, and could not be sure of his future abode; that he was equally uncertain as to the children's relative; indeed, afraid that if he was applied to he might withdraw his assistance altogether, as the children had no legal claim on him. But he concluded a list of vague excuses by saying that the same stipend hitherto paid should be forwarded from a lawyer at Montreal.

Marian fretted to herself over her father's increasing infirmities and decreasing income. That ominous, vague sentence, that conveys so much perplexity, was on her lips, "Something must be done, father."

"Yes, child, no doubt; so I've been thinking all day, and many days. Indeed, I have written this week to Montreal to inquire what occupation Norry's relation has thought of for him. Meanwhile, child, we have much to be thankful for."

As they thus spoke and looked at each other, there was a lambent gleam in their eyes, as if tears had started and been checked; and a little twitching about the father's lips compelled him to silence. He motioned with his hand towards a side-table, on which lay the family Bible. Marian understood the look, and fetching it, laid it before her father. He opened it, and finding the 103rd Psalm, pushed the volume towards his daughter, and leaning back in his chair covered his eyes with his hand.

Very sweet and low was the voice of Marian as she read out the words of praise and thanksgiving—that incense which, kindled by the Psalmist, has gone up through all generations, and as the last "Praise the Lord, oh, my soul!" fell from her lips, her father leaned on his crutch, and took up the hallowed strains in words whose fervent gratitude soared like a flame from the altar of a heart consecrated to all holy desire and loving trust.

#### CHAPTER X.—THE BASKET OF GAME.

"This world is full of beauty,  
As are other worlds above;  
And if we did our duty,  
It might be full of love."

GERALD MASSEY.

It is certain that the nervous organization of us poor mortals so far resembles a harp,

that it is very easily put out of tune, and requires its strings to be constantly kept at the right tension in order to give out the proper sound. It must be owned that the serenity which had been reached on the night before by Mr. Hope and Marian, yielded to depression when they rose the next morning to encounter the troubles of the day—which, sooth to say, were lying in wait for them in the shape of sundry bills in the letter-box, Norry having duly emptied it, and brought the contents to the breakfast-table. The feminine tact of Mysie, to say nothing of Marian, would have kept either of them from showing these until Mr. Hope had taken his frugal morning meal; but Norry, boy-like, was more direct, and he laid the bills down by the side of his master's bread and milk, as if there were no latent unpleasantness in their appearance.

"Bills!" sighed Mr. Hope, opening them one by one.

"They are only the Michaelmas bills, dear father. They are not, I think, very heavy this quarter: that is, I've tried to—"

"No doubt, child, you have been careful."

"Put them away now, dear papa. Hope—put them away," said the fresh voice of Mysie, coaxingly. "They'll keep you from enjoying your breakfast."

"Bitters are good for the appetite, Mysie. There, child, get your own meal."

"Bitter! why bitter?" said Norry, in a tone of inquiry—for it had never been the habit of the family to talk, or, it may be, even to think, of themselves as poor people. They were in the habit of giving their mite to others, and this, at all events to young inconsiderate minds, established a sense of competence. It is related in the biography of Ebenezer Elliot, the "Corn-law Rhymer," that his parents had seven children, and an income less than a hundred a year, and yet that they never considered themselves poor people. However, in these last days at that old Kensington cottage, conviction had been gradually deepening on the minds of the brother and sister—suggested, it may be, from Marian's pensive looks—that there was trouble coming to the house of another kind than that which they had both witnessed—sickness and death—so that the inquiry as to the word "bitter" was silenced by a touch of Mysie's foot under the table, and remained unanswered, which threw a gloom over them all.

A loud ring at the bell came as a relief to the monotony of the breakfast table. Mysie, on whom devolved the answering of the door, ran off, and quickly returned, bringing the book of the delivery van to be signed for a hamper.

In all the eight years that Mr. Hope had lived in Binley Cottage no such arrival had been announced before, and it was no wonder that, when the book was signed and the door closed, the whole family grouped around and peered curiously into the basket. "A hare and four birds: who could have sent them?"

"Pretty birds!" said Mysie, looking at the fine plumage of one of the pheasants. "Are they so very nice to eat, that people take such a delight in killing them?"

"Oh, it's famous sport, shooting—capital!" said Norry, rather contemptuous of her pity.

Her father did not notice the words of the young people; a curious smile curved his lips as he muttered the lines—

"It's like sending me ruffles,  
When wanting a shirt."

And so he turned away, adding, "I'm afraid, Marian our unknown friends over-rate our cooking talents. What will you do with them?"

"I should like to— But no, that wouldn't do."

"What, Marian? Nay, no hesitating."

"To invite some one?" interposed Mysie, quickly.

"No, no, dear. Invite indeed—whom have we to invite? I should like to sell them."

"Sell them—sell a present!" said Norry, drawing up his head, and his great eyes flashing. "Why, Marian, that's not like you—that huckstering way of talking."

"A present! well, that makes them ours, and if they're ours, I suppose it's meant that we should do as we like with them. What does it matter whether we eat or sell them?"

"And pray, Norry, what do you mean by huckstering?" cried Mysie, indignantly.

"Don't be flying at me with that way you've got, Miss Mysie," replied Norry, turning, as he spoke, away from the hamper. "I thought it was rather a low kind of a notion, that's all."

"Not low, my boy," said Mr. Hope, gravely, laying his hand, while he spoke, on the lad's shoulder: "it was an honest thought of Marian's, and that can never be low or mean. If the sale of these luxuries will pay a bill that otherwise would have to wait, it will be better than our fawning Marian with unaccustomed cookery, or feasting on uncoveted dainties."

"Yes, father, that's what I meant. Our buttermilk and grocer is also a poulterer; I know he will take these of me."

Norry hung his head in confusion a moment, and then said, "Let me run, Marian, for you, and ask him. Do let me! I'm always bolting out something I don't exactly mean! I know I'm a stupid fellow, though I don't like Mysie being so ready to tell me so."

The boy's cap was on and he was away in a few minutes, carrying in his young mind some troubled thoughts, that, as he went along, began to shape themselves into distinctness. His errand, and Marian's anxiety, which, if it had existed before, he had never been so struck with, now revealed to him, with something of the force of a sudden discovery, that if Mr. Hope did not complain, and Marian smiled amid her ceaseless industry, it was not for lack of hidden causes of distress. It was a bitter moment, yet a turning-point in his whole history. He had been, hitherto, a fitful, careless boy, fond of, and clever in, many pursuits but without method or much diligence. Now, in less time than we have taken to write it, a conviction darted like an arrow through him that he must begin to work. Poverty often annihilates childhood. What the little toiling mortals who passed Norry in the road—the ragged and feeble recruits in the great army of labor—did from necessity or from fear he must do from gratitude. And to do it effectually he must work his mind harder, it might be, than any toiling urchin who was dragging at a truck, or groaning under a basket.

And so the hamper of game did far more than gratify the palate in Mr. Hope's house. Small as the sum was that its sale paid, it lightened Marian's cares awhile, and, if she had known it, transformed careless, erratic Norry into a thinker.

(To be continued.)